

Eighteen.

Afterwards, when things had had a chance to settle down and order had been restored, it was considered that the destruction of Pitmungo - given what it led to - had been something of a mistake.

The obliteration of the community had not been the initial choice of the authorities, of course. At first, they were prepared to negotiate within limits that, in the circumstances, might have been thought reasonable. A conference of the legal and security authorities was convened the day following the seizure of the village and its pit, and debate raged until late in the afternoon.

All appropriate agencies were represented: the police in the shape of the local Chief Constable, someone from the Lord Advocate's department, special advisers from the Home Office, men from the industrial ministry in London, senior liaison chaps from the various security services, responsible elements from the official miners' staff association, as recently reformed, men from the Specials riot-police, the Auxiliary industrial police, the motorised Paramilitaries, and three very stern chaps from the air-support wing of the Militia. There was even a fellow from the intelligence liaison department of the Protectorate Council itself, which was a very serious matter indeed.

A number of possibilities was aired. Someone thought that an emissary might ask the miners and their families to come to their senses and return to work. Should they do so, then the penalties would be as light as possible. But penalties there would, of course, have to be. The miners, after all, had tried a Militia officer and then hanged him in cold blood. Naturally, there would have to be arrests for the murder of the other Militia personnel who had died in the

fighting for the village: and, under existing legislation, such arrests would include group and family hostages. In the circumstances, little else could be expected. And of course the agitators who had led the rising would have to be handed over, as their conduct had quite clearly been in breach of the law of the land. This approach was very nearly accepted by the meeting, too.

But then the chap from the Protectorate Council (who had flown from London that morning by special aircraft) proposed that sterner measures be taken. Industrial discontent, he announced, might be acceptable at the cost of a few executions and a few families taken as hostages into protective custody. But he understood that the events in Pitmungo had been characterised by an illegal and rebellious form of workers' organisation. These counter-revolutionaries - and at this point he smashed a fist on the Chief Constable's oak table - had declared a miners' republic in Pitmungo, and had challenged the power and authority of the government. Worse, he understood that they had sent agitators to the rest of the coalfield, asking for support and calling on working people to rise and challenge the state!

This - the chap from the Protectorate Council was screaming with rage now - this was intolerable, and had to be crushed at once, for miners in combination were extremely dangerous, and knew only one language. And that was why he had ordered that by dusk that very day a battalion of Mongol assault grenadiers would surround Pitmungo and remove it from the face of the earth. Were there any questions?

There was at this a prolonged silence. The senior man from the Miltia looked for a moment as if he might protest, and ask why his own men were not to be sent in: but a warning look from the

Chief Constable silenced him. The chap from the Lord Advocate's department - a senior lawyer, skilled in the application of the law in difficult circumstances - said nothing whatsoever.

Were there any questions?

That evening was a peaceful one in Pitmungo. It had snowed lightly during the day, but by teatime the snow had stopped and the surrounding hills were white and bright in something of an early and orange half-moon. Some of the leading delegates to the workers' council were closeted with a number of the representatives who had come from the surrounding pit villages to discuss the programme of reform which was shortly to be presented to the authorities - the Pitmungo Charter, as it was already known. Meeting in the miners' welfare and union building, the men listened to the early evening news on the radio they had taken from the Militia buildings, before returning to their discussions. Mining industry officials in Scotland, the radio said, were preparing a thoroughgoing programme of reform related to work norms and face-worker dietary requirements. The arrest of an entire stratum of middle management was imminent.

One of the younger men cried, 'We've won!'

Someone else said, 'Don't count on it, son'.

Then they listened to the rest of the news, though it had nothing to do with events in Pitmungo. Police were still hunting the survivors of a drinking party in Glasgow, which had left eight dead in the city's Blackhill district. A Fleetwood trawler had run aground near the Butt of Lewis, but her crew had been rescued by breeches-buoy. And the fresh meat ration, on account of isolated incidents of sabotage in the farming districts, was to be reduced from the value of one shilling to the value of tenpence: although an extra

tuppence's worth of corned beef would be granted to industrial workers nominated by their managers for especially meritorious effort. And more heavy snow was expected across the entire country within hours.

At seven o'clock, a pair of trucks which had been earlier sent to Cupar to demand food for the village returned. The drivers reported that the authorities in Cupar had been helpful and co-operative, and there was much discussion of the new conditions imminent in the industry. There was even loose talk of a four day week just as soon as tension had eased in the international situation! In line with the demands of the Pitmungo Charter, there were also to be vastly increased safety standards down the pit, as well as the abolition of piece-work and the recognition of independent regional unions.

By way of celebration of this great news, staff at Cupar's regional nutrition depot had been empowered to grant to the residents of Pitmungo a full recognition of their dietary requirements and aspirations. As a result, the trucks were emptied of sacks and crates of potatoes, salted fish, turnip, barley, pickled cabbage in brine and wheat flour adulterated with maize. There was even a generous ration of coarse sea-salt - though salt was never distributed in mining districts, for fear that it might be hoarded. The fresh-meat and corned-beef entitlement was also met in full.

But on this occasion of goodwill, there was much else to be had in Cupar that day. Three sides of bacon were offered and taken, along with six cases of jugged hares. Twenty eight legs of fresh lamb were also presented, with the compliments of the directorate of the mining industry. There were eggs too, reckoned at two per head of Pitmungo's population, and full-cream milk in

farmers' churns, and slabs of bright yellow butter wrapped in muslin: even a tub of cane-sugar - 'for baking cakes', as one of the officials helpfully explained. There were also six open crates of rich tomatoes, gunny sacks of carrots with the fresh earth still on them, three cases of tinned oranges - and even a box of pineapples, at which the miners and their wives stared with dim suspicion.

And then there were gifts for the women and children of Pitmungo - as a gesture of reconciliation. The officials shyly handed over a consignment of rubber shoes in various sizes, along with some modest amounts of American lipstick: and three hundred pairs of nylon stockings, still in their New York sweathouse wrappings. For the kiddies there were some paper hats and chocolate bars, sticks of chewing gum, crayons, picture-books, and fifty presentation-boxes of candied fruits.

And then the alcohol: which came in the shape of three timber-staved casks of liquor with which the honest folk of Pitmungo might toast their modest victory. One of the older miners could read what was stamped on these casks. They contained, he announced to general amazement, extra-strong vodka from the Soviet Navy, of the sort they issued to their sailors before they went into battle, and in quantity equivalent to 900 bottles: or to be rather more precise, one or two bottles of extra-strong vodka for each man, woman and child in the village of Pitmungo.

As a result of this munificence, the community was very soundly asleep by five o'clock the following morning: and it was at this point that the battalion of Mongol grenadiers, which had been flown direct from the Donbas coalfield the previous day, went into action.

By five, they had occupied the hills around Pitmungo, and encircled it so tightly that nothing could hope to escape. At first, they dropped incendiary devices from portable infantry-mortars down into the village: and when it was satisfactorily on fire and children in nightclothes ran screaming in its wynds and closes, they illuminated the scene with incandescent flares which drifted lazily down from the night sky on parachutes. By the aid of these, concentrations of target material were easily identified: at which point fragmentation grenades were lobbed into their midst. Then the machine-gun crews in camouflage white dashed forward from west and south, and destroyed such as could be destroyed with facility: and when they were called to rest, some of their fellows went into the village with flame-throwers and herded such survivors as they could find towards the marshalling yards and pit-head installations at its northern end: at which the machine-guns and mortars recommenced their work.

Soon, little remained to be done but clearing operations with the bayonet, and the snow in Pitmungo's modest wynds was quickly stained and veined in blood. Once, someone screamed for a minute at the north end of the village: a terrible endless howl of terror - but it was silenced at length. Then a very young child began to scream too, from somewhere in the wynds: but a great gale of brutal laughter obscured this cry, and when the laughter ceased, so too had the cry of the child.

By then, it was nearly dawn, and a unit of engineers was called forward to flood the pit and begin dismantling the pit-head installations and removing the railway tracks with medium cutting-gear. As these engineers went to work, the headlights were to be seen of a convoy making its way to the village. It consisted of open-

backed trucks, military bulldozers on low-loaders, and two self-propelled wrecking-cranes.

By noon all that could be killed had been killed and all that could burn had been burnt in Pitmungo. As soon as the fires began to cool the wreckers and dozers tumbled the ruins, and the trucks - another dozen had already arrived - began to remove the rubble. In three days it had gone, and there was no sign left that this little hollow in the hills had - till so recently - been home to a community which had mined coal there since the Middle Ages.

It was all gone. In the Fife coalfield, the children of every fifth family were taken away - some people said to special schools on the Baltic coast - as token of the continuing good behaviour of their community. In the rest of Scotland, the children of every twentieth mining family were taken away, as similar token of good faith. There was no need for the Lord Advocate to involve himself, or his officers, as there was no one to appear before their courts. The good social order of the second Protectorate had been restored in Pitmungo, and the coalfields of eastern Scotland in general. And that was the end of the matter.

Or it might have been, if the news of Pitmungo's destruction had not been broadcast on the BBC, which reported that a vicious minority of local agitators and saboteurs had burned down their own village. These reports were picked-up with interest by an American radio station based in Galway, on the western coast of Ireland. They were investigated, and then re-broadcast in a manner that did some justice to the facts. In particular, the station in Galway took care to broadcast full details of the Pitmungo Charter.

Despite the jamming of frequencies and the penalties for listening to the stations which broadcast on them, these reports

were widely heard and widely discussed. And the results were nearly instantaneous.

Within days, a bloody strike was spreading in the Scottish pits, following street demonstrations and violent picketing in Lanarkshire. Almost at once the trouble spread south, first to Yorkshire and Durham and Wales, and then to Kent, where the principal leaders were old men blacklisted in Wales twenty years earlier. In each location, the trouble began with the painting of slogans, at night, in support of the Pitmungo Charter. Other slogans - which at first seemed to make no sense - called for a Grand National Holiday. Then shifts began to leave the pits during working hours and parade in the streets, shouting slogans of an increasingly political nature. In some places, neither the police nor the Paramilitaries were prepared to intervene.

Then the strike-wave began to roll, and with it the violent occupation of pit-head installations. Some villages were seized in their entirety, and miners armed with crowbars patrolled the streets, or erected roadblocks at those points where incoming traffic could be expected. Soon, picketing began of other industrial plants, followed very quickly by rioting, by the trial of Militia and Paramilitary troopers by popular courts, and by sabotage on an increasingly extensive scale. In many places, monuments were erected in memory of the Pitmungo Martyrs, as those who had fallen in the village quickly became known. When the security forces attempted to intervene and destroy these monuments, serious violence followed. In some districts even, the miners quickly had access to illegal printing presses: and there were rumours that preparations were under way to establish an all-counties Popular Guard.

Within a week, a national council of free miners was demanding independent unions and free elections. It also demanded the disbandment of the Militia and Paramilitaries and all other agencies of state security; and proposed a Triple Alliance of steel, rail and coal workers in the cause of promoting these demands. Above all, it called for an immediate general strike - known in some districts as a Grand National Holiday - as a means of forcing their implementation.

For some days, the authorities wavered. A State Commission was promised into conditions in the mining industry. Some Members of Parliament prepared to tour the disaffected areas on fact-finding missions. Expressions of sympathy were widespread. Officially responsible persons called for calm, mutual understanding and a period of quiet reflection. The BBC was silent. The newspapers equivocated. For some days, it seemed that the miners had won without a fight.

Then God - and the Daily Mail - came out fighting. The Archbishop of Westminster was released from detention to announce in the nation's hour of need that there was, 'no moral justification for a general strike of this character. It is therefore a sin against the obedience which we owe to God'.

And Lord Rothermere rushed to the telephone in his Paris mansion to dictate an urgent editorial. 'A general strike is not an industrial dispute. It is a revolutionary movement intended to inflict suffering upon the great mass of innocent persons in the community and thereby to put forcible restraint upon the Government. It is a movement which can only succeed by destroying the government and subverting the rights and liberties of the people. This being the

case, it cannot be tolerated by any civilised Government and it must be dealt with by every resource at the disposal of the community’.

In the Mail’s press-hall in London, the plates were cast. Then the machine-men of the underground Natsopa union refused to print them. The Militia responded to a direct and personal appeal from the proprietor. The wives and children of these men were arrested and dragged to the machine-room. They would be taken at once to a ship at Tilbury and never seen again. Two mothers were shot dead on the floor. That put an end to the trouble.

Emboldened by this resolution, the Protectorate’s parliament enacted emergency legislation overnight, in the precise spirit of Lord Rothermere’s declaration. Detachments of Milita, Paramilitaries, Specials, Auxiliaries, Regulars and battalions of assault Fraternals made their appearance on the streets in great numbers. Savage wage reductions for the mining industry were announced, and lockout notices posted where it was possible to post them, throughout the disaffected districts. An Organisation for the Maintenance of Supply was established, funded by money ‘which had been placed by patriotic citizens’ at the disposal of the Organisation.

England and Wales were divided into ten divisions, headed by a Civil Commissioner. There was separate but similar provision for Scotland. Each commissioner had a subordinate officer in charge of each of finance, food and fuel. In the event of mounting civil disorder, these subordinate officers would control fuel production and movement, road transport, and the distribution of foodstuffs. The Organisation also called for ‘true patriots’ to rally to its support. After a number of lynchings of these patriots, however, in the

Midlands and Derbyshire coalfields, numbers rallying were less than expected.

The popular response was instantaneous. Within hours, the London Underground had ceased to operate, and scenes of extraordinary chaos came to the city. At some stations there was picketing, followed by violent rioting and the occupation of the stations, in turn followed by savage assaults by Paramilitaries, and Militia detachments. Attempts were made to run a skeleton service, with foreign crews rushed to London overnight: but a number were caught and murdered on the spot. Some trains did subsequently run: but almost all were brought to a standstill by explosive and other devices designed to derail them, or disable them. Arson was also attempted successfully at a number of stations. These arsonists and saboteurs were never caught.

Then the mainline passenger and freight rail services came to a near-complete stop. Many drivers abandoned their trains as close as possible to their home towns, leaving locomotives and rolling-stock scattered the length and the breadth of the rail network. Posters for the illegal unions of NUR and Aslef suddenly began to appear. Platforms were blocked at all the London termini. Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool services also came to a standstill, while the great junctions in the centre of the country were jammed with trains unable to move. In many places the track itself was sabotaged, with the wooden clenching-blocks knocked out over hundreds of yards. In some places even, the fish-plates were removed, and always on a curved section of line. Passenger trains were also set on fire from end to end: fuel termini bombed, steam boilers blown, diesel tanks poisoned and fuel pumps smashed beyond repair.

The iron and steel industry struck work the next morning, and that afternoon the chemical engineering industry also came to a standstill. In Luton the forty thousand workers of the Vauxhall-General Motors plant took control of the factory in one riotous night, and began preparations for its defence. The Clarion, an illegal strike newspaper, announced the return of the the long-banned Amalgamated Engineering Unions. By teatime, tramcar services throughout Britain were also on strike.

That evening the BBC broke its silence and appealed for patriots to volunteer as linotype operators and stereotype hands. Then there was trouble at the docks - initially at Bristol and London, but almost at once everywhere. Electricity supplies were sabotaged, and surfaced submarines were moved towards Tilbury, where they might provide an emergency electrical supply. As an immediate consequence, savage rioting erupted in Vauxhall, Hammersmith, Poplar, Bermondsey and Putney.

That night there was further extensive rioting across the entire country: at Portsmouth and Southampton, at Bridgewater and Wolverhampton, at Rugby and Reading, at Manchester and Hull, at Glasgow and Edinburgh, at Leeds, at Newcastle, at Birmingham, and at scores of smaller towns.

In Edinburgh, mounted police fought running battles throughout the night with crowds which surged the length of the Canongate and the High Street. Not till dawn did the mounted units disperse the rioters across the Meadows, where there was further violence, although on a diminished scale. In Glasgow, fighting raged all night in the East End of the city, and for a time the Calton was ringed with barricades while fiery orators addressed the crowds. Later, these rioters broke through at Glasgow Cross, and surged the

length of Argyle Street, but were stopped, with numerous casualties, in the vicinity of Central Station.

In Newcastle a unit of Militia tried to arrest the leaders of the Chopwell, Blaydon and Ryton Popular Council. Fighting at once erupted in the vicinity of Bigg Market. There was simultaneous trouble connected with the Popular Guard units which had been established at Sowerby Bridge in Yorkshire, at Chatham in Kent, and at Methil in Fife. A Militia despatch rider was also waylaid near Preston Docks: a Militia attempt to get their man back led to fierce fighting for a number of hours. Amid rumours of mutiny in a number of government forces, a wave of arson, sabotage and armed picketing rolled across industrial Britain.

The strikes in rail and steel led at once to a general stoppage in the entire engineering industry. The postal service followed suit. Then the electricity and gas industries came to a halt. The building trade struck work, road haulage ceased to roll, power-stations were occupied, and so many workers in the print-industry simply disappeared that the newspapers were only got out with volunteer labour, and were reduced each to an emergency four pages. Finally, the shipyards on the Clyde and the Tyne struck work, quickly followed by those in Belfast: and there were reports that these strikers were arming their Popular Guards for frontal attack on all Militia installations within convenient reach.

Without warning, there was an upsurge of violence in Glasgow. Members of a bandit group calling themselves Aldredists, with a handful of deserters from the Militia, established an ambush at Govan cross. A simple road block was used to divert a Militia armoured car - with its ever-valuable machine-gun and store of ammunition - into a cul de sac, at each end of which an armed

Aldredist bandit kept lookout. Snipers took care of the Militia men who fled the vehicle, while a close-combat group took control of the vehicle and drove it out into the middle of the cross, where it was disabled. The bandits took care to leave it with a prominent red and black flag flying from its turret, and were presumed to have at once made good their escape, along with the stolen machine-gun and ammunition belts. As a result, the squad of Militia sent to recover it walked straight into an ambush, and came under very heavy fire on its arrival.

A running gun battle developed, down through the empty subway station, and eastwards through the tunnels to the West Street station. The battle - by now it was dark - then returned to ground level and moved into the area centred on the Seaforth Bar at Gorbals Cross. In the confusion, barricades were built, and the Militia came under attack from armed bandits in the upper windows of the district. By midnight, the battle had spread north of the river and into the city centre: at which all units of the Militia were withdrawn from combat, and some semblance of order restored. The next morning, for fear of similar ambush, Militia foot patrols were withdrawn from the streets of Glasgow, and armoured-cars went about in groups of three or kept to the principal thoroughfares.

In London, street-walkers swarmed from their hiding places, openly soliciting custom and cursing the Protectorate and all its works. Those classes still in possession of some hidden wealth made preparations to flee where they could. The great ranks of the middle administrative classes - upon which any state depends - got ready to jump ship and effortlessly change side. A Militia general was jostled in Regent Street, spat upon, and had his pockets picked.

The legal fraternity earnestly prayed for a constitutional settlement. Senior policemen warned their wives of the danger of reprisals, and sent them to the country.

Now the state wavered between repression and conciliation. Aeroplanes droned day and night above the great cities, their bomb doors open and gunners peering down from turrets and hatches. Battleships appeared off all the major harbours: Cromarty and Sullom Voe, the Clyde and Belfast, the Mersey and Plymouth, on the Solent and in the Thames Estuary, in the Tyne and on the Forth. Soviet marines with steel helmets and fixed bayonets patrolled the harbour-side streets - but as night fell, were withdrawn by launch to their ships.

Suddenly the Protectorate gave ground. An announcement in the name of the Protectorate Council conceded that the Pitmungo Chartists - as they were now posthumously known - had demands worthy of attention. The headlines screamed: The General Strike - We will talk to your leaders.

That night the Protectorate Council met in stormy session. After angry debate, the militants won the day. A compromise would be announced, which would be interpreted as a government climbdown. As soon as the enemy was off-guard, food supplies would be withdrawn in their entirety from the principal centres of disaffection.

Thus would they would starve the bastards back to work. And having starved them, the shooting and the hanging could then begin.