

**INDUSTRIAL UNREST: THE  
REPORTS OF THE  
COMMISSIONERS (JULY 1917)  
COLLATED AND EPITOMISED**

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Industrial Unrest: The Reports of the Commissioners (July 1917) Collated and Epitomised by  
William Chance

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**WILLIAM CHANCE**

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BY

SIR WILLIAM CHANCE, BT., M.A.

Chairman of Committee  
British Constitution Association

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### I. NORTH-EASTERN AREA :

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Mr. PHILIP BRIGHT.

Mr. HENRY DAVIES.

### II. NORTH-WESTERN AREA :

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Mr. JOHN SMETHURST.

Mr. J. R. CLYNES, M.P.

### III. YORKSHIRE AND EAST MIDLANDS AREA :

Sir GEORGE C. MARKS (*Chairman*).

Sir MAURICE LEVY, Bt., M.P.

Mr. J. J. MALLON.

Mr. ARTHUR J. WADESON.

### IV. WEST MIDLAND AREA :

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Mr. J. W. OGDEN.

Mr. J. W. WHITE.

### V. LONDON AND SOUTH-EASTERN AREA :

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### VI. SOUTH-WESTERN AREA :

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### VII. WALES AND MONMOUTHSHIRE AREA :

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Mr. VERNON HARTSHORN.

### VIII. SCOTLAND AREA :

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Mr. NOEL E. PECK.

Mr. A. GORDON CAMERON.

*Secretary to the Commissioners :*

Mr. S. M. HODGSON.



# Industrial Unrest

THE causes of "Industrial Unrest" so called have been recently inquired into by special Commissioners appointed by the present Prime Minister. For this purpose the country was divided into eight districts (Ireland as usual being excluded): six English—North-Eastern, North-Western, Yorkshire and East Midlands, West Midlands, London and South-Eastern, and South-Western; the other two being Scotland and Wales (including Monmouth).<sup>1</sup> Each district had its own separate Commissioners, who issued separate reports. Considering the importance of the inquiry and the large amount of ground to be covered, it is almost without precedent, we should imagine, that the work should have occupied only one month (12th June to 12th July, 1917), while two of the reports, especially those for the North-Western area and Wales, are most comprehensive and almost voluminous.

## I. THE GENERAL CAUSES OF INDUSTRIAL UNREST

Industrial Unrest is, of course, no new thing, but it is alleged to have been aggravated and intensified by war conditions. So far as the South Wales Coalfield is concerned

<sup>1</sup> When references to these reports are made they are marked with the initial letters of each district, e.g., N.E. for North-Eastern, N.W. for North-Western, Y. & E.M. for Yorkshire and East Midlands, W.M. for West Midlands, L. & S.E. for London and South-Eastern, S.W. for South-Western, S. for Scotland, and W. for Wales and Monmouth.

it had become almost a permanent condition, and existed before the war: (W. p. 22). Broadly speaking, it arises "from human selfishness in all classes, a narrow outlook on the possibilities of co-operation, and forgetfulness of the golden rule 'to do unto others as you would be done by'" (N.W. p. 11); causes which no Government can remove. In its political aspect it is the result of "a struggle by the workers to secure a larger share of the profits of industry and a greater control over the conditions under which they work and live" (W.M. p. 3). "There exists an element inclined to methods tending to undermine the authority of the duly authorised Executive Councils and District Committees of the Unions, and who are desirous of using the machinery of the Unions to further their own extreme views" (S. p. 3). But "quite distinct from this revolutionary element there is another class who perhaps do something to create a form of unrest, not altogether to be deprecated. . . . We refer to the growing class among the workers of this country who are taking an interest in economic questions, and are studying the principles of political economy. This class which is not at all in sympathy with the extremists first referred to is, it is recognised, inspired by a genuine desire to better the conditions of the workers by obtaining for them a larger share in the results of industry. A strong feeling exists that the workers are not fairly treated in the apportionment of the results of the joint effort of employer and employees" (*Ibid.*).

The *permanent* causes of the unrest as distinguished from the *temporary* ones are carefully gone into in the Wales and Monmouthshire Report (pp. 22-24). They are dealt with from the economic, social and political points of view respectively as follows:—

*Economic.* "(a) While there has been an advance in money wages during recent years, more particularly since 1895, there has been a decrease in real wages, and concurrently with this there has been a steady movement for the raising of the standard of living which naturally necessitates an increase in real wages. Employers have, of course, resisted the demands of the workman for wage increases for the reason that the concession of such demands tended to reduce the margin of profits or were not otherwise justi-

fied. This conflict of forces has resulted in a spirit of antagonism between Capital and Labour.

" (b) The adoption by the workers of the principle that wages should be fixed on the basis of a satisfactory standard of living and the advocacy of a still further view that, even with the wage-rate based on the standard of living, workers should also share in the prosperity of their particular industry.

" (c) The adoption by a section of the workers of the theory that the restriction of output is in the interest of their class.

" (d) The concession of wage advances to one industrial class has accentuated the disparity of wages between that class and a lower paid one in another industry or in another section of the same industry, and this has resulted in a demand by the latter for wage advances.

" (e) The machinery for settling disputes and fixing rates of wages in certain industries has not always worked smoothly, and the delays that occur in the settlement of disputes tend to exasperate the men and cause them to resort to extreme measures.

" (f) The refusal on the part of a small section of workers to recognise their obligation to join the trade union of their industry, though deriving the full benefit of all advantages gained through the Union, is one of the most prolific causes of sudden stoppages and of threats to strike. The difficulty is especially pronounced in the coal-mining industry of South Wales, but is not confined to that industry.

" (g) Some of the employers, also, have occasionally manifested an unsympathetic attitude towards trade unionism, and this has confirmed the men's impression that the employers are hostile to them and their organisation. Irritation is frequently caused also by the fact that facilities are rarely given by the employers to enable the unions to bring non-unionists into membership of their lodges.

" (h) In addition to the above general causes there are a number of causes special to particular industries or groups of industries. Of these we can only enumerate the following :—

" (1) In addition to lowness of wages, railway workers feel aggrieved at their long hours of labour.