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## Chapter 2

### Revisiting Red Clydeside:

#### Co-existing Labour Movements and Racial Hostilities

Paul Griffin

*During the war, from press and platform, it was impressed upon the workers that if they only fought and worked, gave up their union rules, privileges, etc. and won the war, they would see the dawn of a new era. The experience gained in the trenches and workshops had wiped out all class distinctions, and the last had been seen of unemployment, long hours of toil, low wages, and all the misery resulting there from – so ran the fairy tale.<sup>1</sup>*

D.S. Morton, Strike committee member.

This chapter revisits one of the most turbulent periods found within Scottish labour history. The 40 Hours Movement began in late January 1919 with a demand to reduce working hours and to reabsorb the unemployed and demobilized soldiers into the Clydeside workforce following the First World War. The strike that followed has been described as a ‘political strike which directly sought to affect the balance of power between capital and labour and place pressure on the government’.<sup>2</sup> Debates continue regarding the radical potential of this movement but the continued significance of this moment within a longer history of a period characterised as ‘Red Clydeside’ is well recognized. The strike was accompanied by violence, a ‘race riot’, also taking place in January, which was highly connected to some of the strike leaders and reflected longer lasting disputes and confrontations amongst seafaring communities. Given their proximity, the two events can be considered alongside each other and as part of a wider political history of this period. This chapter unpacks this co-existence by arguing that the quantitative demand of a 40-hour working week was indeed integral in shaping a broader political movement and wider spatial imaginaries, but also to acknowledge the dialectical nature of articulating wider solidarities whilst simultaneously fostering racialized exclusions. It is this emphasis upon contradictions and tensions that the chapter looks to briefly consider and more widely reflect the plurality of responses to the end of the First World War, as noted in the introductory extract.

Estimates suggest that over 20,000 striking workers gathered on what became remembered as ‘Bloody Friday’ when the Forty Hours Movement held a rally in Central Glasgow.<sup>3</sup> The event and strike more broadly is often remembered by the iconic imagery of the raising of the red flag in George Square and has been celebrated as a key moment in the development of Clydeside’s ‘working-class presence’.<sup>4</sup> Friday 31 January 1919 is remembered for clashes between striking workers with police and concluded with a British military occupation of parts of the city. Historicizing the actions of workers pursuing the reduction of a working week has largely been considered in celebratory tone, with the violence of ‘Bloody Friday’ reflecting the suppression of a workers’ movement by the state. Yet, riots elsewhere in the city are not always remembered in the same breath. A week previously, the *Edinburgh Evening News* reported how the Broomielaw area of the city witnessed ‘[a] serious disturbance, which at moments amounted to riot’ involving ‘furious fighting between white and coloured sailors and firemen’.<sup>5</sup> These violent scenes were heavily

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1 D.S. Morton, *The 40 Hours Strike: An Historic Survey of the First General Strike in Scotland* (Clydebank Branch of SLP, 1919), Available from University of Aberdeen Archives and Special Collections, p.1.

2 John Foster, ‘Strike Action and Working-Class Politics on Clydeside (1914-1919)’, *International Review of Social History*, 35. 1 (1990), pp. 33-70.

3 National Records of Scotland, Trial Papers, JC26/1919/85/3.

4 Sean Damer, *Glasgow: Going for a Song* (London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 1990).

5 *Edinburgh Evening News*, 24 January 1919.

connected to local trade unions and notable labour organisers within the region. This chapter explores these connections to unpack a more ambiguous and contentious labour history.

The opening quote, from strike committee member, D.S. Morton, indicates the pertinence of these moments when positioned in relation to the historical conditions of 1919. A combination of demobilized soldiers, rising unemployment and emergent forms of working-class political organising had quickly dispelled a post-war fairy tale. Developing a historical geography account of 1919, the chapter proposes to critically explore the variable political histories of this period, to reveal an ambiguous and complex spatial politics emergent in the aftermath of the First World War. By exploring these connections relating to the movement for a shorter working week, the chapter also indicates the usefulness of a more nuanced engagement with the politics relating to particular disputes. To do so, the chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, the chapter surveys key components of the events themselves, to contextualize firstly the strike and then the racialized violence. Secondly, the chapter considers the wider creation of solidarities as part of the working hours' movement, to indicate an emergent sense of politicization and translocal solidarity as part of working-class imaginaries during this period. Finally, the chapter considers the inherently connected exclusionary positions that informed the 'race riots' through a reading of whiteness within the trade-union movement. The conclusion unpacks these contradictions by reflecting on the nature of labour demands and the need for plurality and multiplicity in revisiting demands, grievances and violence within labour histories.

### **January 1919: The Movement for a Shorter Working Week and the Broomielaw 'Race Riot'**

The strike was labelled 'unofficial' partly due to the inability of the strike committee to gain the immediate support of the Parliamentary Committee of the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC). Several meetings had already taken place within the STUC to discuss the issue of hours in late 1918 and early 1919 without resolution. Full-time working hours at this time were 54 hours, with the working day starting at 6am and finishing at 5.30pm, and workers required until midday on Saturdays. There was a shared sense amongst trade unions of a need to reduce working hours, particularly in response to rising unemployment, but there was also obvious disagreement within the movement over the quantity of the demand. The 'Ways and Means Committee' of the Clyde Workers' Committee (CWC) proposed a 30-hour week whilst the national engineer trade union, the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE), had already begun national negotiations for a 47-hour week. Scottish members of the ASE expressed disappointment with this decision with district letters sent to the ASE Secretary, Harry Hopkins, illustrating members' frustration:

That we, the members of Dennistoun Branch, decide to vote against the proposal 47 week as we consider it to be an insult and demand that the working hours shall be so reduced as to absorb all unemployed while maintaining the present Rate of Wages.<sup>6</sup>

Clydeside's disillusionment with the national union's negotiations was clear. Their complaints reflected a growing frustration against a labour bureaucracy following the First World War whereby many concessions were made by the trade-union movement to assist the war effort. The Munitions Act of 1915, for example, had prevented official strike action during the war and made it difficult for workers to move workplaces due to the requirement of leaving certificates from a previous employer.

Negotiating their internal disagreements, a conference of shop stewards and council members decided to take independent action with support from the Glasgow Trades and Labour Council. The

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<sup>6</sup> University of Glasgow Archives, Highton Papers, UGD 102/4/8

CWC was prominent within these negotiations due to their organizing role within the engineering industries.<sup>7</sup> The Glasgow Trades and Labour Council annual reports summarized how:

After a very full discussion, it was decided to declare a general stoppage of work by the 27th January to enforce a reduction of hours [...] Thousands of workmen are being demobilized from the Army and Navy every day. Over 100,000 workers have been dismissed from Civil employment. They are now looking for jobs. There are no jobs for them. There is only one remedy. Reduce the number of hours.<sup>8</sup>

The strike movement did not use their official bodies to co-ordinate the strike and instead employed other methods and strategies to gather support. This decision allowed a more flexible approach than one that could have become contested within the STUC, Trades Council or CWC. The primary demand of this strike committee was immediately evident within the associated *Strike Bulletin*, edited by Patrick Dollan:

The 40 hour movement is making history. This is because it is the greatest effort made by the rank and file. For the first time the workers have become their own leaders. When the workers lead, and unity is maintained, victory is certain. There is one objective in the strike which is: to secure 40 hours' weeks for all workers.<sup>9</sup>

This emotive call to Scottish workers illuminates a labour movement that gained extremely strong support. John Foster has analysed the economic influence of the Scottish working class during 1914-1920 and as part of wider research has shown that 1¼ million working days were lost in the West of Scotland due to the strike of January 1919. According to his records, the Forty Hours Movement had the largest industrial impact across the West of Scotland during this period.<sup>10</sup> The *Strike Bulletin*, cited above, was produced on behalf of the Strike Committee and became describe as 'the organ of the 40 hours movement'. Strike leader Shinwell claims to have fled to the Strike Committee offices to oversee the *Strike Bulletin*, following the violence between workers and police during 'Bloody Friday', before his arrest.<sup>11</sup> He destroyed many other documents relating to the movement to prevent further police investigation. As a result, the remaining labour newspapers are highly useful for gaining an impression of the politics of the strike movement and experiences of workers at this time. Before analysing these documents further, though, this chapter contextualizes the racialized violence within Clydeside during 1919.

Jacqueline Jenkinson's work has revealed the hostilities between white Glasgow-based sailors and foreign labour competition during the early Twentieth Century. Her contribution, alongside other notable works, uncovers a narrative previously silenced within the histories of Red Clydeside, examining how during early 1919 'trade union leaders endeavoured to involve white British sailors in the general strike called in Clydeside by tying ongoing white sailors' protests against the 'unfair' competition posed by overseas labour to the 40-hours strike action'.<sup>12</sup> Her engagements reveal an important insight into Clydeside in 1919, highlighting how labour communications and connections fostered more exclusionary positions. This chapter develops Jenkinson's contribution further, as her work isolates the riot as a more discrete labour experience. Her work does not contrast these scenes with alternative visions during this time and the presence of arguably more progressive and solidaristic internationalism within Clydeside's labour networks. Here, the chapter contrasts the solidarities emerging from the movement for a shorter working week with the more exclusionary

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the CWC's role, see James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movement* (Surrey: The Gresham Press, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> Glasgow Trades and Labour Council, *Annual Report 1918-1919*, p.19-20.

<sup>9</sup> *Strike Bulletin*, 31 January 1919.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, 'Strike Action'.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Shinwell, *Conflict Without Malice* (London: Oldhams Press, 1955), p.63.

<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, Black Sailors on Red Clydeside: Rioting, Reactionary Trade Unionism and Conflicting Notions of 'Britishness' Following the First World War. *Twentieth Century British History*, 19.1 (2008), pp. 29-60 (p.31).

practices within Clydeside. These seemingly contradictory forms of labour solidarity are considered relationally to unpack the ambiguity of the political identities and labour connections emerging from Glasgow's working-class movements.

Newspaper reports described riots that occurred at Broomielaw (Glasgow's quayside) just a week before the strike movement commenced:

#### Big Turmoil at Harbour

White and Black seamen in conflict [...] Man shot: Other two stabbed [...] There had been some chaff between the parties and this led to ultimately a challenge being issued by one of the blacks who expressed his willingness to "take on" any of the opposing faction.<sup>13</sup>

Being chased by the crowd, the sailors returned to a hostel, the Glasgow Sailors' Home. The white crowd followed and smashed the windows before invading the premises. Police were called and eventually were able to split the two sides but violence continued with crowds gathering outside the black sailors' boarding house. The throwing of missiles and shooting was reported. Three people were injured during the scenes, with a black West African sailor named Tom Johnson stabbed, and two white sailors also sustaining injuries. Police removed 30 black sailors from their boarding house and into 'protective custody'. All were subsequently charged with riot and weapons offences. In court, 27 'Not Guilty' pleas were accepted, whilst three black sailors pleaded guilty (Julius Parkinson, Daniel Pratt and Thomas Cole) and fined £3.3s with the alternative of 21 days imprisonment. One white rioter was also charged for being part of an attack on a 'Chinaman' and received punishment of three guineas fine or 20 days imprisonment.

In her study of 1919, Jenkinson provides an overview of the national context for these scenes, including high levels of unemployment and the links with military demobilization, whilst also recognizing racialized trade-union responses.<sup>14</sup> The chapter briefly considers evidence that reflects a wider atmosphere of hostility and indicates a longer-lasting and growing resentment based around race amongst seafaring areas of Britain. This unsettles interpretations of the events relying upon explanations of ignorance or spontaneity. Economic conditions in 1919 were marked by rising unemployment with 47,498 people requiring out of work donations in Glasgow in early 1919.<sup>15</sup> The hopeful notion of a post-war 'fairy tale' noted above were quickly vanishing. Trade unionists and labour organisers were quick to articulate their critiques of a utopian future, albeit these critiques took diverse and sometimes contradictory paths.

These conditions were situated alongside enduring labour grievances within the seafaring industry regarding wages paid to Chinese labour in the early Twentieth Century. Related trade unions documented these grievances regarding labour competition:

The wages paid to Chinamen, engaged in ports in the United Kingdom are £3.10 per month as against £5.10 for white men. The shipowners say the food of the Britisher costs 1/6 d per day, whereas the food of the Asiatic costs only eightpence or ninepence per day.<sup>16</sup>

Whilst occurring under particular economic conditions, this chapter argues that the racialized violence cannot be considered through a linear notion of economic causality. Instead the responses to these conditions must be positioned as an event within a wider political, social and cultural atmosphere of racism, whereby violent and threatening language, hostile relationships and

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<sup>13</sup> *Daily Record*, 24 January 1919.

<sup>14</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, *Black 1919: Riots, Racism and Resistance in Imperial Britain* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> *Forward*, 5 April 1919.

<sup>16</sup> Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, National Union of Seamen Archives, MSS.175/3/14/1-2

exclusionary positions can be traced over a much longer time period. Thinking within and beyond the riots allows a temporal exploration of these moments to frame their formation as being informed and politicized by an enduring racialized rhetoric emerging from key working-class organizers, such as that of the seafaring trade unions. This violence was not limited to Clydeside, with similar events taking place across British ports, including violence in South Shields, Liverpool, Cardiff and Newport. Attending to this violence as an integral part of the history of port towns and cities in 1919 is a central contribution of this chapter. These insights are reflected on further below through an exploration of the contradictions between the articulation of solidarities and the coexisting fostering of exclusions.

### **Solidarities and Imaginaries**

Tommy Graham was present during the events described as ‘Bloody Friday’ of the Forty Hours Movement, and during an oral history interview with John Foster, described the composition of support:

You see it was a logical argument. The leadership wanted to reduce the working hours to allow the soldiers being demobilized to get a job. Well what more logical can any argument be than that. Ex soldiers were in right away. See the young and us. Them that were there wasn't at the war, the women [...] that might have lost brothers or relatives at the war. Of course they went in with it. Yes so the hours should be reduced.<sup>17</sup>

The popular support for the movement was linked to the message of the *Strike Bulletin* noted above and grounded in the communities of activism prevalent during the early Twentieth Century on Clydeside. Industrial relations often stretched beyond the workplace with a wider and varied political culture, including housing struggles, anti-war campaigns and parliamentary activism, emergent during the 1910s. This was not necessarily unique but was distinctive, as illustrated through comparison with the co-existing Belfast strike for shorter hours in 1919. The position and message of the Belfast strike differed significantly with the organizers of Glasgow. Despite the previous expression of solidarity, Belfast strike leaders were critical of the Clydeside strike movement at its conclusion. Criticism was levelled towards the ‘frothy talk of the usual agitator type’ and highlighted the distinctly industrial nature of the Belfast dispute. Belfast strike leaders remarked in relation to their own strike for shorter hours that:

The men held to the idea of a 44-hours as a simple, plain demand, without working out any theories such as were associated with the shorter hours movement on the Clyde and elsewhere [...] If the Clyde and other centres had displayed the same solidarity, made the same stand as we in Belfast made, we should now have been working the 44 hours.<sup>18</sup>

The critique levelled here beings to reveal the novelty of the Clydeside approach. Whilst the demand centred upon a grievance relating to working hours and rising unemployment, it is also clear that the strike movement had a political element beyond the demand itself. In this regard, the strike is notable for a sustained articulation of internationalism and solidarity. The extent of this politicization has been contested within radical and revisionist historiographies of Red Clydeside, with some work indicating a narrower economic reading of the strike.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, the evidence below suggests otherwise by foregrounding an alternative and more dynamic insight into the strike movement.

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<sup>17</sup> Oral History held at The Research Collection, Glasgow Caledonian University. Interview conducted by John Foster, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> *Belfast Newsletter*, 20 February 1919.

<sup>19</sup> Iain McLean, *The Legend of Red Clydeside* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983).

Due to its scale, the strike formed an integral part of the history of Red Clydeside. A key member of the Glasgow Strike Committee, D.S. Morton described the movement as a 'first attempt at a general strike' whereby new forms of organizing emerged:

This new form of strike, involving industries of the most varied description, as far apart as flour-milling and shipbuilding, developed new strike tactics; for example, mass picketing, daily mass meetings, information bureau, official press, and the establishing of regular lines of communication, showing a vast improvement from the strikes of the past, in which strikers were led and lectured by well-paid trade-union officials whose connection with the workshop had become memory.<sup>20</sup>

These developing strike tactics were integral to the wider developments of the movement and reflected a broader politicization of workers during this time. Morton also noted the significance of the *Strike Bulletin* as a communicatory tool. The strike's newspaper was widely distributed, reaching a peak daily publication of 20,000 across the Clydeside area and making an overall profit of £193.<sup>21</sup> The bulletin's primary purpose was to be used as a tactical tool to instruct and inform the workers on the developments relating to the movement. The paper was distributed at district committee meetings and further sold by striking workers throughout Clydeside (as commented upon by Harry McShane<sup>22</sup>). The paper is drawn upon below as a method of scrutinizing the political imaginaries within the movement.

The wider articulation of international solidarity within the *Strike Bulletins* stretched and reimagined the articulation of an economic demand for a shorter working week. Connections and solidarities were regularly prominent, reflecting a wider transnationalism:

#### Bombay's 150,000

The workers in the Government dock-yards and mills in Bombay (India), are on strike for better conditions, and in a march-out the strikers came into conflict with the troops, with the result that two of the men were killed and three injured. The strikers number 150,000, and are giving a great lead to the downtrodden of India to secure better wages and conditions. A victory in Scotland will help our comrades in India, who are with us heart and soul.<sup>23</sup>

This documentation of the strike reflects labour connections during the early Twentieth Century and indicates what Featherstone has described as 'a more generous and recursive account of the relationship between place and broader political imaginaries'.<sup>24</sup> Mentioning India, exhibited a form of internationalism rarely seen previously within Clydeside's workplaces and a geographical imagination of international connections within those striking. Reference to the 'comrades in India' was representative of a verbal solidarity between the distanced workplaces. This intangible sense of connection and communication would continue in the following decades after the strike of 1919. The Workers' Exhibition held in Glasgow in 1938, for example, contested the Empire Exhibition held in the city, by including details of colonial working and living conditions to contest the commercialization of Empire building.

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<sup>20</sup> Morton, '40 Hours Strike', p.1.

<sup>21</sup> J. McKay, *Biography of William Gallacher* (Unpublished, 1993), Glasgow Caledonian University Research Collections. William Gallacher Memorial Library. Uncatalogued. p.100.

<sup>22</sup> Harry McShane, *No Mean Fighter* (London: Pluto Press, 1978), p.105.

<sup>23</sup> *Strike Bulletin*, 31 January 1919.

<sup>24</sup> David Featherstone, 'Towards the Relational Construction of Militant Particularisms: Or Why the Geographies of Past Struggles Matter for Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation', *Antipode*, 37 (2005), pp. 250–71. p.252.

International updates and expressions of support were a regular presence within the *Strike Bulletin* and further connections were noted:

A telegram from Seville states 'The strike is now almost general, and as the compositors joined the rank of the strikers 24 hours ago, no newspaper has appeared today'...All over Spain, it appears, a great strike movement is now in being for a shorter working week.

Only a week ago the Textile Workers in New York won a shorter working week without any loss in pay, by the general strike, and in Seattle at present time 65,000 men are on strike for reduced hours.<sup>25</sup>

This reporting represents a growing textual network developed by workers. Such practices are again illustrative of a broader internationalist culture of labour on Clydeside during the early Twentieth Century. The communications and connections globally frame the demand for shorter working hours. The *Strike Bulletin's* coverage disrupts the localized characterization of the strike and begins to give an insight into the imaginaries of strike organizers, particularly those situating their actions within wider global scales of worker action. This sense of workers' internationalism was not necessarily new. Such practices can be traced to earlier forms of transnational organising and solidarity that emerged in the nineteenth century, including the cultural practices of working class internationalism (as shown during May Days) and the formation of international societies and unions, perhaps most prominently through the four Internationals.<sup>26</sup>

The strike also gained recognition from international journalists, notably Crystal Eastman, who documented the Clydeside action in the American *Liberator* magazine in October 1919. Evidence such as this suggests that the movement clearly had an impact beyond its immediate locale. These connections became useful within the fundraising efforts to provide legal support for the strike leaders arrested during 'Bloody Friday'. Significant funds were gathered within Glasgow but a larger amount £569 was collected from districts outside the city.<sup>27</sup> This financial support provides tangible evidence of the role of connections developed by the Clydeside strike beyond the boundaries of the movement itself. Importantly, an engagement with internationalism and solidarity must also be attentive to the possibility for exclusion within place-based politics. The chapter begins to address this tension, between outward looking internationalism and racialized violence situated within Clydeside, by returning to the race riots previously introduced.

### **Exclusions, Racist Atmospheres and White Labourism**

The *Glasgow Evening Times* reported on the composition of those involved with the riotous scenes prior to the shorter working week movement, highlighting that it was 'a large and hostile crowd of British seamen and white sailors of other nationalities' who followed the 'coloured men' to their lodging-house.<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Hyslop has considered the development of an international 'white labourism' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by tracing the flows, often colonial, which formed exclusionary alliances.<sup>29</sup> Newspaper reports identified 'white sailors of other nationalities' as part of the violent crowd and this coverage indicates a form of solidarity amongst white workers not solely built around nationality. Similar scenes in Liverpool, where Charles Wooton

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<sup>25</sup> *Strike Bulletin*, 9 February 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Parfitt, Lorenzo Costaguta, Matthew Kidd and John Tiplady (eds), *Working-Class Nationalism and Internationalism until 1945: Essays in Global Labour History*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Clyde Defence Fund. Glasgow Trades Council Collection, Glasgow City Archives. Available from: <http://sites.scran.ac.uk/redclyde/redclyde/rc055.htm> (Last accessed: 19 February 2015)

<sup>28</sup> *Glasgow Evening Times*, 24 January 1919.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself 'White': White Labourism in Britain, Australia, and South Africa Before the First World War', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 12. 4 (1999), pp. 398-421.

was chased by a mob and drowned whilst being attacked with stones in the Albert Docks, also involved Scandinavian seafarers and is again indicative of a wider transnationalism amongst white workers. This section explores connections between the strike movement and the race riots, primarily through their spatial proximity, links through the British Seafarers' Union (BSU) who joined the Forty Hours Movement and connections with key labour leadership figures, such as Strike Committee leader Emanuel Shinwell.

Hyslop mentions Glasgow in his own work, and highlights how representatives of the Clydeside's workers and others across Britain pledged support to white South African workers in 1914 demanding 'the exclusion of Black and Asian workers from skilled jobs'. Hyslop makes a key contribution by disrupting national and local approaches to labour history and challenges bounded understandings of agency. He argues that 'the labour movements based on this imperial working class produced and disseminated a common ideology of White Labourism'.<sup>30</sup> The introduction of this transnational ideology illustrates new forms of solidarity and agency, and disrupts singular understandings of labour activity, providing insights into an internationally connected labour politics. These insights introduce contested forms of labour activism within Clydeside, as the BSU, considered an important addition to the strike in the *Strike Bulletin*, had openly hostile feelings towards non-white labour competition for jobs.

In Glasgow, Shinwell led the breakaway formation of a new seafaring union (from the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union) to establish the BSU in 1911. Shinwell was a strike leader during Clydeside's 1919 Forty Hours Movement and went onto become a Member of Parliament, Secretary of State for War, and Minister of Fuel and Power. During the early Twentieth Century, he consistently argued that seafarer grievances were primarily against Chinese workers, claiming that the complaints were directed towards Chinese labour competition undercutting wages.<sup>31</sup> Audience members at connected rallies suggested otherwise though, as noted when a BSU member was questioned in court following the arrest of 40-hour working week organizers. During questioning, a seafaring delegate claimed that:

He remembered Mr Shinwell addressing a meeting of seamen, about 200 in number, in James Watt Lane on Thursday January 30. The main subject of the address was the employment of yellow labour on a boat at Glasgow and the employment of black labour.<sup>32</sup>

Such responses of union members to a speech which took place shortly after the Broomielaw riot are significant and perhaps reveal the audience's impression of a politicized and racialized message as opposed to the leadership's official economic frame. Shinwell himself, when commenting on the Broomielaw riots, noted that 'evidently some Chinese sailors had also arrived in Glasgow at the same time, and the black men got the benefit of any ill-feeling directed against the Chinese'.<sup>33</sup> This insight again points to a trade-union position of racism. Inflammatory remarks towards these workers indicated the racialization of non-white workers with derogatory language being used within labour communications and documentation during this time. These positions must be viewed as influential when revisiting Clydeside in early 1919.

The longer history of publications and records of public speaking from prominent seafaring trade unions, notably the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU) and BSU, are illustrative of this racism. Organized labour responses and a longer trajectory of racialized grievances can be traced through senior trade-union leaders before the First World War. In Glasgow, the *Forward* newspaper published trade-union views on foreign labour competition:

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<sup>30</sup> Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p.399

<sup>31</sup> For example – see *STUC Annual Report (1920)*, p.91.

<sup>32</sup> *Evening Times*, 16th April 1919

<sup>33</sup> Jenkinson, 'Black Sailors on Red Clydeside', p.42.

I do not hate Asiatics; but quite frankly and candidly I don't want to see them coming here on British ships. I would excuse them. So long as they are on these ships, they are a danger to British seamen. Their standard of living, such as it is, is imperilled. The Asiatic is not being employed because he is more efficient. He is not half so efficient as the white man.<sup>34</sup>

This rhetoric was prominent within early twentieth-century trade-union documentation and provides an insight into the racism prevalent on Clydeside during the early twentieth century. Such positions were common within ports in 1919, and this national organizing position of trade unionism can be viewed as one way through which similar events in Cardiff, Liverpool and South Shields can be connected to the violence on Clydeside. In this regard, the racism prevalent here can be connected to a longer trajectory of seafaring organising associated with the life of Havelock Wilson. Wilson, as president of the NSFU and a Liberal Member of Parliament, was renowned as 'the super-patriotic Trade Union leader'. His rhetoric towards foreign labour competition and exclusionary policies were similarly presented as defending the rights of white British seafarers.<sup>35</sup> As such, the events here cannot be framed as spontaneous or without reason, and instead linked to a longer trajectory, and geographically connected, exclusionary politics.

Trade-union documentation highlights the performance of whiteness and protectionism present on Clydeside in 1919. Revisiting this period with an attentiveness to the experiences of those people subjected to this racism is challenging. The fragmented presence of minority groups within Clydeside's archives makes it difficult to foreground the diversity of experiences and positionalities of the seafarers involved in the scenes describe above. One remaining perspective within the Glasgow context are letters from the 'Delegates of Coloured Seamen in Glasgow' (the letter was signed Cornelius Johnson, C. Redmond, A. Horton, J. Carpentier) who made their own grievances clear, whilst also stating their response to suggestions that they should be repatriated, in a letter to the colonial office in May 1919:

We are not willing to surrender our rights for Spaniards, Swedes, Greeks and Chinese since we are all British born subjects and can prove of being in Britain and sailing on British ships long before the war.

We will be loyal and allow ourselves to be deported when the Government of Britain enact a law also that white men who are filling the places of coloured men in Africa and the West Indies are deported to their own native shore.<sup>36</sup>

This account of the situation in Glasgow supports the portrayal provided by newspaper reports following the riots. They highlight the problems associated with a 'colour bar', which prevented their employment on British ships, and indicate how white labour appeared to be given preference internationally without seafaring union complaint. Their concern also parallels the longer trajectory of solidarity based upon whiteness within employer and trade-union practices, which excluded their rights to work, despite their clear claims to British status, particularly given their contributions to the First World War.

According to Jenkinson, about 30 black sailors were arrested following the riots, all were from Sierra Leone and therefore British subjects.<sup>37</sup> This distinction again links to a 'white labourism' whereby workers' solidarity was not necessarily built around nationality but instead a notion of Britishness

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<sup>34</sup> *Forward*, 8 April 1911.

<sup>35</sup> David Byrne, 'Class, race and nation: The politics of the 'Arab issue' in South Shields 1919-1939', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 13. 2-3 (1994), pp. 89-103.

<sup>36</sup> Letter from 'delegates of coloured seamen in Glasgow' to Colonial Office, 7 May 1919. The National Archives (henceforth TNA), CO 323/813.

<sup>37</sup> Jacqueline Jenkinson, 'The Glasgow Race Disturbances of 1919', in K. Lunn, (ed.) *Race and Labour in Twentieth Century Britain*, (London: Frank Cass, 1985), pp. 43-67.

defined by whiteness. The colonial link to 'British subjects of colour on the move' made little difference in terms of solidarity within Glasgow's docks where racialized tension became violent days before the strike. Hyslop's understanding of white labourism was also evident within the letters to the colonial office from delegates who reported a broader exclusionary politics, beyond the violence of the riots, and based upon everyday experiences of poverty and racism:

There are cases taking place in Glasgow in which coloured men have been molested and been ill treated by the police. It is not for one moment entertained by any of us that we are infallible [...] Nature have endowed us with a colour to suit certain climatic conditions under which we had to inhabit, but our intellectual and moral capacities is not the same colour as our faces portrayed.<sup>38</sup>

Their accounts of 1919 begin to reveal the multiple forms of racism prevalent within Clydeside. The delegates were also clearly conscious of a developing hostility towards them within workplaces across Britain and Europe. Another letter from the 'Board of Health' in Edinburgh to the colonial office provided further context for the black seamen's grievances, highlighting at least 100 black seafarers as unemployed in Glasgow during January 1920:

I wish to draw your attention to a very serious problem that has arisen in connection with coloured men in Glasgow. During the War a considerable number of such men were employed by the Government both on land and sea. For many of them such employment is now no longer available, partly on account of the scarcity of shipping, partly on account of the action of the Shipping Federations and Trade Unions who are opposed to the employment of coloured men as long as white men are unemployed.<sup>39</sup>

The intersecting strategies of employers and trade unions are cited above as the primary causes of unemployment amongst black seafarers. These letters indicate how black workers experienced a politics of exclusion through the state (police harassment is referred to above), employer (through the colour bar on ships) and, as has been noted above, white workers and the trade-union movement. These experiences are illustrative of the complex, diverse and dynamic composition of labour within Clydeside in 1919 and begins to reveal the multiple experiences of solidarity and exclusion during this period. This diversity disrupts understandings of labour's agency as being fixed, bounded or stable and instead indicates the importance of relational understandings of place-based politics.

### **Conclusions: Labour Demands and Spatial Politics**

Harry Cleaver interprets the general demand for shorter working hours as being representative of a broader politicized working-class movement. Through his reading of Marx's *Capital*, he proposes that the demand for shorter hours:

[M]oves beyond the particular demands of a narrowly defined group of workers and becomes a demand of the whole class and thus political [...] the individual struggle at each factory or industry can no longer be considered an isolated 'purely economic' struggle and must be grasped as part of the whole, as a political struggle for power.<sup>40</sup>

His contribution stresses the political nature of working-class movements and foregrounds opportunities for autonomous working-class agency despite the many constraints placed upon labour agency by capital. Cleaver's understanding indicates how Clydeside's demand for reduced industrial working hours can be linked beyond economic grievances to a wider political movement,

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<sup>38</sup> Letter from 'delegates of coloured seamen in Glasgow'. TNA, CO 323/813.

<sup>39</sup> Letter from The Secretary, The Board of Health, Edinburgh 9th January 1920. TNA, CO 323/843.

<sup>40</sup> Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979), p.45.

which held possibilities and contradictions. It is this more reflexive approach to demand making that has been stressed to foreground a wider political notion of the Forty Hours Movement, whilst attending to contradictions and tensions.

This approach troubles the events in terms of their potential to be viewed in isolation and instead suggests the productive nature of spatial (through wider geographical influences) and temporal (through longer lasting histories) frames. This highlights the spheres of influence that informed both events, and how each can be viewed as influential in relation to one another. The racism evident during the riots cannot be simply dismissed as ignorance, and instead can be positioned as connected to trade-union leadership, strike movements and similar events elsewhere, as captured in Hyslop's transnational understanding of white labourism. Similarly, the shorter hours' movement can be connected with a wider realm of radicalism and a broader imaginary of working-class activism. Drawing these two events together allows contradictions and tensions to emerge and a more nuanced historical imaginary of Red Clydeside that attends to both radical possibilities and exclusionary conflicts.

The Clydeside strike concluded without reaching an agreement on 12 February. Following the violence of 'Bloody Friday' and arrests of strike leaders, workers began to return to their workplaces. Despite this, the Forty Hours Movement had a significant impact on Clydeside with the *Strike Bulletins* reflecting a broader politics and geography of the movement. Working hours were not reduced immediately but, following continued negotiation, hours were reduced, albeit to 47 hours and not to the 40-hour strike demand. Beyond this, a wider political framing of the movement allows recognition of the longer trajectory of growth within the Scottish labour movement during this period. In this regard, the specific role of the strike has been acknowledged by Foster as an integral part of the 'transformation of attitudes between 1918 and 1920' represented by the election successes for the Independent Labour Party during this period.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Young has highlighted how the general election of 1922, the first following the strike, provided significant parliamentary gains for the labour movement in Scotland with 30 labour seats being won by Scottish Labour in comparison with just seven in the previous election in 1918.<sup>42</sup> This electoral shift begins to illustrate the temporality of working-class activism, which was connected to the demand for a shorter working week.

The racialized violence highlighted here was similarly connected to events elsewhere and a longer trajectory of racialized violence in 1919. Peter Fryer considers this broader context in his book *Staying Power* and indicates how 'an anti-black reign of terror raged in Liverpool' for three days in May 1919 after violence between Scandinavians and West Indians. He also documents similar scenes in Cardiff where 'three men were killed and dozens injured'. The events in Liverpool connect with the argument made by Hyslop with the involvement of Scandinavians in these disputes suggesting a wider identity of 'whiteness' rather than one formed with national boundaries.<sup>43</sup> More generally, the racialized violence across the UK illustrate the relational nature of the tensions within the labour movement. The exclusionary politics evident should not be explained, or even excused, through accounts suggesting ignorance or an isolated politics, but rather acknowledged as formed through a series of broader connections within and beyond place-based disputes and labour organizations as Hyslop's discussion of white labourism and imperial connections reveals.

Racialized violence during the early Twentieth Century was not limited to British port places. Tony Martin documents how sailor disputes were equally prominent in the Caribbean. His work links to the response of the 'delegates of coloured seamen' by illustrating the broader spatiality of

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<sup>41</sup> Foster, 'Strike Action', p.58.

<sup>42</sup> James D Young, *The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class* (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 2009), p.186.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist – J.T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacan, 2004).

grievances amongst workers.<sup>44</sup> He revisits a workers' strike in Trinidad in December 1919 and shows how violence occurred between black residents and white sailors during a peace demonstration in July that year. He considers how several British sailors from the H.M.S. Dartmouth 'were wantonly and severely assaulted, as were several other European members of the community' and 'very lewd and disparaging remarks were freely made about the white race and about their women folk'.<sup>45</sup> Martin links these scenes to the spread of knowledge about the British riots (specifically those in Cardiff) between white and black sailors in 1919. Featherstone discusses these links further by contextualizing the violence through the involvement of black soldiers returning from the British West Indies Regiment who had mutinied in Taranto, Italy, in December 1918 'in protest at their degrading and humiliating treatment at the hands of white officers'.<sup>46</sup> Foregrounding such variable and contested connections, sometimes tangible, sometimes discursive, is key for a retelling of the historical geographies of Red Clydeside and more generally a revisiting of 1919.

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<sup>44</sup> Tony Martin, 'Revolutionary Upheaval in Trinidad, 1919: Views from British and American Sources', *Journal of Negro History*, 58. 3 (1973), pp. 313-326.

<sup>45</sup> Martin, 'Revolutionary Upheaval', p.318

<sup>46</sup> David Featherstone, *Solidarity: Hidden Histories and Geographies of Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2012), p.93.