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*The Odyssey of Frank Hodges**

by Chris Williams, PhD

The life of Frank Hodges, born 1887, died 1947, was indeed an odyssey. As the labour historian, Professor David Howell of the University of York has written, in the course of his life Hodges went from being a 'radical prodigy to chauvinistic anti-communist, to the status of classic renegade'.¹ It is the purpose of this paper to explore and to assess that journey. Although labour historians have, rather than examine individual lives, preferred, on the whole, to write narratives dealing with institutions such as trade unions and political parties, or to treat expressions of collective action such as strikes or riots, the career of Frank Hodges merits attention for two reasons. First, he led a life in which he was confronted by a number of political and moral dilemmas. He resolved those dilemmas in controversial ways that provoked outrage from his contemporaries in the Labour movement and disdain from many of its later chroniclers. Second, Hodges was born two years before the foundation of the Mineworkers' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB), later the National Union of Mineworkers. He died in the year in which the coal industry was nationalised. Whilst it would be an exaggeration to suggest that Hodges's life can serve as a metaphor for the experience of the British miners in that sixty-year period, nevertheless, for some twenty years from the late 1900s onwards, he stood at the centre of many critical developments in the coal industry, in its industrial relations, and in its political culture.

This paper is unashamedly biographical in nature and chronological in structure. Primarily it is an account of Hodges the public man. There are no personal papers, and very little that sheds light on Hodges's private life. To date, no trace has been found of Hodges's family and descendants. Even Hodges's autobiography, *My Adventures as a Labour Leader*, published in 1925, reveals little of the inner self, preferring to describe Hodges's travels in Europe and in North America. Instead, heavy reliance has been placed on newspapers and government reports, pamphlets and contemporaneous accounts, minutes of meetings and conferences, autobiographies by and biographies of Hodges's contemporaries, as well as upon archives in the National Library of Wales and the Public Record Office. The account that emerges falls into four uneven quarters: the first with the subject's early life, up

* A lecture delivered to the Society at the Oakdale Institute, the Museum of Welsh Life, St Fagans, on 24 October 1998, with the Chairman of the Council in the chair.

¹ David Howell, "All or nowt": the politics of the MFGB', in Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and David Howell (eds), *Miners, Unions and Politics, 1910-47* (Aldershot, 1996), 35-58, 39.

to age of twenty; the second with Hodges in his twenties, rising to a position of prominence in the counsels of the South Wales miners. Then, from 1919 to the late 1920s, Hodges entered what was the most crowded and controversial decade of his life, upon which his reputation largely hangs. Finally, there are the last twenty years, in which he developed new interests and perhaps even a new identity. The paper will conclude with an assessment of the character, contribution and reputation of a man who, as Professor Kenneth O. Morgan has written, 'for many socialists . . . provided an industrial version of Ramsay MacDonald'.²

Frank Hodges was born in the village of Woolaston, close to Lydney in Gloucestershire, on 30 April 1887, one of six sons of Thomas and Louisa.³ His father, at that time working on the land, was of 'Welsh stock', his mother English. Like the families of many small farmers, the Hodges were Liberals and Nonconformists, but agricultural depression rendered their life unrewarding, and Thomas Hodges sought alternative work in the coal mines of Monmouthshire. At the age of six, Frank, with the rest of the family, followed his father and elder brother to settle in Abertillery and the young Hodges was educated at Queen Street elementary school.⁴ Whatever educational promise he showed was rendered irrelevant by his father's invalidity and when Frank reached the age of twelve he left school to find work.⁵ For a year he worked as a newsboy and as a grocer's assistant, before finding employment, initially as a doorboy, later as a coal-hewer, in the company of nearly three thousand other miners at the local Gray and Vivian colliery, then owned by the Powell's Tillery Steam Coal Company. He was to work underground for eight years.⁶

Despite the undoubtedly arduous nature of his work, neither valley nor mine confined Hodges's intellectual horizons. He had, like many of his contemporaries in the Western Valleys of Monmouthshire at this time, an eagerness to acquire a greater understanding of the world in which he lived, a compulsion to comprehend, and thereby perhaps to change, the dynamics of human society. Initially, whilst a doorboy, he read Shakespeare underground by the light of an oil lamp, reading that stimulated 'a tremendous passion for other books' which, Hodges recalled, 'I read without discrimination and with a kind of avidity'. He began to attend evening classes run by Monmouthshire County Council, studying arithmetic, composition, geography and science. He became friendly with a local mine official, who gave him encouragement, a copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and an introduction to the local debating society.⁷ Then, at the age of seventeen, Hodges was caught up in the conta-

² Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Socialism and syndicalism: the Welsh miners' debate, 1912', in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History* 30 (1975), 22-37: 25.

³ John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London, 1993) is thus incorrect in suggesting (535) that Hodges was a native of the Ogwr valley.

⁴ Frank Hodges, *My Adventures as a Labour Leader* (London, 1925), 2-6.

⁵ Herbert Tracey (ed.), *The Book of the Labour Party*, Vol.3 (London, 1925), 318.

⁶ Hodges, *Adventures*, 6-11; *Western Mail*, 22 December 1924.

⁷ Hodges, *Adventures*, 13-17.

gious wave of enthusiasm that was the Religious Revival of 1904-5. Abertillery was, as the *South Wales Argus* put it, a town 'in which sin of every description' had formerly been 'rampant', but it welcomed the Revival with as much excitement as the rest of the South Wales coalfield, and over one thousand 'converts' were recorded in the town by mid-December 1904.⁸ Hodges became heavily involved in the Primitive Methodist cause, and deeply interested in theology and philosophy. He decided to study for the Methodist ministry, but from the beginning, he had a keen interest in the social implications of the Christian message. Ultimately this was to prove his undoing, as the 'trial sermon' that he delivered was felt by the church, to be too unorthodox, and he was discouraged from making further progress. However, although Hodges turned away from the ministry as a vocation, he remained committed to the Methodist church and to a Christian socialist ethos, as both a church worker and a lay preacher.⁹

The ministry's loss was very much the miners' gain, as Hodges threw himself instead into trade union work. He became, first, a member of the local pit committee and then of the joint committee for the Powell's Tillery Colliery Company Ltd., eventually becoming its secretary. He served as a miners' representative on the local trades council and joined the Independent Labour Party (ILP). Eventually, having already taken correspondence courses with Ruskin College, he was successful, at the age of twenty-two, in gaining a miners' scholarship to attend that establishment.¹⁰

Hodges enjoyed the intellectual challenge of Ruskin, as well as the relief it provided from underground labour. It was his fortune to be there for the revolt of 1909, in which he participated and to be transferred to the new, more radical, Central Labour College.¹¹ He completed his studies with a three-month stay in Paris, at the Foyer de l'Ouvrier, accompanied by fellow miner Arthur Jenkins, studying French, the social conditions of the French working class, and the organisation of the Confédération Générale du Travail. He met and was impressed by the French Marxist Paul Lafargue, his wife Laura (the daughter of Karl Marx) and the French socialist leader Jean Jaurès.¹²

On returning to Abertillery in 1911, Hodges married his 'sweetheart', Henrietta Carter, a union that was to last to the end of his life, and was to pro-

⁸ *South Wales Argus*, 16, 19 December 1904.

⁹ Hodges, *Adventures*, 17-20; *Labour's Who's Who*, 1924 (London); Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940* (Cardiff, 1993), 95-6; *Tamworth Herald*, 9 February 1924.

¹⁰ Hodges, *Adventures*, 20-7.

¹¹ Hodges, *Adventures*, 28-38. Richard Lewis, 'The South Wales Miners and the Ruskin College Strike of 1909', *Llafur* Vol.2 No.1 (1976), 57-72: 68; idem, *Leaders and Teachers*, 85; W. W. Craik, *The Central Labour College, 1909-29: A Chapter in the History of Adult Working-class Education* (London, 1964), 176.

¹² Hodges, *Adventures*, 32-3, 37-48. *Glamorgan Gazette*, 17 May 1912; Arthur Gleason, *What the Workers Want: A Study of British Labor* (New York, 1920), 169; Roy Jenkins, *A Life at the Centre* (London, 1991), 5-6.

duce a daughter, Väninna.¹³ Hodges was a handsome man, 'clean-shaven, brown-eyed', 'with a head of dark, floppy hair and a lean and restless face'.¹⁴ He was 'passionately fond of any sport', enjoying walking, football, cricket, tennis, hockey, golf and billiards and, later in life, shooting and motoring as well. He seems to have been well ahead of his time in advocating a Ministry of Sport.¹⁵ Whether he had much time to relax is, however, extremely doubtful. He returned to work underground, and in the evenings, ran classes in French for Monmouthshire County Council. For the Christian socialist New Era Union and the Plebs' League, he taught political economy, English and industrial history.¹⁶ By this time, Hodges's political ideas were typical of the 'young men in a hurry' who could be found in both the Western Valleys of Monmouthshire and the Rhondda Valleys in Glamorgan. He believed in industrial unionism, and, in 1912, spoke alongside the great ideologue Noah Ablett in a debate at the Judge's Hall in Trealaw, arguing in favour of a system of workers' control and against the straightforward nationalisation of the mines by the state.¹⁷

It is very likely that Hodges's 'advanced' views played a major part in his successful application in 1912 for the post of miners' agent in the Garw Valley. The Garw district had a long tradition of mining trade unionism, with the Garw Miners' Association having been formed in 1880. The district included not only the lodges of the steam coal pits in the Garw Valley itself (such as the Ffaldau, Ocean, Glengarw, Pontyrhyl and International) but also those at Wern Tarw, Meiros, Raglan, Ynysawdre, Park and Cefn Slip.¹⁸ From 1888 the miners' agent had been John Thomas, born in Coity in 1852. By 1912, there had developed considerable friction between Thomas and the steam coal lodges of the Garw, and this resulted in a district general meeting removing Thomas and advertising for a new agent.¹⁹ The ballot took place in May 1912 and Frank Hodges was, quite remarkably, elected on the first ballot ahead of thirteen other candidates, including seven local men. Hodges

¹³ *Kelly's Handbook to the Titled, Landed and Official Classes*, 1929; Beatrice Webb, *Diaries Vol. I: 1912-1924* (London, 1952), 16 July 1921: 215.

¹⁴ Gregory Blaxland, *J. H. Thomas: A Life for Unity* (London, 1964), 142; Gleason, *op.cit.*, 34.

¹⁵ Hodges, *Adventures*, 34; *Labour's Who's Who*; *Tamworth Herald*, 20 September 1924; *Burton Chronicle*, 5 June 1947.

¹⁶ Hodges, *Adventures*, 48-50, 57-8; Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation*, Volume 1 (London, 1938), 78; *Plebs* Vol.5 No.8 (September 1913). Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, 96-7, 163.

¹⁷ Morgan, *op.cit.*. The debate was on the question 'The nationalization of mines. Is this in the best interest of the workers?' Hodges's speech contained many references to conditions in France, and a quotation from Paul Lafargue.

¹⁸ Eric Wyn Evans, *The Miners of South Wales* (Cardiff, 1961), 135.

¹⁹ Some of the smaller, house coal lodges down the valley and around Tondu did not agree with this move, initiated by the larger and more powerful steam coal lodges: they set up a Lower Garw District with John Thomas as its head. *Glamorgan Gazette*, 3 July 1914; SWMF EC Minutes, 29 August 1912.

amassed 2137 votes; all twelve other candidates together just 1414, with Hodges's nearest rival attracting 313 votes.²⁰ For a young man of twenty-five years of age, the youngest miners' agent in Great Britain, without even a checkweigher's post behind him, this was an incredible achievement, even more so given that Hodges spoke no Welsh in what was still a predominantly Welsh-speaking area.²¹

Living first in Tondu, and then in Bridgend, Hodges justified the faith of the Garw miners in his five and a half years as their agent. He ran a strong campaign against non-unionism, involving him in house-to-house visits of individual non-unionists, and worked hard to repair the schism in the district caused by the circumstances of his predecessor's dismissal. He developed a reputation as an able negotiator and was credited with establishing a strong position in the matter of price lists.²² He played a part in local affairs, becoming a magistrate in 1917, and served on Bridgend's Food Control Committee during the last year of the Great War.²³ A member of the Executive Council of the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF), he was prominent both on the recruiting platforms during the conflict and amongst those successfully calling for a strike in July 1915.²⁴ With Noah Ablett, he gave impressive testimony on behalf of the SWMF to the Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest in Wales, in June 1917.²⁵ Moreover, Hodges was a rising star attracting attention from both miners and other trade unionists across Britain. At the MFGB conference of 1913, he had moved the resolution that had established the 'Triple Alliance' of miners, railwaymen and transport workers.²⁶

²⁰ *Glamorgan Gazette*, 3, 10, 17 May 1912.

²¹ Hodges, *Adventures*, 59-62. Interestingly, given Hodges's later career, the district meeting carried unanimously a resolution that the new agent should not be nominated for any public honours, but should devote the whole of his time to organising the district.

²² Hodges, *Adventures*, 64-6; *Glamorgan Gazette*, 3 July 1914, 31 January 1919. A non-unionist campaign in July 1914 reduced the number of non-unionists from five hundred to seventy-six.

²³ *Glamorgan Gazette*, 7 September, 5 October 1917; *Colliery Guardian*, 10 August 1928; E. C. May, 'A Question of Control: Social and Industrial Relations in the South Wales Coalfield and the Crisis of Post-War Reconstruction, 1914-1921', PhD thesis, University of Wales (Cardiff), 1994, 123-8.

²⁴ *Glamorgan Gazette*, 7 May, 4 June 1915, 15 September 1916; Edwards, *op.cit.*, 80; Robin Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners: 2 – 1914-1926* (Cardiff, 1975), 99-100; Paul Davies, *A. J. Cook* (Manchester, 1987), 21. Note however that the *Glamorgan Gazette*, 24 August 1917 reported Hodges speaking at the Pontycymmer Hippodrome in favour of sending delegates to the Stockholm conference.

²⁵ Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest: No.7 Division, Cd.8668: *Report of the Commissioners for Wales, including Monmouthshire* (London, 1917), 45. See Edgar Chappell papers, National Library of Wales, Box 7 for the extent to which whole sections of the final report was based on the testimony of the SWMF representatives. See also Frank Hodges, 'Unrest in the South Wales Coalfield', *The Welsh Outlook*, November 1917, 395-6.

²⁶ Hodges, *Adventures*, 67-72; MFGB, Report of Annual Conference, Scarborough, October 1913, 139-40.

He had spoken out in criticism of Whitley councils for assuming that the interests of Labour and Capital were identical, arguing at the TUC at Blackpool in 1917 that 'there never could be permanent relations between employer and employed'.²⁷ Although committed, like the MFGB, to the nationalisation of the mines, he did not see this objective as an end in itself, suggesting that 'the struggle for control will be waged against the Government long after nationalisation is an accomplished fact. The educated miners have for some time passed beyond the point of the view which regarded industrial nationalisation as the panacea for all our social ills'. He remained, primarily, an advocate of some form of workers' control or guild socialism, urging at the MFGB conference in July 1918 that 'the workmen should have some directive power in the industry in which they are engaged'.²⁸

When the MFGB decided, given the impending retirement of its part-time secretary, Thomas Ashton, to appoint a permanent official in that role, Hodges, helped by his reputation as a 'Welsh Bolshevik', first won the nomination of the SWMF, ahead of such luminaries as Noah Ablett, George Barker, Will John, and T. I. Mardy Jones, and then proceeded to defeat seven other nominees in the MFGB national ballot.²⁹ At the age of thirty-one he became secretary of the largest, most powerful trade union, certainly in Britain and perhaps across the world. He was seen by some as 'the most powerful young man in Britain', 'the voice of the young radicals' in the labour movement, who represented 'the promise of the coming generation'. Within a year of Hodges's appointment as MFGB secretary, the American writer Arthur Gleason gave this perceptive assessment:

Hodges has the culture, the manners, the background, of a university man of the upper class. But he carries a consciousness of the delegated power of a million working men. His dangers will be those called out by so youthful and astonishing a career: bitterness, conceit, the flattery of the privileged destroying his belief in his mission and leading him into compromise.³⁰

Immediately Hodges was absorbed in a series of industrial and political crises, in which, at least initially, his reputation was enhanced. His service on

²⁷ John R. Raynes, *Coal and Its Conflicts: A Brief Record of the Disputes between Capital and Labour in the Coal Mining Industry of Great Britain* (London, 1928), 156; John Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918* (Oxford, 1991), 247.

²⁸ Hodges, 'Unrest', 396; MFGB Annual Conference, Southport, 10 July 1918; Carter L. Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control: A Study in British Workshop Politics* (London, 1920), 12; Raynes, *op.cit.*, 74.

²⁹ John Saville, entry on Thomas Ashton (1844-1927) in *Dictionary of Labour Biography* Vol.1 (London, 1972), 30-2; SWMF EC Minutes, 2 November 1918; MFGB EC Minutes, 27 November 1918; Hodges, *Adventures*, 78; Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour 1920-1924: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge, 1971), 33. Hodges won the MFGB ballot on the fifth round, amassing 151,813 votes to the 94,239 of his nearest rival.

³⁰ Gleason, *op.cit.*, 34, 80, 100, 122-3, 127, 169-70.

the Royal Commission on the Coal Industry, the Sankey Commission, in 1919, attracted considerable praise from fellow commissioner Sidney Webb, and from one of Hodges's boyhood heroes, Philip Snowden, who wrote that Hodges's 'masterly advocacy; his extraordinary command of facts and the dexterity with which he marshalled them, his clever cross-examination of hostile witnesses, commanded universal admiration'.³¹ Ben Tillett hailed him as a future leader of the trade union and Labour movement.³² After Sankey, Hodges was involved in the campaign to try to win public support for the goal of nationalisation, in March 1920 publishing his book *Nationalisation of the Mines*, dedicated 'to the toilers of the underworld and Robert Smillie', then president of the MFGB.³³

Hodges remained, at least until the beginning of 1921, a radical advocate of direct action, workers' control, and a militant stance in the disputes with which the coal industry was beset. He stood to the left of Smillie, and the latter's resignation of his presidency in March 1921 was believed to owe something to the different views they had of the Datum Line strike in October 1920.³⁴

Yet by the spring of 1921 Hodges had begun to adopt a more moderate stance. He shared, along with most of the MFGB Executive Committee, doubts over whether the miners' proposal for a national wages pool could be secured, but, due to the result of a ballot, remained duty bound to argue in its favour and won explicit recognition for his skill as a negotiator and expositor of the case from the other members of the committee.³⁵ Even Prime Minister David Lloyd George paid Hodges the tribute of suggesting that he had missed his vocation and might have had a more remunerative one than secretary of the MFGB.³⁶ In retrospect, perhaps it was praise such as this that led Hodges, on Thursday 14 April 1921, to venture the comment that provided the pretext for the events of 'Black Friday', by which, in the eyes and through the pens of many historians, his reputation has been permanently besmirched.³⁷

The crisis of spring 1921 hinged upon the wages settlement that would follow the government's decision to hand control of the coal industry back to the private owners. A cut in wages, particularly in exporting coalfields, was to be expected, given the economic downturn in coal prices in the international market. Understandably, the MFGB wished to limit this cut and, in addition,

³¹ *Weekly Dispatch*, 8 March 1925; Beatrice Webb, *Diaries* Vol.1, 23 June 1919: 161.

³² Robin Page Arnot, *The Miners: Years of Struggle: A History of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain (from 1910 onwards)* (London, 1953), 259.

³³ Frank Hodges, *Nationalisation of the Mines* (London, 1920).

³⁴ Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 185; idem, *The Miners*, 268-70, 295.

³⁵ MFGB EC Minutes, 11 April 1921; Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.1, ed. K. Middlemas, (Oxford, 1969), 4 April 1921: 132; Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 205.

³⁶ CAB 21/191: Coal Dispute 1921: Verbatim Report of Conference between the Government and the Executive Committee of the Miners Federation, 12 April 1921.

³⁷ Beatrice Webb, *Diaries* Vol.1, April 16 1921: 207.

proposed the establishment of a national wages pool whereby the wages of miners in relatively uneconomic coalfields would be subsidised by the profits accruing in more prosperous areas. This last proposal seemed to be the sticking point: neither the coalowners nor the government appeared ready to concede what they felt to be tantamount to continued state control. The miners had begun strike action at the beginning of April, and the Triple Alliance arrangement was due to bring both the railwaymen and transport workers out in sympathy on the fifteenth of that month. But the leaders of both the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and the Transport Workers' Federation (TWF) wanted to find a compromise rather than to have to carry out this threat, a fact of which Lloyd George was aware.³⁸ As the day drew nearer so attempts to find a solution intensified, and late on the evening of Thursday 14 April Hodges spoke before Members of Parliament in a room at the House of Commons, in the company of the new MFGB President Herbert Smith and South Wales miners' leader and MP Vernon Hartshorn. Gregory Blaxland, the biographer of railwaymen's leader Jimmy Thomas, relates that Hodges 'was a sensitive young man and his face was strained as he faced his audience of critical MPs. He had soon won them over with his quiet and earnest tone which contrasted so sharply with the arrogance and inflexibility of the owners' spokesman'.³⁹ When he finished speaking there was a flurry of questions. Hodges handled them well, and then was asked 'If we can get you a satisfactory wages settlement, will you agree to temporarily abandon your "pool"?' Hodges wrote of this moment in his autobiography:

Here was a question for decision. If I had said 'No,' their assumption about the 'pool' would have been confirmed. If I said 'Yes,' it would have been entirely on my own responsibility, and contrary to the decision of the Miners' Executive. In a moment my mind was made up, and in the presence of my two colleagues, and without audible opposition from them, said: 'Whilst I cannot see at the moment how a satisfactory wages settlement can be arrived at in the absence of the national pool, if you can induce your Government to propose such a settlement as you suggest, I have no doubt whatsoever that such a proposition will be favourably considered by my Executive Committee.'⁴⁰

The following morning Lloyd George made an offer of further negotiations to the MFGB based on what he understood Hodges to have said in the Commons the previous night. The railwaymen, transport workers, and Labour MPs all expected the crisis to be resolved through compromise, but the offer was rejected (by a majority of just one vote) by the MFGB EC. Hodges tendered his resignation but was persuaded to stay in office. The NUR and TWF

³⁸ J. H. Thomas, *My Story* (London, 1937), 66; E. L. Ellis, *T. J.: A Life of Dr Thomas Jones, CH* (Cardiff, 1992), 221.

³⁹ Blaxland, *op.cit.*, 154-5; Thomas, *op.cit.*, 67.

⁴⁰ Hodges, *Adventures*, 130-41; Patrick Renshaw, *The General Strike* (London, 1975), 84-5.

decided that they were not prepared to commit themselves to strike action in these circumstances and the Triple Alliance collapsed.⁴¹ The miners fought on, alone, to eventual defeat. The events of 'Black Friday' attained mythical status as 'a date of shame in the Labour movement, the day when the miners were betrayed by timid allies' as the historian A. J. P. Taylor characterised it. But for Taylor 'this was a romantic view. Black Friday marked rather a clash between two conceptions of union policy – the old outlook of class war, to be fought with the bull-headed obstinacy of the trenches, and a new unionism, aiming at compromise or even partnership'.⁴² Professor Hugh Clegg, the great historian of British trade unionism, believes that the miners were unrealistic in expecting their Triple Alliance allies to back them over the issue of the pool, when both their leadership and the MFGB EC had shown itself unenthusiastic over the issue. In his opinion only action in support of wages settlements on a district basis might have succeeded.⁴³ Certainly the MFGB was tactically naïve, after only rejecting Lloyd George's offer by a majority of one, to expect its allies to strike on its behalf when its demands caused so much division within its own ranks.

As for Hodges himself, he too was naïve and presumptuous in believing that he could, on his own initiative and without authorisation from his executive, find a satisfactory resolution to the crisis. His logic may have been correct in thinking that the objective of the profits pool was unattainable, but his spontaneity and the lack of any prior consultation, were fatally ill judged. However, there is no evidence that Hodges deliberately 'betrayed' his members, whatever was thought by his critics then or since.⁴⁴ Hodges himself stated a week after 'Black Friday' that 'if history ever writes a true record of what happened, and history says that Hodges erred, I think the historian would have to write that he erred in the interest of his members'. This historian is inclined to share that view.⁴⁵

The miners' strike of 1921 dragged on for three months. Towards the end Hodges recognised that defeat was unavoidable, acknowledging that the return to work would be an act of 'sheer desperation born of famine and hunger, when the will no longer controlled physical instincts', but that the union lead-

⁴¹ Jones, *Whitehall Diary Vol.1*, 8 April 1921: 140; Thomas, *op.cit.*, 68; Blaxland, *op.cit.*, 156; Renshaw, *op.cit.*, 86-7.

⁴² A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford, 1965), 146. For a similar comment see Renshaw, *op.cit.*, 88.

⁴³ Hugh Armstrong Clegg, *A History of British Trade Unions Since 1889: Volume 2: 1911-1933* (Oxford, 1985), 301-2.

⁴⁴ There were calls for his resignation from some areas, including the Western Valleys District and the Garw Valley. SWMF EC Minutes, 18 April 1921. *Glamorgan Gazette* 22 April 1921; SWMF Special Conference, 20 April 1921.

⁴⁵ MFGB Special Conference, 22 April 1921. Beatrice Webb believed that Hodges knew how reluctant Jimmy Thomas was to strike, and that he was therefore inclined 'to find a way out for the miners or, by being reasonable, to compel the Alliance to keep their word.' Beatrice Webb, *Diaries Vol.1*, 24 April 1921: 209

ership had to take responsibility for conceding, rather than allow, as he put it, 'this huge mass of the population to go on and on until breaking point comes, and chaos and disorder run where now discipline, good will and solidarity hold the field'. He also predicted the bitterness that followed the end of the dispute and soured industrial relations in the coal industry for a generation:

When we are through this the iron will have entered every miner's soul. He will know where to place the primary responsibility. It is the Government, and the Government alone, that is responsible for the unhappy pass to which we have been brought. I believe the miners, when this is over, will never again rest content until they have expressed their hostility, as effectively and as constitutionally as possible, towards this Government in their attempt to bring it down.⁴⁶

Hodges, along with Herbert Smith and James Robson of the Durham miners, played a critical role in bringing the dispute to an end by negotiating with Lloyd George at Chequers on 26 June, their action ironically being approved by their executive after the event.⁴⁷ Had the same executive approved Hodges's olive branch on 14 April the dispute might never have taken place and a much more favourable deal for their members secured, a point that was not lost on either Hodges or Herbert Smith.⁴⁸

Hodges continued to act as an effective Secretary of the MFGB after the 1921 dispute.⁴⁹ As late as Spring 1923 he was providing an optimistic assessment of the future for the South Wales miners in their *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, arguing for unity and for 100 percent membership, and still holding successful mass meetings in the area, despite some criticism from the left.⁵⁰ But his activities were not confined to the MFGB, as Hodges was simultaneously creating a favourable impression within the upper echelons of the Labour Party through his service on the National Executive Committee (NEC).⁵¹ Most prominently he articulated the NEC's opposition to the affilia-

⁴⁶ Raynes, *op.cit.*, 188; J. E. Williams, *The Derbyshire Miners: A Study in Industrial and Social History* (London, 1962), 662. Beatrice Webb, *Diaries* Vol.1, 27 June 1921: 211-12, felt that this was a 'dignified and sombre address', and noted that Hodges was already beginning to look to Parliament 'as the appropriate place for him to fight the miners' battle'.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.1, 27 June 1921: 162; Edwards, *op.cit.*, 122.

⁴⁸ Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 212; *idem*, *The Miners*, 318-20.

⁴⁹ Renshaw, *op.cit.*, 87, for instance, is wrong to think that Hodges's career as miners' leader was 'finished' after 'Black Friday'.

⁵⁰ 'A Message to the Welsh Miners', *Colliery Workers' Magazine* Vol.1 No.3 (March 1923), 53-4; see also *Colliery Workers' Magazine* Vol.1 No.2 (February 1923) and Edwards, *op.cit.*, 123-6.

⁵¹ He had already been first President of the Young Labour League in 1920, and in 1922 the NEC appealed to the MFGB to change its rules to allow Hodges to sit in Parliament whilst retaining the secretary's post. James Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain Volume 1: Formation and Early Years, 1919-1924* (London, 1969), 222-3; Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 222.

tion of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB or CP) at the Edinburgh conference in 1922, arguing that the CP 'had no use for political democracy' or for 'democratic institutions', as it believed instead 'in the dictatorship of a nucleus of people who were taken to represent the will of millions of others'. He went on to argue that the British Communists:

were the intellectual slaves of Moscow, unthinking, unheeding, accepting decrees and decisions without criticism or comment, taking orders from the Asiatic mind, taking the judgment of middle-class Russia – the residue of the old regime – not even the judgment of the plain Russian people, but the dictates and decrees of the same type of intellectuals whom they despised in this country.⁵²

Hodges has been subjected to much criticism, then and since, for these views. But it would be wrong to see them simply as a chauvinistic anti-Communist reflex. Instead, they were based on a sound appreciation of the attitudes towards parliamentary democracy held by the British Labour and Communist Parties respectively.⁵³ Even when expounding the strongest views in favour of 'direct action' he had believed that Britain could 'move through to the social revolution' only through 'constitutional channels'. Before 'Black Friday' in September 1919, when still enjoying a reputation as the 'Welsh Bolshevik' he had made himself clear on this point, stating 'I do not believe that with the characteristics of the British race, and with our traditions and institutions, a Soviet system of Government would ever become adaptable to our country'.⁵⁴ It is difficult to disagree.⁵⁵

At the 1923 General Election Hodges stood as Labour's parliamentary candidate for the Lichfield constituency in Staffordshire.⁵⁶ The retiring member, a Coalition Liberal, did not seek reelection, and the Liberals, having held the seat for twenty-seven years, were in such a state of division and disarray that

⁵² Report of the Twenty-Second Annual Conference of the Labour Party, Edinburgh, 1922, 198. See also his speech at the Twenty-Third Annual Conference of the Labour Party, London, 1923, 186-9, where he argued that the Communists should carry out their propaganda outside the Labour Party, 'openly and honourably'; Klugmann, *op.cit.*, 318-19.

⁵³ Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, 168.

⁵⁴ Gleason, *op.cit.*, 101, 124. This speech was at the TUC Congress, Glasgow, September 1919. He also opposed the proposal to affiliate the MFGB to the Red International of Labour Unions in 1922: Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 225.

⁵⁵ Hodges was increasingly active in the early 1920s outside the institutional channels of the British Labour movement. He became a governor of Birkbeck College, made trips abroad to visit the labour leaders of America and Canada, and developed a commitment to ideas of 'industrial welfare'. He was elected a fellow of both the Royal Statistical Society and the Royal Economic Society. See *Colliery Guardian*, 10 August 1928; Frank Hodges, *Industrial Welfare: Its Place in our National Life* (London, 1922); Tracey, *op.cit.*, 321; *Who Was Who, 1941-50*.

⁵⁶ He was sponsored by the Midland Miners' Federation. *Tamworth Herald*, 17 November 1923: Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 222.

their candidate lost his deposit as well as the seat. Hodges's main rival was a Conservative banker, Roy Wilson, brought in from Woking at the last moment.⁵⁷ Lichfield was a mining seat, but not a strong one. According to the 1921 census, thirty per cent of the male population was occupied in coalmining, but a substantial part of the remainder was in agriculture. Hodges received strong support from the miners of the Chase Terrace area, but the city of Lichfield itself was not sympathetic to Labour, being considered 'an unassailable fortress of Toryism'.⁵⁸ Nor did the Staffordshire miners enjoy a close working relationship with the local Labour Party. Nevertheless, Labour having come a close second to the Coalition Liberals in 1922 with 46.8 per cent of the vote, managed to raise this to 48.5 per cent and win the seat in 1923.⁵⁹

Hodges's success hastened a constitutional crisis within the MFGB. According to the union's rules, its permanent officials could not serve in Parliament. Although there was considerable sympathy from within the Federation for his position, and attempts were made to amend the regulations, by this stage there was sufficient antipathy towards Hodges, based on 'Black Friday' and his anti-communism, combined with a sincere belief that the secretary could not perform his duties adequately if also sitting in the Commons, to force his resignation. Hodges's successor was to be another Welsh-based West Countryman, Arthur James Cook, who was to lead the British miners from 1924 until his death in 1931.⁶⁰

Whatever his disappointment at losing the secretary's post, Hodges did not have long to grieve, as he was appointed Civil Lord of the Admiralty by Ramsay MacDonald in the first minority Labour Government of 1924. In this capacity, he had to deal with much routine business, but he also made three telling interventions in debates on more general issues. His maiden speech in the debate on the address provoked comparisons with the oratory of Winston Churchill and he spoke on the principle of a national minimum wage and on a private member's bill to nationalise the mines.⁶¹ Sidney Webb was later to consider Hodges a failure as a minister, arguing that he had failed to justify his appointment, 'quarrelling furiously' with his Parliamentary Secretary Charles

⁵⁷ *Lichfield Mercury*, 23 November 1923; *Tamworth Herald*, 24 November, 1 December 1923.

⁵⁸ *Lichfield Mercury*, 30 November, 7 December 1923, 2 May 1924.

⁵⁹ Duncan Tanner, 'The Labour Party and electoral politics in the coalfields', in Campbell, Fishman and Howell, *op.cit.*, 59-92: 66, 76, 80; *Lichfield Mercury* 14 December 1923. The result was:

Frank Hodges (Labour)	11029
Roy Wilson (Conservative)	9010
T. E. Morris (Liberal)	2683

⁶⁰ Ironically, Hodges had spoken in favour of the rule when it was introduced in 1918. MFGB Special Conference, 20-22 August 1918; MFGB Annual Conference, 10 July 1923; MFGB Special Conference, 14 December 1923; *Lichfield Mercury*, 21 December 1923, 11 January 1924.

⁶¹ Parliamentary Debates, 17 January, 4 March, 16 May 1924; *Lichfield Mercury*, 25 January 1924; *Tamworth Herald*, 26 January, 8 March 1924.

Ammon, being unable to get on with the First Lord, Lord Chelmsford, failing to 'get the hang' of his administrative duties, speaking seldom in the House of Commons and not doing much outside it. Hodges was almost certainly disappointed by not getting into the Cabinet and by then being appointed to a post in which he had virtually no interest. At a meeting at Lichfield he remarked to much amusement that if he had 'pictured in one's mind the kind of office one would have liked to have filled, that of Civil Lord of the Admiralty would have been the last'. The Webbs apparently pleaded for him to be given the transport brief 'owing to his general capacity and interest in electricity' but MacDonald and Jimmy Thomas believed that although he had the brain he had not the standing. There was also some speculation that he might have been made Air Minister.⁶² It was Philip Snowden's opinion that Hodges was in the Commons for too short a time to impress, and that it had been a mistake to give him a minor post 'which afforded him no opportunity for his capacity and for which he had no affection'.⁶³

Hodges was in the Commons for too short a time owing to his being defeated in the General Election of 1924. Whereas in 1923 Hodges had benefited from the disorganisation of both opposing parties, as well as from a favourable national swing towards Labour, in 1924 the swing was against and he had to face just one opponent who could expect to muster not only Conservative but many Liberal votes as well.⁶⁴ Hodges increased his total poll, but 46.2 per cent of the vote was not enough to retain the seat, so Hodges was out of Parliament and, temporarily at least, unemployed.⁶⁵

Once more, any idleness did not last long, as in May 1925 Hodges was appointed Secretary of the International Miners' Federation. Hodges had occasionally performed this role since 1920, in an honorary capacity, but henceforth this was to be a permanent, salaried post, based in London.⁶⁶ The International Federation had nearly two million affiliated members, spanning

⁶² Sidney Webb, 'The First Labour Government', *Political Quarterly* 32 (1961), 6-44: 16. The *Colliery Guardian* (13 June 1947) considered Hodges's parliamentary career 'short and undistinguished'; Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.1, 20 March 1924: 273. Hodges was reportedly unpopular with his colleagues, who were jealous of him and critical of what was felt to be his vanity and his liking for 'the comforts of this world'. See Blaxland, *op.cit.*, 166; *Lichfield Mercury*, 28 December 1923; Beatrice Webb, *Diaries* Vol.1, 15 January 1924: 261; *Tamworth Herald*, 3 May 1924.

⁶³ *Porth Gazette*, 14 March 1925.

⁶⁴ *Lichfield Mercury*, 17, 24 October 1924.

⁶⁵ *Lichfield Mercury*, 31 October 1924. The result was:

Roy Wilson (Conservative)	14588
Frank Hodges (Labour)	12512

⁶⁶ Hodges, *Adventures*, 97-102; MFGB EC Minutes, 23 January 1925; *Western Mail*, 30 April 1925; *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.3 No.6 (June 1925). Some MFGB militants had doubts about the wisdom of appointing him, and made an attempt to cancel the nomination. See MFGB Special Conference, 27 February 1925; *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.3 No.5 (May 1925).

fourteen countries, but was dominated by the British, American and German miners, who together represented four-fifths of the total membership.⁶⁷ Initially the signs were good: most European miners' leaders were sympathetic to someone by this stage seen as a moderate and, speaking at the MFGB conference in 1925, Hodges gave a much-praised overview of the challenges facing the coal industry across the world.⁶⁸ He was by this time arguing that the industry, in Britain more than anywhere else, needed a period of prolonged industrial peace, 'which will enable us to get down to the real economic facts and make the necessary readjustments in our industry', in order to regain a measure of stability and prosperity. He advocated a five-point plan, involving a national minimum wage, a three-year no-strike agreement, profit-sharing, compulsory arbitration, and compulsory trade union membership. In addition, he argued for more research into the development of coal by-products and greater rationalisation, particularly in selling and distribution, as ways of responding to a shrinking market for coal and fierce international competition.⁶⁹ Unfortunately for Hodges and perhaps unfortunately for the British miners as well, these innovatory and conciliatory ideas were out of step with the hard-line stance adopted by Arthur Cook and Herbert Smith and Hodges was publicly criticised by Cook for his suggestions. But Hodges refused to remain silent and by the beginning of the dramatic year of 1926, he represented a rallying point for those who opposed official MFGB policy.⁷⁰ As the deadline of 1 May approached, with its seemingly inevitable lock-out, Hodges suggested that it would be better for the miners to accept a temporary lengthening of their shift of up to half an hour rather than be forced to take a cut in wages.⁷¹ He argued that 'neither a strike nor a lock-out can change the inexorable economic facts of the situation' and either would only leave the industry in a far worse position than it already was, given the readiness of international competitors to step into traditional British coal markets.⁷² Such statements, as well as the evidence he gave before the Samuel Commission, was heavily criticised by the

⁶⁷ MFGB EC Minutes, 23 January 1925.

⁶⁸ Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 248; *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.3 No.8 (August 1925); *Western Mail*, 27 February 1925.

⁶⁹ *Western Mail*, 26 February 1925. Hodges's ideas for the creation of a national coal selling agency to fix prices and eliminate wasteful competition between British producers in the international market was similar to proposals later made by Sir Alfred Mond. See Isador Lubin and Helen Everett. *The British Coal Dilemma* (New York, 1927), 298; Williams, *op.cit.*, 555-6; Jones, *Whitehall Diary Vol.2*, 101 (13 May 1927).

⁷⁰ Alan R. Griffin, *The Miners of Nottinghamshire 1914-1944: A History of the Nottinghamshire Miners' Unions* (London, 1962), 135, 164; Williams, *op.cit.*, 555. The rift between the two men became a matter of press speculation: see *Western Mail*, 28 February, 2 March 1925; *Weekly Dispatch*, 1 March 1925.

⁷¹ *Western Mail*, 10, 12 April 1926; A. R. Griffin and C. P. Griffin, 'The Non-Political Trade Union Movement', in Asa Briggs and John Saville (eds), *Essays in Labour History 1918-1939* (London, 1977), 133-62.

⁷² *Western Mail*, 26 April 1926.

MFGB leadership, whom Hodges in turn accused of a 'noticeable disposition to fly-away from economic facts', arguing that the MFGB had to concede some ground to find a settlement.⁷³ He asked the following question:

Assume for a moment that the formula 'not a penny off the pay and not a minute on the day' were eventually conceded. Would that be victory? It would be a victory for some men, a minority of men working in the best districts, or even the best miners within those districts. But what of the vast army of men also members of the federation who might be sacrificed to permanent unemployment? . . . A settlement should be one which should embrace the largest possible number of pits and men . . .⁷⁴

Such uncompromising public statements led to accusations of sabotage and calls for Hodges's resignation.⁷⁵ Yet behind the scenes he worked for conciliation, meeting with Thomas Jones in April and, along with Vernon Hartshorn, Seebohm Rowntree's private secretary in June, in attempts to find a way out of the conflict.⁷⁶ When one was not forthcoming, he called for district settlements to be reached, believing that a national settlement was impossible and that the alternative was 'unauthorised pit settlements', of the sort, in fact, soon to be attempted by his old syndicalist friend and militant adversary, Noah Ablett in Merthyr Tydfil.⁷⁷ The miners' leaders, he felt, needed to get 'the best possible terms for the men, not what we would like to get, not our ideal agreement, but the very maximum which the industry, plus able negotiations, can now yield'.⁷⁸

Looked at in the abstract, Hodges may be seen as a voice of reason at a time of great crisis. Yet, if it is difficult to feel comfortable with the fact that he publicly broke ranks with the MFGB during the dispute, a consideration of his role as a supporter of the non-political trade union movement raises additional awkward questions. Hodges certainly enjoyed a flirtation with both the Spencer Union in Nottinghamshire and the South Wales Miners' Industrial

⁷³ *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.4 No.6 (June 1926); Williams, *op.cit.*, 555, 709. Hodges approved of the recommendations of the Samuel Report (Christopher Farman, *The General Strike, May 1926* (London, 1972), 66).

⁷⁴ *Western Mail*, 29 May 1926.

⁷⁵ *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.4 No.10 (October 1926): SWMF Special Conference 5 October 1926 unanimously carried such a resolution. See also *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.5 No.2 (February 1927). A. J. Cook was reported as saying that Hodges's name stank 'in the nostrils of honest men' (Williams, *op.cit.*, 722). James Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain Volume 2: The General Strike, 1925-1926* (London, 1969), 244.

⁷⁶ Thomas Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.2, ed. K. Middlemas (Oxford, 1971), 15 April 1926: 58; Davies, *op.cit.*, 194; Farman, *op.cit.*, 248-9.

⁷⁷ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1980), 66.

⁷⁸ Griffin and Griffin, *op.cit.*, 139-40.

Union (MIU). He gave public support to the Derbyshire miners' leader Thomas Spencer, and to Nottinghamshire's George Spencer, lambasting Arthur Cook and Herbert Smith for their incompetent leadership in the process and he was present at a dinner along with representatives of the Spencer Union and Havelock Wilson's National Union of Seamen in July 1927.⁷⁹ Supporters of the non-political unions thought of him as a potential leader, as 'the ablest man in the miners' movement' and he received a number of invitations to become President of the MIU and of the British-wide Federation of Miners' Industrial Unions.⁸⁰ The coalowner Sir Samuel Instone welcomed the possibility of Hodges taking up such a role in mining trade unionism once more, noting that he 'enjoys the confidence of owners and men alike'.⁸¹

Given the demonology of the non-political trade union movement in the history of the South Wales coalfield, it might be thought that Hodges's association with it leaves an indelible stain on his character. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the real situation, both at the time and in the memory of South Wales miners themselves, was rather more complex than the conventional Manichean images allow. Today we are meeting in an institute building, upon whose 1916 foundation stone the name of a certain Harry Blount is engraved. As Alun Burge has pointed out, in the history of the institute that its members produced after the Second World War, Blount's contribution was given pride of place, being described as 'having the perpetual remembrance of the workmen'. This same Harry Blount was a prominent member of the MIU at Nine Mile Point colliery at Cwmfelinfach between 1931 and 1934. To be a 'scab unionist' did not necessarily result in lifelong estrangement or condemnation.⁸²

In any case, Hodges did no more than give encouragement from the sidelines and even then only in the first year of the MIU's existence. Rather than continue to be embroiled in the bitter, internecine warfare of the trade union world, he was preparing to leave it for a new career in industry and public service. In 1927 he was appointed to the Central Electricity Generating Board, chaired by former Coal Controller Sir Andrew Duncan, on which Hodges rubbed shoulders with Directors of the Bank of England and of Lloyds Bank.⁸³ This appointment led directly to his resignation as Secretary of the International Miners' Federation and to the termination of his formal links with the British labour movement, Hodges stating that 'he wanted to have liberty and thought

⁷⁹ Griffin, *op.cit.*, 223; Williams, *op.cit.*, 710; Griffin and Griffin, *op.cit.*, 140-1.

⁸⁰ *Merthyr Express*, 18 June, 2 July 1927; *South Wales News*, 20 June 1927; *Western Mail*, 8 July 1927.

⁸¹ Francis and Smith, *op.cit.*, 139-40.

⁸² Alun Burge, 'In Search of Harry Blount: Scabbing Between the Wars in one South Wales Community', *Llafur* Vol.6 No.3 (1994), 58-69.

⁸³ PRO 30/69/1172/1: letter to Ramsay MacDonald from Frank Hodges, 15 January 1927; *The Times*, 2 February 1927.

of action'.⁸⁴ *The Times* felt he had been driven out by 'an unreasoning militancy' and that, having been 'assailed with personal venom and bitterness' by Arthur Cook, his position had been made intolerable.⁸⁵ There was an element of truth in this, but Hodges's inability to disguise or moderate his lack of sympathy with the direction the labour movement had taken had not helped.⁸⁶

The last phase of Hodges's life is the one about which we know least. He remained publicly active, sitting on the Blanesburgh Committee on Unemployment Insurance, on the Industrial Court and acting as Vice-Chairman of the National Fuel and Power Committee. He was friendly with the Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin.⁸⁷ Later, in the 1930s, he acted as an adviser on special areas policy. However, most of his energies were invested in business. In the classic action of a 'poacher turned gamekeeper' he joined the board of L and N Coal Distillation Company, became a director of New Lount and New Rockwood collieries in Leicestershire and Chairman and Managing Director of Leicestershire Colliery and Pipe Company Ltd.. He was a director of many other companies: the Securities Management Trust Ltd. (a subsidiary of the Bank of England), National Combustion Engines, International Combustion Ltd., William Beardmore and Company Ltd., Granville Shipbuilders, Co-Operative Printers, the Glasgow Iron and Steel Company, the Lancashire Cotton Corporation, the Newbold Brick Company Ltd. and Motherwell Brick Company Ltd..⁸⁸ Although living most of the time in Leicestershire, he maintained a London address and membership of various London clubs including the Bath and the Royal Automobile. Occasionally he attracted press attention by commenting on the coal industry, appealing in February 1928 for greater co-operation between employers and unions for the 'common good' and remaining critical of 'those leaders of the miners whose only contribution to the industry has been devastating and destructive criticism'.⁸⁹ In his own collieries he developed a sound reputation as an employer and was judged to have 'marked vision and business capacity' in his colliery concerns.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ *The Times*, 1 June 1927; *Colliery Workers' Magazine*, Vol.V No.6 (June 1927); MFGB EC minutes, 3 March 1927, 13 April 1927; MFGB Special Conference, 2 June 1927.

⁸⁵ *The Times*, 2 June 1927.

⁸⁶ PRO 30/69/1172/1 includes a letter to Ramsay MacDonald from Arthur Henderson, dated 29 November 1927, reporting that Hodges had been touring Denmark speaking very critically of the MFGB's policy during 1926, and praising the Liberal Party's land programme. Apparently Hodges had 'kept exclusively to the company of the employers' and capitalists' representatives', travelling with Charles Hansen, the Anglo-Danish bacon manager, in what was manifestly one of his rasher actions.

⁸⁷ Keith Middlemas and John Barnes, *Baldwin: A Biography* (London, 1969), 381, 383; Cowling, *op.cit.*, 424; Robert Rhodes James, *Memoirs of a Conservative: J. C. C. Davidson's Memoirs and Papers, 1910-37* (London, 1969), 186; Renshaw, *op.cit.*, 129.

⁸⁸ *The Times*, 27 June 1927; *Western Mail*, 4 June 1947; *Burton Daily Mail*, 4 June 1947; *Burton Chronicle*, 5 June 1947.

⁸⁹ *Leicester Mercury*, 4 June 1947; Raynes, *op.cit.*, 285; *Colliery Guardian*, 19 January 1945.

⁹⁰ *Colliery Guardian*, 13 June 1947.

In the late 1930s, Hodges developed interests beyond industry and finance. Always having had an affection for the agricultural life of his family origins, in 1936 he bought a three hundred acre dairy farm in Leicestershire and took the tenancy of another farm nearby. He became noted for his modern methods of farming, was active in the National Farmers' Union and, during the Second World War, was visited by the Minister of Agriculture who was interested to study the methods he used.⁹¹

By the time Frank Hodges died from 'heart trouble', at the age of sixty, he was living at Rotherwood House, Ashby-De-La-Zouch, Leicestershire. He had been ill for two years, and seriously ill for about eight weeks. He passed away at a convalescent home in Ruthin, Denbighshire, on the morning of Tuesday 3 June 1947, leaving his widow, daughter and a granddaughter. He was cremated a few days later at Groby Road cemetery, Leicester. Local magistrates paid tribute to 'a man of great attainments and outstanding personality'. He left a substantial fortune of £132,959.⁹²

Hodges's death was the occasion for substantial obituaries in some national papers and journals. The *Colliery Guardian* devoted an editorial to his 'remarkable career', which was held to throw 'a vivid light upon the turbulent issues that distorted the British coal mining industry between the wars'.⁹³ The *Western Mail* felt that his life was, in itself, 'a refutation of the theory that born agitators are incapable of developing business capacity' and compared him with Vernon Hartshorn and William Brace for effectiveness in 'sober, logical argument and logical effectiveness'. As an employer the *Western Mail* found him 'a model ... in all the great concerns and undertakings with which he became connected' and felt that he had been able to be more 'constructive' in the business world than he could have been had he continued as a trade unionist.⁹⁴

Subsequent judgments, from the opposite end of the political spectrum, have not been so generous. The view of one of his contemporaries, MFGB Treasurer W. P. Richardson, given on the occasion of Hodges's resignation from the International Miners' Federation in 1927, is worth citing because it encapsulates a view echoed by many later commentators:

... with all his ability Mr. Hodges has to thank the Welsh miners and the British miners for giving him his chance in life, and they had a right to expect a proper return, but he became so absorbed with his own importance that he forgot the people who helped to make it possible for him to use his abilities and succeeded to a point when he failed to remember the class from which he sprang.⁹⁵

⁹¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 4 June 1947; *Burton Chronicle*, 5, 19 June 1947.

⁹² *Western Mail*, 4 June 1947; *The Times*, 5 June 1947; *Leicester Mercury*, 5 June 1947; *Burton Chronicle*, 5, 12 June 1947.

⁹³ *Colliery Guardian*, 13 June 1947.

⁹⁴ *Western Mail*, 5 June 1947.

⁹⁵ MFGB Special Conference, 2 June 1927.

Some writers convey the impression that Hodges was almost predestined to 'betray' the labour movement, but others have judged such a perspective unfair.⁹⁶ A. J. P. Taylor felt that Hodges had been wrongly and retrospectively blamed for 'Black Friday', largely as a result of 'his making in other circles'.⁹⁷ Charles Loch Mowat, another great historian of the inter-war period, came to a similar conclusion, seeing Hodges's turn away from the Labour movement as the result of his experiences over 'Black Friday' rather than as proof of his 'long-concealed original sin'.⁹⁸

Critics have also seized on Hodges's 'lifestyle' as further evidence of his essentially flawed character, arguing that he had too much of an eye for making money, and a taste for the 'flesh pots'.⁹⁹ According to Alf Palfreman, interviewed by Robin Page Arnot in 1963, Hodges once spoke to an ILP meeting in Ogmore Vale on the 'Life of Karl Marx'. Afterwards, asked what his expenses were, he replied 'Give me three pounds and I will be satisfied'. Palfreman's response was 'Three pounds! You have this evening been telling us about the sacrifices endured by Karl Marx and his family and yet, with an Agent's salary, you come and ask us for three pounds!'¹⁰⁰ Hodges was believed to have 'very rich friends among the aristocracy', with whom he enjoyed shooting and fishing.¹⁰¹ During the 1921 dispute, he was said to have 'been reckless in enjoying luxuries' and to have appeared in Lord Howard de Walden's box at the Derby.¹⁰² Apparently his 'well-cut blue suit and silk handkerchief' at the Labour Party conference in Edinburgh in 1922 'aroused disgust among ILP delegates', and his much-publicised golfing match involving the Duke of York, the future King George VI, at Ton Pentre in the Rhondda Valleys, was unlikely to have enhanced his reputation amongst militants.¹⁰³

Hodges was not alone amongst labour movement figures in enjoying the benefits of 'conspicuous consumption' and, had he remained within the

⁹⁶ Craik, *op.cit.*; Page Arnot interview; Harold M. Watkins, *Coal and Men: An Economic and Social Study of the British and American Coalfields* (London, 1934), 225.

⁹⁷ Taylor, *op.cit.*, 240.

⁹⁸ Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940* (London, 1955), 123.

⁹⁹ Cowling, *op.cit.*, 33.

¹⁰⁰ Robin Page Arnot papers, South Wales Coalfield Archive (Swansea), notes of interview with Alf Palfreman, 23 May 1963.

¹⁰¹ W. H. Williams, Oral History Transcript, South Wales Miners Library (Swansea). Interview conducted by Richard Lewis and Hywel Francis, dated 21 November 1972, 7. See also Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.1, 20 March 1924: 273.

¹⁰² Cowling, *op.cit.*, 424.

¹⁰³ John Paton, cited in Kenneth O. Morgan, *Consensus and Disunity: The Lloyd George Coalition Government 1918-22* (Oxford, 1979), 235; *Lichfield Mercury*, 9, 23 May 1924; *Tamworth Herald*, 24, 31 May 1924. Apparently the Duke was asked to judge a canary show, preside at a whippet race and witness the display of a professional contortionist during lunch on the day. The Duke visited Tamworth later that month to open the War Memorial, *Lichfield Mercury* 30 May 1924. There was criticism in the *Lichfield Mercury* 24 October 1924 by a 'Chase Terrace Miner' of Hodges's opulent lifestyle and his 'blowing of his own trumpet'.

movement, it is unlikely that his reputation would have suffered from so much criticism on this account. It is interesting to speculate that Hodges may have been influenced by the 'hedonist Marxism' (as Leszek Kolakowski put it) of Paul Lafargue, who had written in his 1883 work *Le Droit à la paresse* (The Right to be Lazy) that under socialism:

The working class, like the bourgeoisie before it, will have to curb its taste for asceticism and develop its aptitude for consumption. Instead of the workers getting, at best, a small bit of tough meat every day, they will eat large juicy steaks. Instead of inferior wine mixed with water they will drink bumpers of fine claret and burgundy; water will be the drink of animals.¹⁰⁴

It is evident, comparing the careers of Frank Hodges and his successor Arthur Cook, that the Labour movement and its historians have been able to forgive ineptitude, but not heresy. There is little doubt as to who was the more able man. In the opinion of Thomas Jones, Cook was a 'poor replacement' for Hodges.¹⁰⁵ The *Colliery Guardian* praised Hodges as having a cool head, rather than the 'erratic qualities of the heart' of his successor.¹⁰⁶ Lloyd George likened Hodges to a 'Chancellor of the Exchequer'.¹⁰⁷ Jimmy Thomas felt him to be 'one of the intellectuals . . . in sheer ability, he was one of the ablest men in the ranks of the miners' although at the same time, Thomas argued, he was 'much too sensitive of nature to withstand the turmoil of political battle'.¹⁰⁸ And if these opinions do not seem to come from wholly reliable sources, it is worth taking account of the views of the Communist Party member and miners' historian Robin Page Arnot, interviewed by Hywel Francis in 1973. Page Arnot praised Hodges in almost unreserved terms as exceptionally 'clever, able and accomplished', who could manage to 'very rapidly pick up every subject'. He considered Hodges 'a born Queen's Counsel', the most talented of all South Wales miners' leaders from Noah Ablett all the way through to Will Paynter, evincing 'a brilliance quite exceptional'.¹⁰⁹

Frank Hodges then, was something of a flawed genius. He was one of the most far-sighted men in the miners' union, perhaps in the Labour movement. As early as 1920, at a time when coal was indisputably still 'king', he

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution. Volume 2: The Golden Age* (Oxford, 1978), 147. There is an echo of this idea in Hodges's own view, expressed at the end of the Great War, that 'work in the modern industrial world is unpleasant for the majority of workers. They will find their expression as human beings outside the working hours – in the use of leisure for family life, education, recreation, a hobby': Gleason, *op.cit.*, 182.

¹⁰⁵ Ellis, *op.cit.*, 282; Farman, *op.cit.*, 72.

¹⁰⁶ *Colliery Guardian*, 13 June 1947.

¹⁰⁷ Jones, *Whitehall Diary* Vol.1, 9 November 1921: 177.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, *op.cit.*, 65.

¹⁰⁹ R. Page Arnot, London, interviewed by Hywel Francis, 6 March 1973 (SWML). See also Page Arnot, *The Miners*, 342-3.

suggested that oil presented a serious threat to the mining industry's long-term future and that 'it might hasten out the coal era in a shorter period than we are prepared to admit'. He advocated industrial co-operation between workers and employers, with the miners taking and shouldering responsibility for critical decisions. In 1924 he could see that 'belligerency', on both sides of the capital/labour equation, was taking the place of 'reason and calm judgement' and that there was a need for compromise.¹¹⁰ And yet, at least while he remained a miners' leader, he continued to believe in the long-term objective of the nationalisation of the industry, an objective that would need patience and careful educative propaganda to convince the general public of its desirability.¹¹¹ His understanding of the economics of coal, his desire to find solutions that would satisfy all parties and the respect he commanded amongst colleagues, adversaries and neutral observers, suggest that he would have been a far more effective leader of the British miners than Arthur Cook ever was, for all the latter's inspirational courage and passion. Had Hodges patiently kept his own counsel during 1925 and 1926, had he given unambiguous support to the MFGB at that time, whatever his private doubts as to the wisdom of its tactics, then subsequently his views may have been not only proven, but publicly acknowledged, as correct. Hodges, perhaps too headstrong, too conceited, perhaps caring too much about the fate of the industry and those dependent on it to sit back and say nothing, intervened, and sealed his own fate with the British labour movement. But as his local newspaper the *Burton Chronicle* put it upon his death, he was 'a remarkable man who spoke his mind whether it pleased or offended'.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Frank Hodges, 'Workers' Control', in Gleason, *op.cit.*, 170-83, 170; idem, *Nationalisation of the Mines*, 81-3; MFGB Annual Conference, 10 July 1918; *Western Mail*, 8 December 1924.

¹¹¹ *Porth Gazette*, 25 December 1920, 5 March 1921.

¹¹² *Burton Chronicle*, 19 June 1947.