

Archive photographs in their context

#3 – The 1911 Parliament Bill and Industrial Strike Action

It's very rare with a photograph over 100 years old to say exactly when it was taken.



The photograph above shows Cecil Snowden (centre); his wife, Louisa, and an unknown postman. The Snowden's ran the Kildwick Post Office, on Kildwick Corner, for over 25 years from March 1911 and developed the business into a successful newsagents and general goods store.

We can say, with a fair degree of certainty, that this photograph was taken on or around Friday 11th August 1911, in the middle of a spectacular heatwave. (A temperature of 98°F was recorded in Northamptonshire on August 9th – a UK record that held until 1990.)

But it's not the remarkable summer weather that makes this photograph so very interesting; it's the conjunction of the two newspaper headlines shown on the posters by the front door.

The 1911 Parliament Act



The 1911 Parliament Act represented a major curtailment of the power of the House of Lords, by removing its ability to veto measures that had been approved by the House of Commons.

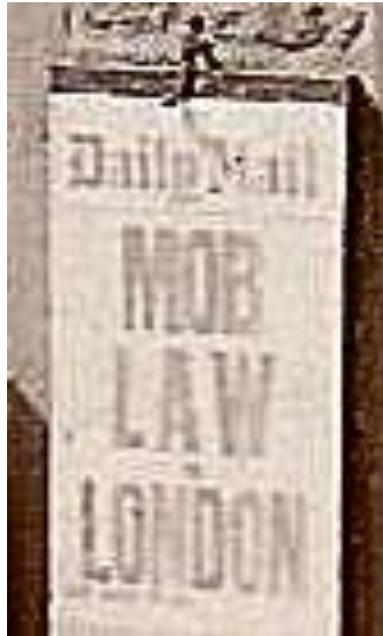
In the early years of the 20th century, with an overwhelming majority in the House of Lords and consequently the power to stop any legislation that was not in its interests, the Conservative Party assumed it had a “divine right to rule”. This was expressed clearly by the party leader Arthur Balfour during the 1906 General Election campaign when he asserted that: “The great Unionist Party should still control, whether in power or whether in opposition, the destinies of this great Empire.” The overwhelming victory of the Liberal party in that election therefore virtually ensured a clash between the two parties.

As part of the 1909 budget the Liberal Chancellor, Lloyd George, proposed the introduction of a land-tax which would impact disproportionately on Conservative supporters, particularly the land-owning members of the House of Lords. In an action that was contrary to the usual constitutional conventions but fully consistent with Balfour’s 1906 statement, Conservatives in the Lords voted down the budget and forced a General Election.

The Liberals returned with a minority government in 1910 (at elections in January and December) and, in 1911, introduced a bill to significantly reduce the power of the Lords. In the face of opposition by the Conservatives the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith obtained agreement from George V that he would if necessary create 250 new Liberal peers; thus removing the Conservative majority and replacing it with a Liberal one.

With the threat of losing its Lords majority, the Conservative Party withdrew its opposition to the Parliament Bill which was passed on 10th August 1911, by 131 votes to 114.

Industrial Strike Action



In his diary, Midshipman Stephen King-Hall wrote:

Friday, 11th August - General strike was declared in London yesterday. The Daily Mail came out with immense placards: "MOB LAW IN LONDON" but on my arrival in the "besieged city", the "famine stricken emporium of the world's goods", everything seemed much the same.

Perhaps the Daily Mail was over-exaggerating things ? (Something that the paper wouldn't do these days, would it ?)

The summer of 1911 saw major industrial unrest, with strikes engulfing the country's ports and railways. The photograph in our archive must have been taken at the height of all this.

Early in August, a dispute involving London dockers escalated and, on the 10th, a strike was called of all transport workers in the city. Food rotted in markets, in depots, on trains and on vessels in the Thames, where upwards 150 ships were waiting to be unloaded.

On the 12th, troops from Aldershot barracks were drafted into London and other major towns in an attempt to restore order. Two armoured cruisers were sent to Liverpool.

On the 13th, a demonstration of about 80,000 people in Liverpool was broken up by the police, and on the 15th soldiers shot dead two dockers.

On the 18th a National rail strike was called.

On the 19th a riot in Llanelli resulted in the death of two unarmed protestors.

The government made concessions to the dockers and railwaymen, but industrial unrest rumbled on right up until the start of WW1.

Further Information

Parliament Bill

<http://spartacus-educational.com/L1911.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliament_Act_1911

<http://www.totalpolitics.com/history/226547/the-1911-parliament-act.shtml>

Industrial Strike Action

<http://kinghallconnections.jottit.com/7200-s-midshipman-1911-14>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1911_in_the_United_Kingdom

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/08/24/1911-time-possibility>

<http://www.express.co.uk/expressyourself/263251/Britain-on-the-brink>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Railway_Strike_of_1911

Fantastic early news-reel footage can be found at:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/maurizio-cinquegrani-factory-girls-on-strike-in-camden-town-1911-r1105682>

<http://www.britishpathe.com/video/civil-war-london-and-liverpool-under-mob-law>