

# **THE SCOTTISH RAILWAY STRIKE 1891: A HISTORY AND CRITICISM**

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The Scottish Railway Strike 1891: A History and Criticism by James Mavor

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**JAMES MAVOR**

**THE SCOTTISH RAILWAY  
STRIKE 1891: A HISTORY  
AND CRITICISM**



THE SCOTTISH  
RAILWAY STRIKE

1891

A HISTORY AND CRITICISM

BY

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*Prof. C. F. Dunbar*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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## PREFACE.

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ALTHOUGH it is not yet possible to estimate even approximately the economic effects of the strike of the railway men in Scotland, there is a certain advantage in making a strictly contemporary record and criticism, ere the turmoil of the strife is over, and ere its incidents are forgotten. The closeness of our view militates against our realising fully the larger issues involved, and perhaps also prevents us from clearly apprehending the relations of the struggle to others of a similar character at home and abroad. An attempt will however be made to describe and discuss the strike in a dispassionate and scientific spirit, and to make some estimate of the place in the general labour problem, of the special questions that have been raised during its course.

J. M.

GLASGOW, 31st January, 1891.





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## LEADING DATES.

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|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1882-83—                   | Caledonian Railway Strike and Agitation among North British Railway Employees.                            |
| 1889, September—           | General Agitation for Ten-Hours Day.  |
| 1890, January—             | Concessions granted by North British Coy.   |
| 17th August—               | After Dissatisfaction among Certain Sections of Employees during the Summer, Meetings of Railwaymen held. |
| 10th September—            | Correspondence between Companies and Secretary of Society.  |
| 19th October—              | Offer by men of submission to Arbitration, and proposal to Strike in the event of offer being rejected.   |
| 9th November—              | Correspondence with Companies. Offer rejected. Meetings.  |
| 11th and 15th Nov.—        | Correspondence with Companies.  |
| 23rd November—             | Meetings.   |
| 30th November—             | Meeting at Edinburgh.   |
| 7th December—              | Meeting at Glasgow.   |
| 14th December—             | Meetings in the Country. Delay resolved upon.   |
| 21st December—             | Meetings at all Centres. Resolution to Strike forthwith carried.  |
| 27th December—             | Public Meeting at Edinburgh to express sympathy with men.   |
| 27th December—             | Dundee Negotiations.  |
| 31st December—             | G. & S.W. men returned to work.   |
| 1891, 7th and 8th January— | Mr. Haldane's Negotiations.   |
| 9th January—               | Glasgow Citizens' Meeting.  |
| 9th till 17th January—     | Glasgow Citizens' Committee Negotiations.   |
| 21st and 22nd January—     | Lord Aberdeen's Negotiations.   |
| 22nd January—              | Civil Action raised by North British Compy. against Messrs. Milne, Tait, etc.                             |
| 24th January—              | Large body of men return to work on Caledonian System.  |
| 29th January—              | Settlement with North British Railway.  |
| 31st January—              | Settlement with Caledonian Railway.   |

# THE RAILWAY STRIKE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### NARRATIVE OF THE TRANSACTIONS PRIOR TO THE STRIKE.

The agitation for reduction of hours in the railway service in Scotland may be said to have formally begun in 1882. In January, 1883, the men employed on the Caledonian Railway engaged in a strike, and though the attempt to reduce the hours of labour may be described as a partial failure, the ultimate result was a considerable modification of the conditions of employment in that company.<sup>1</sup> In the same year, deputations from the employees made representations to the North British Railway Coy., with the result of at least certain nominal concessions. The demand of the men at that time was for a working day of nine hours.<sup>2</sup>

In the case for the North British Railway Coy., as stated in the "Circular to Staff, 15th November, 1890," the agitation of 1883 is represented as having been based upon a desire for increase of wages, rather than for a diminution of labour. This construction is, however, repudiated by the men, as is also the statement that the present agitation has any such object.<sup>3</sup> During the years subsequent to 1883, strong efforts were made to consolidate the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants in Scotland, and while this was going on, public representations by the men to the companies fell for the time into abeyance. A demand for a normal working day of ten hours for all grades was formulated in the autumn of 1889, and presented to the

(1) It is alleged, however, that the men in the mineral department lost rather than gained ground by changes in the summer of 1883.

(2) North British Railway Company. Circular to Staff, 15th November, 1890.

(3) Report by Executive Committee Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, 23rd November, 1890. On this point see below, page 28.