

Revolt on the Clyde: Birth and Significance of Red Clydeside, 1914-1922

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At noon on Friday, January 31st, 1919 in Glasgow Scotland, revolution is in the air. On the one side, a great mass of the city's working class is on strike and has gathered in George Square, the city's commons, outside of the city chambers to hear the government's reply to their demands. Tens of thousands in number, they make up a sea of working men and women turned out to see change in their working lives. They seek an end to the forty-seven-hour work week, to be replaced with a forty-hour work week, so as to secure work for the many workers returning from the front. The red banner, the flag of revolutionary socialism, flutters in the crowd. All across Europe, that same banner flies: it has been flying in Russia since the Bolsheviks took power in the October Revolution, and it is being raised up and torn down daily across Germany in the chaotic aftermath of its loss in the Great War. The crowd is invigorated in a way that Glasgow has not seen since the labor militancy during the War, when the workers of the city had agitated vigorously for better pay and working conditions while their wives had campaigned for better housing and cheaper rent. Many of them had taken up the cause of socialism when they heard any number of speakers in the city demonstrating against the war. The crowd is tense, and shot through with anticipation running like lightning in the guts of every working man and woman assembled in the square.

On the other side, the police stand with their truncheons at the ready, the defenders of the old world that seemed to be in a life-or-death struggle with the new. They represent His Majesty's government, frantically trying to maintain the country's stability in the wake of the upheaval of the last months. Ten days earlier, the Irish republican party *Sinn Fein* had declared independence for Ireland, initiating years of bloodshed on that island that has occupied the government's attention as of late. The government may be fearful of Irish nationalism, but they are veritably paranoid about a Bolshevik uprising in Great Britain, fearing a similar sequence of events to those in Russia that would invariably

end up with them in exile or facing down a firing squad.¹ Fearing a Red January in Glasgow, the government has sent for a number of troops, ten thousand in total, to be deployed to the city, including a number of tanks, enormous mobile fortresses that had made their debut mere years earlier; they are en route as the crowd gathers.² The rumor goes around the crowd that, fearing desertion of the soldiers to the strikers' side, the government has sent English soldiers to monitor the city, and they are en route as the cold wind blows in George Square.

Inside the city chambers, strike leaders meet with the government to hear their reply. Two days earlier, the Lord Provost had sent a telegram to Bonar Law, deputy prime minister, of the strikers' demands; the strike leaders await his reply. The strike leaders represent the Clyde Worker's Committee, the main locus of wartime labor militancy that had called the strike the Monday before. Both in the chambers and in the crowd, there are people whose names will go down in the city's history as heroes. Much to the crowd's disappointment, John Maclean, the Lion of Red Clyde, is not present; he is in Lanarkshire, rounding up support from the miners to ensure that the strikers have support across Scotland.³ But among them are William Gallacher, David Kirkwood, Emanuel Shinwell, Harry McShane, Jimmy Maxton, Tom Bell, and many others whose names will go down in Glasgow history as leaders and fighters for the working man. Some of its leaders would go on to advocate for revolution, others would dedicate themselves to parliamentary reform, but for the moment, all are united in one purpose. Revolution is playing itself out throughout Europe, reason in revolt now thunders, and the Clyde Worker's Committee is ready to strike while the iron is hot.

What happens next is the stuff of legends. No one is quite sure how it gets started: the police will later say that they were provoked, although accounts differ as to how, but ask any of the strikers

1 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1983), 125.

2 Gordon Barclay, "'Duties in the Aid of the Civil Power': The Deployment of the Army to Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919," *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies* 38, no. 2 (2018): 287.

3 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 132.

and they will tell you the police started it all. The police charge the crowd, batons at the ready, and a melee ensues with the crowd. The strikers fight back with fists, cobblestones, and bottles, and the entire scene descends into a wild, frenzied brawl. The strike leaders inside the city chambers hear the commotion outside and burst onto the scene, only to be arrested by the police for inciting a riot; the leaders outside among the strikers don't fare much better. William Gallacher tries to talk with the police to deescalate the violence, but he and David Kirkwood are beaten with batons and arrested after brief brawls with the police.⁴ The Riot Act is read to the crowd, but no one hears it; the crowd is in the full heat of it now, and either fight it out with the police or melt away into the streets surrounding the Square. The violence spills out onto the streets of Glasgow, lasting all night and seeing sporadic acts of vandalism and fighting between the police and bands of striking workers. The Sheriff of Lanarkshire orders the military to act that night, and the first deployment of troops has begun by the time the sun rises over Glasgow the next morning, but at that point, things have died down, and the strikers have dispersed back to their homes or into the cells of Glasgow's jails. In the immediate aftermath, the press announces 19 police and 34 civilians injured, though many more would trickle in with more minor injuries or be seriously injured enough to necessitate extended treatment.⁵ In the pubs of Clydeside on February 1st, those men that had been lucky enough to get away from the police's batons and cuffs will drunkenly regale their listeners of how, for a brief moment, it looked as if a revolution may have been at hand. The revolution may have been lost, but Red Clydeside had entered the world stage as a locus of socialist agitation for many years to come.

This is how popular history has remembered what has since been known as the Battle of George Square, as a moment where it seemed as if revolution was around the corner and the working class was about to storm the heavens and seize the means of production for the first time in history. The

4 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 228.

5 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 133.

government certainly believed so; the War Cabinet spoke of a “Bolshevist rising” that had been narrowly avoided thanks to the efforts of the police.⁶ This has formed, as many subsequent writers have dubbed it, the “Legend of Red Clydeside”, that collection of tales and figures that is cherished among the working classes and radicals of all stripes of Glasgow. Socialists, communists, and leftists of all tendencies in Scotland claim the mantle of the Red Clydesiders, seeking to return to the days when the working class was led by living legends and was not afraid to send a stark message to the bosses in Glasgow and in London. Whatever shape the legend takes, it continues to be recounted in song and myth by those that wish to keep it alive, and has been entrenched in the minds and hearts of many Glaswegians.

But are the legends true? How much of the common tale of the Battle of George Square, and the wartime militancy that preceded it and the Red Clydeside period that succeeded it, is actually true? After all, for an event that would go down in history as “Bloody Friday,” no one died that day, so immediately there appears to be a disconnect between cultural representation and fact. This is the main question that this investigation will seek to answer. This investigation will grapple with the popular and historiographical conceptions about the war years, the Battle of George Square, and the Red Clydeside period that succeeded it, interrogating some of the major contentions about the day itself and the events leading up to it that have befuddled both historians and raconteurs ever since. With these things in mind, this investigation will shed some light on how the experience of Glasgow in those pivotal years fits within the broader national rise of the Labour Party and the left in Britain.

The legend of Red Clydeside, simply put by Iain McLean, a preeminent historian on the topic of Red Clydeside, is this: “[that] Clydeside was ripe for revolution throughout the First World War; [that] the revolution failed to occur in January 1919; and [that] some revolutionaries entered Parliament four

6 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 137.

years later, still determined to wipe capitalism out”.⁷ Put plainly, the legend is that the Clyde was a revolutionary area in the war, that the Battle of George Square constituted an event when a revolution could have happened, and that after that revolution failed, the post-war era of Red Clydeside was a unique and transformational political and cultural phenomenon. The main historical question that any work approaching this topic has to ask is whether or not this legend was true to life, or a culturally created fiction. Moreover, if the legends of Red Clydeside are false, to what extent are they false? To what extent was Glasgow in 1922 unique among its contemporaries, and to what extent was Red Clydeside even a significant historical phenomenon apart from its legend?

Those works that approach the topic from a more legend-sympathetic perspective often tack, in earlier works’ case, to a reading of the legend as it is classically delivered, with only brief criticism levied at more outlandish myths that persist. Those works that, on the other hand, seek to dispel the legend often levy criticism at the idea that the situation during the war was truly revolutionary, new, or even particularly unique, and they ultimately constitute a “revisionist” view. The tradition of the “post-revisionist” apologist accounts take the criticisms of the revisionist view to heart but ultimately reiterate the idea that the period and the situation were, if not revolutionary, at least significant and unique and that, despite their connection to the established ideas and trends of the past, still synthesized them into a transformational movement.

A number of historical texts about Red Clydeside in particular and the labor movement in Scotland in general take the view that Red Clydeside was a historically unique and important phenomenon that created a new paradigm in Scottish and British political life. Arthur Marwick’s *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* is the prototypical example of a text that analyzes the Red Clydeside period through a lens that takes claims about the labor disputes of the times’ radicalism and capacity to change Scotland and Britain as a whole seriously. Marwick argues that there was

7 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 1

significant and ideologically-tinged labor unrest bubbling on the Clyde very shortly after the announcement of hostilities on the continent: he sketches out a city in which, already after the first week of war, there were “demonstrations against the war as a purely capitalist venture,” and a brewing revolt of the workers associated with the Amalgamated Society of Engineers against their union leadership due to a “disputed wage claim combined with syndicalist agitation against the war.”⁸ Moreover, he lays out how this already simmering pot started to bubble up even harder during the middle war years, describing the Clyde Worker’s Committee in a somewhat revolutionary fashion, highlighting the fact that “the Committee did put in the forefront of its demands... that of ‘Worker’s Control’” while also making sure to make the reader understand that these lofty goals were seen with “a certain stern practicality” and that “the proposals for the reorganization of industry were all extremely carefully elaborated.”⁹ When compared to the rest of Britain, which Marwick claims “learned” from the example of Red Clyde, the city during this period is depicted as particularly significant and unique.¹⁰ Marwick, of course, does not get swept up totally in the legend, and pays scholarly deference to things like the fact that men in the ASE and their crusade against dilution (tinged with sexism, as their labor was being diluted partly by women) were the main engine of unrest, but in the main he tacks towards a sympathetic view of the situation on the Clyde.¹¹

In contrast to these accounts, there are those accounts who seek to argue that much of what has been said about the period, like the nature of working-class solidarity within the city, the unique position of Glasgow within British society, the real significance of the war years and their immediate aftermath on the political and social landscape of the country in the interwar years is in some way overstated. In short, this camp of scholars, generally of a revisionist bent, seek to ground an

8 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965), 71.

9 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 73.

10 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 76.

11 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 72.

understanding of Red Clydeside in less maximalist terms and to clarify the real divisions between the working classes of Clydeside at the time and the ways in which the trends in Red Clyde correspond to national trends.

Iain McLean has challenged many basic premises of older accounts: speaking of the idea of genuine, incredibly significant change in the city during and after the war due to labor unrest, he says that “it *is* a legend.”¹² McLean’s text attempts to push back against the hagiography and sentimentalism about the war years and its immediate aftermath in Glasgow, arguing that the Red Clyde of the war was a failure, and Bloody Sunday the coda on that failure. Red Clydeside of the war was not a movement of the working class fighting the state against oppression; it was a series of narrow industrial disputes that never managed to get the city into a place where it would have been ready to prosecute revolution.¹³ For McLean, the second Red Clydeside, when Glasgow sent some of its “heroes” to Parliament and the Labour Party began its grip on Glasgow’s government, is the more successful of the two periods; even then, that success is more limited than popular retelling would have one believe.¹⁴ To be sure, Clydeside was in no shortage of “honest men,” but to McLean, honesty and import are two different things.

This tendency towards revisionism continues to this day in various ways. For example, in Malcolm Petrie’s 2018 *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, the revisionist lens is used to describe the radicalism of the post-war period in Scotland. While certainly affirming that, among the Scottish, the Glasgow working class in the post-War period was among the most radical, Petrie argues that this radicalism put them at odds with national Labour leadership that was trying to distance itself from communists and moving away from the more antiquated tactics of the

12 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 1

13 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 2

14 Ibid.

street confrontation of the old days.¹⁵ This leads him to draw conclusions that shine a less than flattering light on the heirs of the radicalism of such figures as William Gallacher and John Maclean, the Communist Party of Great Britain's Scottish section, and their relationship to the majority of the urban working class in Glasgow. Petrie also emphasizes the real change going on in the Labour Party post-war away from a party for the urban proletariat specifically and towards a more nationally-focused, cross-class party that sought to smooth over as many conflicts as it sought to fight, and the effect that this change had on the energy that had been radiating out of Glasgow since 1914.¹⁶

Somewhere in the middle of these two perspectives is the "post-revisionist" school. This perspective takes into account the criticisms of traditional historiography on the labor movement and Red Clydeside, but seeks to rehabilitate some version of the legend of Red Clyde as an important and significant moment in and of itself. Rather than repudiating the legend, these accounts seek merely to put an asterisk on it, accepting some criticism but maintaining more or less the idea that Red Clydeside in the wartime and after constituted something real, unique, and important; this scholarship is in a sense synthetic. Terry Brotherstone's essay "Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?" presents a left-wing reassessment of the historiography around this period. Brotherstone argues for a renewed look into Red Clyde as a period in which political awakening was starting in a very real way, and that despite the failure of revolution in that city in that time, this awakening constitutes something transformative.¹⁷ He explicitly ties this project into a political one, seeking to understand resistance to Thatcherism in the 1980s in the same vein as the resistance to Lloyd George and the wartime government in the 1910s.

15 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 24.

16 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 16.

17 Terry Brotherstone, "Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?" in *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde, 1900-1950* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992), 75.

This idea of a post-revisionist look at Red Clydeside laid the groundwork for a number of popular retellings of the Red Clyde period that have sprung up in recent years, which take some aspect of the Red Clyde story and seek to rehabilitate in some way the legend and to argue for the importance and significance of some aspect of the period. Books like Kenny MacAskill's *Glasgow 1919* and Henry Bell's *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside* offer popular accounts of the Red Clydeside period and the figures who captured public imagination both at the time and today that, in contrast to previous culturally-transmitted accounts of the period, do legitimately grapple with the criticisms of revisionist accounts while ultimately reaffirming that cultural memory. MacAskill argues for the interconnectedness of the historical Glaswegian experience to resistance during the war, and Bell attempts to properly orient such a looming figure as John Maclean within the actual organization and events of the Red Clyde years.¹⁸ These works are interesting historiographically, as they mark a recent turn in interest towards Red Clydeside from a popular audience, outside the academy, that nevertheless grapples with the realities of the era under a post-revisionist framework, one in which they grapple with the legends of Red Clyde to create a more grounded if still sympathetic view of the period. They also grapple with the legacy of Red Clyde in a modern way, laying out its significance for both the socialist and the nationalist left in the Scottish National Party-dominated Scotland of the 21st century and weighing in on the extent to which either interpretation is supported by the facts of the period.

It is in this school that this study of the period will fall. Early attempts at characterizing the labor movement in Scotland and the rise of Red Clydeside were often too accepting of the received wisdom of the period and as such require some amount of revision. However, revisionist histories of the period often end up making one wonder why the events actually came to be remembered popularly at all. This thesis will argue that critical analysis of this era reveals a radical departure from the pre-war

18 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2019), 6.

state of politics in the city, and a unique moment in the city that displayed characteristics unseen in other parts of the country. The facts of the matter, as they were both at the time and as they appear to recipients of the culturally transmitted legend of Red Clyde point towards a genuinely significant change in political culture brought about during and after the First World War, generated in varying degrees by wartime unrest and post-war labor-based political organization, a change that came about thanks to conditions in Glasgow that make it an exception to trends in the rest of the country. The cultural conception of this significant change deserves to be analyzed as well, both from its source from eyewitnesses as well as from subsequent generations that have been culturally aware of something that is Red Clydeside. With all this in mind, it becomes clear that, while the efficacy of the wartime and post-war movements was certainly less than revolutionary, the fact remains that Glasgow from 1914 to 1922 was a place in which real political change occurred, and occurred in ways and for reasons that, while similar to the events taking place throughout the country, were unique. Red Clydeside, then, is a period that is both unique and significant.

Chapter 1 – Socialism in Scotland

*Arise, ye workers, from your slumber, arise ye prisoners of want!*¹⁹

¹⁹ Eugene Pottier, *The Internationale* (Paris, June 1871),
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

Of all of the ideas and ideologies that sprang forth from the fertile soil of the 19th century, few are quite so important or globally significant as socialism. Due to the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of a capitalist economy first in Britain and eventually in the rest of Europe, there existed the technological and economic development sufficient to create a critical mass of urban workers, proletarians, whose conditions of life and of labor inspired the development and spread of the ideal of socialism across the world. However, like all ideologies, socialism did not emerge fully formed onto the world stage and immediately turn every working man's heart towards revolution; instead, it developed over the years through the efforts of political organizations, intellectual circles, and trade unions into a force that, on the eve of the First World War, counted millions among its ranks. In some nations, such as Imperial Germany, their socialist party, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany, SPD), had a million members.²⁰

However, despite Britain being the most established industrial power in Europe, the British Labour Party, a loose conglomeration of trade unionists, socialists, and working-class reformers of all types, was very much in its political infancy at the start of the 20th century. Reflecting this reality, Glasgow at the time also was not a bastion of working-class socialism in the way that Berlin, Hamburg, and Paris were. How, then, did it transform into a city that many in the government feared was on the verge of revolution by the beginning of 1919? This chapter will examine the origins of organized, independent working-class politics in Britain and the political makeup of the working class in Glasgow on the eve of the First World War, and track the development of this movement throughout the wartime years. By doing so, a clear picture will emerge of the situation immediately preceding the events of 1919.

20 Albert Lindemann, *The Red Years: European Socialism vs. Bolshevism 1919-1921* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 2.

The term “socialism” resembles a great work of art in that it elicits nearly an infinite number of interpretations, very few of which actually resemble the artist’s intent. The Labour Party’s 1918 constitution’s fourth clause provides a succinct and uncontroversial definition of the mission of socialism: “to secure for the producers, by hand or by brain, the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.”²¹ Apart from merely transforming the basis for property and production, the expansion of democracy, alluded to in Clause IV, is also a major ideal of socialism. The rights of women and minorities, alluded to in the announcement of the Labour Party’s 1918 constitution written by Fabian Society leader Sidney Webb, are also a major issue for socialists.²² Historically, these ideals have been compromised to varying extents, but in the context of Scotland in the early 20th century, this general description provides a fair characterization of the tenets that all socialists involved subscribe to.

To achieve these ends, there is also the question as to the means that the working classes ought to use to achieve this goal: Rosa Luxemburg, German socialist and leader of the Spartacists in the aftermath of the First World War, dichotomized the options available to socialists as “reform or revolution.”²³ Reformists believed that the working class ought to work within the institutions of government and society to change them to be more equitable and beneficial to the working classes. Ramsay MacDonald, leader of the Labour Party from 1911 until the First World War (and controversially thereafter) and a paradigmatic reformist, denounced revolution as a method for actual, substantive political change: the revolutionary aspect of socialism is its transformative nature and not its method, and as such, the path towards such a large and transformative change need not cleave fully

21 Sidney Webb, “The New Constitution of the Labour Party,” 1918, 1.

22 Sidney Webb, “The New Constitution of the Labour Party,” 1918, 2-4.

23 Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (London: Militant Publications, 1986), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/>.

towards illegalism and violence.²⁴ He argued that socialism was to come about through the gradual process of the working classes utilizing the state as a tool for its own protection and to accomplish its goals: with a popular socialist party in power in a parliamentary system, the state will transform into “an authority which says ‘let us do this together’ instead of one which says ‘you must not do this,’” which will lead the people into a state of social justice and equality.²⁵ While Ramsay was socialist out of ethical inclination, even many Marxists believed in the necessity of reform over revolution; Marx himself had argued that the working class could possibly come to power through electoral means in Britain.²⁶ At any rate, the reformist camp on the eve of the First World War included a great number of ideological tendencies.

On the other hand, revolutionaries believed that some level of force was necessary to destroy the old order and build a new socialist order in its place. Luxemburg, in her polemic against reformists like Eduard Bernstein in the German SPD, argues that the reformist path is one which is fundamentally a mistake, possibly even a betrayal, for the socialist movement: by setting its sights solely on the amelioration of social ills and the smoothing of the rough edges of capitalism, and by waiting for the productive mode of capitalism to transform through sheer inertia, the reformist tendency represents a “recommendation to renounce the socialist movement itself.”²⁷ Instead, revolutionaries like Luxemburg argued for a continued adherence to the necessity of revolution and argued that the best thing to be done was to organize the working classes to make their revolutionary push against the old order.

Over and above all of this is the question of what the character of the path towards socialism is. Many socialists, like Ramsay MacDonald and his friends in the Fabian Society, believed socialism a moral imperative to be brought about through the dissemination of socialist ideas to the masses that

24 James Ramsay MacDonald, *The Socialist Movement* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), 104.

25 James Ramsay MacDonald, *The Socialist Movement*, 106.

26 Karl Marx, “La Liberté Speech,” in *On Britain* (Moscow: Foreign Language Press, 1962), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/09/08.htm>.

27 Rosa Luxemburg, “Conquest of Political Power,” in *Reform or Revolution* (London: Militant Publications, 1986), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/>.

ought to include middle class elements; others, Marxists like Luxemburg, believed the mechanism to be the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system brought about by its own contradictions, which will be spearheaded primarily by the working class. Socialists also tend to be against war and generally be internationalist in their outlook, although the degree to which this is true became a major conflict within the left at large and within the Labour Party in particular. Before the war, the Labour Party as a whole, while seeing the active participation of explicitly socialist elements, was not explicitly socialist, which would only happen in 1918.²⁸ Of course, it is also important to remember that not everyone who agitated for change in Glasgow during and after the war self-identified or even should be identified as a socialist; however, the extent to which their interests aligned or did not align helps explain the story of the political developments in the city during and after the war.

The story of socialism and the labor movement in Britain and Glasgow in particular up to the beginning of the First World War in August 1914 is a story of slow progress that, at that point, was still on its way to capturing the majority of votes and participation from the working classes of Britain. Early attempts at socialist political organization in Britain in the latter half of the 19th century mostly did not obtain the success of the continental social democratic parties. The majority (but certainly not the totality) of the working classes of Britain were loyal politically to the Liberal Party for most of the latter part of the 19th century, and it was still the predominant party for working men at the beginning of the war. Because of expansions in the franchise spearheaded by the party and the alignment of interests between the more prosperous workers who could vote, the majority (though not the totality) of enfranchised workers generally voted for the Liberals.²⁹ With the economy in depression and the political power of workers at its nadir in the 1880s, the working classes subsequently settled into a

28 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 91.

29 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 3.

position of support for the Liberal Party.³⁰ The propensity for the British working class to vote for Liberals prompted Friedrich Engels to remark that they were the “tail of the great Liberal Party.”³¹

The Trades Union Congress (TUC), a federation of trade unions throughout Britain that represented the unionized workers of the country, was the main locus of explicitly working-class power in the country in the wilderness years of the socialist movement in Britain. The TUC had been recognized legally in 1871 and began using its combined resources to apply political pressure on both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, extracting concessions from them throughout the era.³² It must be remembered that, in the early days, the TUC and the unions that made it up predominantly represented the interest of a small proportion of the working class in Britain at the time that generally worked in skilled trades and were represented by disparate, more conciliatory “craft” unions. This status as elite within the working class, termed the “labor aristocracy” by some, led to this section of the working class identifying much more closely with the middle class and their party, the Liberals.³³ However, with the birth of the so-called “New Unionism” in the 1880s that continued up to the First World War, the idea of trade unions as solely for labor aristocrats began to be challenged. In reaction to the previous craft unionism that predominated in the trade unions, the New Unionism sought to unionize all workers in a given industry under one banner, including unskilled workers.³⁴ Obviously, this new sort of unionism butted heads with the older craft unionism of the past, a story that would play itself out once again in Glasgow during the war. It must be noted that the trade unions, while officially working with the Labour Party, were fairly uninterested in parliamentary politics before the war, instead staking their claims mainly on strike action.³⁵ At any rate, the trade unions and their organizations were the organizations most in control of the state of working class politics at the start of

30 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 6.

31 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 7.

32 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 4.

33 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 6.

34 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 80.

35 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 105.

the war, rather than the parliamentary organs of the Labour Party, and they were very much the body which many workers in Britain turned to in order to accomplish their ends.

Coherent, independent socialist political organizations did exist, and they and the trade unions eventually came to collectively command enough popular support to form a loosely organized party for the purpose of advocating and agitating for the interests of the working class. There were a number of small socialist organizations that failed to accomplish any sort of mass appeal. The Fabian Society, an intellectual circle of socialists, were the main non-Marxist socialist organization of late 19th and early 20th centuries, and, alongside the trade unions, helped form the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), the precursor to the Labour Party.³⁶ In contrast, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) made up the Marxist equivalent to the Society. The organization was explicitly based on other socialist organizations on the continent; the organization's first program mirrored the famous Gotha Program of the German SPD.³⁷ The SDF also contributed to the founding of the LRC.³⁸ By the time of Red Clyde, the SDF had rebranded itself as the British Socialist Party (BSP). Many of the heroic figures of the Red Clydeside period, including John Maclean and William Gallacher, were members of the BSP, though many would leave the organization during the war.³⁹ These two small parties represent the intellectual base of the socialist movement in Britain at the turn of the century and beyond, and in many ways typify its divisions: the Fabians on the one hand representing a reformist, non-Marxist socialism, and the Social Democratic Federation/British Socialist Party representing the Marxist faction that included many that argued for a proletarian revolution.

The most important (though still marginal in comparison to the trade unions) socialist political organization, however, was the Independent Labour Party. The Independent Labour Party was the

36 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 207.

37 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 26.

38 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 207.

39 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside* (London: Pluto Press, 2018), 19.

brainchild of Keir Hardie, a Scotsman by birth who, frustrated by the lack of results from the various attempts at a workingman's political organization, was the progenitor of the first electorally successful attempt at an independent party for labor and socialism. Founded in 1893, the ILP was created "to build a Parliamentary party on the basis of a programme of labour reform;" to this end, many of the socialist societies that were present at and observers to the establishment of the ILP were sidelined in favor of the much more politically and organizationally powerful trade unions.⁴⁰ The failures of the previous attempts of securing political power for the working class (or, at least, parties founded in their name) had been rooted in their inability to secure popular motivation and will, as well as resources, towards their cause, and as such, the decision was made to work hand-in-hand with the trade unions, organizations that had a ready-made system for just that purpose.⁴¹ However, the socialism of the ILP should not be reduced or overlooked: a number of its founders were present for the foundation of the Second International, and the party was explicitly dedicated to the socialization of the means of production and the nationalization of landownership.⁴²

From 1900 onwards, the trade unions, the socialist societies and the ILP worked together first under the aegis first of the Labour Representation Committee, and after 1906 as the Labour Party.⁴³ Unlike most continental parties, the Labour Party was not so much a centralized party as much as it was a conglomeration of different leagues, organizations, and groups. Apart from the trade unions, who often had their own agendas, the ILP was the most effective and most unified of these groups, but even saying that is less of a glowing review of the ILP and more of a condemnation of the other socialist organizations in Britain at the time; there was a saying about the whole socialist situation at the time

40 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 118.

41 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 123.

42 Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labor Party, 1880-1900*, 86-119.

43 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, xviii.

that said that “the Labour Party is a jellyfish, the ILP its backbone.”⁴⁴ Moreover, the Labour Party was still run very much so at the consent of the trade unions: on the eve of the First World War, the vast majority of the organization at the local level was left to trades councils, conglomerations of local trade unions.⁴⁵ The Labour Party in many ways was a tool of the trade unions, or at least was beholden to the trade union movement in such a manner as to be remarkable: the party leadership was forced to concede autonomy to the unions in many of the country’s biggest industrial centers, and while it helped earn their loyalty, also helped to establish a state of affairs wherein the party’s leaderships was walking a tightrope.⁴⁶ Due to the influence of trade unions, which were often skeptical of socialists, the party was not even explicitly committed to socialism on the eve of the war, and would not be until 1918.⁴⁷ The Labour Party, far from being a political party in a position to dictate terms to the establishment, was still a minor player on the political stage with a number of internal organizational foibles at the start of the 20th century.

With this understanding of the national political situation at the start of the First World War, the political situation on the River Clyde at that time can be understood. Scotland had only a handful of Labour members of Parliament in August of 1914, and only one of those MPs, George Barnes (an ILP member and trade unionist), represented Glasgow. Scotland at that time was under the almost unilateral control of the Liberal Party, owing to the widespread support for increases in the franchise in Scotland and the legacy of Chartism, a movement in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s that demanded a universal franchise for all adult men that often allied itself to trade unionism and the struggle for economic rights of the underclasses.⁴⁸ Chartist sentiments had been high in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow, where a riot broke out in March of 1848 following a protest for unemployment relief that mirrored the events

44 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 71.

45 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 33.

46 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 38.

47 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 96.

48 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 26.

occurring concurrently on the continent.⁴⁹ As a result of this influence on the country, the Liberals did not lose a single election in Scotland after 1850, with the exception of the khaki election of 1900, when the Tory government's victory in the Boer War led to a landslide election in their favor.⁵⁰

Another issue that led to the city and its working classes broadly to accept and support the leadership of the Liberal Party was the city's notoriously poor housing conditions. Working-class, municipal housing in Britain in general was of a poor quality at this time, but Scotland's was famously so: at the start of the war, the national government had already appointed a Royal Commission on Housing to investigate the sorry state of housing in industrial Scotland.⁵¹ However, it must be stated that the rent on this housing was cheaper than it tended to be in other industrial centers in Britain.⁵² Exacerbating the housing problem was a lack of governmental initiative on the matter; in keeping with classical liberal economic principles that reigned almost unchecked in the government of Britain at that time, provision of housing was left a private matter, and when it was not it was mostly under the control of localities rather than the national government.⁵³ The state of housing in Glasgow engendered a feeling of antipathy towards landlords in the city's lower classes that translated to electoral success for the Liberals; the landlords tended to identify with the Tories, and as such, the unpropertied or small-holding Liberals found in the agitated, landlord-hating working classes of the Clyde a natural ally.⁵⁴ The state of renting in the city resulted in a working class whose political will was very much linked with housing policy.

The most important factor in working-class politics on the eve of the First World War was the great strike wave that struck the country in the first half of the 1910s, dubbed "The Great Labour

49 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 27.

50 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 31.

51 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 24.

52 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 25.

53 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 24.

54 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 32.

Unrest.”⁵⁵ This wave of labor unrest was one of the most significant in British history, with almost 41 million labor hours lost to strike action in 1912 alone.⁵⁶ These strikes were notable not just because of their existence, but also due to their composition: alongside craft unions like machinists, who would play a large role in the unrest in Glasgow during the war, unions of workers in transport and mining also had large and particularly turbulent strikes during this time.⁵⁷ Moreover, the strikes, rather than being disconnected, were often accompanied by sympathy strikes by other unions; for example, railwaymen struck in sympathy with dockers in Liverpool during the unrest, and they started this strike before their union gave them permission.⁵⁸ Nationally, the strike wave culminated in the forging of a “Triple Alliance” in early 1914 between the miners, the dockworkers, and the railway workers, which pledged to unify their strike activity in order to provide a greater weight behind their demands; however, this alliance was exceptionally new at the time of the war’s outbreak, and was unable to flex its muscles before the war.⁵⁹ The Unrest even saw unusually high levels of participation by syndicalists, socialists who wanted to use strike action for revolutionary purposes.⁶⁰ However, with the strike wave cresting in 1914, it showed that the unions, more than anyone else, were the main players in the politics of the working class, and that their power was much greater than any other player on the left, so great that the government had started to fear that some of the violence that accompanied many of the strikes might spill over into something more.⁶¹

Glasgow followed and even eclipsed these trends in a number of different ways. Significant strike action in Glasgow and the west of Scotland continued into 1914, a break from the national

55 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 441.

56 Ibid.

57 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, 442.

58 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, 444.

59 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, 472.

60 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, 446.

61 Geoffrey Russell Searle, *A New England?: Peace and War, 1886-1918*, 444.

trend.⁶² Employers also found it quite difficult to win confrontations in the west of Scotland, betraying a strength to the trade unions that puts Glasgow at the very least into the upper tier of effectiveness when compared to the rest of the country.⁶³ At any rate, the trade unions and the labor movement that they represented were very much in the spotlight at the start of the war, and their power over the labor movement and its representative bodies is a story that would continue into the post-war years.

In August 1914, the British Empire entered the First World War to fulfill their treaty obligation with Belgium, kicking off almost a decade of death, destruction, and revolutionary change. The Labour Party almost immediately accepted the necessity of a settlement with the government to win the war. The Labour Party put up some resistance to the war when it was still questionable whether or not Britain would join the great continental bloodletting, holding mass demonstrations against the war.⁶⁴ However, the party came around to the idea of the war when the country joined. On August 5th, a day after the entry of Britain into the war, the parliamentary Labour Party voted in favor of the war credits that the government requested to prosecute the war, and the pacifist leadership of the party, including Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald, was subsequently pushed out in favor of Arthur Henderson's faction supporting negotiations with the government.⁶⁵ That resolution eventually came, among other things, in the form of a strike pledge, hammered out by Henderson with the government, to forego striking in war-related industry and to send all industrial disputes to government arbitration; no matter how one slices it, this was a severe downgrade in the unions' power, especially when compared to the years between 1910 and 1914 when their power was at its zenith.⁶⁶ *Labour Leader*, the Independent Labour Party's publication, published an article that highlighted the roles of capitalism in the origins of

62 Glasgow Labour History Workshop, "Roots of Red Clydeside: The Labour Unrest in West Scotland, 1910-1914." in *Militant Workers: Labour and Class Conflict on the Clyde, 1900-1950* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1992), 84.

63 Glasgow Labour History Workshop, "Roots of Red Clydeside: The Labour Unrest in West Scotland, 1910-1914," 102.

64 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 32.

65 Christopher Howard, "MacDonald, Henderson, and the Outbreak of War, 1914," *The Historical Journal* 20, no. 4 (December 1977), 881.

66 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 58.

the war, called the workers of Germany and Austria “comrades and brothers,” and expressed the hope that after the war “the greater Democracy will be born,” but fell short of actually advocating for opposition and resistance to the war.⁶⁷ The Labour Party, and the socialist movement in general, was on the back foot in the wake of the outbreak of the First World War.

The mood in Glasgow was sympathetic to the war at the outset, as it was in essentially every combatant nation at the start of the war. In August alone, 20,000 Glaswegians volunteered for the army.⁶⁸ William Gallacher, Clyde Workers Committee leader and titan of Red Clyde, expounded upon this mood in his laconically titled memoir *Revolt on the Clyde*: “What terrible attraction a war can have! The wild excitement, the illusion of wonderful adventure and the actual break in the deadly monotony of working class life!”⁶⁹ Yet Glasgow was not a city that was baying for bloodshed: pacifists and socialists turned out two days after Britain’s entry into the war to protest for peace, bringing out 5,000 anti-war demonstrators.⁷⁰ This was to be a prelude to the agitation that would grip the city for the next five years.

The story of broad-based agitation in Glasgow against the government and ultimately against the war started with two different but related struggles: the campaigns in the machinist factories and the campaigns for lower rents in the working quarters of the city. While support for the war was still high as wartime production got underway, the first crack began to show in early 1915 when the Amalgamated Society of Engineers’ rank and file members in Glasgow refused to accept the settlement reached by their national union’s leadership for a raise of 3/4ths of a pence an hour for tool work, instead agitating for their initial bargaining position of two pence an hour.⁷¹ The Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), who were to become one of the most important players in wartime militancy, had

67 “The ILP and the War,” *Labour Leader*, August 14, 1914, The British Newspaper Archive.

68 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 41.

69 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 18.

70 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 41.

71 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 71.

become increasingly radical for the 20 years before the war; they elected socialist George Barnes as their leader in 1896, and had been fighting employer-mandated automation ever since.⁷² Despite being very much so a craft union of exceptionally skilled workers, the ASE was a fairly left-leaning organization, especially on the Clyde, and this fact would become important when analyzing the reasons for Glasgow's lurch to the left.

Around the same time, the major machine conglomerate in Glasgow, G. and J. Weir, and their director William Weir brought in 2,000 American laborers to take over the work of many of the tool workers of the Weir plant, working on, as reported later by a worker at the Cathcart plant to then-Minister for Munitions David Lloyd George, "pump rods, roughing piston rods, rocking levers, shafts, columns, glands, neck rings, pump levers and washers, valve chest end and bottom doors, locks for piston valves, and some chest covers."⁷³ This system of labor dilution, the process by which new, non-unionized, and cheaper labor (often women or foreigners) is brought onto the factory floor in an effort to increase production and subsequently drive down the wages and ability of the workers to self-manage, proved to be the spark that lit the fire of Red Clydeside, a fire that would ebb and flow at various strengths throughout the war and thereafter.

The ASE and a number of other local, more radical unions struck in February 1915, despite the national ASE organization disavowing the strike and not paying out strike funds to the workers.⁷⁴ This action galvanized many of the activist elements on the Clyde, the explicitly socialist organizers and the more radical union leadership, to form the Central Withdrawal of Labour Committee, so-called because the Defense of the Realm Act had made the prospect of proclaiming a "strike" a dubiously legal one.⁷⁵ The Clyde Withdrawal of Labour Committee took upon itself the vanguard mission of negotiating with

72 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 7.

73 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 12.

74 Ibid.

75 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 14.

the owners and the government on behalf of the Glaswegian working class.⁷⁶ John Maclean, William Gallacher, David Kirkwood, James Maxton, Harry McShane, and other famous figures of Red Clyde all took part in the formation and leadership of the Clyde Withdrawal of Labour Committee, entering through their roles as trade unionists, socialist agitators, or both. This Committee eventually became the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC), an organization which claimed that its goal was to “weld... unions into one powerful organization that will place the workers in complete control of the industry.”⁷⁷ The CWC was to play a major role when the Munitions Act brought another wave of unrest to the city.

The other locus of discontent that struck the city during the early days of the war was the Rent Strikes. As the number of men employed in Glasgow's munitions factories increased as a result of increased production requirements during the war, the supply of low-income housing in the city started to dwindle, leading the already cramped and squalid conditions of Glaswegian housing to only worsen. Moreover, rents were rising as the housing supply dwindled, the landlords of the city announcing an increase by 25%.⁷⁸ While this lofty increase never materialized, the government commission that eventually formed to investigate this situation did find that rent had increased by at least 5% in almost 35% of the houses they surveyed.⁷⁹

This situation galvanized the city, and even managed to enlist the official help of the parliamentary socialist organizations and trade unions that had more or less stayed at arm's length of the agitation of early 1915.⁸⁰ The Glasgow Women's Housing Association led the charge on resistance to these rent increases, headed by Mary Barbour, Agnes Dollan, Mary Laird, and Helen Crawford,

76 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 72.

77 “The Clyde Workers' Committee,” *The Worker*, January 29, 1916, Marxists.org.

78 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 86.

79 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 21.

80 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 19.

women who have become heroes of Red Clydeside in their own right.⁸¹ The Association kicked off a rent strike in the summer of 1915, reaching over 20,000 participants by October.⁸² The demonstrations generally went as such: neighbors, hearing of a planned eviction, would assemble outside an evictee's home, blocking the landlord or his agent from evicting the tenant; Mrs. Barbour's Army manning its defensive positions. It should be stressed that the evidence from the time does not bear out a reading of the Rent Strike as a new Paris Commune in the making. One article from the *Sunday Post*, one of western Scotland's premier weeklies, quotes one striker as saying "if the Sheriff says we must leave the house, that's the end of it." However, the latter part of that quotation reveals the radical seed that would continue to germinate and grow throughout the wartime years: "if the Sheriff says we may stay, then only a bomb will shift us!"⁸³ The Rent Strikes, while not thoroughly radical, was still a major and serious attempt by working-class people in Glasgow to affect change.

While the method of eviction in the beginning was mostly left in private hands, when the landlords shifted their tactics to using the courts to try to evict, a mighty throng of workers and their wives descended on the Sheriff's Court to make their strength known in November 1915, ahead of a major eviction trial. Gallacher framed this as a fantastical tale: "Every factory was keyed up and ready... Mrs. Barbour's Army was on the march... but even as they marched, mighty reinforcements were coming from the workshops and the yards."⁸⁴ Gallacher was ever the fabulist, and one ought not to uncritically accept this version of events. However, due to the cross-profession nature of the rent strikes, an issue that appealed as much to labor aristocrats with good machinist's jobs as it did common laborers, and the fact that many of the leaders of the CWC, which had support from some sections of the skilled workers, as well as establishment members of the labor movement, were involved in the

81 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 86.

82 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 89.

83 "Rent Strikes Spreading," *The Sunday Post Special*, October 3, 1915, The British Newspaper Archive.

84 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 54-55.

strikes, one ought not to doubt this in its entirety.⁸⁵ Assuredly, many workers and their wives were on the march in Glasgow. Taking this holistically, there is evidence for a budding radicalism that in many ways presages the later events of the war and the post-war period.

Parliament passed a rent control bill in November 1915, but the extent to which that was influenced by the Rent Strikes is an open question. Gallacher presented it as a significant victory for workers by workers, enacted after the Sheriff of Glasgow sent a hasty telegram to parliament demanding rent controls, saying that “the workers have left the factories” before telling the mob of his demand.⁸⁶ Again, Gallacher did not so much tell the truth as much as he told a good story. Certainly it must have looked to him, at the end of a months’ long campaign that drew in all ranks of the lower classes and the might of the CWC, the parliamentary socialist organizations, and all the legends of Red Clyde, that his march with the *sans culottes* of the city led to the immediate passage of the act, stemming fully from ground-up support. However, this picture has been muddied by many that came after.

Historian Iain McLean rejects the notion of a ground-up cause for this bill. He argues that the strike was necessary for the passage of the bill, but not sufficient; the real impetus was the belief that rent controls were necessary to keep munitions production up, whether that be because of rent strikes or merely a concession to workers.⁸⁷ Yet the Rent Strikes ought not to be discounted for their significance nor for their ability to inspire change. The fact was that Lloyd George was willing to enlist the help of Coalition Tories in the passage of rent controls despite grumbling from their backbench, something not terribly surprising but which belies a sense of urgency.⁸⁸ More importantly, the fact that he was willing to go against the Radical wing of the Liberal Party, many of whom thought the measure uneconomical

85 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 27.

86 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 57

87 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 27.

88 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 24.

and drastic and a member of whom argued that the bill was “unjust and unnecessary”, shows that the situation seemed urgent enough to Lloyd George that action was necessary.⁸⁹ Moreover, when taken with the fact that Lloyd George would later become incredibly reactive, arguably overreactive, to popular discontent during and immediately after the war, it becomes clear that one ought not to understate the extent to which the Rent Strikes created real change and represented a locus from which future organization could occur.

At the same time that the forces of discontent in the city were gaining ground on the housing front, the beginnings of the conflict that would control the class struggles on the Clyde for the rest of the war were taking form: the fight over labor dilution. However, with the issue of labor dilution, the solidarity showcased in the rent strikes starts to break down; morality tales about noble proletarians standing in iron-like solidarity with their class brethren against the wicked attacks of the bourgeois government make for good propaganda, but do not stand up to analysis. Dilution meant that a number of different kinds of people could be brought into the factories and earn machinist’s wages: unskilled workers and women would be brought into the factory, and the skilled workers’ resistance to this state of affairs calls into question the narrative of wartime working-class solidarity.⁹⁰

Moreover, a number of socialist activists in Glasgow at the time welcomed labor dilution, at least in theory. David Kirkwood, a comparably moderate voice in the CWC and an ILP member, maintained that he was not opposed to labor dilution, as it would strengthen class consciousness, but wanted a sort of “worker’s dilution”, one where workers could maintain their pay and their control over the factory floor with the added benefit of more bodies for the fight.⁹¹ The Munitions of War Act, passed in July 1915, increased the government’s control over the munitions factories in the country, and banned strikes as well, although this power was utilized with some discretion, as a miner’s strike in

89 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 25.

90 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 34.

91 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt* (London: Harrap & Co., 1935), 109.

Wales was treated with kid gloves.⁹² Moreover, Lloyd George sought to continually reiterate that the act would not immiserate workers in an effort to stave off unrest: he declared that “it would be a violation of the spirit and the letter of the Munitions Act if the employment of women or unskilled men on munitions work should be utilized for the purpose of lowering the remuneration of men customarily engaged on that class of work.”⁹³ Despite his best efforts, the calls for dilution by the Munitions Ministry and its minister, the aforementioned Lloyd George, immediately set off a long chain of labor unrest in Glasgow that would eventually come to a head later in the war. Initial attempts to provide production results that satisfied the Ministry and kept the labor unions happy did not work out, and so the Ministry imposed dilution on the manufactories of Glasgow.⁹⁴

It is no wonder that the engineers of Glasgow immediately felt like dilution was something to be opposed as bitterly as possible: William Weir, aforementioned tycoon of the G. and J. Weir Ltd. industrial empire in Glasgow, had been advocating for labor dilution *before* the war, and was more than happy to comply with government demands to dilute his labor force and to take another trench in the long battle against his workers.⁹⁵ The skilled workers and their tribunate immediately realized the effect this order would have on their ability to manage their affairs, and spared no unkind words for the practice. Christopher Addison, despite being a pro-war, Liberal MP and member of the committee convened to see the Ministry’s work done, described dilution as an attempt by the employers of the Clyde to exercise dictatorial control over their workers, “a sort of martial law” for the working man in the factory.⁹⁶ Immediately, a new front for labor agitation opened up, and groups like the Clyde Workers’ Committee were all too happy to take up the sword once again. In the summer of 1915, while the rent strikes were still ongoing, the first labor strikes against the policy of dilution as well as a

92 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 29.

93 “Munitions of War Act 1915”, UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/parliament-and-the-first-world-war/legislation-and-acts-of-war/kdjgh/>

94 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 32.

95 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 31.

96 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 35.

number of other policies sent down from the Ministry began.⁹⁷ Strikes continued sporadically throughout the summer and fall of 1915, with varying degrees of CWC participation, the *sine qua non* of an action with a socialist tinge. McLean argues that the CWC's participation was more limited than generally thought: for example, a major action occurring at Lang's machine tool factory was completely unrelated to the CWC.⁹⁸ With this in mind, the CWC emerges less as a vanguard of union action and more of a political group that worked closely with disgruntled workers to achieve political ends, a goal they prosecuted with some success. When John Maclean was fired from his job as a teacher almost certainly due to his prior conviction for violation of the Defense of the Realm Act⁹⁹, the CWC's influence was such that it was able to get factory workers to officially denounce the schoolboard's decision.¹⁰⁰

The first blow by the government against the unrest in Glasgow came in late 1915 as a result of a now infamous event in which David Lloyd George was unceremoniously harassed and harangued by the very munitions workers he had come to Glasgow to mollify. It is one of the enduring legends of Red Clydeside: Lloyd George, in his post-war memoirs, said that he came to Glasgow to "see for myself what the position was, and put before the men and their leaders the exact facts."¹⁰¹ He had been on the Tyne the week before, and came to the Clyde to meet the leaders of the labor organizations, including the CWC. Holding meetings with union organizers on the 23rd of December and the CWC on the 24th, he then went to address a great assembly of workers in St. Andrew's Hall on Christmas Day to convince them of the government's position. Immediately, everything went out of hand. David Kirkwood, a party to the meeting, reported that 3,000 turned up in the hall, with an unknown number of others waiting outside, and the crowd was raucous from the start. The hall, bedecked in patriotic

97 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 38.

98 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 40.

99 He was convicted of making statements liable to hurt recruitment efforts as a result of his speeches in favor of peace

100 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*. 52.

101 David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George. 1914-1915* (Boston: Littleton, Brown, and Co., 1933), 274.

military regalia and with a group of policemen keeping watch over the crowd, erupted into mocking as soon as Lloyd George entered the scene; the men and women were so spoiling for a fight that they even mocked him when his hair got in his face. Arthur Henderson spoke about the sacred neutrality of Belgium, but the crowd had none of it. Lloyd George got up to speak, but continued to be harassed by the crowd; Kirkwood noted that he looked harried and downtrodden. Kirkwood, under whose auspices the meeting was supposedly held, asked the audience to at least hear the man out, and Lloyd George was able to finish his speech before slinking away.¹⁰²

Lloyd George recounted the event much differently, arguing that the vast majority of the crowd was peaceful, that the jeers came from a small group of malcontents, and that the speech more or less went off fairly well, despite the occasional interruptions from the crowd.¹⁰³ He also said that, if anything, Arthur Henderson got more of the crowd's ire than he did.¹⁰⁴ In any case, it's unknowable whether or not Kirkwood was exaggerating the resistance to Lloyd George or if Lloyd George was downplaying that resistance, but at any rate, there certainly was a streak of discontent and unrest among the engineers sufficient to have them at least jeer against a visiting member of the government and his entourage.

The next day, the establishment press carried a report that downplayed the agitation: the *Sunday Post's* report is placid, and mentions the presence of policemen and fliers passed along outside but little about any commotion.¹⁰⁵ The *Forward*, the ILP paper in Glasgow, did report on the unrest at the meeting, criticizing the mainstream press by saying that "it is simply stupid to go about deluding people that only an insignificant minority, and not the vast overwhelming majority of the meeting, was

102 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 112.

103 David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, 276.

104 Ibid.

105 "Lloyd George's Tour," *The Sunday Post*, December 26, 1915, The British Newspaper Archive.

angry.”¹⁰⁶ By the end of the month, the paper had been suppressed by the government on what seemed to many to be very shaky grounds.¹⁰⁷ The debate about to what extent the reportage on the infamous meeting played in the suppression of the *Forward* is an ongoing one, with popular telling being that Lloyd George, embarrassed by being given a rough and tumble Glasgow greeting by the workers of the city, suppressed it out of embarrassment, but the historical record agrees with McLean that this is an oversimplification. The idea that Lloyd George’s embarrassment helped sway him is probably factual, but McLean’s argument that the other members of the government responsible for dilution smelled an opportunity to remove a key locus of agitation in the fight against dilution in the *Forward* and that the news of this embarrassment would further hurt the campaign seems to be correct.¹⁰⁸ Whatever happened, the government was in no mood to treat the Clyde with kid gloves going into 1916.

Early 1916 was the high watermark of both labor unrest during the war and the government’s response to said unrest. Both sides opened with a strong salvo. The CWC’s paper *The Worker*, started after the government suppressed John Maclean’s *Vanguard*, published an article titled “Should the Workers Arm?”, an article with an inflammatory title but whose conclusion skirted the line and stayed within the text of the law: the workers would probably like to arm, since the usurpations of labor dilution and the suppression of their press organs was so odious, but the paper maintains that that would be a bad idea, and that they should use the power of labor withholding, as “a worker’s labour-power is his only wealth.”¹⁰⁹ The government fired back: they suppressed the paper, and in February 1916 arrested James Maxton, James MacDougall, William Gallacher, John Muir, and Walter Bell, the CWC members most involved with the publishing of the paper, and charged them with sedition over

106 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 54.

107 Ibid.

108 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 61.

109 “Should the Workers Arm?,” *The Worker*, January 29, 1916, Marxists.org.

the article.¹¹⁰ This came on the heels of another high profile arrest, as John Maclean, who had never stopped speaking against the war on the streets of Glasgow, was arrested on the grounds of violating the Defense of the Realm Act in late January.¹¹¹ They would all serve prison time, with Maclean serving the longest and most damaging prison sentence of three years penal servitude.¹¹²

March 1916 saw Red Clydeside at its most volatile, with the labor dilution unrest and the politically socialist unrest converging to create a tempest for the government. The CWC was being led primarily by Kirkwood, whose conciliatory though still radical politics kept him from seeing the inside of a jail cell, although all of the arrested members of the CWC were not set for trial until April. He still found himself in trouble when he was subject to a minor scandal when he asked the women brought into the factory to join the women's union out of turn, leading to his exile from the women's section of the factory.¹¹³ This, combined with remaining unrest over the state of dilution (there were complaints of diluted labor refusing to join unions), led to a large strike in late March, with the men of Kirkwood's factory marching out with the men from the major munitions plants across the city at their sides.¹¹⁴ The fact of the spark for this demonstration having to do with women in the workplace hints at sexism at play, but the many complaints against dilution more broadly muddy the picture and keep one from declaring it wholly influenced by sexism. Whatever the case, the government, fearing a CWC-led wider based strike, deported much the leadership of the CWC, including Kirkwood, out of Glasgow, not arresting them but making them leave the city.¹¹⁵

The influence and significance of the CWC is evident from this event. The fact that this is the last major, broad-based strike of the wartime in the city, although labor unrest would continue throughout the wartime and political agitation continued. It appears, due to the fact of this being the last

110 Ibid.

111 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 66.

112 Ibid.

113 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 78.

114 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 81.

115 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 82.

major industrial action of the war of note coinciding with the arrest or deportation of most of the major members of the CWC members, that the CWC, or at least the people at the helm of the organization, had more sway over the working class and had more hands on the levers of the industrial situation than scholars like McLean are wont to admit.

The gendered aspect of much of the unrest in Glasgow during the war is also fairly clear with this incident. While the inciting incident was fairly nondescript, the fact that the men of the factories turned out to protest a decision by the women's section of the factory should not go discounted. Labor dilution was achieved partially by bringing in women, previously excluded, to the factories, and the extent to which the unrest often split "we, the workers" and "they, the government's stooges" along gendered lines is fairly evident in this event. While the unrest in the wartime certainly had progressive features, the fact that the dilution scheme put women on the side of the government and the bosses meant that sexism cannot be discounted, if not as a motivator than a convenient line of attack for engineers in Glasgow.

On the national scale, the experience of Red Clydeside in the first half of the war, that of major industrial action taking place despite the government's agreement with the trade unions, was rare. The closest analogy was that of the aforementioned South Wales miners' strike of 1915, when, similar to the Glaswegian workers, the workers of southern Wales' mines went on strike, against the wishes of the national miners' union, after local mineowners argued that the war bonus awarded to miners nationally ought to substitute for their local agreement with the miners.¹¹⁶ The strike, however, concluded much more successfully for the Welsh miners, who used their unity and stranglehold on the production of coal, much needed for the war-effort, to force the government into wide-ranging concessions.¹¹⁷ The

116 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 75.

117 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 36.

Welsh workers, unhampered by division, were able to force the government to the table much more effectively than the workers of Glasgow.

A vector of unrest that Glasgow experienced that was fairly uniform with the rest of the country, however, was that unrest brought about by the introduction of conscription. The British Army, a volunteer force bleeding manpower as a result of the slog of the First World War, was in need of more recruits to fill the boots of dead men, and as such, a bill was put before parliament in January 1916.¹¹⁸ The Labour Party in parliament was vehemently against such an imposition, and had to be cajoled back into the good graces of the government with a number of concessions.¹¹⁹ It's not hard to see why Labour, conciliatory but still protective of its wages and seeking to make the wartime necessities as painless as possible, would be against such a scheme. The imposition of conscription generally meant the imposition of dilution: a factory whose fighting age men have been sent to the front is a factory in need of dilution. There were even worries that the imposition of military conscription would mean the eventual imposition of industrial conscription: men and women led at gunpoint into the factories to work for army wages under army supervision, absolutely tanking organized labor's position.¹²⁰ Even apart from this, many rank and file workers, especially those in danger of having their essential worker status removed by the imposition of broader forms of conscription, occasionally organized official protest to the imposition of conscription. In Sheffield, the accidental conscription of an ineligible working man brought on an unofficial strike that included voices for "workers' control" among its speakers.¹²¹

In Glasgow, too, the imposition of conscription activated a fairly sizeable public protest, with John Maclean and Sylvia Pankhurst organizing a meeting against conscription that would be banned by

118 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 78.

119 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 84.

120 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 79.

121 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 84.

the Lord Provost, and be held anyway to a sizeable crowd.¹²² However, locally and nationally, it must be remembered that the provisions of conscription, which exempted many skilled working men, kept the lid on conscription as an engine of discontent among many participants of the wartime unrest.¹²³ While it might not be correct to say that conscription was an imposition that brought about vast swathes of the population against it, it provided yet another point of friction between the government and sections of the working populace who were growing weary of the demands put on them by the war.¹²⁴

The rest of the wartime saw a slowdown of labor agitation as such but an increase in political agitation in the city. The arrests and deportations of 1916 removed a locus of labor agitation in the CWC, which descended into factionalism and became ineffectual in the wake of the arrests, and while those arrested would all be released sometime in 1917, they were in no shape to throw themselves back at the walls of the government. Everyone except Gallacher was in poor health upon their release in early 1917, and John Maclean, released much later, needed much time to convalesce.¹²⁵ The situation of dilution had also started to fall away: the government's need for munitions meant that dilution had to happen on some level, and negotiated dilution schemes had continued after the strike in March 1916.¹²⁶

It was around this time in late 1916 when David Lloyd George replaced H. H. Asquith as prime minister. The failures of the Asquith ministry to conduct the war with any amount of skill, including a shoddy roll out for conscription, led to discontent within his ministry, and already in May there were calls to reorganize the cabinet.¹²⁷ By December, Asquith was faced with the possible resignation of many of his cabinet ministers, and he fell on his sword, with Lloyd George forming a government on December 7th.¹²⁸ Lloyd George managed to sway Labour to support his ministry by promising

122 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 61.

123 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 77.

124 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 82.

125 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 83.

126 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 85.

127 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 181.

128 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 184.

arbitration and concessions, including by getting serious on mobilization of resources and industry.¹²⁹ However, with Lloyd George, the man responsible for munitions dilution, in charge, the stage was set for some amount of friction between government demands and workers in the coming years.

However, even more grounded and less fantastical accounts of this time period admit that the political situation on the Clyde was heating up in direct contrast to its labor situation. Large crowds gathered in March 1917 to commemorate the February Revolution in Russia, with two phrases on their lips: “Free Russia” and “Free Maclean.”¹³⁰ The city saw its largest May Day march in history, with 70,000 people reported to have actively marched and, when one counts spectators, 250,000 participating.¹³¹ The rhetoric of the speakers was radical as well: the organizations participating moved for “the overthrow of the capitalist system of production for profit”, and sent their “fraternal greetings to the workers of the world.”¹³² This feat was repeated the next year, when similar numbers of workers downed their tools for May Day marches throughout the city; *Forward* estimated 100,000 participants, while the *Glasgow Herald* gave a more conservative 70,000.¹³³ There is also some evidence that the Russian October Revolution of 1917, an event less construed as positive in broader British society, also had some level of popular support on the Clyde as well: William Gallacher reports “huge meetings, night after night” in support of the Bolsheviks, and while this is almost certainly a politically motivated exaggeration, his reportage that P.J. Dollan, a man whose later career was marked by conciliation and reformism, reported a large amount of sympathy by the workers and socialists in Glasgow for the Bolsheviks and the October Revolution shows that there was some level of excitement for Red October in the city.¹³⁴ Years of unproductive slaughter in Flanders’ fields had also chipped away at the old political order of the city, and anti-war sentiment was high in the city; the Glasgow of 1914, running

129 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 184-185.

130 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 83.

131 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 84-85.

132 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 84.

133 “Labour’s Greatest May Day,” *Forward*, May 1918, The British Newspaper Archive.

134 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 176.

towards the front lines high on patriotic fervor of the nation as a whole, was gone, and the new Glasgow was against the war, and voices that would decry all war as capitalist slaughter were not far from one's ears in the city towards the end of the war.¹³⁵ The city, for as long as anyone could remember a bastion of populist liberalism, now contained more voices than ever waving the red banner of socialism.

Nationally, while labor agitation quieted down somewhat in Glasgow, the example of Red Clyde had spread across the country during the later stages of the war, with a particularly important wave of informal strikes occurring during May of 1917, the uncleverly named "May Strikes."¹³⁶ These were a number of strikes, spread throughout the country, that occurred for a myriad of reasons, including one familiar to students of Red Clyde: dilution. These strikes lasted a fortnight, but were generally dealt with much more placidly than the agitation on the Clyde; the government agreed to bargain with the trade unions over concessions, and a number of men arrested under the Defense of the Realm Act had their charges dropped.¹³⁷ This sort of sporadic action continued throughout 1917, with a fairly significant outburst happening in late 1917, when workers in Coventry struck over non-recognition of shop stewards; again, the government's solution was consultation.¹³⁸ The experience of Red Clydeside, which had occurred much earlier, had spread at least somewhat to the rest of the country.

With all of this in mind, what then is to be said about Red Clydeside during the war in terms of its uniqueness? Was Red Clydeside unique in the British experience of the war, or was it one of many cities in which a trend that was seen throughout the country played out in much the same way as it had in the other major cities of Britain?

135 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 96.

136 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 206.

137 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 206.

138 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 208.

The facts are plain to see: Glasgow pioneered strike action against the policies of the government, saw earlier participation by members of certain industries against schemes like dilution than other cities, and felt harsher crackdowns. Unrest against dilution began in 1915, with the first unofficial action by the engineers that summer; only Wales would see a similar timeline of events, with most of the country kept under wraps until later in the war. Similarly, the crackdown on the CWC was much harsher than against the leadership of other strikes, with some charged and imprisoned and others deported, while leaders of the May Strikes were merely threatened with prosecution. Of course, on certain issues, especially that of conscription, Glasgow was no different than other places, and as such fits much more into the pattern of national unrest over conscription. However, with regards to strikes and labor unrest, the engineers of the Clyde were the first to attempt a large-scale resistance to the schemes of the government, and as such, in this aspect at least, Red Clydeside constitutes a legitimately unique phenomenon, if not in the broad strokes then certainly in the details.

However, the most enthralling question, both then and now, continues to be whether the city was ripe for revolution as a consequence of the wartime unrest. McLean argues wholeheartedly that the situation was not revolutionary during wartime, and goes further to say that it was not even particularly conducive to revolution in the war years. The leadership on the ground lacked all the unity and daring of the Bolsheviks, or even the Socialist Revolutionaries, in Russia: the ILP, never having made up its mind on revolution and split like every other socialist party over the issue of the war, could not foment revolution, and the smaller socialist leagues and parties were either too split or not powerful enough to wage revolutionary war.¹³⁹ The industrial action, the locus of agitation in the first half of the war, was too much concerned with the rights of the labor aristocrats in the machinist shops, and never reached out to the unskilled workers, even spurning them when they diluted their labor; efforts by political

139 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 102.

socialists like Kirkwood could never bridge this gap quick enough.¹⁴⁰ Finally, the unskilled workers of the city were liable to conscription, while the skilled workers were not: an impediment on the road to class solidarity if ever there was one.¹⁴¹ All of these factors constitute the argument against the myth of revolution being a possibility in the wartime.

With this in mind, the war years should be understood less as a loss by revolutionaries and more as a vitally important factor in the change in the political makeup of the city. Glasgow in 1914 was voting for Liberals who, while more radical and conciliatory towards the working class than many, still more or less operated as they had for the past hundred years, pushing for home rule and expanded suffrage and little else. At war's end, the city saw record attendance for May Day marches and other ideologically-tinged demonstrations. When a place makes such a rapid shift in ideology, even if many of the city's inhabitants still stick to the old ways, that is the sign that things that have not been seen before are on the horizon, that the old world, while not completely melting away into air quite yet, is started to sag along the edges. Revolution could not have come in 1917 in Glasgow like it did in Petrograd because Glasgow was not Petrograd: people still more or less got what food they needed, and the government had not prosecuted a 19th century war against a 20th century opponent like the Tsar had. In this sense, McLean is right: wartime Glasgow was not revolutionary. However, the organization and unrest that occurred during the war did contribute a galvanizing issue that some elements of the city's working class, namely the engineers that participated most in the wartime unrest, that animated later changes in the broader political culture of the city, and as such, it ought to be understood as the prologue to the later dawn of Glasgow as a thoroughly red city. Taking McLean's path of calling it a failure due to the inability of the wartime agitation to secure the totality of their goals is an

140 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 108.

141 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 109.

understandable declaration, but must be tempered by recognizing that it helped contribute to the genuinely remarkable shift towards Labour and the left in the post-war era.

Chapter 2 – Revolt on the Clyde

*For reason in revolt now thunders, and at last ends the age of can't!*¹⁴²

142 Eugene Pottier, *The Internationale* (Paris, June 1871),
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

If wartime Clydeside was the rising action, then the events of January 31st, 1919, known as “Bloody Friday” or “The Battle of George Square,” were the climax. Over the course of one day, all the tension that had been building up in the Clyde Valley over the course of the war was let loose, with the outcome ultimately being one of chaos and disorder in the city and a failure to bring about a revolutionary change. However, the extent to which the battle in particular and the changes in the city since the beginning of the war in general paved the way for a legitimately status quo-breaking shift in the body politic is something that must be interrogated.

With the armistice of November 11th, 1918, the First World War finally came to an end after four long years of global bloodletting. Great Britain, as one of the victorious powers, was thankful that the war had been brought to a seemingly satisfactory conclusion, with various towns and municipalities experiencing massive demonstrations of rejoicing throughout the country.¹⁴³ However, the war had indelibly changed the fabric of British society, and the stress put on society by the war as seen in Glasgow certainly played itself out in varying degrees in other locales around the country as well. It cannot be forgotten that a great mass of servicemen were slated to return at war’s end, and the disenchanting effect of the trenches cannot be discounted as a factor in a changing society.¹⁴⁴ At the end of 1918, the country, while still reminiscent in many ways to the one it had been in 1914, had been undergone a tremendous trial and was shaped by this trial.

The epochal changes that happened in Europe at the end of the First World War were echoed by the changes to Glaswegian society. At war’s end, the city of Glasgow looked very dissimilar to the place that it had been a mere four years earlier. The labor militancy of the war years had certainly deescalated to a level of background noise at this point, but the events of the war had left their mark on the city, and whole swathes of people had been galvanized into ideological socialists. While the

143 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 260.

144 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 217.

working classes of the city cannot fully be characterized as being united together in brotherly proletarian embrace, it certainly is the case that the city was certainly more radical coming out of the war than it had been going in.

The end of the war in Europe came not with a bang, but with a whimper. It was due to no final conflagration of retributive violence or showcasing of a new, horrible weapons system like in the Second World War, but due to the collapse of the German Army after American reinforcement and the threat of revolution on the homefront caused Germany to raise the white flag. Befitting this ignominious end, the reaction to the end of the war in Glasgow was somber and resigned, happier to be over with the fighting than elated at the country's hollow-feeling victory. After brutal battles at the Somme and Passchendaele, the death and loss that everyone in Britain felt at least on some level cast a pall on the celebrations at the end of the war, and nowhere was this truer than in Glasgow. *The Glasgow Herald*, on the end of the war, remarked that "never in all reverence be it said, could the message of Calvary be apprehended with greater vividness than now when, grieving for the sacrifice, but rejoicing in the hope of the resurrection, the nations acclaim the conquest of the powers of darkness."¹⁴⁵ Certainly the sacrifice of the past four years is put to patriotic use here, but the fact remains that even the patriotic press could not get away from the immense toll that the war had taken on the country as a whole.

One of the first things that immediately affected the people of the city was the return of the soldiers from the front. With many men conscripted into the army and away from the workplace, the country and the city had to adjust to reintroducing the men away from the army and back into the jobs that had been diluted and filled in by others. The government's demobilization scheme created a large amount of anxiety and discontent among the returning soldiers. Rather than establishing some sort of government program to reacquaint men with their previous employers or to find new employment, the

145 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 170.

plan essentially left the process to individual employers.¹⁴⁶ This failing on the part of the government to secure employment effectively for the returning veterans would be the fuel for the fire that would burn bright during the Forty Hours Strike, being the root problem which that campaign sought to seek redress about. Already, in November 1918, the Labour-aligned newspaper *The Daily Herald* began to grumble about the shabby state of the government's efforts to reintegrate returning soldiers into the working world, saying coyly that "none but an imperial People, victorious against its enemies, but overcome with emotion and thankfulness before its returning heroes, could have done it," it being the poor job of reintegration of soldiers back into working life.¹⁴⁷ Already, discontent mounted over the economic conditions that came with the end of the violence in Europe and the government's response to it.

It is in this context that one of the most significant changes in the composition of the left in Britain occurred: the reorganization of the Labour Party and the drafting of a new, explicitly socialist constitution for the national organization in early 1918. It is from this constitution that Clause IV, the declaration that the Labour Party's objective was socialism (or at least implied to be), came to be, and its reorganization into a more conventional political organization with a coherent ideology and a mass membership. The change to the constitution was certainly radical for the Labour Party: it included individual membership in the party, the establishment of local party affiliates that the unions would meld into, and Clause IV, the socialist objective "to secure for the producers, by hand or by brain, the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service."¹⁴⁸ This was the constitution that created for the

146 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 268.

147 "The Return of the Soldier," *The Daily Herald*, November 23, 1918, The British Newspaper Archive.

148 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 94.

Labour Party a party in the traditional sense, a party with a more or less clarified ideology and a party that would be open to mass membership, not just the unionized working classes.

The first question that this brings up is simple: how did this happen? The Labour Party was previously very much beholden to trade union influence that remained fairly non-ideological and fairly jealous of its privileged position in the party with regards to membership, and so these changes deserve an explanation. Ross McKibbin argues that there are a number of explanations that can explicate these seismic shifts in ideology and organization. In his attempt to convince the various constituencies in the Labour Party of the necessity of the constitutional change, Arthur Henderson stressed the fact that Labour, which had tasted power very obliquely in its association with the coalition during the war, had the opportunity to achieve power by its own means, and that a number of things would be necessary to achieve this power, namely a rationalization of the party's structure and the inclusion of some sort of ideological unity of purpose.¹⁴⁹

Clause IV and the reorganization of structure served this purpose more than they did any other objective. Clause IV's inclusion seems odd when one considers that there existed ideological ambivalence and occasional hostility from many of the great constituent unions of the party; however, it is this ambivalence that explains it almost perfectly. McKibbin argues that the socialist objective, worded vaguely so as to imply socialism without declaring it, mostly passed less out of an upswelling of socialist feeling from the majority of the trade unionists and more so out of passive, ambivalent assent to it as an idea.¹⁵⁰ The socialist objective and the path towards it that cleaved towards nationalization rather than expropriation served the unions, wary of revolutionary overthrow and content with government direction of key industries, while the inclusion of it at all served as a

149 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 92.

150 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 102.

concession to the socialist organizations.¹⁵¹ A number of secondary resolutions, very much so in the vein of the socialist objective and demanding nationalization and government control of industry, also collected trade union support.¹⁵² McKibbin argues that the trade unions, politicized by the war, accepted certain politically motivated decisions, like Clause IV and the reorganization of the party, as a necessity in order to see their desires put through in policy.¹⁵³ The ability of the trade unions to bargain directly with the government, and occasionally to become a very part of the government through sitting on some committee to oversee various wartime production requirements, gave them a taste of the power that being in the government could give them, and as more willing to accept the socialist objective and the expansion of the party if it would help them ensure their interests in parliament.¹⁵⁴ In his presidential address to the TUC in 1917, John Hill argued that the best path forward was “strong and intelligent trade unionism linked with our political arm, the Labour Party.”¹⁵⁵ The TUC, experiencing governmental power for the first time in the war, had decided to throw its weight behind Labour, and could countenance a number of changes if it helped them achieve that power.

It is then a somewhat ironic occurrence that the adoption of Clause IV and the decision to turn the Labour Party into a mass party with local party affiliates in the major industrial centers of the country sounded a defeat for the socialist left on the national scale in the Labour Party. The ILP was sidelined by many of these reorganizations, as they had been one of the few routes into the Labour Party in the past, and even considered disaffiliation, but decided against it.¹⁵⁶ The Labour Party was as beholden as it ever was to the trade unions that made up its body, and the explicitly socialist organizations could only count Clause IV as a victory, which is somewhat cold comfort. However, it must be remembered that this is a national trend, and that in many localities, the socialist character of

151 Ibid.

152 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 104.

153 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 105.

154 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 105.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

the organizations and the people that made them up differed with national trends. At any rate, the Labour Party, a mass organization and newly socialist in 1918, was nevertheless an organization whose platform and ideological base was more or less unchanged on a national scale from where it had been in 1914: ambivalent towards ideological socialism as anything other than a vague goal, and more or less hewing towards the center of left-wing politics.

The first challenge this newly refurbished party would meet was the General Election in December 1918. During the war, the election slated for 1915 was postponed and the government allowed to continue until war's end due to the wartime emergency, and the Liberal Party brought in the Conservatives as well as some of the Labour Party into a grand wartime coalition. However, at the war's end, an election was announced on November 14th, 1918 to be held in exactly one month's time.¹⁵⁷ Much like the rest of British society, the war had turned the political atmosphere on its head. The split between Asquith and Lloyd George solidified in 1918, causing a great crisis for the Liberal Party. Lloyd George campaigned on a coalition with the Conservatives, to continue the wartime coalition into the immediate post-war years; Asquith and his Liberal loyalists, after Lloyd George rejected his offer of reconciliation, sought to campaign for a Liberal government.¹⁵⁸

The Labour Party, too, left the coalition, emboldened by the newly politically-motivated unions and a number of factors being in their favor. The Liberals looked to be especially weak: Lloyd George had essentially destroyed his own party, or at least severely weakened its foundations, in order for a bid at post-war governance, and it seemed like the conditions were such that Labour could fill in the Liberal Party's gaps. Additionally, changes in the franchise seemed to point in Labour's favor, with most working class adult men and some propertied women allowed to vote for the first time; the franchise expanded from around 7 million to around 21 million, with expectations of this being in

157 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 262.

158 Ibid.

Labour's favor.¹⁵⁹ Many demobilized soldiers were disillusioned with the British government by war's end, and had no intention to vote; those that did, generally intended to vote Labour.¹⁶⁰ Finally, the party's role as negotiator on behalf of the working man during the war helped earn them some support.¹⁶¹ All this caused the Labour Party to be cautiously optimistic going into the election.

The traditional account of the election of 1918 is that the election was a failure for Labour and a phenomenal success for the Coalition. The coalition managed to secure 484 of the seats in a 707 seat parliament, a clear majority, and the Liberals who ran with Lloyd George and received what Asquith called his "coalition coupon" (a letter of endorsement from the prime minister) walked away with the lion's share of Liberal seats.¹⁶² Glasgow only returned two Labour MPs out of a possible fifteen, one of them a "Coalition Labour" MP who supported the government; hardly an electoral victory for what looked like a bastion of Labour support. Iain McLean states the account plainly: "the result was a severe disappointment for Labour."¹⁶³ This may lead interpreters of the Red Clydeside moment to conclude that the wartime militancy was all smoke and mirrors, or at least much thinner on the ground than in local legend. In any case, in the traditional estimation, the December 1918 election was a landslide of the highest order for the coalition government.

However, the argument that the 1918 election was a massive disappointment for Labour misses much of the context of the election, and underplays it as a bellwether for future trends in Labour's favor. Take, for example the claim that this even constituted a defeat for the Labour Party. To be sure, 57 seats in parliament does not seem to be a truly revolutionary sum for the Labour Party, but it is important remember that this marks the first time in history that Labour was the principal opposition party,

159 "Representation of the People Act 1918." UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/electionsvoting/womenvote/parliamentary-collections/collections-the-vote-and-after/representation-of-the-people-act-1918/>.

160 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

161 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 172.

162 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

163 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 154.

Asquith's opposition Liberals suffering tremendous defeat and sinking to a tertiary place in parliament, a position from which it never recovered. It must also be remembered that the British system creates a certain gap between the parliamentary seats of the second and third largest parties, so that may be a factor in the poor showing seat-wise. Labour, at the outset of the war a tertiary party that sought to push Liberals on reforms where it could, was now in the position to officially represent discontent with the government, a fact they would use to their advantage in the turmoil of the 20s.

More to this point, the Liberals suffered greatly as a result of this election. The split between Coalition Liberals and Asquith's true Liberals was not official, but deepened as a result of the election. This led to a mutual animosity between the two factions that was unable to be rectified in a timely manner, and it was already too late by the time the dust had settled. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that this coalition scheme of Lloyd George's was an instance of short-term planning *par excellence*: at the expense of party unity within the Liberal Party, Lloyd George managed to buy himself and his faction another few years, during which time they would be faced with the great crises of the post-war era. The real beneficiaries of this arrangement seem to have been the Conservatives who monolithically followed the continued coalition scheme. They came out of the election with a strict majority of seats in parliament, and would helm Britain almost unhindered until the end of the next war.¹⁶⁴ The election was a win for the government; however, it also sounded a grim portent for the Liberals as an electoral group.

In a similar vein, it is necessary to examine the conditions and context under which the election actually took place in order to understand the results of the election and to soften some of the harsh pronouncements placed at the foot of the Labour Party and the socialist movement in Britain and in Glasgow in particular by historians such as McLean. A very simple and intuitive explanation for the results is that Lloyd George won the war, and the public rewarded him for it. The Labour Party was

164 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

seen, perhaps unfairly, as the party of pacifism and of leniency towards Germany.¹⁶⁵ As such, a public that was high on a victory and wanting to punish Germany for its aggression distrusted Labour and sought to reward Lloyd George's win. This creates a major problem for anyone declaring Glasgow to be undergoing a sea change in political composition due to the war, what with its fairly meager showing of only two of fifteen Labour electeds.

This explanation contains some of the truth, but misses key points. A number of contributing factors led to a showing by the Labour Party that failed to live up to its aspirations. Primarily, the timing of the election contributed to the electoral landscape. The election was announced for a month after its announcement; enough time to campaign, but not long enough to form a particularly resonant message unless one has the ready-made message of "we won the war!" The Labour Party simply lacked the resources to mount a quick campaign, and suffered as a result.¹⁶⁶ Compounding this, possibly the biggest factor in the coalition's favor and against Labour was the insufficient way in which demobilized soldiers' voting took place. Only one in four soldiers registered a vote in 1918.¹⁶⁷ The extent to which this was due to voter apathy is debatable; certainly, it was a major factor. However, a number of other factors contributed. The expansion of the voter's registers was a labored process, one which certainly could not have been conducted correctly in a month even under the best of circumstances, and many soldiers could not vote as a result.¹⁶⁸ John Maynard Keynes connected the haste of this "stampede election" and the failure of the government to actually secure the votes of the newly registered voters.¹⁶⁹ One need not read a conspiracy into this series of events to see that the fact was that a speedy, logistically insufficient election redounded to the coalition's success.

165 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 173.

166 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 174.

167 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

168 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 173.

169 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

Moreover, the extent to which men who were still in France awaiting their ticket home were able to vote is very much in question; in reality, many of the soldiers were unable to vote due to mismanagement.¹⁷⁰ The extent to which soldiers were able to actually express their opinion at the ballot box was limited at best.¹⁷¹ Even with an added two weeks to tabulate soldiers' votes, it is still clear that the soldiers' voices were inadequately heard. This resulted in an election whose theoretical franchise was the most expansive in British history yet only received votes from between 50 and 60% of those eligible.¹⁷² Of that 50 to 60%, it is not unreasonable to assume that, due to problems with election management in France, the representation of pro-government opinion was at least somewhat over-represented, as a heavier weight was placed upon the votes of those at home, people not returning home from a bloody war in need of work. All of this is, essentially, to say that the election, one of the most famously one-sided in British history, would probably have been at least somewhat closer if the Coalition Government had been fighting a fairer fight against its opponents without the ability to call a quick election with the slight advantage of a number of problems in the electoral process redounding to their favor.

Despite the success of the coalition, within little more than a month of the seating of the new parliament that there would be a surge in labor militancy. 1919 was a year of strikes that very much so continued in the tradition of industrial action that predominated before the war, but was marked indelibly by the issues of the day brought about as a result of the ending of the war and the attempt to reinstitute a peacetime system. Before the year was out, a great number of industrial disputes would play out across Britain: the Miners' Federation threatened a nationwide stoppage of work, the railway workers across the country had gone on strike, and a number of smaller, local trade disputes broke out

170 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 173.

171 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

172 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 264.

in cities like Lancashire and Liverpool.¹⁷³ With the attempt to return to a sense of normality, the country once again invited upon itself the threat of massive industrial action, previously arrested by wartime agreements and the Defense of the Realm Act, and as such, there was created a great many points of contact between industrial workers and the government.

The first battles in this wave of unrest began in Glasgow. The Clyde Workers' Committee, which had fallen derelict after the events of the war, returned to a commanding role, leading industrial action in a campaign that would culminate in the Forty Hours Strike. David Kirkwood, a leader in the wartime CWC, reports that some of the revolutionaries from the war, all back in their own stomping grounds after the end of wartime suppression, tried to set up a council in the vein of the workers' and soldiers' councils in Russia and Germany, although this attempt would peter out with only half-hearted support by the Labour Party.¹⁷⁴ The events of the coming months proved that, rather than a mere trick of wartime anxiety and tension, labor militancy was going to be a continual force in the city, and that the struggle preached by the activists and revolutionaries in Clydeside was not aimed solely at stopping the war: it was a dagger pointed at the heart of the old order itself.

War almost always creates problems economically when it ends: factories are retooled to make weapons and people who otherwise were not in the workforce are brought in to man the tools, and when those weapons and people are no longer needed, there is some amount of shock that is inevitable without careful management from the government. The principal problem in Glasgow in early 1919 was unemployment. Soldiers returning from war needed jobs; they received little help from the Coalition government and so needed some ability to return to working life and to earn wages again. The old guard of Clyde militants, engineers, iron molders, and lathe turners working in the city's factories that had led the fight on the homefront during the war, found common ground with these

173 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 274.

174 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 170-171.

newly discharged servicemen: for employed workers, unemployment was a bad sign, as it inevitably drove wages down as the increased ranks of the reserve army of labor and expanded expectations for productivity.¹⁷⁵ This harmony of purpose led the leadership of the workingmen, both ASE and CWC leadership alike, to back a call for at least forty hour work week in the major industrial works, the best solution that would help keep wages livable for the men who had never left and help free up some hours that the returning servicemen could pick up when the old guard had worked their allotted times.¹⁷⁶ The forty-hour work week demand was to have the addendum that there was to be no reduction in pay for currently employed workers: if successful, this would be a grave (possibly mortal) hit in the pocketbook for employers and a massive win for the workers.¹⁷⁷ It must have seemed like the stars had aligned for the ideological activists on the Clyde: here was the perfect issue to unite the old guard labor militants, a hearty and tough bunch but numerically small, with the vast number of returning servicemen.

Whatever the case, the organizations on the Clyde sprung into action. For the first time in a long time, the entire left of Glasgow was united with one purpose: to obtain the forty-hour work week. The local branches of the TUC, the ILP, and the Labour Party in general were all on board for forty hours, and the local branch of the ASE and the CWC were pushing for even more radical demands: the CWC was pushing for a radical work week of thirty hours.¹⁷⁸ The strike saw interest from a number of different trades, most notably the dockworkers, the carters, and the electricians, all striking for their own reduction in the work week. However, it was primarily an affair of the engineers, as McLean states; however, even he would admit that the imposition of the forty-hour work week benefited all workers, so the extent to which we should cynically think of this as just another engineer's dispute must be

175 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 114.

176 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 273.

177 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 219.

178 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 115.

called into question.¹⁷⁹ One of the main qualities of the Forty Hour Strike was its decentralization; rather than being a unified front for a legal forty hour work week, the Forty Hour Campaign was a collection of connected strikes and actions in different industries, which complicated efforts to bring in vast swathes of the city.¹⁸⁰ There were a number of attempts by CWC men, notably John Maclean, to revive the old Triple Alliance of miners, railway workers, and transportation workers to come out in solidarity, but these would eventually prove unsuccessful.¹⁸¹ Moreover, there is some extent to which that old rivalry between skilled and unskilled workers reared its head again, as the forty hours campaign had a hard time enlisting their unskilled compatriots in another “craftsman’s strike.”¹⁸² Caution must be exercised in interpreting this as antipathy towards the campaign on the part of the unskilled workers, though; the campaign saw some amount of unskilled interest even if it was ultimately insufficient, as evidenced by parallel strikes by dockers and carters. In any case, the stage was set for the Forty Hour Strike to begin on the 27th of January, 1919. For some, this was the time to do right by the working men and women of Glasgow; for others, it was the beginning of the last fight to destroy capitalism.

When the strike began on the 27th, it was on a level that disappointed its leaders’ hopes for a general strike. The dockworkers and others sectors, sympathetic though they were, were not brought into the strike, as their leadership had voted against such action.¹⁸³ However, this should not make one think immediately that the strike action was doomed to be a failure, as the wildcat strike was still very much an option on the table for the masses in Glasgow in 1919, and the Joint Strike Committee reported 40,000 absent from work on that Monday and a further 70,000 absent by Tuesday the 28th; a

179 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 118.

180 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 186.

181 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 131.

182 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 181, 119.

183 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 190.

significant portion of the city's one million people.¹⁸⁴ The atmosphere was similar throughout Britain; there were a number of small industrial actions throughout Great Britain happening concurrently, and a general strike in Belfast, which would eventually see almost 100,000 workers striking from work for almost a month.¹⁸⁵ Gallacher reported being positively giddy at the prospects for revolution that could arise from this strike. Despite his admitting that the deck was stacked against them, he recalled thinking that the revolutionary masses had a few tricks up their sleeves, namely that "revolt was seething everywhere, especially in the army... we had within our hands the possibility of giving actual expression and leadership to it..."¹⁸⁶ While consensus is now that that was an overly optimistic sentiment, without the benefit of hindsight, it certainly seemed like something was in the making.

The aforementioned number of men out on strike certainly was enough to swell the hearts of the organizers. However, more seemed to be going the way of the strikers as well: the electrical workers, members of the campaign striking alongside the engineers, had marched out of their power works and gone down to the tramways to try and beseech the workers to join them on the spot, without approval of their union leadership.¹⁸⁷ This would eventually fail, but it did not deter the strikers from their campaign for forty hours. The strike committee sent their fateful message to the Lord Provost of Glasgow on January 29th, requesting Bonar Law's response to their demands; they promised that the strikers would be in George Square on Friday to hear the demands, and if they didn't have an answer by then, the leaders of the strikers implied that they could not know what would happen next: the telegraph sent by the Lord Provost to Bonar Law said that the organizers had said that "unconstitutional

184 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 121.

185 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 190-191

186 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 221.

187 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 123.

tactics might develop if the workers' demands were ignored."¹⁸⁸ Everything was set up for a confrontation on Friday, January 31st, 1919.

The atmosphere in Glasgow had tensed as the strikers awaited the response from the government. The city center was not a stranger to large scale protest: enormous crowds had turned out in support of the franchise expansion of 1884, and the aforementioned Chartist riot in 1848 resembled the gathered crowd in a number of different ways.¹⁸⁹ However, the assembled crowd dwarfed the numbers seen in previous bouts of unrest: even conservative estimates, like those that came from *The Scotsman*, put it close to 20,000.¹⁹⁰ Elements of the military had been moved in to ensure that the (in the government's eyes) inevitable violence did not turn the city over, but the actual security on the ground was mostly left to the Glasgow Police.¹⁹¹ Contrary to popular belief, no tanks were present in the city on Bloody Friday; they were still being shipped by rail northward when the altercations took place.¹⁹² The government's response was going to upset the crowd no matter how much the Lord Provost did: the government had been leaving these things to the employers since war's end, and was not about to upturn its entire program for the engineers of Glasgow.¹⁹³ At any rate, the crowd assembled in the square was tense, and the police were just as tense.

The actual spark of conflict is unclear: what basically everyone agreed on, however, is that it had something to do with a tramcar. The *Glasgow Herald* reported that tramcar traffic, being held up by the swell of the crowd and, reportedly, a gang of ruffians messing with the flow of traffic, had slowed to a halt, and the police attempted to use force to beat back the crowd and allow the flow to continue, until, as the article reads, "the storm broke loose."¹⁹⁴ The crowd pushed back, fighting ensued, and the

188 Ibid.

189 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 27-29.

190 "Glasgow Disorders," *The Scotsman*, February 1, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

191 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 124-125.

192 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 125.

193 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 204.

194 "Glasgow Street Fighting," *The Glasgow Herald*, February 1, 1919, Google News Archives.

police made their first charge against the crowd, batons at the ready, and injured 40 people, including a number of people who were not participating in the protest and merely looked on at the crowd.¹⁹⁵ The police subsequently made a number of charges into the rest of the square from the southeast and up North Frederick Street, fighting with the protesters in pitched battles every time they charged with batons at the ready; notably, they were pelted with lemonade bottles by a number of men on North Frederick Street.¹⁹⁶ The police charged into crowds that contained women and children on a number of occasions, many of the striking workers having brought their families with them to show solidarity.¹⁹⁷ The battle had begun.

William Gallacher was partaking in an activity fit for a man such as him: he was giving a speech sat atop the statue of William Gladstone in the square. He described the police assault as “sudden” and “without warning,” which is understandable, since the charge was fairly sudden and he was not in a position to see the inciting incident.¹⁹⁸ As the first melee ensued, Gallacher reports running across the square to talk to the policemen to call off the violence, only to be greeted by batons; he told a somewhat suspect story about fighting off a policeman with a comrade’s help, including him landing a “full power uppercut” to the jaw of a policeman seeking to strike him, before describing the events that came after.¹⁹⁹ The crowd turned to face the police, no longer being charged in the back, and begun to brawl in earnest; how much the “being charged in the back” claim is true is up for debate, as the *Herald* described the crowd as being charged from the southeast of the square, very much not to the back of a crowd that is facing the city chambers that lie to the square’s east.²⁰⁰ It seems probable that Gallacher was trying to wave the bloody shirt with this description, attempting to elicit sympathy from his audience.

195 Ibid.

196 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 125.

197 “Glasgow Street Fighting,” *The Glasgow Herald*, February 1, 1919, Google News Archives.

198 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 227.

199 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 228.

200 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 229.

At any rate, the violence had begun. Gallacher said that, as he was being dragged towards the chambers to the east, he saw the police brutally bludgeon Kirkwood in the back of the head; a true sucker punch, and a blow Gallacher called “one of the most cowardly and unjustifiable blows I have ever seen struck.”²⁰¹ The two and some of their compatriot strike leaders (except for Neil McLean, the only Red Clydesider to become a member of parliament in the December election) were then arrested, the crowd was read the Riot Act, and the violence started to take its bloody course.²⁰² Gallacher firmly held that the police lied in their later testimony, that the tales of missiles thrown at the police leaving them no choice but to charge the protesters was a lie, as he said that the lack of broken windows and lamps implies no missiles being thrown until the violence spilled out onto the streets later that day.²⁰³ He also corroborated the story told by the *Herald* of lemonade being thrown at the police, this time spicing it up by describing how a truck filled with bottles of “aerated waters” was seized by the striking workers before being turned into small barricades and used to hurl bottles of fizz at the policemen. Taken into the chambers, he said that he and the other leaders (except Shinwell, who had managed to escape the scrum and wouldn’t be arrested until later that night) were arrested, but asked to urge the strikers that wished to remain peaceful and not brawl with the police to reassemble on Glasgow Green, which they eventually did.²⁰⁴ Gallacher then once again was remanded to jail.

Kirkwood’s account describes a slightly different story. His story is more or less the same as Gallacher’s, except that he was inside the building when the commotion started. Being drawn out by the commotion, he ran towards the police cordon to talk to the officers to urge calm before being struck in the back of the head. However, crucially, he reported that the Riot Act had already been read before

201 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 229.

202 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 230.

203 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 230-231.

204 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 233.

he was struck on the head, a detail that somewhat complicates the story of rank police injustice weaved by Gallacher, who claimed that the police cruelly charged the crowd and arrested leaders even before reading the Riot Act. Either way, this corroborates Gallacher's claim that the authorities begged him and Gallacher to beseech the crowd to disperse.²⁰⁵ He then said, as the newspapers report, that a fair number of men that had been in the square had not had the fight they desired by night's end, and went around the city marching, breaking windows, and destroying property.²⁰⁶ In any case, he assured the audience that the city was in the military's hands by the end of the night.²⁰⁷

In either case, neither men were in the position to recount the facts about the march to Glasgow Green, which was itself fraught with violence. The police continued to battle it out with elements of the march as they made their way to Glasgow Green, even once again coming to blows with a large section of the crowd when they finally entered Jail Square and subsequently as they attempted to cross Albert Bridge.²⁰⁸ Once again, when they reached the Green, the violence continued, and at this point those with no desire to get police blood on their hands melted away as those who still kept the faith continued to fight.²⁰⁹ True to Kirkwood's account, there was sporadic vandalism, theft, and destruction of property into the night, reportedly until around 10 or 11 o'clock that night.²¹⁰ All told, no one was killed immediately on the day that, ironically, came to be known as "Bloody Friday," with official tolls counting 19 police wounded and 34 civilians wounded; the number of people coming away with more minor injuries, bruises and scrapes, probably adds to this count.²¹¹ However, records indicate that the

205 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 172.

206 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 173.

207 Ibid.

208 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 219.

209 Ibid.

210 Gordon Barclay. "'Duties in the Aid of the Civil Power': The Deployment of the Army to Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919," 280.

211 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 133.

lone fatality of Bloody Friday occurred some months later in June of 1919, when a police officer injured in the melee died of sepsis as a result of his injuries.²¹²

Much has been made about the military's role in the events of January 31st in popular consciousness, but the actual story is infinitely more sedate in nature. Stories about soldiers firing on striking workers or otherwise intervening in the fighting are, obviously, incorrect. However, the actual reality of the military's presence in the city is also fairly minor. Far from participating in the dispersal of the rioters, the riot had essentially burned itself out by the time that the bulk of the troops had been deployed in Glasgow.²¹³ All evidence shows that the soldiers were kept mostly to tending to security at public buildings or marching through the streets on the way to their posts: the *Herald* put forward a plain description of the military's presence, remarking that "[the soldiers] are guarding various important points, including the City Chambers, the railway stations and bridges, the electric power stations, and gasworks."²¹⁴ Soldiers were of mixed ethnicity, Scottish and English, so a planned use of English troops against a Scottish population by a government afraid of national solidarity is unlikely; pictures exist of soldiers wearing tam o' shanter bonnets, only issued to Scottish soldiers, marching through Glasgow in the aftermath of Bloody Friday.²¹⁵ In general, the military occupation was fairly lighthanded in Glasgow after the violence of Bloody Friday.

With the actual events of the day laid out, one can now examine the attitudes of the various news organizations in Glasgow, and explain possible explanations for their responses. The *Herald*, despite giving a very in-depth account of the events of the day's violence, was certainly against the workers and on the side of the government in their editorializing. The article on the battle, "Glasgow

212 "Scottish Police Memorial Trust Roll of Honour." Scottish Police Memorial Trust, <http://www.spmt.scot/spmt-roll-of-honour.php?tpages=12&page=8>

213 Gordon Barclay, "'Duties in the Aid of the Civil Power': The Deployment of the Army to Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919," 280.

214 "The Strike Position," *The Glasgow Herald*, February 3, 1919, Google News Archives.

215 Gordon Barclay, "'Duties in the Aid of the Civil Power': The Deployment of the Army to Glasgow, 31 January to 17 February 1919," 282.

Street Fighting,” immediately highlighted the violence and riotous nature of the protests in its secondary headlines: “The Riot Act Read,” and “Long List of Casualties.” The coverage became significantly more weighed against the strikers in the actual body of the article: the brief contains a description of how a number of local institutions, including a number of “loyal workers” organizations, have decried the violence and calls the protest and subsequent violence a “policy of intimidation.”²¹⁶ It published editorials decrying the strike as the work of Bolshevism, and urged the maintenance of law and order.²¹⁷ It is not unsurprising to read that the *Glasgow Herald*, an old name in the Glasgow news business and a paper of record for the powerful in the city, was unsympathetic with the strike, and that it chose to highlight the disturbance of the trams as a valid *casus belli* to charge the crowd. From this coverage one can see that the coverage given to the strikers in respectable press, what many a striker might call “bourgeois” press, was more or less unsympathetic.

The *Sunday Post*, another font of more or less capitalist-friendly media, was in many ways more blatant than the *Herald*. Whereas the *Herald* simply sought to state the facts and highlight some opinions that went against the strike broadly, the *Sunday Post*’s coverage was much more naked in its coverage. The article from February 2nd entitled “Glasgow an Armed Camp” stated that the violence on Bloody Friday sparked “revulsion” in the workers despite their union leaders’ backing of a declaration against police aggression. It also provided in large letters and very visibly the employer’s statement on the riot, calling the strikers “catspaws of continental Bolsheviks.” The workers’ side and the side of their union officials is told only after there had been a sufficient amount of ink spilled over the loyal workers who were repulsed by the unconstitutional and unseemly violence they had witnessed.²¹⁸ The *Post*’s article again typifies the reaction of what many Red Clydesiders might have dubbed the “bourgeois” press: unsympathetic, focused on the horrible violence without truly interrogating the

216 “Glasgow Street Fighting,” *The Glasgow Herald*, February 1, 1919, Google News Archives.

217 “A Bolshevik Strike,” *The Glasgow Herald*, February 1, 1919, Google News Archive

218 “Glasgow an Armed Camp,” *The Sunday Post*, February 2, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

possibility that the violence was started, and the certainty that the violence was escalated, by the police, and choosing instead to highlight the reactions of owners and “loyalist” workers rather than the strikers themselves.

However, these publications were not the only ones running articles on the events in the immediate aftermath in Glasgow; the socialist and trade unionist newspaper *Forward*, outlet of the ILP, also commented on the news. Possibly due to the nature of *Forward* as a paper on a tighter budget than the *Post* or the *Herald*, *Forward* didn’t comment on Bloody Friday until February 8th, but when it did in its “Socialist War Points” section, it provided a completely different perspective than the one in the record press.²¹⁹ It made clear that the *Forward* believed the Forty Hours Strike to be a matter of world historical importance, and decried the capitalist press (calling the *Herald* by name) for standing in the way of the workingman’s progress. Moreover, it spared no vitriol for the police attacks on the demonstrators at George Square: “the workers will not forget.” The crowd was on good behavior until the police charged; certainly, this was a “conspiracy by the master class.” *Forward* even leveled their guns at the capitalist press for carrying water for the police and for the government in decrying not the charge of the police, but the reaction of violence from the crowd when pressed. Moreover, *Forward* defended Emmanuel Shinwell from antisemitism that had been leveled against him by the *Morning Post*, who called him and the leader of the Belfast general strike, Simon Greenspan, “semitic anarchists” intent on bolshevizing Great Britain. To this, *Forward* simply asked, “so what?,” as Jesus himself was a Jew. From the press coverage in *Forward* one can see the authentic voice of at least the politically active segments of the working class that voted or would eventually vote Labour and organized themselves in trade unions, the men and women that had been in George Square for the protest and had turned out for May Day the year before: rather than decrying the violence and wringing their hands over the loss of property and Bolsheviks ghosts, the *Forward* and its readership stated firmly and

219 “Socialist War Points,” *Forward*, February 8, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

clearly that the police had been at fault, that they had charged the crowd more or less unprovoked, and that the working men and women deserved to be heard regardless of any capitalist threats against them.

This dichotomy, of the press of record generally being against the strikers and the press of the Labour Party and its affiliates designed for the working class being staunchly in support of the strikers carried on throughout Scotland and throughout Great Britain. *The Scotsman*, a top tier Liberal paper based in Edinburgh, decried “terrorism” in its article “Glasgow Disorders,” saying that the leaders of the strike had intentionally sought to use extra-constitutional means since they had been rebuffed by the government, a charge not even the *Herald* leveled at Kirkwood, Gallacher, and company.²²⁰ The *Daily Mirror*, still a cornerstone of British tabloid journalism and a paper that often sold over a million copies in 1919, displays a much more levelheaded, but still fairly unsympathetic view of the strikers, akin to the *Herald*’s coverage. With the remove of being in London, the passions were not as hot in the *Mirror*’s press rooms, but the paper did firmly come down on the side of the violence being started by strikers trying to derail a tramcar, something that appears to be close enough to what eyewitnesses said happened at the scene but contains much more drama and a much more accusatory tone than even the *Herald* leveled at the strikers.²²¹ The *Labour Leader*, a paper tracing its lineage back to Keir Hardie’s paper *The Miner* and serving as a national Labour paper, took up the cause that *Forward* had taken up in Glasgow: it also accused the government of being in cahoots with capitalists and sicking their mad dogs, the police, on the crowd for no reason, even going so far as to accuse the reading of the Riot Act to have taken place hurriedly and under false pretexts so the beating could begin. The clubbing of women and children was also highlighted, and it finished the story off by talking of the soldiers, loaded for war with the Hun, that had been brought into the city.²²²

220 “Glasgow Disorders,” *The Scotsman*, February 1, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

221 “Baton Charges in the Glasgow Strike Riots,” *The Daily Mirror*, February 1, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

222 “The Strikes,” *Labour Leader*, February 6, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

What does that terrain reveal about public opinion and the wider atmosphere surrounding the battle? For one, the fact that coverage ranges from neutral enough with some sprinkling of very obvious ideological motivation to outright accusatory of the strikers and their leaders in the middle and upper class press, the papers of record, tells us that the people who wrote for these papers and the people who read them were either genuinely scared of some sort of socialist rising in Britain like they had seen in Russia, or thought that a scene of violence and unrest in a major city would be a good tool to bash the left. Moreover, it shows that there was very little attempt from the side of the press to try and understand the strikers' side of the story; they were either terrorists for some, or simply mostly culpable for others. Of course, as the more or less established press, these reactions are not terribly surprising, as they have some interest in decrying violence in the name of changing the status quo. As far as the depiction of Bloody Friday in the socialist and working-class press goes, it shows that this movement felt like it had the power, or at least was in good enough position to quickly obtain the power, to admit no wrongdoing, to be on the attack, to be riling the people up with the bloody shirt of George Square. The socialist press went to the hilt for the strikers of Clydeside, matching every (mostly) incorrect insinuation of putschist Bolshevism by what they dubbed the "bourgeois press" with an equally misleading story of a grand government conspiracy to crush a working-class demonstration. It also highlights that the urban working class, or at least the least restive element of it, was again fairly united in its sentiment that the violence was not the fault of the strikers, and that the police were in the wrong for trying to disperse the crowd. The entire press environment at the time provides brilliant insight into the opinions and political considerations of most of the classes of people in Britain at the time.

With the press and primary source narratives in mind, the question becomes: who struck the first blow? The idea put forwards in the more reactionary middle class press that the strikers were Bolshevik terrorists who sought to start a fight with the police is, like the idea that the government

brought the strikers out into the open so it could crush them down, an ideological fantasy. It seems like, given the preponderance of it in the narrative, that some sort of dispute over a tramcar probably kicked it off. The gangs of ruffians messing with the trams being a common thread in the reportage of the establishment press seems to point towards it being at least somewhat true, and moreover is a believable occurrence in a huge protest like George Square. However, some caution must be exercised; the idea that it was a gang of rioters trying to derail the car seems like a fabrication of a far off newspaper going off hearsay more than anything. It stands to reason that the *Herald's* account, with some tweaking, is a plausible course of events. Blockage of tramcars leads to an argument between strikers, maybe hooligans but probably just rough looking working men milling about, and the police. The group either did not hear or did not comply with the directive to move away, and a jumpy police force being told that there is revolution afoot decided to try and break up the defiant strikers by force. This descended into violence, and the rest of the police were brought into the fray to protect their fellow officers; the strikers did the same. The police, much more well-armed than the strikers and with the directive to control a crowd that had gotten violent (even if it is due to their actions), started to crack down heavily, more heavily than can be excused or justified, and Bloody Friday ensued. This is not the definitive story of what happened on Bloody Friday; however, it seems that, in light of the commonalities in the sources, it is at least one of the plausible explanations for what led to the violence in George Square on January 31st.

One of the first questions that was asked by all sides in the aftermath of the events of Bloody Friday is a question that still inspires discussion and wistful counterfactuals to this day: was the Battle of George Square a revolutionary moment? Basically everyone involved seemed to think so except the people that were actually there, and even they thought it might have been given time to think it over. Willie Gallacher is the most vehement Clydesider to declare the Forty Hours Strike and its fallout a revolution in the making: he kicks himself when he said “we were carrying on a strike when we ought

to have been making a revolution,” and declared that, when they sent him out to calm the crowd to move them to Glasgow Green, he should have told them to march to the Maryhill Barracks to try to enlist the help of the city’s soldiers.²²³ The government, too, feared a rising: at the War Council meeting held that day, “the Secretary for Scotland said that, in his opinion, it was more clear than ever that it was a misnomer to call the situation in Glasgow a strike – it was a Bolshevist rising.”²²⁴ Some circles of the press also seemed to think it was Bolshevism in the making, narrowly avoided, and that the presence of troops in the city was a welcome bulwark against any subsequent motions to overthrow the state. In sum, evidence suggests that people on both sides thought that the moment was revolutionary.

However, with the value of hindsight, that conclusion seems less tenable. Iain McLean argues that the moment was no revolution, and that it was a repeat of the events of 1916, a white-hot dispute among one section of the working class that nevertheless failed to enlist enough of the city to come along with it to actually be effective that, due to the crackdown, gave the important but otherwise not groundbreaking events an air of legend.²²⁵ His pointing out of the structural weakness of the strike is key, and meshes with the opinion of even other socialists at the time like John Maclean, who wished to hold off the strike until they could enlist the help of the miners and trainworkers to turn the strike general.²²⁶ With only engineers, power workers, and associated supporters without much institutional support from their unions in the strike, the idea that this was a broad push is a flawed one. Moreover, the idea from people like Gallacher that the movement lacked decisive leadership rings true. The leadership of the Forty Hours Campaign simply did not think they were making revolution, and the people did not either: this was a campaign to secure employment in certain industries for returning

223 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 221-233.

224 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 125.

225 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 138.

226 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 131.

soldiers and a good working schedule for all involved. With this in mind, it seems like no, the Forty Hours Campaign and the Battle of George Square were not revolutionary events.

Nevertheless, speculation about revolution is a throughline in popular discourse on Bloody Friday from the very start. The newspapers' and the government's fear of a Bolshevik rising inculcated this sense into the public memory, and it is ironic that the government's panic at the events was a major factor in giving the otherwise haphazard events of Bloody Friday revolutionary import. This idea continues even into the 21st century: on the 100th anniversary of the battle, *The Guardian's* article on the subject notes that in the popular retelling of the story, like in the novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books*, the myths of government repression and the revolutionary aspect of the events is still a subject of much speculation.²²⁷ One can speculate almost endlessly on what might or might not have happened, and perhaps it is this open-endedness and the seeming presence of possibility that keeps the events in the minds of Glasgow's left-wing acolytes and their students. However, it is just idle speculation, the fodder for alternate histories and late night what if scenarios, not the stuff of actual historical work.

What *is* in the realm of actual historical discussion, however, is whether or not the event constituted an important or significant factor contributing to the evolution of the political makeup of the city of Glasgow into the 1920s, and as to this, the picture is much less clear. McLean argues that "the police misbehavior in George Square... gave the strike a romantic history which concealed an otherwise ignominious failure."²²⁸ The immediate effect of such a pronouncement is to make the reader think that it did not actually affect the coming events much, except maybe to convince many of the participants that direct action was not the way to go. However, it points towards a factor of how these events contributed to the development of a socialist stronghold on the Clyde Valley: in providing a sense of violence perpetrated by the representatives of the state that helped to keep people on the path

²²⁷Robert McKie, "100 Years on: The Day They Read the Riot Act as Chaos Engulfed Glasgow," *The Guardian*, January 6, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jan/06/100-years-on-the-day-they-read-the-riot-act-in-glasgow>

²²⁸Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 138.

of supporting and ultimately voting for socialism. There is evidence that the idea of a usurpation by the police against strikers stuck in the minds of many of the people of Glasgow for at least some amount of time: the *Forward* describes the May Day demonstrations of 1919 as having a distinctly Bloody Friday-flavored tinge to them, with demonstrators heckling the police about their violence.²²⁹ Of course, the violence would have been still fresh in the mind of the demonstrators, but it does point towards significance for a section of the working class in Glasgow that assuredly contributed to the reign of Red Clydeside in the 1920s. The fact that there even are “legends of Red Clydeside” having to do with the Battle of George Square points to its significance in the working-class political culture of the city.

There is no doubt that the Battle of George Square was not the most important aspect resulting in the change of Glasgow’s political makeup from broadly Liberal to solidly Labour in the post-war era, but to discount its significance entirely is a misstep. The fact that there was a high-profile clash between the police and striking workers, one that made the news across Britain in the immediate aftermath, undoubtedly contributed to sentiment swinging towards Labour in the next election. As has been discussed, the Labour-friendly press did not hesitate to highlight the violence and injustice of the police’s actions on that day, and this media environment cannot be completely discounted as a factor for the solidification of wartime unrest into interwar political support. Under this understanding, the Battle of George Square provided another tool in Labour’s belt heading into the 1920s to further solidify their grasp on and excite the working class, or at least the section of the working class that had participated in the strike most seriously.

Similarly, the question must be asked: were the events of early 1919 even that unique in comparison to the rest of the country? As previously touched upon, 1919 was a year of strikes in Britain, with a number of major unions taking thousands of their workers off the job in ways that would have been unthinkable only a year prior. It would not be incorrect to assume that the events of January

229 “May-Day Demonstrations,” *Forward*, May 10, 1919, The British Newspaper Archive.

1919 in Glasgow were a part of a nation-wide trend in strike activity occurring in Britain that year.

While certainly the events of 1919 in Glasgow had many of the same root causes as strikes and industrial unrest throughout the entire country, like the reintegration of a workforce that had previously been under arms and the depression of wages that that entailed, the fact that the demonstrations and the strike were being guided by the CWC, the group that had lead the wartime unrest and had counted among its ranks many socialist activists, belies a level of continuity of purpose that cannot necessarily be ascribed to industrial action across the country.

Moreover, the events in Glasgow are unique because of their response. With Glasgow as the first major city to see any sort of sustained labor unrest in the beginning of 1919, the government's response was panicky, worried that a Bolshevik rising was about, and the crowd was hence suppressed with violence. However, this trend does not bear out in all of the other industrial actions in Britain in 1919. Marwick mentions that a policemen's strike in Liverpool in August ended in rioting, and wartime emergency powers were used in the case of the railway workers' strike in September and October, but the government for the most part played the situation much cooler than they had in Glasgow in January, with the concurrent miners' strike averted through a commission by the government, and the railway workers' strike brought to a conclusion due to its success in stopping a decrease in wages.²³⁰ Bloody Friday, then, stands out due to both its position as the first of the major strikes and one which the government responded to violently and by bringing out the army. It is true that the Forty Hours Strike was not anomalous in the world of Britain in 1919 in its occurrence, nor was it particularly anomalous in its root causes, but where it is truly unique, and where its significance in the historical record lies, is in the fact of the government's uncharacteristic response to the demonstrations.

In addition to questions of the uniqueness of Glasgow's experience with labor unrest on a nation level, one must also ask whether or not this wartime and post-war unrest is merely a continuation of the

230 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 274.

Great Unrest that preceded it. The fact that the Great Unrest happened so close in time to Red Clydeside and subsequent national labor unrest certainly calls into question whether or not these were merely war-tinged continuations of the Great Unrest. However, the fact of a long lull between significant strike action in 1914 and the national labor unrest of 1917 problematizes an easy reading of continuity. The content of unrest, also, should cause one to pause before pronouncing that wartime unrest was simply the continuation of the Great Unrest: dilution being a primary factor in strikes starting in Glasgow and reaching across the country during wartime, and unemployment as a result of the war being a factor during the post-war period puts the lie to this theory. Moreover, the fact that many of the strikes during the war were unofficial and the strikes after the war failed to enlist sympathy strikers from organizations like the Triple Alliance shows that a different sort of process than the organized, broad strikes of the Unrest was playing out. Perhaps, then, it would be more correct to say that the wartime unrest was not the Great Unrest, but occurred in the shadow of it. The strong labor organizations that prosecuted the massive strikes of the Great Unrest birthed strong local organizations more confident in their ability to strike, even without union approval, and the conditions of the war, including dilution during the war and unemployment after, created the conditions where that memory of strike action was bound to be put to use locally. With this in mind, labor agitation during and after the First World War, first on the Clyde then throughout the country, is not merely a direct continuation of the Great Unrest, but rather a movement whose birth was shaped in almost every conceivable way by the experiences of and organizations built by that period.

In any case, any sort of immediate, radical change failed to manifest on the Clyde as a result the Battle of George Square. However, this was just the beginning of Red Clydeside, a period that stretched into the 30s, and the next period would be the one in which the unrest of the interwar period transformed, where the legends of Red Clyde would ascend from personhood to legend through their leadership through the interwar years, and a period in which the questions of revolution and economic

equality were just as live as they were during the war and in its immediate aftermath. It is this second phase of Red Clydeside in which the atmosphere of change solidified into a state of affairs that would reign for the next decade.

Chapter 3 – Red Clydeside

*Away with all your superstitions, servile masses, arise, arise!*²³¹

²³¹ Eugene Pottier, *The Internationale* (Paris, June 1871),
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

The last punch thrown in George Square on Bloody Friday was the last time that there would be a major, violent confrontation between workers and the government in Glasgow of this sort for at least the next ten years. It was possible that this would be the end of the story of Red Clydeside, and that the city would return to its pre-war state. However, the events of the next decade would prove that the specter of Red Clydeside would not be exorcised for quite some time, even if it did take a more conciliatory, less insurrectionary character. Glasgow, which had not returned more than a few Labour candidates due to the nature of the election and Labour's lack of resources for the 1918 election, would in 1922 elect Labour to 10 of its 15 seats in parliament, more by percentage than any city outside of London with a sizeable number of parliamentary seats.²³² Many of the popularly remembered "heroes", men like David Kirkwood, Emmanuel Shinwell, John Muir, and James Maxton, would be sent to parliament, where they would occupy the sit firmly on the left wing of their party.²³³ This second Red Clydeside, one marked by electoral control of a party whose stated goal was socialism and with varying levels of popular support for other left-wing parties, solidified the legacy of the period and made socialist organization in Glasgow a political force to be reckoned with for years to come.

An important factor post-Bloody Friday in politics on the left in Britain was the Communists, and the level of affiliation that the Labour Party ought to have with them. Russia's first revolution of 1917, the February Revolution, was greeted with great acclaim by many in Britain, as Russia shed its autocratic despotism while still maintaining its dedication to the war. However, the second, much bloodier revolution of that year, the Bolshevik-lead October Revolution, was much more controversial, even on the left; the level of revolutionary change promised by the Bolsheviks caused a major split among members of the working-class coalition in the country due to their methods and their hostility to

232 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 159.

233 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 281.

the war.²³⁴ With the Russian Revolution in full swing by the time Bloody Friday had passed, the issue of the attitudes of the Labour Party and its constituent organizations to the unabashedly revolutionary doctrine of communism were incredibly important. The Bolsheviks had won themselves few friends in the halls of the great social democratic parties of Europe, and the Labour Party was no exception; the adoption of Clause IV, McKibbin argues, was at least in part driven by a desire to stake out a clear position different from the system proclaimed by the Bolsheviks.²³⁵ With the trade unionist wing of the Labour Party in ascendance and the ideologically socialist wing of the party taking a number of hits to their influence, the party unsurprisingly found itself, as McKibbin states, as the “rock upon which European social democracy was already building its fortress against Bolshevism.”²³⁶ Overall, in the aftermath of Bloody Friday, the Bolshevik position was not the majority position among a Labour Party whose trade unionist, dubiously ideological wing was in control.

However, this situation was complicated by a number of different factors. The state of the socialist left in Great Britain was perhaps the most opaque and idiosyncratic in the entirety of Europe at the time. The Labour Party, despite its reorganization that made it much more under the control of the party as a body, was in a unique position among European socialist parties in that it was much freer and much more diverse in its membership; the local parties, often reliant on organizers and agitators who had turned communist in the wake of the war, occasionally ignored the central party’s protests against running communist candidates and ran them anyway.²³⁷ This would be further muddied by Lenin and the Bolsheviks’ policy towards building the power of communists in Great Britain. Lenin called the Labour Party “a highly original type of party, or rather, it is not at all a party in the ordinary sense of the word,” as he believed it allowed everyone from “the worst bourgeois elements, the social-traitors” to

234 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 189.

235 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 92.

236 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 92.

237 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 131.

those who “freely and openly declare that the party leaders are social-traitors” to hold membership.²³⁸ This meant that the communists perceived an opening (despite the fact that this was rapidly closing due to party reorganization), and they intended to exploit it. Lenin urged British communists to form their own communist party, but to then attempt to affiliate themselves with the Labour Party. They were to support it “as a rope supports a hanged man” and prove that reformism was bankrupt by letting it run itself into the ground.²³⁹ All of this made for a complicated, messy atmosphere for the left in Britain in the 1920s.

In the heady days of the early 1920s, Scotland was perhaps the area of Great Britain that most hung in the balance between these different strains of leftist thought, and nowhere was this truer than in Glasgow. Glasgow, more than most cities, had had a number of voices in positions of acclaim advocating for the Bolsheviks and their mission since their revolution in November of 1917: John Maclean was appointed the Soviet Consul in Scotland in January 1918, and spoke openly for communism at the time.²⁴⁰ The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) was founded in 1920, and quickly found partisans in many of the giants of wartime agitation, although its membership was small at the start.²⁴¹ William Gallacher was an indispensable tool in the development of the party in Scotland, being personally asked by Lenin at their meeting in Moscow in 1920 to join the newly formed party and to persuade his like-minded colleagues to join alongside him.²⁴² Alongside him were many of the leading activists of wartime Clydeside: Helen Crawford, John Bell, Arthur MacManus, and Harry McShane all joined the newly formed party.²⁴³ The immediate agenda was to seek affiliation with the Labour Party, as Lenin had suggested in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. The stage was

238 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Speech on Affiliation to the British Labour Party,” in *Lenin’s Collected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/x03.htm#fw6>.

239 Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Left Wing Communism in Great Britain,” in *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (USSR: Progress Publishers, 1964), <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch09.htm>.

240 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 98.

241 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 261.

242 William Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, 253.

243 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 140-143.

set for an attempt to take hold of the ready-made machinery of labor politics and activism in Glasgow, in Scotland, and in Great Britain as a whole by the communists, and to wield it for their own purposes.

The pro-Soviet, revolutionary faction acted first. The Scottish Division of the ILP voted overwhelmingly to associate with the Third International in 1920, the Glasgow Trades Council urged Labour to allow affiliation of the new Communist Party, and the Scottish Trade Unions Council voted to join the Soviet trade union consortium, the Red International of Labour Unions, due to agitation by the Glasgow section of the STUC.²⁴⁴ However, the reaction came, mostly outside the city, when the ILP nationally voted to join the “Second-and-a-Half International”, an odd amalgamation of fence-sitting socialist parties that had not made up their minds on many of the questions of the day, and further allowed the request to join the Red International of Labour Unions to die on the vine.²⁴⁵ With this, the Labour Party nationally and more or less in Glasgow asserted itself as a decidedly non-Bolshevik organization in its leanings. However, it must be remembered that the Labour Party, despite its restructuring in 1918, still left much up to local decision, and it would still be rife with members on its left wing, especially in Glasgow, who were much more drawn to radical means and methods than the party line allowed.

Cooperation with the communists, while officially discouraged, was practiced to varying degrees throughout the early 1920s, especially in Scotland. The Communist Party, despite Labour’s rejection of their affiliation in 1920, still maintained a policy of curiosity towards the party, working with the local institutions that, through personal connection and their abundance of dedication, did not cooperate fully with the national organization’s dictates.²⁴⁶ The communists would choose not to run for seats that the Labour Party had candidates running for, in an effort to form a working-class “united

244 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 139.

245 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 139-141.

246 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 24.

front.”²⁴⁷ For the time being, the Communist Party, especially in Scotland, still interpreted Lenin’s dictate strictly, and sought to work their way into the body of the Labour party wherever local sympathy and pragmatic necessity allowed them to.

It is under these conditions that Labour and the CPGB prepared for the election of 1922, the election that would catapult Glasgow to the national stage as a seat of labor power, a town that had truly earned its nickname of “Red Clydeside.” The successes of messaging and policy, the differences in and failure of tactics, and the conditions upon which these messages and tactics were exercised are this chapter’s focus. The question is simply: what did the left in Glasgow do that led to its meteoric rise to power in the city, so much so that the Labour Party would dominate there for the next decade?

One of the primary axes upon which the left made massive gains in the years between the end of Bloody Friday and the 1922 general election was in support coming from unskilled and unemployed laborers. The economic slump that follows many wars, as production is ramped down and the government stops flooring the pedals of the economy, was felt particularly hard in Glasgow, where many of the industries that had been retooled to rely on the wartime demand were located. An unsuccessful strike of miners in the surrounding areas in 1921 led to an increase in unemployment and a momentary hampering of the ability of the Triple Alliance unions to contribute to workers’ struggles.²⁴⁸ The decrease in demand for shipbuilding created massive unemployment in the shipbuilding industry – the site of a key demographic for workers’ militancy both during and after the war – set the stage for a large mass of disaffected, unemployed workers who blamed many of their hardships on the coalition government and their inability to handle a transition to a peacetime economy.²⁴⁹ The left, especially the Communist Party, seized on this in Glasgow. A number of different demonstrations of the unemployed were held in the city in 1921, unemployed workers marching

247 Ibid.

248 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 164.

249 Ibid.

through the wealthy parts of the city and demanding reforms that would ameliorate and solve the problems that came with unemployment.²⁵⁰ The communists especially were successful in organizing the unemployed. While his relationship with the Communist Party was a complicated one, as his doctrinal disputes over the usefulness of nationalism and the necessity for immediate revolution led him to refuse membership, and his refusal to join almost certainly hampered the party's ability to organize and wield power, John Maclean's early efforts and eventual cooperation with the party led to their success in earning the hearts and minds of many unemployed workers, which they would use to criticize the Labour Party from the left.²⁵¹ Moreover, this fact helped the communists get an in with the miners, as the fallout from their failed strike and subsequent unemployment crisis provided the cracks necessary for the Communist Party to slip into.²⁵²

Another area of messaging through which the left made massive gains was on the issue of housing. The explanation for how this was is actually quite simple: housing was a serious issue in Scotland as a whole and Glasgow in particular during the wartime, as evidenced by the Rent Strikes, and with the wartime compromise expiring at the end of the war, the issue once again reared its head, with spectacularly successful results for the left. This time, the issue of the quality of housing was at the forefront, as it was famously poor in Glasgow.²⁵³ This was coupled by the fact that rents as a proportion of wages had increased in 1920; when all was said and done, the working class of Glasgow was brewing for another confrontation over rent.²⁵⁴ A brief campaign for a rent strike saw limited success, as it was not particularly well-attended throughout the campaign by unskilled workers, who Labour still hadn't penetrated, and had no parliamentary or nation-wide support by the Labour Party.²⁵⁵ However, the local politicians, many of whom would run in the 1922 election, had the backs of the

250 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 90.

251 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 143.

252 Ibid.

253 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 169.

254 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 168.

255 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 169-171.

strikers, and they turned their ire on the cowardice of national Labour to back them; this won them great acclaim in the city.²⁵⁶ With this issue galvanizing people across skilled and unskilled lines, the messaging and policy put forward by the Party helped them to win the city in the 1922 election.

The final major axis along which the left gained electoral success in 1922 was in their reaching out to the large Irish community in Glasgow. The Irish had long been excluded from socialist organizations in Great Britain, if not by doctrine then by circumstance. In Glasgow, most Irish fell under the classification of unskilled workers; in the pre-war Labour Party that catered mostly to skilled workers, there was little place for the Irish immigrants, who were courted by the Liberals in no small part due to their association with Home Rule and a softer touch in Ireland.²⁵⁷ However, the Labour Party made massive overtures to the Irish in the years after the end of the First World War, not the least of which was their backing away from temperance as a tenet of their platform.²⁵⁸ While humorous, this shows that Labour was more willing to accept certain departures from socialist doctrine if it meant winning Irish hearts for their party. The Labour Party took the side of Irish Catholics in a xenophobically-coded fight against Catholic schooling in Glasgow, and as such earned themselves a great number of Irish voters who were more Catholic than socialist, but willing to be fellow travelers nevertheless.²⁵⁹ Contrast this approach with the communists, who were more influenced by the Protestant tradition and were very dismissive, even hostile, to Catholicism, and who therefore lost a great deal of Irish support from the outset; they attributed this to the Catholics voting how their anti-communist priests directed them to, an overstated if not completely unfounded claim.²⁶⁰ They attributed By taking the side of the Irish on a number of different issues, the Labour Party was able to do what the communists never could and turn them into a reliable voting bloc.

256 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 171.

257 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 181.

258 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 182.

259 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 192.

260 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 61-64.

Moreover, Labour's support for *Sinn Fein* during the Irish War of Independence certainly helped them clinch a key demographic in Glasgow and in the west of Scotland as a whole. Labour's opinion was split on the republican party during the wartime and immediately after, with official opinion being skeptical; the Easter Rising, in particular, was accompanied by such violence that it turned many pacifistic Labour men away from the party, although the incredibly swift and violent execution of the organizers certainly elicited some support from even the most pacifistic socialists.²⁶¹ Of course, there were a number of socialist organizers who were outspokenly supportive of *Sinn Fein*; on the day of John Maclean's only speech for the 1918 election, mere weeks after his release from prison, he was preceded by three *Sinn Fein* politicians, connecting their struggle against imperialism in Ireland with his and all the Clydesiders' struggle against capitalism in Scotland.²⁶² Whatever the case, the subsequent Irish struggle for independence, ongoing since 1918, placed Labour firmly in the corner of *Sinn Fein*, especially as the war crimes of the Royal Irish Constabulary and their paramilitary the Auxiliary Division, infamously known as the Black and Tans, became obvious and inexcusable. The support which the party gave to the Irish in their fight for independence was unique among the major parties; the Tories and the Coalition Liberals were the one's prosecuting the war, and Asquith's Liberals were too much of an unorganized mess of a party to profit much from their criticisms.²⁶³ In any case, the left profited from this turn of events greatly, and these and other factors lead to the polarization of the working-class Irish vote towards the parliamentary left and away from the Liberals and towards the Labour Party.

Moreover, McKibbin argues that the Liberal Party had more or less lost the plot with regards to the class-based voting patterns that would emerge as a result of the extension of the franchise to more people in the aftermath of the war. The Liberal Party, which had tried to be the party for all progressive

261 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 194-197.

262 Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside*, 125.

263 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 198.

comers in the past, was unable to lay claim to any real constituency, and as such was swallowed up by Labour, a party which, while in the process of watering down its own class-based message nationally, was still more or less seen as the party of the working man.²⁶⁴ In a city like Glasgow, it's unsurprising that the great masses of workers, recently granted the vote, would cleave more towards the party which claimed to stand for them instead of a party that claimed to stand for such ephemera as progress and morality.

The common thread of these factors, as put forward by Iain McLean, is that the divisions among the working class in Glasgow during wartime fell away and allowed the working class to achieve a unity of purpose it had not experienced during the war. The wartime militancy transformed into a broad, working-class movement that was less impeded by the boundaries of differences in interest.²⁶⁵ This seems to be, in the main, correct, although there is some extent to which there are other factors at play. The main factor is the extent to which the Coalition government had done a poor job at securing the peace and the Liberal Party bore much of the blame for this. Lloyd George said in his famous election speech in Wolverhampton in November 1918 that his task was "to make Britain a fit country for heroes to live in;" his government's mishandling of the housing and employment situations after the war meant that there was pushback against the government for their failure to make Britain a country that honored the sacrifice of its heroes.²⁶⁶ The coalition liberals had insisted on being in the driver's seat for the immediate post-war years but failed to secure their mandate; to discount this as a factor in Labour's 1922 successes seems to be to overlook a major occurrence that redounded to Labour's benefit.

With the General Election of 1922, Labour would win big nationally, and would take its place as official opposition to the overall victorious Conservative Party, a position it has traded back and forth with the Conservatives ever since. While the party did not win the election, which saw the

264 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 244.

265 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 181.

266 Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 263.

Conservatives maintain their absolute majority on parliament, the election did see the Labour share of the vote increase markedly in most major industrial cities in the country when compared with 1918: from 18.9% to 41.6% in Glasgow, 14.7% to 42.5% in Sheffield, 22.1% to 34.8% in Manchester, and 17.7% to 24.6% in Liverpool.²⁶⁷ Thanks in no small part by the decline of the Liberals, many that had previously voted for the more radical members of the Liberal Party now found a place in the Labour Party, much to the party's benefit.²⁶⁸ The party that accomplished this was a party that was thoroughly beholden to trade union influences, often at the expense of the ILP; the local parties that won many of the districts both in the cities and in the mining districts of places like Wales were established and run predominantly by the trade unions there.²⁶⁹ This was a victory for the newly reorganized Labour Party, the party that had adopted Clause IV and had gone into the 1920s with a newly emboldened center and a declining left wing.

Labour swept the Glasgow elections, taking ten of fifteen seats in the city and most of the others in the Clyde Valley, and sent members of the old guard Red Clydesiders to parliament, where many would make up the left wing of the Labour Party during their tenure. The "Clyde Group," as they were known, left Glasgow by train as thousands of cheering supporters wished them good luck. David Kirkwood, one of the Red Clydesiders catapulted to parliament, describes his feelings thusly: "We marched through thousands of exuberant citizens. We were exuberant. I was the most exuberant of all."²⁷⁰ The Clyde Group would help elect Ramsay MacDonald, a moral pacifist who had been opposed to the First World War since August of 1914, a figure of dubious acclaim in hindsight but one whose principled stance against the war earned him great admiration by the Red Clydesiders.²⁷¹ The Communist Party of Great Britain returned an MP from nearby Motherwell, and continued to have a

267 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 158.

268 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 121.

269 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 139-140.

270 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 194.

271 David Kirkwood, *My Life of Revolt*, 195-197.

presence in the city for years to come. Until the 1931 general election, on the national level, the politics of Glasgow were decidedly red in their character, whether that be the scarlet of the Labour Party or, for a small minority, the blood red of Marxism-Leninism as represented by the Communist Party of Great Britain. Red Clydeside had not been a flash in the pan brought on by the war; it was a legitimate political phenomenon.

The story of 1922's Red Clydeside, when the city turned decidedly towards the left with its votes, and of Red Clydeside as a whole, is one which has swelled the hearts of many socialists ever since it happened. It is often told as a great story of the people's triumph over adversity which made their world different from the one they started. But how much of the traditional story is true to life in light of the historical evidence? To what extent are the popular conceptions of it true? The questions one can ask to this effect are endless, but the four most important are: how "red" was this Red Clydeside, how much of a radical shift from the status quo was the period as a whole, how different was Red Clydeside from the more general upsurge of Labour support at the time, and what does the period mean in hindsight?

The first question is the most contentious. The left has been troubled by factionalism since its genesis, with various groups claiming the true mantle of socialism. The historiography is split on such an issue. The revisionist historians, such as Malcolm Petrie, argue that the Labour Party, the main recipient of the second Red Clyde, had started to abandon working-class struggle in favor of cross-class collaboration by that time: throughout the 1920s, they started to move away from the idea of being for the working class and had started to move towards the idea of Labour representing the nation as a whole, albeit with more attention paid towards the workers than the owners.²⁷² Moreover, the Communist Party of Great Britain failed to capture the masses of Glasgow, with their tactics and radicalism being a bridge too far for many on the Clyde who saw the Labour Party as a reasonable

²⁷² Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 77.

alternative.²⁷³ McLean puts it bluntly: “It was the housing crusade and the Irish, and not anything connected with the wartime struggles, which led to Labour’s triumphs... they have left their mark on Glasgow in a way John Maclean and Willie Gallacher never could,” the implication being that the second Red Clyde owed more to the struggles against rent increases than it did to popular participation in socialism.²⁷⁴ Certainly, any partisan of the revolutionary left will probably not see the second Red Clyde as being worth much of anything; to use Lenin’s words, the support of the masses was going to the “social-traitors.”

The post-revisionist school seeks to problematize this pessimistic view of class struggle and socialism in Red Clyde. All of the Red Clydesiders, if asked, would admit freely that their goal was socialism: the social ownership of the means of production. They sought accomplish this goal through democratic means; certainly they cannot be faulted for not knowing how difficult this would be as the first large group of socialists elected to parliament.²⁷⁵ A commentator like Terry Brotherstone would also urge students of the period to see it as “red” not so much as it involved the revolutionizing of the masses towards true socialism, but along the lines of a historical process that advanced the cause of workers’ rights and workers’ participation in the economy and in government.²⁷⁶ The Red Clydeside period helped to advance a process of worker’s organization, the process of workers becoming a political category in and of itself. As this process advances, so advances the fortunes of socialism; a victory for labor, even if it is represented by Labour, unites the workers of the world that much more. When coupled with the fact that the Labour Party of the time had not fully ceased their commitment to socialism (a process that would begin with actions and end with words), this more restrained thesis is the stronger. In particular, Brotherstone’s argument that a victory for the working class, especially at this

273 Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 51.

274 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 201.

275 Kenny MacAskill, *Glasgow 1919*, 284.

276 Terry Brotherstone, “Does Red Clydeside Really Matter Any More?,” 75.

time, is a victory for socialism, seems true. As the working class of the city began to utilize its political might, they were able to better argue for and secure the rights and conditions of their choosing: an advancement towards that ideal of an equitable economic system. Not all who voted for Labour in 1922 were socialists, but by-in-large, they voted for socialists, even if they were generally reformist in outlook, and they put their power behind organizations that claimed their goal to be the reform of capitalism into socialism.

The second question, whether Red Clydeside was a radical departure from the past, both in the sphere of labor activism and in the political landscape, is one that must be argued by degrees. There is a sense in which, same as in 1919, Glasgow was a different place than it had started out, that the political power of the working classes had been transformed from its previous form. During this time, there was a very evident shift away from the strike as a means of utilizing working-class power after the failure of the Forty Hours Campaign to enlist Great Unrest-levels of sympathetic buy-in from Triple Alliance unions due to their partial integration into the government apparatus during wartime towards political organization and demonstration that promised to transform the scattered interests of the working class into a unified platform for political pressure. The May Day parade in 1926, deep into the era of Red Clyde, was the largest the city had ever seen, and included the revolutionary communists from the CPGB as well as ILP men and trade unionists of all stripes.²⁷⁷ It is undeniable that the state of political culture and the state of electoral politics in the city were much different in 1922 than they had been in 1914, and attempts to downplay this by arguing that the representatives elected failed to materialize significant changes do not undercut the fact that this was an epochal shift in the culture of a major city to a degree that were much greater than those seen in other parts of Scotland. However, it was still a significant political and cultural change, one that would be durable for decades to come, and one that marked an ensuing shift in the culture of the city.

²⁷⁷ Malcolm Petrie, *Popular Politics and Political Culture: Urban Scotland, 1918-1939*, 125.

The third question, whether or not Red Clydeside is a particularly unique phenomenon when compared to the rest of the country, which was experiencing an upsurge in Labour sympathy as well, is similar to the last question in that it must be argued by degrees. As McKibbin points out, the Labour Party at the time of the 1922 election was a party that shied away from radicalism, and which had an ascendant right wing: he argues that “class loyalty drove out socialist doctrine,” that the trade unions were in the driver’s seat as far as the national Labour Party was concerned, with class-conscious working-class organizations driving out the socialists, many of them educated men of the middle classes, and keeping the agenda focused on a vision of a society in which the industrial working class bargained rather than fought.²⁷⁸ The local parties, and the people that they nominated to stand for their constituencies in elections, were very much so beholden to the trade unions in much of the country, from industrial cities like Manchester to mining districts like Wales.²⁷⁹ The explicit socialists, especially members of the ILP, were very much so junior partners in the coalition that brought Labour to the opposition in parliament.²⁸⁰ The Labour Party that won massive gains in the 1922 election, while progressive and explicitly dedicated to the establishment of socialism through electoral means, was in the hands of trade unions for whom that goal was a secondary concern.

However, this picture is obviously unrepresentative of the Clyde Valley, a fact which McKibbin himself references when he says that the Scottish left was unusually strong.²⁸¹ In Glasgow, the interests of the working classes, the trade unions, and explicitly ideological socialists like the ILP aligned in a way that McKibbin argues did not happen elsewhere, at least not to any deep an ideological extent. The Clyde Group counted a number of men in its ranks that were both working men and dedicated socialists, men like Shinwell and Kirkwood who had spent their time in the factories and been ILP members for

278 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 244.

279 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 139-140.

280 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 105.

281 Ross McKibbin, *The Evolution of the Labour Party 1910-1924*, 163.

quite some time. Even outside of major figures, the influence of radical socialism on the organs of the left-wing organizations in Glasgow can be seen in the decision of the Scottish TUC to endorse affiliation with the communist international organization, the Glasgow Trade Council's request to allow communists in its ranks, and the Scottish ILP's attempt to affiliate with the Third International. This certainly stands out in a landscape that, as McKibbin states, was sidelining its left wing in favor of ambivalently socialist but thoroughly working-class support. In Glasgow, the forces that were arguing for socialism in explicit terms and the forces that were fighting for the working men and women practically were much closer linked than they were in the rest of the country, and this redounded to the left's success in the Clyde Valley. The level of penetration of socialists and socialism, especially members of the ILP, into the trade union apparatus of the city meant that the city's left wing was much stronger as a result. The story of Glasgow is unique because the same forces that were playing out across the country, the shift rightward and towards a more class-based collectivism and away from ideological socialism, were not occurring. To be certain, the Clyde Group were not communists (although they too had an outsized influence in the area, as evidenced by the election of an MP from Motherwell), but many of them were ILP men who believed that they could fight for socialism from the halls of parliament. If the question is "why is Red Clydeside important," then at the very least it is important because it signifies a break in the general nationwide trend towards the center or even the right wing of Labour, and represents a dedication to socialism by some portion of the working population and the Labour organizations that claimed to represent it that is anomalous when compared to the national situation.

The final question is the most open ended, and as such possibly the hardest to answer: what was the legacy of the Red Clydesiders? On the one hand, revisionist historians like McLean would have one assess this time period through a decidedly dour lens: he says that the parliamentary Clydesiders did little more than make the Commons "a more colorful and livelier place," and poetically,

he calls the 1924 Housing Act the “monument” of the Red Clydesiders.²⁸² This is a harsh pronouncement: full of sound and fury, the period ended up signifying nothing, at least when compared to popular conception. But there’s a sense in which, as Petrie showcases in his discussion of the political culture of the city in the period, a student of Red Clydeside ought to see the period as a change, even a fundamental one, in the political culture of the city. The city that previously had medium-sized at best rallies for workers’ rights and strike demonstrations subsequently showcased some of the largest May Day marches and strike participation in the country; this is not the same city at the end as it started out. To this end, an open-minded student of Red Clydeside ought to view the time period as a change, a radical change even, to the political and cultural fabric of the city, a change that took disaggregated workers from all sections of the working class and galvanized them behind a political ideal that even the most revisionist historian must admit happened at least to some extent. The extent of change was not the epic, daggers-drawn confrontation with capitalism popular memory describes it as; the change itself, however, is undeniable.

282 Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, 241.

Epilogue – The Tales of the Red Clydesiders

*We'll change henceforth the old tradition, and spurn the dust to win the prize!*²⁸³

283 Eugene Pottier, *The Internationale* (Paris, June 1871),
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

Red Clyde as a political movement would continue for the next decade, until the wave election of 1931 saw the Conservatives establish a foothold in the city in an atmosphere in which the Labour Party was split dramatically by Ramsay MacDonald's decision to pursue a coalition with the parties to its right. Red Clyde as a cultural touchstone continues to this day. In the memory of the city of Glasgow, and in the memory of the socialist movement globally, the period lives on. The period is sung of in song and lives on in popular memory; the album *The Red Clydesiders* by Alistair Hulett and Dave Swarbrick commemorates the time in song, and comparisons to Red Clyde abound when discussing the future of politics in the city.²⁸⁴ The political makeup of the city has changed, like most things, since the 1920s; the Scottish National Party, a big tent nationalist party whose goal is Scottish independence, now has a one-party grip on the city nationally that would make Bolsheviks like Gallacher and Maclean doff their caps. However, the legend remains. Partisans of the SNP occasionally call to mind the days when the Scottish people, rather than the workers of the world, came close to revolution on the stones of George Square, seeking to call that moment back into being for the 21st century; Kenny MacAskill, author of *Glasgow 1919*, is one such partisan. Red Clydeside, despite its one hundred year chasm between that time and the current one, refuses to die in the minds of those that wish to see it revitalized.

One of the primary ways in which Red Clyde as a movement lives on is through the continued tradition of historical remembrance. *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside* was written in 2018; *Glasgow 1919* in 2019. These newer takes on the historiography of the Red Clydeside period illustrate two things. First, these works illustrate that the idea of a Red Clydeside is something that has not faded from the memory of the people of Scotland and international fellow travelers alike. The tales of the Red Clydesiders still captivate readers to this day, are still important enough to be recounted and retold even one hundred years later. People that would like to emulate the Red Clydesiders' success, such that it is, still draw lessons from their trials, their tribulations, and their triumphs. Secondly, and more

284 Dave Swarbrick Alistair Hulett, *Don't Sign Up for War*, Red Clydeside (Red Rattler, 2002).

importantly, it showcases that a new wave of historiography with a popular audience and point of view is on the horizon, one which this thesis seeks to engage with in a scholarly and academic fashion. These histories of Red Clyde come from a place of popular interpretation; they shed light on a popular conception of what these things mean, and show what those who are looking at the events of Red Clyde from the bottom-up rather than from the top-down take away from this era of revolt on the Clyde. Rather than supplanting the scholarly research of the past years, these works synthesize it with the political and cultural legacy of the topic into a narrative that combines people's culturally transmitted ideas on what Red Clydeside meant with the historical record about what was happening at the time. As the left, atrophied and on the retreat since the late 20th century, seeks to assert new power on the world stage, these historical analyses show the astute reader what exactly the partisans of that new left think about and take away from the Red Clydeside period.

What does it all mean? The dreams of both Red Clydesides seem to be mostly distant memories: violent confrontation with capitalism seems little more than a fantasy in a world as stable and as removed from mass politics as the modern world, and broad-based democratic support for explicitly socialist reforms have suffered significant setbacks as of late. To even attempt to recreate Red Clydeside seems like somewhat of a quixotic endeavor: why emulate a political movement that could not abolish the present state of things through confrontation, and could not achieve long term success in the halls of parliament? But the history of Red Clyde teaches that great change can happen quickly, and unexpectedly. Glasgow in 1914 was a city utterly beholden to the Liberal Party, with massive divisions within the working class and its political culture mostly dominated by small struggles with little political ambition seeking to make things slightly better on a case by case basis. Glasgow in 1923, however, was city where, to at least some extent, the culture of the underclasses was politically united behind a socialist party that held massive demonstrations in which an entirely new world of promise and opportunity was at their fingertips. Red Clydeside teaches its students that the world is not quite so

fixed as it might seem; a new world is always lurking around the corner, and needs only for the match to be lit for a great inferno to be unleashed. The heroes of Red Clyde were mere men and women in reality, but men and women that believed deeply in what they professed; Iain McLean calls a number of them “honest men,” and honest they were. Through their work, they were able to transform the cultural and political makeup of a major European city. The tales of the Red Clydesiders, and the people that invested their political will in them, remind their admirers that, as the old song says, “each at the forge must do their duty, and we’ll strike while the iron is hot.”²⁸⁵

285 Eugene Pottier, *The Internationale* (Paris, June 1871),
<https://www.marxists.org/history/ussr/sounds/lyrics/international.htm>.

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