

‘DUTIES IN AID OF THE CIVIL POWER’:  
THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE ARMY TO GLASGOW,  
31 JANUARY TO 17 FEBRUARY 1919

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**Abstract.** On 31 January 1919 a demonstration in Glasgow in support of an unofficial strike for a 40-hour working week descended into violence, the ‘Battle of George Square’, probably set off by an ill-judged police baton charge. Troops called by the Sheriff of Lanarkshire began to arrive late that evening, and six tanks arrived on the following Monday. The ‘Battle’ and the subsequent military deployment have entered the mythology of Scottish socialism and, more recently, of Scottish nationalism. The strike had an overtly political aim: to force the Government to step in to regulate industry. Many in government believed that it had a more profoundly political, or even revolutionary aim. No detailed account of the troop deployment has yet been written, and in this gap mythology has flourished. This paper is intended to fill that gap and to challenge the myths.

**Keywords.** Red Clydeside, Battle of George Square, Glasgow, Military aid to civil power, mythology, Socialism

‘for a soldier there is no more distasteful duty than that of  
aiding the Civil Power’.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The story of ‘Red Clydeside’ has been a key part of the identity narrative of many on the left in the west of Scotland. The established picture was of a ‘heroic

<sup>1</sup> E. Ironside, *Archangel 1918–19* (London, 1953).

episode of labour struggle' in which a potential for revolution was never fulfilled and it was only in the 1960s that a scholarly reappraisal began, spurred on by the release of the relevant government documents.<sup>2</sup> The 'revisionists', led by Iain McLean, proposed a view in which industrial unrest was driven less by socialist ideology than by material concerns. Academic historians have since discussed the detail of the social, political and labour history of 'Red Clydeside'. One aspect of the period has not received much attention: there has been no evidence-based account of the legal, constitutional and administrative framework within which around 10,000 soldiers and six tanks suddenly appeared in the second-largest city of the Empire, over a long weekend. In academic accounts, the deployment has generally been treated as a coda to the 'Battle of George Square', requiring no more than a mention: the troops just 'arrive', 'sent by government', to deal with 'a Bolshevik rising'.<sup>3</sup> Even historians of the role of the army in supporting the civil power have shown little interest.<sup>4</sup> The violence in George Square and the arrival of the military are given greater and more dramatic prominence in popular histories, and in socialist accounts of 'Red Clydeside'.<sup>5</sup> These rely heavily on previous popular accounts and online sources, with limited academic apparatus and, where primary sources are quoted, it is not clear that they have been consulted in detail.

In summary, much of what circulates as fact, not only online but in print, about the deployment of the army to Glasgow in 1919 is not supported by primary evidence.

### The myths

The overall narrative of the deployment is made up of a number of elements, none of which seem to be supported by primary evidence, which appear in different combinations in everything from academic accounts, to educational material for schools, to overt propaganda. First, the government (or 'Churchill'<sup>6</sup>) sent the

<sup>2</sup> I. McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1999). Originally published in 1983, the 1999 edition has a summary of the debate between 'revisionists' and their opponents to that date.

<sup>3</sup> M. Pittock, *Scottish Nationality* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 103; T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation: A Modern History* (London, 2012), ebook page reference: 811.7–813.5/1763.

<sup>4</sup> The events are mentioned briefly in K. Jeffery and P. Hennessy, *States of Emergency: British Governments and Strikebreaking since 1919* (London, 1983), p. 10. Weinberger's treatment is problematic (below). B. Weinberger, *Keeping the Peace? Policing Strikes in Britain 1906–1926* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 152–62.

<sup>5</sup> M. Craig, *When the Clyde Ran Red* (Edinburgh, 2011), pp. 161–5. N. Naughton, *Glasgow's East End: From Bishops to Barrabos* (London, 2014), pp. 91–4, 191. M. Fry, *Glasgow: a History of the City* (London, 2017), pp. 320, 429–32. J. Leopold, 'The Forty Hours Strike', in L. Flynn (ed.) *We Shall Be All: Recent Chapters in the History of Working Class Struggle in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1978), pp. 39–40.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest occurrence so far that could be found for the assertion that Churchill was personally responsible for the deployment is Shinwell's 1973 autobiography *I've lived through it all* (London, 1973), p. 45: 'Churchill persuaded the Cabinet that troops, machine guns, and tanks should be deployed in the Clydeside area'. This suggestion is missing from his earlier autobiography, in which 'Whitehall' is blamed (*Conflict without Malice* (London, 1953), pp. 64–5) and from his later two, in

army to Glasgow to crush the strike;<sup>7</sup> in many accounts the tanks/troops were sent into George Square against the demonstrators with 'orders to kill' or with the tanks 'ordered to fire on the strikers', and people were injured or killed.<sup>8</sup> Second, only 'English troops' were used.<sup>9</sup> Third, the troops were all or mostly young, raw recruits.<sup>10</sup> Fourth, the troops in Maryhill barracks were 'locked' in, because they might side with the strikers.<sup>11</sup> And finally, the army was in Glasgow for 'a week' or 'months'.<sup>12</sup>

On social media, the passing off of myths as history is hardly rare,<sup>13</sup> but the mythology has poisoned the wells of both academic history and educational materials prepared for schools. For example, from the website of the government agency Education Scotland:

In an event unique in British history, Winston Churchill dispatched English troops and tanks against a large demonstration in George Square on 31st January 1919. The event became known as The Battle of George Square. Scottish troops already present in Glasgow were locked in Maryhill Barracks for fear that they might join the demonstrators and precipitate a major revolution. Thousands of English troops remained in Scotland for many months.<sup>14</sup>

There are six statements (underlined) in this short extract which either cannot be evidenced, or can easily be disproved; the deployment of troops and tanks was not 'unique'; Churchill didn't send them; they weren't 'all English'; they weren't sent against a demonstration; there is no evidence that the troops might have joined the demonstrators; they left on 17 February. The 2013 edition of the Scottish history

the first of which he claimed, that it was, with the police role in the riot, 'a deliberate act on the part of Lloyd George' (*Lead with the Left* (London, 1981), p. 65); also H. Shinwell and J. Doxat, *Shinwell Talking* (London, 1984), p. 93–4.

<sup>7</sup> J. Jenkinson, 'Black sailors on Red Clydeside: rioting, reactionary trade unions and conflicting notions of "Britishness" following the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19 (2008), pp. 29–60 (p.36). J. McGonigle and C. Wood, *The Era of the Great War 1910–1928* (Glasgow, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>8</sup> <https://twitter.com/travisbynigh/status/955584961758703616>. Fry, *Glasgow*, p.429.

<sup>9</sup> W. Gallacher, *William Gallacher's Last Memoirs* (London, 1966), p. 120; Craig, *When the Clyde Ran Red*, p.165. Fry, *Glasgow*, p. 430. Wood correctly states, 'various English and Scottish regiments': I. S. Wood, 'Internal policing and public order, c.1900–94', in E. M. Spiers, J. A. Crang and M. J. Strickland (eds), *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 542.

<sup>10</sup> W. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (Chadwell Heath, 5th edn 2017 [1936]), pp. 163–4. H. McShane and J. Smith, *Harry McShane: no mean fighter* (London, 1978), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> Craig, *When the Clyde Ran Red*, p. 165. Online variants have them refusing to go on the streets, or even having an armed stand-off with English troops.

<sup>12</sup> Fry, *Glasgow*, p. 429. Education Scotland website; document 'The road to the Scottish Parliament', [p14] <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/documents/soc10-you-decide/soc10-ptimeline.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Detailed referencing of the myths used on social media is not attempted here: the reader may create their own collection by searching on Twitter and Facebook for combinations of the words: 'Churchill'; '1919'; 'George Square'; 'Glasgow'; 'English'; 'troops'; and 'tanks'.

<sup>14</sup> Education Scotland, 'The road to the Scottish Parliament', [p14].



Figure 1. 'Julian' tank in a fund-raising parade, 1918.

textbook for National Curriculum 4 and 5 *The Era of the Great War 1910–1923*, also includes similar problematic statements.<sup>15</sup> One image, that of a tank in a crowd, has been used repeatedly to illustrate 'Tanks and soldiers brought in to quell the unrest in Glasgow', but this was proved in 2018 to have been taken a year earlier, and is of veteran tank 'Julian' in a fund-raising parade.<sup>16</sup>

### Sources<sup>17</sup>

The progress of the strike, the immediate causes of the violence in George Square, the political fallout of the violence, and the strike's failure have been dealt with extensively elsewhere. Only where these factors cast light on the actions of local and national government are they considered here. The primary sources are often quoted selectively and summarily to illustrate, make or dramatise specific points, rather than as the basis for a coherent narrative. The sources comprise, first,

<sup>15</sup> McGonigle and Wood, *The Era of the Great War 1910–1928*, p.84.

<sup>16</sup> *Herald*, 29 Jan. 2018.

<sup>17</sup> I have relied on McLean's 'revisionist' accounts: I. McLean, 'The Labour Movement in Clydeside Politics, 1914–1922' (DPhil, University of Oxford, 1972); 'Popular Protest and Public Order: Red Clydeside, 1915–1919', in R. Quinault and J. Stevenson (eds), *Popular Protest and Public Order Six Studies in British History, 1790–1920* (London, 1974), pp. 215–42; *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh, 1999).

contemporary newspaper accounts, especially when written by eye-witnesses, and photographs. Accounts of the behaviour of the crowd and the causes of the outbreak of violence in George Square ought to be read with knowledge of the newspapers' political positions, and by their reliance on the police version of events. Observations of more mundane and, at the time, less politically sensitive, details are more likely to be accurate. Second, there are the minutes of the War Cabinet; these were at that time sealed for 50 years. Third, the transcript of the trial of the strike leaders for incitement to riot and other offences in April 1919, sheds light on the actions of the key public figures before and after the reading of the Riot Act.<sup>18</sup> Finally, there is contemporary documentation on the legal framework and administrative structures within which the deployment took place.

### **The events of 1919**

The City Fathers and the War Cabinet were influenced by a range of factors in their actions and reactions to events in Glasgow. Most important was the atmosphere of political, military and industrial unrest in the UK and across Europe. On Friday 31 January 1919 only 82 days had passed since the Armistice. The War Cabinet was still meeting, the terms of the Defence of the Realm Act were still in effect, around 2,000,000 men were still under arms in the British armed forces, and many of them verged on mutinous. Fighting continued in Eastern Europe between combinations of pre-existing and newly-established states; British forces were fighting in Russia; and violent socialist revolution gripped European cities. In this context, the history of industrial unrest on the Clyde during the war weighed on their minds.<sup>19</sup> The reputation of the key leaders of this unofficial strike as radical or even revolutionary was also an important point, an impression reinforced by some of their reported words in the run-up to the violence on 31 January.<sup>20</sup> The avowed intention of the organisers to bring out on strike the employees of the city-owned power stations and tram system led local and national government to be deeply concerned. The strike organisers promised only to maintain power to hospitals and possibly to homes.<sup>21</sup> The authorities believed that workers who did not want to strike were being intimidated by mass-picketing, when they might have to pass between shouting crowds of strikers 5,000 to 10,000 strong.<sup>22</sup> The strike organisers' explicit threat to move beyond constitutional means, conveyed in the Lord Provost's telegram to the government

<sup>18</sup> Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], JC 36/31 'Trial transcript from the trial of William McCartney [et al] for the crime of mobbing and rioting at George Square, Glasgow and other locations... at the High Court, Edinburgh... 7 April 1919'.

<sup>19</sup> McLean, 'Popular Protest and Public Order,' p. 215.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>21</sup> McLean, *Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 122.

<sup>22</sup> *Scotsman*, 31 Jan. 1919; D. S. Morton, *The 40 Hours Strike: An Historic Survey of the First General Strike in Scotland* (Clydebank, 1919), p. 6.



**Figure 2.** Mass picketing outside a factory (*Illustrated London News*, Saturday 8 February 1919).

of 29 January (see below), can only have exacerbated the government's concerns.<sup>23</sup> There was evidence that the strike organisers planned acts of sabotage and that the government knew of these plans through an informer.<sup>24</sup> More generally, there were strong fears of the outbreak of violent socialist or bolshevist revolution in the UK, as had occurred in other parts of Europe, and that the Clyde was probably the most likely place for this to erupt. Alarmist intelligence reports from Special Branch fed these concerns.<sup>25</sup>

### **27 January to 30 January 1919: the build-up to 'Black Friday'**

The War Cabinet was a small group, created in 1916, its purpose to 'take decisions and issue orders without recourse to the full Cabinet'.<sup>26</sup> In January 1919 it comprised Lloyd George, Andrew Bonar Law, Austen Chamberlain, Sir Eric Geddes, and Lord Curzon. Ministers, civil servants and senior military officers were present for certain agenda items. In the context of this discussion, in particular in relation to the personal blame often attached to Winston Churchill

<sup>23</sup> London, The National Archives [TNA], CAB23/9/9, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 522, 30 January 1919'.

<sup>24</sup> P. M. Slowe, *Manny Shinwell: an Authorized Biography* (London, 1993), p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, pp.136–7; TNA, CAB24/74/13, 'Fortnightly Report on Revolutionary Organisations in the United Kingdom and Abroad, 28 January 1919'.

<sup>26</sup> J. P. Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet* (London, 1977), p. 371.

in the mythology, it is important to note that neither he nor his naval equivalent, the First Lord of the Admiralty, were members of the War Cabinet, nor was the Foreign Secretary.<sup>27</sup> In the key meetings on 30 and 31 January, only three and two members of the War Cabinet were present, respectively: everyone else was there to speak to business items on the agenda and, crucially, they were not party to War Cabinet decisions, but had to implement them.<sup>28</sup>

The War Cabinet was alarmed, even 'panicky', about unrest in labour relations and the possible connection to revolutionary socialism, especially in Glasgow. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Maurice Hankey, wrote to the man temporarily replacing him, on 17 January 1919:

The ministers. . . seem to have the 'wind-up' to the most extraordinary extent about the industrial situation. C.I.G.S. [Chief of the Imperial General Staff] also is positively in a state of dreadful nerves on the subject. Churchill is the only one who is sane on this subject. . . '<sup>29</sup>

The 40-hours strike began on Monday 27 January 1919. At the second War Cabinet meeting of the day, on 28 January, Sir Robert Horne, Minister of Labour (and a Glasgow MP), said that, 'In his opinion the newspapers were unduly alarmist about the situation [in Belfast, Glasgow and London]. The present sporadic outburst of discontent was not unexpected'. On 29 January the Lord Provost of Glasgow offered to convey to government the demand of a delegation of Glasgow strike leaders, that government intervene to settle the dispute in their favour. The full text was published in a number of newspapers. For reasons of space, the preamble is omitted and the Provost's rather orotund style is paraphrased (marked in square brackets; my emphasis):

... The deputation [of 11 men]... requested me to represent to the Prime Minister and... the Minister of Labour that they wished the Government to intervene with the employers [to reduce working hours] to forty per week. . . It was further stated that they had hitherto adopted constitutional methods in urging their demand, but failing consideration being given to their request by the Government, they would adopt any other methods which they might consider would be likely to advance their cause. They have, however, agreed to delay taking any such action until Friday in order that I may be able to communicate your reply. I have just learned from the manager of the electricity department that all men in the generating stations have been compelled to-day to join the strike, and that only sufficient men will be allowed to run the

<sup>27</sup> R. R. James, *Churchill : A Study in Failure 1900–1939* (London, 1990), p. 100. Mackintosh, *British Cabinet*, p. 382.

<sup>28</sup> War Cabinet members present: 30 January 1919, meeting 522: Andrew Bonar Law, chair; Austen Chamberlain; Sir Eric Geddes. 31 January 1919, meeting 523: Bonar Law and Geddes.

<sup>29</sup> McLean, 'Popular Protest and Public Order', p. 241, n39.

plant necessary to provide lighting and power for hospitals and infirmaries and possibly lighting of private dwelling houses.<sup>30</sup>

The strike leaders were due to return, accompanied by a large crowd of their supporters, to receive the government's response, on Friday 31 January 1919. In the underlined phrases, the Lord Provost clearly signals to the government the likelihood of actions beyond 'constitutional methods' occurring on or after Friday. Unfortunately reinforcing the impression of looming trouble, Shinwell and Gallacher, two of the strike leaders, told their supporters outside the City Chambers after the 29 January meeting: 'Drastic action would have to be resorted to if the reply to the Lord Provost's message was unsatisfactory...' and 'If the strike was not settled by the end of this week they would not hesitate to stop every tramcar, shut off every light, and generally paralyse the business of the city'.<sup>31</sup> It is understandable perhaps that the City Fathers began to see Friday's demonstration as being freighted with menace. The Sheriff later stated that he had been apprehensive of trouble at the Friday demonstration, and that after the meeting on the 29th he had felt it necessary to ascertain 'whether it would be possible to get the assistance of the Military if the Civil Authorities could not cope with the [anticipated] disturbances' on the 31st.<sup>32</sup>

In his statement in defence of his actions, made to the Council on 6 February, the Lord Provost said that one outcome of his writing to the government was that 'time to obtain sufficient military aid was thus obtained'.<sup>33</sup> The 'Strike Situation in Glasgow' was the first item on the agenda at War Cabinet meeting No. 522, 30 January 1919, convened at 3pm. The War Cabinet was chaired by the deputy Prime Minister, Andrew Bonar Law (another Glasgow MP),<sup>34</sup> with Austen Chamberlain (Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Sir Eric Geddes. Also present, but not members of the War Cabinet, were Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for War, Sir Robert Horne, Minister of Labour, Robert Munro, Secretary for Scotland, and Scotland's chief law officer, the Lord Advocate, J. A. Clyde. There were five other civilians present, and four senior soldiers, of whom Sir H. H. Wilson (Chief of the Imperial General Staff) and Sir W. R. Robertson (C-in-C Home Forces) were the most important. Of the 12 civilians present, seven were Scots, as were two of the three War Cabinet members.

First, the Provost's telegram and the government's draft response were discussed. Government policy was not to get involved in labour disputes of this kind, especially where this would undermine the official trade unions, and this

<sup>30</sup> TNA, CAB23/9/9, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 522, 30 January 1919'. McLean (*Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 137) notes that the Lord Provost was misinformed, because the Pinkston station was not affected at any time during the strike.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in McLean, *Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 123.

<sup>32</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript...', cross examination of Sheriff A O M Mackenzie.

<sup>33</sup> *Glasgow Evening Times*, 6 Feb. 1919.

<sup>34</sup> The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, was at the Peace Conference in Paris, but he and Bonar Law had spoken earlier that day.



was the line they took on this occasion. After a discussion about the merits of the dispute, Bonar Law said (my emphasis):

That he thought it vital for the War Office to be satisfied that there was a sufficient force in Glasgow to prevent disorder and to protect those volunteers or others who could be made available to take over the operation of the generating stations and municipal services. It was certain that if the movement in Glasgow grew, it would spread all over the country.

The underlined text indicates the government's priority, to ensure that societal order was to be maintained in the face of a politically-motivated strike, intended to force the government to intervene in the regulation of industry. Bonar Law went on to suggest that 2,000 Special Constables should be used to take over the municipal services, as more suitable than soldiers. Protecting these people from interference was another problem, as the Glasgow Police was much depleted by men still being away on military service. The accelerated return of Glasgow policemen from military service was dismissed as impracticable.

Scottish Secretary Munro, having noted that the Lord Provost and the Sheriff [of Lanarkshire] were jointly responsible for law and order, suggested that a senior Labour Ministry official should go to liaise with them. The involvement of the Labour Ministry was, however, agreed to be problematic, given the government's refusal to intervene in the dispute, and later in the meeting it was decided that a senior Scottish Office civil servant, Mr John Lamb, would be 'sent to Glasgow to keep the government closely informed of the course of events'.<sup>35</sup> Bonar Law instructed that Lamb should 'get in touch with the Lord Provost of Glasgow and the Sheriff'. Given the personal blame for the military intervention frequently ascribed to Churchill, Bonar Law's statement at this point is worth emphasising, that 'The first responsibility in the whole matter must be by the Secretary of Scotland'.

After the involvement of the Ministry of Labour had been rejected, the C-in-C Home Forces made a significant contribution (my emphasis):

The military part of the question was quite simple. The civil authorities were responsible for law and order, and the military could not step in except at their requisition in accordance with King's Regulations. This did not apply, however, if martial law was declared.

The imposition of martial law in Glasgow was not even discussed.<sup>36</sup> The *King's Regulations and Orders for the Army* in force in 1919 were those published in 1912,

<sup>35</sup> Later Sir John Lamb, Permanent Under-secretary in the Scottish Office 1922–33.

<sup>36</sup> As the *Evening Times* put it on 3 Feb. 1919, 'Indeed a person ignorant of the actual position might think that Glasgow was under martial law, which, of course, it is not'. The imposition of martial law would have meant that all functions of civil government were taken over by the military, which was not the case.

as subsequently amended. The amendments issued between 1914 and 1923 did not affect paragraphs 955 to 975, which covered 'Duties in Aid of the Civil Power'.<sup>37</sup> A new edition would not be published until 1923. In addition, the War Office published in 1912 a small booklet for officers entitled *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*; this document is considered further below.<sup>38</sup>

Para. 956 of the Regulations stated that except in 'great and sudden emergency', an army officer could not legally order troops out without a written request from the 'civil authority', defined in Scotland as the Sheriff of the county, and that troops would not be despatched until the commander had subsequently received authority from the War Office. The military authority would decide how many troops would be sent, and the civil authority would be responsible for housing and feeding them. To show that the troops were acting on behalf of the civil authority (Para. 958) a magistrate was to meet the troops at the railway station, and conduct them either to their quarters, or to the location of any ongoing disturbance. The army commander would decide on the deployment of troops, in consultation with the magistrate. A magistrate had to accompany every detachment of troops when trouble was feared, to be ready to read the Proclamation under the Riot Act, if it were necessary. The reading of the Proclamation was 'important, both as conveying a distinct warning to the crowd, and as involving the legal consequences that those who do not disperse within one hour are guilty of felony'. The reading of the Proclamation was not, however, a legal necessity before calling for military aid: 'The importance of reading the Riot Act refers to the actual moment before troops are used to disperse rioters, usually by opening fire, and the Riot Act must be read on each occasion force is used'.<sup>39</sup>

The Regulations laid particular stress on the personal responsibility of the magistrate and army officer for anything done by them not justified by circumstances—that is, if they used disproportionate force (as was the case with General Dyer's indiscriminate use of machine guns at Amritsar later that year (Clements, pers comm)).

At the War Cabinet, after reminding the meeting of the legal constraints, General Robertson stated that there were in Scottish Command 19 infantry battalions which were 'all Scottish but one'. 'One of the battalions was in Glasgow, one at Greenock and about 12 in the vicinity of Edinburgh' (below). He then reported that 'they were all reserve-finding units, and consisted of all sorts of men, old, young, convalescent, and men with wounds. As regards the officers, these

<sup>37</sup> The King's Regulations and Orders for the Army (1914). *Various Amendments and Reprints of Amendments to the King's Regulations Published between 1914 and 1921* (1914–21). Both the 1916 reprint of the 1914 Regulations, and a document in which all the amendments to 1921 are collated, are available for free download, from, respectively: <https://goo.gl/wHbvLV> and <https://goo.gl/TfiPQM>

<sup>38</sup> War Office, *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* (London, 1912): a copy is on War Office file TNA, WO 32/18921, 'Use of military personnel in aid of civil powers in event of civil disturbances and strikes: publishing of information from secret army documents' 1918–19.

<sup>39</sup> Col (ret) W H Clements, pers comm.

were not very efficient'. In the First World War these reserve-finding battalions undertook the training and preparation of drafts of men to go to the battalions on active service. They also included officers and men recovering from wounds or illness, or who were otherwise not suitable for active duty; hence the comments made at the War Cabinet. Such units would frequently comprise over 2,000 men (Table 1).

After an exchange about the legality of troops being used to operate the power stations (General Robertson was clear that it wasn't), he said that there were 'certain disadvantages in employing Scottish troops, but on the whole, he thought it would be safer to use them than to import English battalions' to restore order and protect the volunteers operating the power stations. Churchill intervened at this point, stating that 'we should not exaggerate the seriousness of this disturbance'. He did, however, suggest that the situation in Glasgow had been brewing for a long time and, although he considered that the 'disaffected were in a minority', he believed that 'there would have to be a conflict in order to clear the air'. He added that there would have to be 'plenty of provocation' before taking 'strong measures', but the moment for troops to be used 'had not yet arrived'. He felt, however, that the Defence of the Realm Act should be used to arrest some of the leaders. The Lord Advocate, agreed, later in the meeting, to look into the legal position.<sup>40</sup> Bonar Law, agreeing with Churchill, was anxious that there should be 'some responsible person in Glasgow ready to call in the military when necessary, and that this person should be told that the military had received orders to hold themselves in readiness'. The Special Constables were to be readied (to operate the power stations) and a mechanism was to be established to allow the government, the Lord Provost and the Sheriff to keep in touch. It was at this point that Mr Lamb was nominated to go north.<sup>41</sup>

Both Chamberlain and Churchill, despite the latter's words about 'conflict', stressed that the government should not act in advance of public opinion. Lamb was to be briefed that the government's view was that, 'the situation should be dealt with patiently but firmly, and the military only called in when asked for in order to prevent serious disorder and intimidation, and to preserve the lighting arrangements of the city'. The final exchange was between Sir Eric Geddes and Churchill. The former warned that strike action might shut down the railways on Saturday, and this might affect the movement of troops to Glasgow:

Mr Churchill said that the War Office would take all the necessary steps to meet such an eventuality [that is, the possible railway strike] and would consider arrangements for placing troops in the vicinity of Glasgow.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The use of D.O.R.A. to arrest the ringleaders of industrial unrest harked back to the Government's heavy-handed response to events in Clydeside in March and April 1916 (McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*. Ch 7 *passim*).

<sup>41</sup> The HQ of the Scottish Office was at that time in London.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, CAB23/9/9, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 522, 30 January 1919'.

**Table 1.** The location and effective strength of units in Scotland in January 1919.

Also shown are the strengths of the two battalions of the DLI and the 5th Bn Easy Surrey regiment, which may have been involved. The regimental depots also contained between 900 and 4,900 men, but the War Cabinet minutes were explicit in naming the Reserve Battalions as the source of the troops. All units were on the same stations in December 1918 and January 1919, apart from the 4<sup>th</sup> (Reserve) Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers, which moved from Kinross to Glasgow in December 1918. (Source: WO 73/110).

<b>Regiment [Depot]</b>	<b>Reserve Battalion</b>	<b>Location Jan 1919</b>	<b>Effectives Jan 1919</b>
Royal Scots [Glencorse, nr Edinburgh]	4th (R) Bn	Cupar	2,275
Royal Scots Fusiliers [Ayr]	3rd (R) Bn	Fort Matilda [Greenock]	2,195
	4th (R) Bn	Glasgow [Maryhill]	1,475
KOSB [Berwick-upon-Tweed]	4th (R) Bn	Dunfermline	1,438
Cameronians [Hamilton]	3rd (R) Bn	Invergordon	3,067
	4th (R) Bn	Redford [Edinburgh]	1,171
East Surrey	3rd (R) Bn	Bridge of Allan	2,904
Black Watch [Perth]	4th (R) Bn	Fort George	1,553
Highland Lt Infantry [Hamilton]	3rd (R) Bn	Haddington	3,824
	4th (R) Bn	Arbroath	1,537
	1st (R) Garrison Bn	Glasgow [Maryhill]	27
Seaforth Highlanders [Fort George]	3rd (R) Bn	Cromarty	2,187
	4th (R) Bn	Glencorse [Midlothian]	651
Gordon Highlanders [Aberdeen]	3rd (R) Bn	Aberdeen	2,143
	4th (R) Bn	Colinton [Edinburgh]	2,172
Cameron Highlanders [Inverness]	None in Britain		
Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders [Stirling]	4th (R) Bn	Dunbar	1,807
	5th (R) Bn	Galashiels	2,257
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32,683</b>

**Table 1.** Continued.

<b>Regiment [Depot]</b>	<b>Reserve Battalion</b>	<b>Location Jan 1919</b>	<b>Effectives Jan 1919</b>
<b>Outwith Scotland</b> East Surrey [Kingston on Thames]	5th (R) Bn	Tunbridge Wells	72
Durham Lt Infantry [Newcastle]	3rd (R) Bn	South Shields	3,941
	4th (R) Bn	Seaham Harbour	1,427

The minutes in general, and this portion in particular, have been used to suggest that the military intervention was Churchill's idea. Burrowes subtly changes this quotation to (my emphasis of the key alterations): 'He [Churchill] did say, however, the War Office would take all necessary steps to meet any eventuality and arrangements would be made for troop movements to Glasgow. Churchill's orders were acted on and men in various barracks throughout Scotland gathered their battle gear and made ready for a new front line. . . the city of Glasgow'.<sup>43</sup> Weinberger's premise is that the government deliberately engineered the military intervention without involving the local authorities, the riot 'simply provided the necessary trigger for the anti-strike measures agreed by the cabinet. . .'. Her claim that Churchill was the one who made 'a positive proposal [to use troops] which was the one adopted' is not, in my view, supported by a dispassionate reading of the minutes.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, on the evening of Thursday 30 January 1919<sup>45</sup> a telegram had been sent to the Lord Provost stating that the government would not intervene in the dispute, over the heads of the unions; he and the Sheriff had been told to maintain the lighting of the city, if possible; the Sheriff had already ascertained if military aid could be supplied, should the civil authorities be unable to cope with the disturbance<sup>46</sup> and had been told that they would be in readiness 'when requested'; instructions had been sent to Scottish Command that troops were to be held in readiness and an officer had been sent north to explain the situation;<sup>47</sup> Mr Lamb of the Scottish Office was travelling to Glasgow to brief the Provost and Sheriff; the first responsibility in the whole matter' was to be taken by the Scottish Secretary and his sub-committee for 'consultation during the continuance of disorder'.

<sup>43</sup> J. Burrowes, *Great Glasgow Stories* (Edinburgh, 1998), ebook reference 629.5/640.

<sup>44</sup> Weinberger, *Keeping the Peace?*, p. 158.

<sup>45</sup> TNA, CAB23/9/9, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 522, 30 January 1919', except where noted.

<sup>46</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . .', cross-examination of Sheriff A O M Mackenzie.

<sup>47</sup> This was reported by General Romer at the next day's War Cabinet meeting (TNA, CAB23/9/10, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 523, 31 January 1919').

It is important to note the priority given in the discussion, and in the decisions made, to the maintenance of the city's power supply and the continuation of societal order. Although the wider political and economic context was mentioned, the troops were to be put on standby to maintain order and the power supply, if they were needed. These were not the preparations to deal with an incipient revolution. Iain McLean suggests that the situation had to a great extent been manipulated into being by the Lord Provost, whose own admission was that his purpose in passing on the strikers' demands had been to convince the government of 'their necessity for immediately providing a sufficient force to aid the civilian force in any emergency which might arise'.<sup>48</sup> It is possible, however, that this is merely post hoc self-exculpation.<sup>49</sup>

The lights will have burned late at Scottish Command to prepare the orders ready to be sent out to the units, should they be needed: to select suitable men for deployment; to prepare for movement; and to issue arms and rations. The pamphlet *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* provided advice to officers organising deployments: to ensure the men had three days' rations, necessary 'camp', telegraphic and telephonic equipment, 20 rounds of ammunition per man, waggons and so on.<sup>50</sup> Provision was to be made for an immediate report to the War Office by telegram, on arrival, stating the size of the force, and telephone communication was to be kept open to the War Office, night and day. Arrangements for rail transport and for ensuring that there was enough rolling stock were to be made locally. Alternatively, if one takes a conspiracist view, the whole thing had been planned days before: Kendall has asserted, 'That Glasgow could have been placed under armed occupation without prior planning and consultation is inconceivable'.<sup>51</sup> It is, however, only 'inconceivable' if one believes that what was in 1919 the most efficiently organised army in the world, could not manage a relatively small-scale deployment 50 miles from its local HQ in peacetime conditions, in 9–18 hours, with c.18 hours advance notice.

### Friday 31 January

The wording of the government's telegram, refusing to become involved in the dispute, was published on the morning of 31 January in many newspapers, including the *Glasgow Herald*<sup>52</sup> and, it was written that:

there was no reason whatsoever for a demonstration in force before the City Chambers. The answer returned by Mr Bonar Law to the message from the

<sup>48</sup> McLean, *Legend of Red Clydeside*, p.126. Lord Provost's statement as quoted in *The Glasgow Herald*, 7 Feb. 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Addison, pers comm.

<sup>50</sup> War Department, *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*, pp.3–4.

<sup>51</sup> W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Scotland 1900–21* (London, 1969), p. 139.

<sup>52</sup> The Lord Provost was upset that the government's decision had been publicised in advance of his meeting with the organisers (NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . .', evidence of the Lord Provost).

Unofficial Strike Committee was common property in the early morning; for it had been published broadcast by means of the morning journals circulating in the city.<sup>53</sup>

The strike organisers indeed knew the evening before that their demands had been rejected, although it was by then too late to put off the demonstration.<sup>54</sup> Whether this knowledge affected the purpose and mood of the crowd is not clear, but the Lord Provost and Sheriff may reasonably have feared that Shinwell's 'drastic action' might be resorted to 'if the reply to the Lord Provost's message was unsatisfactory. . .', and that the crowd was possibly there to take that action. We do not know what would have happened once the leaders had formally received notice of their failure to get the government to intervene; what were their intentions? The author of Shinwell's authorised biography was in no doubt, that, after they had received the official rejection, he:

would then return to the crowd which would by now be angry with the government's sharp rebuff. The scene would be set for action and set too for Shinwell to use the full powers of his oratory. He would let rip. He would rouse the assembled masses . . . ' [original ellipsis]<sup>55</sup>

It is likely that the government knew what was discussed by the strike organisers, through someone present at the discussion, the alleged informer, Edith Hughes.<sup>56</sup> Through her, they probably also knew of the plans made for acts of sabotage that the committee had discussed, the 'materials or plans' relating to which Shinwell burned, after he slipped away from the riot on the Friday afternoon.<sup>57</sup> Around noon on Friday 31 January the strike leaders entered the City Chambers and asked for the Lord Provost. The Provost was in a special meeting of the magistrates of the city which he had convened for 11.45 and went into at 11.55. The strike leaders were told of the delay and while they were waiting in the library, the sounds of violence outside were heard and they rushed off.

The causes of the violence are contested. There were originally 70 police in the square, and another 70 arrived with the various processions of demonstrators arriving from outlying areas.<sup>58</sup> Six mounted police and a reserve of officers at least 27 strong were held in the internal quadrangle of the City Chambers.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *Daily Record*, 1 Feb. 1919

<sup>54</sup> Slowe, *Manny Shinwell*, p. 83.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83. This is in contrast to Shinwell's 1973 self-exculpatory autobiography, *I've lived through it all*.

<sup>56</sup> Slowe, *Manny Shinwell*, p.84.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85. R. K. Middlemas, *The Clydesiders* (London, 1968), pp. 92, 94.

<sup>58</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . .', evidence of the Chief Constable. He also responded to a question as to why he had deployed so few policemen (out of a force 14,000 strong) that he had 'made such provision as I thought would meet any circumstances that might arise'.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* evidence of Sergeant McClure. Not the 'hundreds of police' alleged by Shinwell *Lead with the Left*, p.61.

This relatively small force faced around 20–25,000 demonstrators.<sup>60</sup> Whatever the reason (and Weinberger's 'all the signs of over-reaction on the part of an outnumbered force' seems the most plausible)<sup>61</sup> the police baton-charged the crowd along the southern side of the square, in an eastward direction. This occurred around 12.20.<sup>62</sup> The *Strike Bulletin* of 2 February 1919 set out what has since become part of the standard narrative of the left, 'The attack by police was carefully planned. Of this there can be no doubt, in view of what happened'. A further outbreak of violence occurred in front of the City Chambers and there was a second baton charge. The Sheriff, observing the disturbance from an upstairs window of the Chambers,<sup>63</sup> said to Sir John Lindsay, the Town Clerk, 'From what I have seen I am satisfied that mobbing and rioting is taking place, and I propose to read the Riot Act'; he then went into the magistrates' meeting and said the same thing to the Lord Provost and magistrates and they proceeded downstairs. Bailie John Stewart, who was called as a defence witness at the trial, said that many of the magistrates were unduly anxious about events, and he described the Sheriff 'in a highly excited condition'.<sup>64</sup> The *Glasgow Herald* put it:

In the circumstances the Lord Provost had a consultation with Mr Lamb, the Legal Adviser to the Scottish Office, Sheriff A O M Mackenzie, Sir John Lindsay, the Town Clerk, and the magistrates. The result of the consultation was that the Sheriff proceeded to the front of the building for the purposes of reading the Riot Act.<sup>65</sup>

Two magistrates, Bailies Wheatley and John Stewart, asked that they might be given the opportunity to 'go down and quieten the mob'.<sup>66</sup> This was not successful and by this stage elements of the crowd had armed themselves with bottles from a stranded lorry and were throwing them from North Frederick Street at the police and civic party in front of the Civic Chambers. The Sheriff again said 'I am going to read the Riot Act'.<sup>67</sup> The *Bulletin* published a photograph of the civic party immediately prior to the reading of the Proclamation. The Chief Constable, beside the Sheriff, was struck by a demonstrator; his deputy was also

<sup>60</sup> Contemporary estimates of the crowd size vary between 20–25,000 (newspapers reports and Gallacher in his cross-examination of a police witness at his trial) and 100,000 (Gallacher, *The Last Memoirs*, p. 120). The application of the Jacobs formula to the area of George Square, taking account of the information on crowd density and location provided by contemporary photographs, and the description at the trial suggests there is little reason to dispute the 20–25,000 accepted at the time. H. Jacobs, 'To count a crowd', *Columbia Journalism Review*, 6 (1967), pp. 37–40; NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . . ' *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> Weinberger, *Keeping the Peace?*, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . . ' *passim*

<sup>63</sup> Not, 'from the opposite end of the square', Fry *Glasgow*, p.429.

<sup>64</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . . ', evidence of Bailie John Stewart.

<sup>65</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>66</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . . ', evidence of Bailie John Stewart.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, cross-examination of Sir John Lindsay.





**Figure 3.** The Sheriff, marked, about to read the Riot Act on Friday 31 January 1919. John Lamb of the Scottish Office stands third from the right (*Bulletin*, Saturday 1 February 1919).

struck, as was Inspector Swan and the Town Clerk. The Sheriff was hit by a bottle and had his copy of the Riot Act torn from his hands.<sup>68</sup> The *Glasgow Evening News* reported that, 'Having completed the reading of the Act, the Sheriff and the civic party re-entered the City Chambers, where they discussed the expediency of calling out the military'.<sup>69</sup> The *Strike Bulletin* put it thus, 'after the Riot Act had been read and the crowd attacked, another meeting [of the magistrates] was held at which a minority of the Magistrates wanted the military called out to disperse the people—by guns and bayonets'.<sup>70</sup>

The Sheriff's main evidence at the trial included this exchange:<sup>71</sup>

Q: After reviewing all that you had seen and taken part in that day, did you have a consultation with the Lord Provost and the Chief Constable? A: Yes, I spoke to both of them.

Q: And did you tell them you had come to the conclusion that the resources of the Civic Authorities were insufficient for securing the maintenance of order in the City at that time? A: Yes, we were all agreed. We had heard other things of more disorder.

Q: You had heard of disorder in the Trongate and elsewhere? A: Yes

<sup>68</sup> *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>69</sup> *Glasgow Evening News*, 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>70</sup> *Strike Bulletin*, 2 Feb. 1919. In the copy consulted the word 'minority' is very unclear—it could be 'majority', but the point is moot.

<sup>71</sup> NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript. . .', evidence of Sheriff A O M Mackenzie.

Q: And did you in consequence make up your mind that the necessity had arisen for appealing to the Military Authorities? A: Yes.

It is likely that Lamb of the Scottish Office acquainted Munro's ad-hoc Cabinet committee in London of events, and, in the absence of evidence of another source, probably provided the information given at 3pm to the War Cabinet by the Scottish Secretary and the Minister for Labour (below). Three newspapers reported a Press Association story that 'arrangements were being made for calling out military assistance, when the order was cancelled' owing to the temporarily calming effect of the speeches from the City Chambers by Gallacher and Maclean, who, although under arrest, were permitted to try to disperse the crowd.<sup>72</sup> How the story of a cancellation spread is not clear.

The War Cabinet convened at 3pm,<sup>73</sup> chaired by Bonar Law and with only one other member present, Sir Eric Geddes (both Scots). For item 1, concerning the unrest, there were 11 other civilians present (including ministers for the Colonies, War, First Lord, Home Secretary, Scotland, Ireland, Labour, and the Lord Advocate). Three military men were in attendance, the Deputy C.I.G.S. and Generals Romer and Childs. Seven of the 13 civilians present (including the War Cabinet) were Scots.

The Minister for Labour:

said that his latest information was to the effect that a crowd had met in front of the Municipal Buildings in order to receive the Government's reply to the Lord Provost's telegram. He had no details, but understood that foot and mounted police had charged the crowd in order to quell a riot and casualties had resulted.

At this point, the Scottish Secretary made the most 'panicky' remark recorded in the minutes for that week, to the effect 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 Bolshevik rising'. He asserted that there were no more than 10,000 malcontents, that public opinion would back the government in quelling any disorder and that, 'The crisis would probably be reached today'.

General Romer (Chief of Staff, Home Forces) reported that orders had already been sent to Scotland, and that the number of troops which could be put into Glasgow at short notice was about 12,000. The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Harington) added that six tanks and 100 motor lorries with drivers were 'going up north by rail that night'. Churchill contributed only briefly, on the authority necessary to arrest the strike leaders under the terms of D.O.R.A. The Scottish Secretary's words are often portrayed as one of the main triggers for

<sup>72</sup> *Glasgow Evening News*, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, and *The Manchester Guardian*, all 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, CAB23/9/10, 'War Cabinet, Minutes of Meeting 523, 31 January 1919'.

the troops being deployed, even though the troops were in motion before he spoke, for example (my emphasis), 'As a consequence [of Munro's words], the government quickly despatched six tanks and 100 lorries to Glasgow by train'.<sup>74</sup>

We may assume that the request for military aid had been made within an hour of the Riot Act being read, by 1.30pm at the latest. From one account we know that one Reserve Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders was first paraded to remove any Glaswegian men,<sup>75</sup> and this was probably done in all units. This is often presented as somehow sinister, but it was a reasonable and humane precaution, as the presence of any men who might hesitate to carry out an order, even for a moment, could be dangerous, and Glaswegian men might find themselves facing friends and relatives in the crowd. It is frequently asserted that the troops housed in Maryhill Barracks (the 4th (Reserve) Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers) were not used because, 'The chance of their changing sides was too high' or 'for fear of them siding with the demonstrators'.<sup>76</sup> There is no contemporary evidence for these statements, and it is likely that they arise from Gallacher's wishful thinking almost 20 years later, that, 'If we had gone [to Maryhill Barracks] we could easily have persuaded the soldiers to come out and Glasgow would have been in our hands'.<sup>77</sup> As Macfarlane wrote in his study of the British Communist party '... Gallacher later persisted in the view that the workers were ready to support an uprising in Glasgow... This confident assertion shows a complete lack of understanding of the political situation at the time'.<sup>78</sup>

The soldiers in the Reserve Battalions chosen would first have to be selected for the duty (because these units could be vast, unwieldy bodies of men in different stages of training and in different states of health). Those selected would then have to gather their own kit, be issued with any special equipment, be armed and issued with ammunition and rations, and finally paraded and inspected. The waggons noted as accompanying the men would have to be loaded up. How much of this had already been done in the morning, in the event of being needed, is not clear.

It has often been written that the troops were accompanied by a howitzer (or even by more than one), placed, improbably, in the doorway to the City Chambers.<sup>79</sup> The presence of such a weapon is not mentioned by any of the contemporary newspapers or by the *Strike Bulletin*, which were assiduous in

<sup>74</sup> R. Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (Totowa, N.J., 1977), ch IX.

<sup>75</sup> H. McShane, *Glasgow 1919: The Story of the 40 Hours Strike* (Glasgow, 1978) [not paginated].

<sup>76</sup> Craig, *When the Clyde Ran Red*, p.165. Naughton, *Glasgow's East End*, p.94.

<sup>77</sup> Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, pp.163–4. The unit within Maryhill Barracks is frequently misidentified as the Highland Light Infantry (eg Wood, 'Internal policing...', p. 543). As noted above and in Table 1, however, the army's records show only 27 men of the HLI in Glasgow, in a Garrison Battalion being disbanded (TNA, WO 73/110, 'Distribution of the Army: monthly returns, Jan–June 1919').

<sup>78</sup> L. J. Macfarlane, *The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development until 1929* (London, 1966), p. 43.

<sup>79</sup> For example, Fry, *Glasgow*, p.429; Burrowes, *Great Glasgow Stories* [ebook ref 634.5/640].

describing and photographing the presence of tanks and machine-guns. The earliest reference yet found to such a weapon being present is Harry McShane's memoir of 1978. Until further evidence is found for its presence, the howitzer(s) might be better consigned to the 'uncertain' category.<sup>80</sup>

When ready, the contingents would be marched to the nearest railway stations large enough to accommodate special military trains. The Gordon Highlanders unit recorded as being at 'Colinton' in the monthly army returns (probably the Redford Barracks complex) would have had a five-mile march to Waverley Station; with the inevitable delays caused by the numbers involved, and the presence of carts and vehicles, at least two hours would be needed for the march. Other Edinburgh-based units were further away, for example, at Glencorse. While this was going on, special military trains of carriages and goods waggons would have to be made up and got to the platforms set aside that day for the army. The loading of men and equipment into the trains may have taken an hour or two. The first troops are reported as arriving in Glasgow at Queen Street Station in the late evening of the 31st, around 10pm, after what would have been a rail journey from Edinburgh of about two hours. Some eight to nine hours for the army to go through the processes to reach Glasgow seems reasonable. Soldiers brought from more distant units would have had to go through the same processes, before their longer rail journeys.

The violence of the riot continued in the streets around the city centre, trams were smashed up, and shops had their windows broken and their stock looted. The *Glasgow Herald* of 1 February reported that disorder in the streets (including vandalism, theft and looting) continued until a 'late hour last night and several somewhat ugly incidents occurred between ten and 11 o'clock'.<sup>81</sup> The troops, just beginning to arrive, were not involved. The *Daily Record* of 1 February reported, however, that:

The disturbances were all at an end for the day when the first detachment of the troops arrived. The soldiers reached Queen Street station shortly after ten o'clock, and from that hour until the early morning there was a constant stream of men fully equipped for all emergencies.<sup>82</sup>

Troops are recorded as arriving until the early hours of Saturday 1 February:

Tiny forces, so to speak, dribbled into Glasgow by train during Friday evening; as the night passed into the early morning the main body came into the fullness of warlike strength... Famous regiments, English and Scottish, were of the number. And the kilt was prominent. The arrival of the Highlanders

<sup>80</sup> McShane, *Glasgow 1919*. It is possible that German 'war trophy' howitzers, recorded as being in the square on 21 December 1918 (*Daily Record and Mail*) were misidentified (MacNeill, pers comm).

<sup>81</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 3 Feb. 1919; NRS, JC 36/31 'Trial transcript...', passim.

<sup>82</sup> *Daily Record*, 1 Feb. 1919.

had nothing stealthy about it; they came with the pipes echoing through the streets silent save for its sound.<sup>83</sup>

The troops were first marched to the Central Station where they were fed, before going to quarters in various parts of the city, 'long columns of khaki-clad men, who belonged to the Seaforths, the Gordons and other Highland regiments. . .'.<sup>84</sup> The *Glasgow Evening Times* of 1 February provided the most detailed and circumstantial description of the arriving soldiers:

Large forces of military reached Glasgow yesterday evening and are now stationed at various points throughout the city, including railway stations and bridges. The regiments are English and Scottish. Commencing at ten o'clock last night and continuing till an early hour this morning, a steady stream of troops was poured into the city through the medium of Queen Street Station. Men of the Seaforths, mingled with the Gordons and the East Surreys, are quartered in different parts of the city, including the railway stations. At the Central Station, to which the men marched accompanied by ammunition waggons, they were supplied with food and refreshment. Pipe bands accompanied the Highland troops. Men of the 3rd and 5th<sup>85</sup> Battalions of the East Surrey Regiment are in St Enoch Station. Piles of baggage, blankets and other necessary material, standing between platforms 5 and 6, are guarded by sturdy English lads, with rifle and bayonet. They are wearing the 'soup-plate' hats which they have brought back with them from France last year, and over the greatcoats are slung canvas cases containing an extra allowance of 100 cartridges. On the paved way between platforms 2 and 3 about 100 rifles are stacked in batches of five, while machine guns of the Lewis pattern are placed at intervals along the row. Those of the men who are not at post-duty are strolling about unconcernedly, chaffing the station hands (male and female alike) buying from the cigarette kiosk and writing post-cards to friends.

The *Observer* of Sunday 2 February:

The military is now in full possession of the more important points of the city, such as City Chambers, the Post Office, the railway stations, river bridges, and electric power stations. The City Chambers is like an armed camp. The quadrangle is full of troops and equipment, including machine guns, as also are the corridors upstairs. . .<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 1 Feb. 1919.

<sup>85</sup> The 5th Battalion was not in fact present; see below.

<sup>86</sup> *Observer*, 2 Feb. 1919.



**Figure 4.** ‘Troops arriving in George Square to take charge of public buildings’, on either Saturday 1 or Sunday 2 February. The Tam o’Shanter bonnets and the Glengarry worn by the officer were issued only to Scottish troops. One soldier, at the extreme right, wears a soft trench cap, as do men behind. Another, his head visible between the two uniformed messenger boys, to the left, wears a slouch (bush) hat (*Bulletin*, Monday 3 February 1919).

A feature of the photographs is that the men marching together show such a variety of uniform and headgear (soft trench caps; Glengarry caps; Tam o’ Shanter bonnets; even a slouch (bush) hat). This might be explained by the haste with which a very mixed body of men, older, younger, more or less experienced, returned from the trenches or never having left the base, were gathered together. Men wore either the kilt or uniform trousers.

The *Glasgow Herald* claimed that cavalry had also been drafted into the city but no further mentions nor any photographs of mounted men have been found.<sup>87</sup> Both papers noted the presence of large quantities of barbed wire, and machine-guns; although the 1912 pamphlet *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power* noted that machine guns were not to be taken on such deployments, Lewis Guns were, by 1919, an integral part of the equipment of an infantry battalion.

It is often stated that all, or the majority, of the men deployed were inexperienced or ‘raw’ recruits, used in preference to experienced men who might sympathise with the workers; this idea may have been introduced by Gallacher in 1936 and was reinforced by McShane in his 1978 memoir.<sup>88</sup> It is unlikely that inexperienced troops, who could over-react fatally under stress, would be used; contemporary photographs indeed show the presence of mature and even middle-aged men (unlikely to be recruits in 1919), and the *Daily Record* of 3 February recorded the presence of men with medals and wound stripes.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>87</sup> The *Edinburgh Evening News* of the same date repeated the story.

<sup>88</sup> Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde*, p. 163–4. McShane and Smith, *Harry McShane: no mean fighter*, p. 107.

<sup>89</sup> *Daily Record*, 3 Feb. 1919.



**Figure 5.** Scottish soldiers, wearing their distinctive Tam o' Shanter bonnets, resting at the City Chambers. The man in the foreground and the two standing at the back (who wear Glengarry caps) are in middle age (*Bulletin*, Tuesday 4 February 1919).

The *Manchester Guardian* of 3 February noted that, 'They were, many of them, soldiers just returned from France who had been hurriedly drafted here from demobilisation camps'.<sup>90</sup>

It is often assumed that the tanks arrived at the same time as the infantry,<sup>91</sup> and, indeed, it is frequently asserted that the tanks were sent into George Square against the demonstrators on the 31st.<sup>92</sup> The most far-fetched of these stories is that Mannie Shinwell 'faced down a hostile tank in George Square'.<sup>93</sup> Shinwell, of course, was in police custody when the tanks actually arrived, three days after the riots, on Monday 3 February, and he makes no such claim in his various autobiographical writings. All tanks in Britain at that time were based at the Tank Corp's depot at Bovington in Dorset.<sup>94</sup> Even more so than for the infantry, complex preparations would have to be made to get the tanks, spares, crews, fuel, equipment and ammunition ready, and then loaded onto waggons, and

<sup>90</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>91</sup> McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 126.

<sup>92</sup> <https://twitter.com/takeourblueback/status/960051669336764416>

<sup>93</sup> *Scotland on Sunday*, 4 Oct. 2009, 'Hero Shinwell "incited racist Clydeside mob"'. Naughton, *Glasgow's East End*, p. 191.

<sup>94</sup> RTR Archive, pers comm.

marshalled into a train. The 100 motor lorries would require similar preparations and probably more than one train to accommodate them on flat waggons, and their crews, fuel, spares and equipment in carriages and goods vans. The problems of moving heavily-loaded, slow-moving special trains safely across the rails of more than one railway company, and through complex passenger and goods timetables, would make the journey slow. Even if the tanks and lorries started their journey on the Friday night, which is doubtful, because of the scale of the operation, it is simply not possible that the tank train could have arrived on Saturday. The arrival of the tanks on Monday 3 February was in fact reported in a number of newspapers on the following day<sup>95</sup> and the press was invited to the Cattle Market to photograph them: a series of images of the scene was printed in the *Bulletin*,<sup>96</sup> the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*,<sup>97</sup> the *Daily Record* (one with the men posing proudly in front of their machine, named in the caption ‘Princess Pat’)<sup>98</sup> and even the *Nottingham Journal*.<sup>99</sup> The Royal Tank Regiment (successor to the Tank Corps) appears to be unique in actually mentioning the deployment in a 1959 regimental history:

The moral effect of the tanks in maintaining order came to be appreciated in numerous quarters during these disturbed post-war years. . . [as] had been seen at home. . . for in January 1919 there had been a call for tanks to overawe rioters in Glasgow; six were sent and, besides their moral effect, proved useful as armoured transport for the police.<sup>100</sup>

A trawl of the RTR archive and the contemporary newspapers provides no evidence that the tanks left the Cattle Market, nor of them transporting police, and it seems likely that the last phrase of the sentence is an elaboration, for narrative effect.

### The men

The military had reported at the War Cabinet meetings that there were 19 battalions of infantry in Scottish Command (one being English) and that up to 12,000 troops could be put into Glasgow at short notice. The official records for December 1918 and January 1919 do not quite tally with this. Table 1 lists the Reserve Battalions in Scotland in January 1919.<sup>101</sup> We rely on contemporary

<sup>95</sup> *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, *Daily Record*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, all 4 Feb. 1919.

<sup>96</sup> *Bulletin* 4 Feb. 1919.

<sup>97</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 5 Feb. 1919.

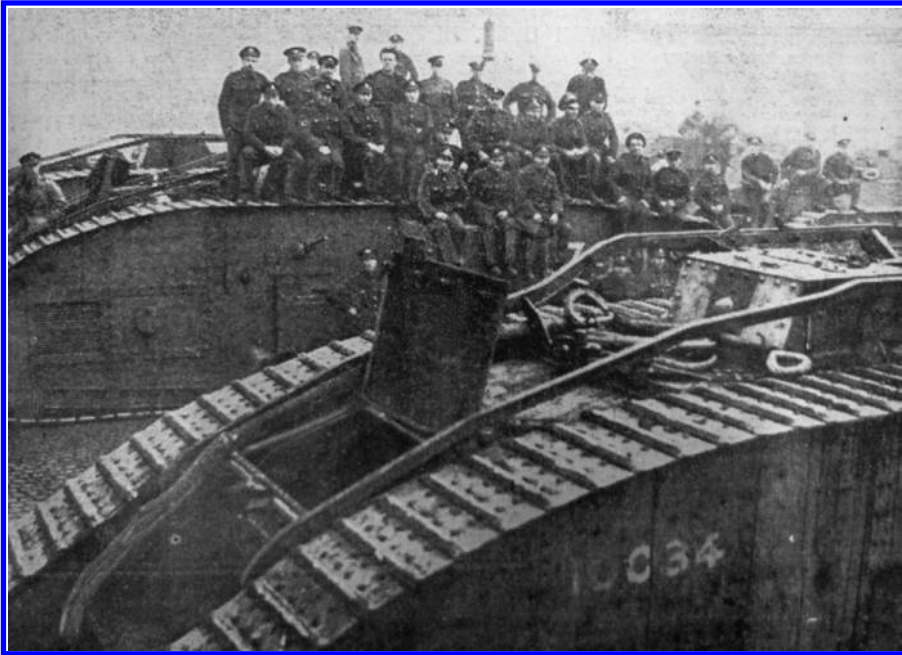
<sup>98</sup> *Daily Record*, 5 Feb. 1919.

<sup>99</sup> *Nottingham Journal* 6 Feb. 1919.

<sup>100</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Tanks. The History of the Royal Tank Regiment and Its Predecessors – Heavy Branch Machine-Gun Corps, Tank Corps and Royal Tank Corps, 1914–1945* (2 vols, London, 1959), i, p. 205. The deployment is not mentioned in histories published nearer the events.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, WO 73/110, ‘Distribution of the Army: monthly returns, Jan–June 1919’. Reference was also made to the previous month’s return WO 73/109, ‘Distribution of the Army: monthly





**Figure 6.** An infrequently published view of two of the tanks and about 30 men, in the Cattle Market (*Bulletin*, Tuesday 4 February 1919).

newspaper accounts to know which regiments had battalions deployed. The single English battalion in Scotland was the 3rd East Surreys, based at Bridge of Allan. In neither month, however, were there another 18 reserve-finding battalions listed. It is possible that other units listed (one or more of the regimental depots?) were counted in. At the War Cabinet it was noted that one battalion each was at 'Greenock' and 'Glasgow'; these were the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalions of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, the latter having moved to Glasgow from Kinross only in December.

Elements of the regiments recorded as being present in the deployment were located as follows, with the number of 'effectives' recorded in W073/110:

4th (Reserve) Battalion (Bn) The Royal Scots (Cupar 2,275)<sup>102</sup>

3rd (R) Bn East Surrey Regiment (Bridge of Allan, 2,904)<sup>103</sup>

3rd and/or 4th (R) Bns Seaforth Highlanders (Cromarty, 2,187; Glencorse, Midlothian, 651)<sup>104</sup>

returns, July–Dec 1918'; All references to locations, depots and numbers are from these two files.

<sup>102</sup> *Bulletin*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Daily Record*, 1 Feb. 1919.

3rd and/or 4th (R) Bns Gordon Highlanders (Aberdeen 2,143; Colinton, Edinburgh, 2,172)<sup>105</sup>  
4th and/or 5th (R) Bns Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders (Dunbar, 1,807; Galashiels, 2,257)<sup>106</sup>

That is, a total of around 16,500 men, not all of whom, of course, would be suitable for active service.

The Reserve Battalions present in Scotland but not listed as being in the force sent to Glasgow (although the lists in the newspapers may not have been complete) were: Royal Scots Fusiliers; King's Own Scottish Borderers; Cameronians; Black Watch; Highland Light Infantry (it is notable that only 27 men of the HLI are recorded as being in Glasgow in January 1919—the rest were in Haddington and Arbroath, the depot in 1919 being recorded as being in Hamilton). The Cameronians and HLI (both with depots in Hamilton) might have counted as 'local' units not to be deployed. One newspaper reported the presence of men from the 5th Battalion East Surrey Regiment,<sup>107</sup> which was, however, recorded in January as being at Tunbridge Wells, and down to 72 men, in preparation for disbandment. It is possible, however, that men from the 5th had been posted to the 3rd.

Elements of only one non-Scottish infantry regiment based outside Scotland are reported as being present: the Durham Light Infantry, with its depot at Newcastle-upon-Tyne.<sup>108</sup> Two Reserve Battalions of the DLI were based in the north-east, the 3rd at South Shields (3,941) and the 4th at Seaham Harbour, south of Durham (1,427). The War Diary of the 4th Battalion, for January/February 1919, does not mention any involvement in Glasgow, and it seems more likely that the 3rd was the unit chosen.<sup>109</sup> The arrival of troops from England on Sunday 2 February was reported in the newspapers, on the following day, 'The military were reinforced last evening by fresh arrivals of troops', and that, 'A large number of additional troops have arrived in the city to reinforce the military guards'.<sup>110</sup>

The *Manchester Guardian* was taking a line of contemptuous amusement at the scale of the military presence, and reported that (4 February, my emphasis):

the Glasgow authorities asked only for military assistance; they never expected the descent upon them of a small army hastily joined from London corps and from remote parts of Scotland'.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> *Bulletin*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 5 Feb. 1919.

<sup>107</sup> *Evening Times*, 1 Feb. 1919; *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>108</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>109</sup> Durham County Archive, pers comm.

<sup>110</sup> *Aberdeen Press & Journal*, *Daily Record*, and [*Glasgow*] *Evening News*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>111</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 4 Feb. 1919.

There is no evidence, however, that troops did indeed travel from London and the reporter may have assumed that the East Surreys had travelled from their depot, at Kingston-upon-Thames.

Both the Edinburgh *Evening News* and the *Evening Times* of 4 February named the commander of the force in Glasgow as General Fanshawe, who was at that time the commander of the Forth Garrison, defending the Firth of Forth, the Rosyth naval dockyard, and the city of Edinburgh. Contemporary newspapers suggest that 10,000 men were involved, 'While the officials are reticent, it is believed that the number of troops now in the city is well-nigh ten thousand'.<sup>112</sup> Given the reality of the situation, it is generally agreed that such a force, with tanks, was disproportionately large. Para. 956 of King's Regulations makes it clear that:

The responsibility for deciding as to the strength and composition of the force detailed rests with the military authorities. If the civil officer mentions them, it will only be as a guide to aid in estimating the force required.

The size of such a deployment would be determined by the military, but who exactly? The C.I.G.S. (General Wilson), General Robertson (C-in-C Home Forces), or General McCracken (C-in-C Scotland)? Both Wilson and Robertson were known as men of a type not likely to have been bullied into an over-large deployment by their political masters. It is possible that the size of the force reflected C.I.G.S.' anxieties, as he had been reported as 'positively in a state of dreadful nerves on the subject' two weeks earlier.<sup>113</sup> And Wilson was certainly a tank enthusiast, as one of his first actions on becoming C.I.G.S. in February 1918 had been to almost triple the Tank Corps' size.

The size of the deployment might be explained by a number of factors other than C.I.G.S.'s nerves. No military commander would wish to go into any situation with barely adequate forces, as a prolonged struggle would be far more likely to lead to casualties than a sudden and overwhelming show of potential force. And the possible replication of the events in Dublin in 1916 may have encouraged the army to prepare for the worst—another violent urban deployment.<sup>114</sup> The presence of the tanks above all else fuels a narrative of oppression, 'a spell-binding contrivance that leaves onlookers in no doubt where they stand...'.<sup>115</sup> McLean wondered what the tanks could have done 'if the rioting had become more serious, unless shell the City Chambers as if they were the Dublin GPO'.<sup>116</sup> The tanks sent, however, were the Medium C type, armed not with heavy guns, but with five .303-inch Hotchkiss machine-guns

<sup>112</sup> *Dundee Courier*, [Edinburgh] *Evening News*, both 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in I. McLean, 'Popular Protest and Public Order', p. 241, n39.

<sup>114</sup> M. Pittock, *Scottish Nationality*, p. 103. Col (Ret) W. H. Clements, pers comm.

<sup>115</sup> P. Wright, *Tank* (London, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>116</sup> McLean, *Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 136.

each. Had they been used against unarmed civilians, their effect would have been appalling.<sup>117</sup>

Clements (pers comm) wonders how actually using the tanks in the face of a demonstration could ever have been considered 'proportionate force'.<sup>118</sup> Surely the tanks were there merely to overawe, as was suggested in the RTR regimental history? One could surely justify them opening fire only in the most extreme circumstances, where fire was being exchanged with armed 'revolutionaries' in the absence of unarmed civilians.

### The 'military occupation'

There are few details of the activities of the military while in Glasgow, apparently because they did little that was noteworthy. The newspapers of the time recorded their presence with greater or less interest. The *Bulletin*, for example, showed the men either as very business-like and efficient or at their ease, resting, cooking and so on. In the 3 February issue there were five images of the military: a 'night signaller' with his equipment at an upper window of the City Chambers; despatch riders; 'Troops arriving in George Square to taken charge of public buildings'; a slim, neatly dressed sentry, wearing his steel helmet at a very rakish angle;<sup>119</sup> The *Daily Record* included two clearly posed photographs of men with Lewis machine-guns in their issue of 5 February.

The *Bulletin* of 3 February also published a photograph of two soldiers in trousers and Glengarries, one carrying a signalling flag, on the roof of St Enoch station.<sup>120</sup>

The troops seen on the streets were those escorting their own supply waggons<sup>121</sup> or standing guard, to protect places determined by the War Office pamphlet *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*: 'banks, explosive factories, armouries, gun and rifle factories and shops, petrol stores, telegraph offices, telephone exchanges and call offices, postal services, food depots, bonded stores, gas works, power and electric light installations. . . and other vulnerable points or mains'.<sup>122</sup> The *Daily Record* of 3 February printed photographs of the armed guard at the

<sup>117</sup> The tanks had a crew comprising commander, driver and two machine-gunners. (D. Fletcher, *British Battle Tanks: World War I to 1939* (Oxford, 2016), pp.131–3). There is some confusion, not explored here, about which units in the Tank Corps were equipped with these tanks. (TNA, WO 73/110, 'Distribution of the Army: monthly returns, Jan–June 1919').

<sup>118</sup> Legal opinion had been obtained in 1908 from the Solicitor General, Rufus Isaacs MP, and his successor, John Simon MP, on proportionate force: troops 'must not use lethal weapons to prevent or suppress minor disorder or offences of a less serious character, and in no case should they do so if less extreme measures will suffice', TNA, WO 32/8466 'Procedure to be followed when troops are required to aid civil power. Report of Select Committee, 1908'.

<sup>119</sup> *Bulletin*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 3 and 4 Feb. 1919. *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Feb. 1919. *Illustrated London News*, 8 Feb. 1919.

<sup>122</sup> War Office *Duties in Aid of the Civil Power*, p.6. Col (Ret) W. H. Clements, pers comm.



**Figure 7.** A soldier, with rakishly slanted helmet, guarding a rail bridge (*Bulletin*, Monday 3 February 1919).

City Chambers, including men in steel helmets, Tam o' Shanter bonnets and Glengarry caps (the last two being issued only to Scots soldiers); another showed men in steel helmets and British trench caps off-duty at St Enoch Station.<sup>123</sup>

The *Bulletin* of 6 February published four more images of the soldiers, posing for the camera: two soldiers guarding railway property; two images of soldiers on observation duty (one 'watching George Square'); and a group of soldiers warming themselves round a brazier.

### **Withdrawal**

Labour Councillors, as part of their demand for a Public Inquiry into the events of the 31st, also urged, 'the immediate withdrawal of the military, being convinced that their presence is unnecessary'.<sup>124</sup> Although it is occasionally stated that the troops were in Glasgow 'for months', two newspapers, recorded the final departure as having taken place on 17 February, in their editions of the 18th.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> *Daily Record*, 3 Feb. 1919.

<sup>124</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 5 Feb. 1919.

<sup>125</sup> *The Glasgow Herald*, 18 Feb. 1919.



**Figure 8.** Soldiers cooking their rations (*Bulletin*, Tuesday 4 February 1919).



**Figure 9.** The boarded-up windows of a looted shop (*Bulletin*, Monday 3 February 1919).

The *Daily Record* published a photograph of troops packing to leave.<sup>126</sup> By the time the troops had left this 'unique' deployment, troops had also been sent to London and Belfast. A 'section of tanks' was recorded as being in Edinburgh on 18 March 1919, and it is possible that these were the six from Glasgow.<sup>127</sup>

### Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to create an evidence-based account of the processes which led to the deployment of the military to Glasgow, and to describe the framework within which it happened. In the process it is to be hoped that the more egregious myths have been laid to rest. From this evidence it is clear that neither the government nor Churchill 'sent the troops in'; they had no legal power to do so, without martial law being declared. They were requested by the Sheriff. The troops were not 'sent to crush the strikers' or, indeed, an incipient revolt; they were invited by the Sheriff to ensure the maintenance of societal and economic order and to protect the power supplies. The soldiers were not all 'English', neither were they all 'raw recruits' and there is no evidence that any troops might have joined the strikers. The demonstrators did not face troops, machine-guns or tanks in George Square; they all arrived hours or days later; consequently, no-one was injured or killed by the military. Martial law was not declared. It was not an 'English government' that made the troops available; the majority of decision-makers and civilian contributors to the key discussions were Scots.

There is a wider mythology surrounding the 40-hours strike's place in the dominant narrative, which has not been addressed here, but it is to be hoped that some light has been cast on the reality of the military deployment, and the reasons that perhaps made local and national government believe that it was prudent, tempering the narrative of heroic struggle, oppression and victimhood. It was neither so oppressive, so unreasonable, nor so violent, as the current mythologised, or even in places fictionalised, account would have people believe.

The strike staggered on until 12 February:

lacking a political direction the strike collapsed. The men were not driven back at gunpoint, they simply discovered they had nowhere to go once the government showed a determination to resist their demands.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>126</sup> *Daily Record*, 18 Feb. 1919.

<sup>127</sup> TNA, WO 32/18920 'Use of military personnel in aid of civil powers in event of civil disturbances and strikes: Great Britain 1919'.

<sup>128</sup> D. C. Unger 'The Roots of Red Clydeside: economic and social relations and working class politics in the West of Scotland 1900–1919', D.Phil Thesis (Univ. of Texas, 1979), p. 435.

As McLean has written, the net effect of the tanks in the Cattle Market was probably 'to give the strike a romantic history which successfully concealed an otherwise ignominious failure'.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> McLean, *Legend of Red Clydeside*, p. 138.