



Context – Gold Return and Coal Wages

Winston Churchill's 1925 decision to restore the pound to the Gold Standard at its pre-war parity effectively **overvalued the currency by about 10%**, forcing industries to cut costs ¹. Coal owners immediately pushed for large wage cuts. In fact, mine-owners demanded a **13% cut** in miners' pay (plus longer hours) ². This hit working families hard: even before cuts, a typical pitman's wage was low – e.g. South Wales miners averaged only about **£2 13s 6d per week in 1925** ³ (contrary to exaggerated claims of £3-4).

- **Gold Standard effect:** Return to gold overvalued the pound by ~10%, "making it workers' wages ... that would be slashed" ¹.
- **Wage demand:** Coal owners insisted on a **13% wage cut** (and an extra hour per day) ².
- **Pre-strike wages:** By 1925 miners' weekly pay was only about **£2-3** ³. Even Welsh miners got ~£2 13s 6d on average ³.

These pressures set the stage for the 1926 lockout.

The Miner's Background

Our case is **Councillor Hugh Reynolds**, a coalminer and union lodge official at Plean Colliery (Stirlingshire) ⁴. By 1926 Reynolds was married with a wife and **one young child** ⁵. He had started work at Plean in 1904, earning just **1s 8d a day** (about 8s-9s per week) ⁶ – illustrating how "a decent wage" was far out of reach for miners. (He later fought in WWI and returned to mining.) In context, Reynolds's pit paid far below the roughly £2-3 weekly rates quoted above.

The 1926 Strike and Lockout

When the government's **9-month coal subsidy** ended in April 1926, owners gave strike notices for the refused 13% cut ². On 30 April miners were locked out, and the TUC called a 9-day General Strike (4-12 May) in solidarity. However, once the General Strike was suspended, the miners **alone** remained out of work for months – roughly **seven more months** after May ⁷. In effect the coalfields were locked out from May to November 1926. During this prolonged lockout, miners' families suffered extreme hardship. One historian notes that families survived only on soup kitchens, charity and local solidarity ⁸.

- **Lockout duration:** Miners were locked out/striking from May through about November 1926 (\approx 7-9 months) ⁷.
- **General Strike:** After 10 days the TUC ended the General Strike, leaving miners isolated ⁷.
- **Hardship:** Throughout the lockout "families [were] surviving on soup kitchens, charity and community solidarity" ⁸.

Relief and Daily Struggle

Strike relief was pitifully small. Reynolds recalled that during the lockout "*I had a wife and one child, then, and got a voucher for 18s worth of groceries per week.*" ⁵ That is roughly £0 18s (90p) a week in food aid – barely

enough to feed a family of three. Even this aid was a **loan**: Reynolds had to repay it at 1s/week out of his post-strike wages ⁵. In practice, most families got nothing like their full wage. For comparison, official relief rates were only about **15s/week for a miner's wife plus a few shillings per child** ⁹. In short, the miner's household lived on crumbs – soup kitchens, meager vouchers and handouts – while the lockout dragged on.

- **Actual relief:** Reynolds's family got **18 shillings per week** in groceries ⁵. (Typical Poor Law relief of the era was about *15s/week for a wife and 3s per child* ⁹.)
- **Repayment:** Reynolds was on the local Relief Board but had to resign to claim aid; he later repaid every penny of relief (18s/week) at 1s/week ⁵.
- **No other income:** There was essentially no unemployment benefit or union strike pay to live on; many families went hungry or into debt.

Throughout the nine-month lockout, the Reynolds family – like thousands of others – endured severe poverty with almost no income. Even local institutions (some controlled by middle-class Guardians) were reluctant to provide relief ⁹. The miner himself later noted that he had to pay back "*every penny of the poor relief I got for my family in 1926.*" ⁵.

Aftermath – Back to Work on Owners' Terms

In November 1926 the strike finally collapsed. The miners returned to work under the owners' terms ¹⁰. That meant **accepting the 13% wage cut** and a new eight-hour day ² ¹⁰. The union won none of its demands. As one account bluntly sums up: the miners were "*finally starved into submission and forced to accept the owners' terms*" ¹⁰. For Reynolds's family, this meant going back to the pit with permanently lower pay (roughly 13% less than before) and no promise of relief.

- **Outcome (Nov 1926):** The lockout ended with defeat. Miners **accepted the 13% wage cut** and 8-hour day ¹⁰.
- **Long-term effect:** Reynolds and his family resumed mining life on sharply reduced income – the direct result of the pre-strike Gold Standard policy and owners' demands.

Summary: This miner's story shows how Churchill's monetary policy translated into real suffering for a working family. A policy decision to keep the pound over-valued (to benefit bankers and maintain parity) forced coal owners to slash wages ¹ ². The consequence was a brutal nine-month lockout: a loyal miner lost most of his income, relied on meager 15–18s/week relief ⁵ and charity ⁸, and ultimately had to return to work on poorer terms ¹⁰. He did nothing wrong – he simply paid the price in poverty for a financial policy over which he had no control.

Sources: Contemporary and retrospective accounts (Hansard, union histories, oral testimony) document these facts ¹ ² ³ ¹¹ ⁵ ⁹. They confirm typical wages (~£2–3) ³, the 13% cut demand ², the 7–9 month lockout ¹², and the tiny relief payments (≈15s–18s/week) ⁹ ⁵.

¹ Britain 1926 General Strike: On the Verge of Revolution

<https://marxist.com/britain-1926-general-strike-revolution.htm>

2 Bbc Schools Broadcast (General Strike) - Hansard - UK Parliament

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1958-11-13/debates/2f4f270c-62a9-4c00-adff-865e49940698/BbcSchoolsBroadcast\(GeneralStrike\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1958-11-13/debates/2f4f270c-62a9-4c00-adff-865e49940698/BbcSchoolsBroadcast(GeneralStrike))

3 Wages, South Wales - Hansard - UK Parliament

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/1933-04-04/debates/e1f499c2-fcf5-4587-b395-70cb08d46711/WagesSouthWales>

4 **5** **6** files.libcom.org

https://files.libcom.org/files/Strike-live-history_0.pdf

7 **8** **10** **11** **12** South Wales Miners' Federation - Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Wales_Miners%27_Federation

9 Poor Law Relief and Miners' Lockouts – Forest of Dean Social History

<https://forestofdeansocialhistory.co.uk/poor-law-relief-and-miners-lockouts/>