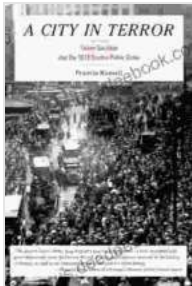


Calvin Coolidge and the 1919 Boston Police Strike: A Tale of Law, Order, and Legacy



A City in Terror: Calvin Coolidge and the 1919 Boston Police Strike by Matt Grossmann

★★★★☆ 4.4 out of 5

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In the annals of organized labor, few events hold the same historical significance as the Boston Police Strike of 1919. This watershed moment in American history witnessed a dramatic collision between the forces of labor and authority, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to shape our understanding of law enforcement, labor relations, and the role of government in maintaining social order.

At the heart of this tumultuous episode was a young politician named Calvin Coolidge, then Governor of Massachusetts. Coolidge's response to the strike would catapult him onto the national stage, propelling him to the presidency in 1923. His actions during this crisis would both define his political persona and shape the course of American history.

The Genesis of Unrest

The Boston Police Strike did not arise in a vacuum. It was the culmination of simmering tensions between the Boston Police Department and its rank-and-file officers. At the turn of the 20th century, police officers in Boston, like their counterparts in many other cities, faced grueling working conditions, low pay, and limited opportunities for advancement.

As the First World War raged in Europe, inflation eroded the already meager wages of Boston's police officers. The escalating cost of living put a severe strain on their families, fostering a sense of discontent and resentment within the ranks.

The Birth of a Union

In response to these grievances, a group of Boston police officers, led by Patrolman Michael J. Crowley, formed the Boston Police Union in 1918. The union sought to improve working conditions, increase wages, and provide officers with a collective voice in their dealings with the city administration.

The formation of the union was met with fierce resistance from the Boston Police Commissioner, Edwin U. Curtis. Curtis, a staunch opponent of organized labor, refused to recognize the union or engage in negotiations with its representatives.

The Spark Ignites: the Police Strike

Tensions escalated further in August 1919 when the Boston Police Union voted to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). This move directly challenged Commissioner Curtis's authority and set the stage for the strike that would soon follow.

On September 9, 1919, more than 1,100 Boston police officers walked off the job, demanding recognition of their union and improved working conditions. The strike brought the city to a standstill, leaving it vulnerable to crime and disorder.

Governor Calvin Coolidge, facing a crisis that threatened the safety and stability of the Commonwealth, took swift and decisive action. He refused to negotiate with the striking police officers and ordered the Massachusetts National Guard to restore order in the city.

Coolidge's Iron Fist

Coolidge's response to the strike was both swift and forceful. He deployed the National Guard to patrol the streets of Boston, and he ordered the arrest of any striking police officers who resisted or refused to return to work.

Coolidge's unwavering stance sent a clear message that he would not tolerate any challenge to the rule of law. His actions drew both praise and criticism, with some accusing him of being too harsh and others applauding his decisive leadership.

Despite the widespread condemnation from organized labor and some sectors of the public, Coolidge remained steadfast in his conviction that the strike was an illegal act that threatened the safety and welfare of the citizens of Boston.

The Strike's Resolution

The Boston Police Strike lasted for eight days, ending on September 17, 1919. The striking officers, facing overwhelming pressure from the National

Guard and public opinion, reluctantly returned to work.

In the aftermath of the strike, Commissioner Curtis resigned, and many of the striking officers were fired or suspended. The Boston Police Union was dissolved, and the city enacted new regulations restricting the rights of municipal employees to organize and strike.

Coolidge's Legacy

Calvin Coolidge's handling of the Boston Police Strike cemented his reputation as a strong and decisive leader. His unwavering commitment to law and order resonated with the American public, who were weary of the social unrest that had plagued the country in the wake of World War I.

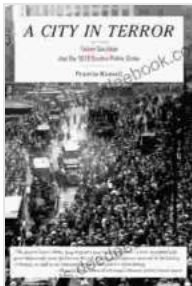
Coolidge's actions in Boston propelled him into the national spotlight, and he was subsequently elected Vice President in 1920 and President in 1923. His presidency was marked by a conservative approach to government, a belief in limited government intervention, and a strong emphasis on law enforcement.

Coolidge's legacy is complex and controversial. His handling of the Boston Police Strike is often cited as an example of his tough stance on labor unrest, while his economic policies are credited with helping to usher in a period of economic prosperity in the 1920s.

The Boston Police Strike of 1919 was a pivotal moment in American history, testing the limits of authority, challenging societal norms, and leaving a lasting legacy that continues to shape our understanding of labor relations, law enforcement, and the role of government in maintaining social order.

Calvin Coolidge's decisive actions during the strike catapulted him into the national spotlight and would ultimately propel him to the presidency. His unwavering commitment to law and order resonated with the American public, who were weary of the social unrest that had plagued the country in the wake of World War I.

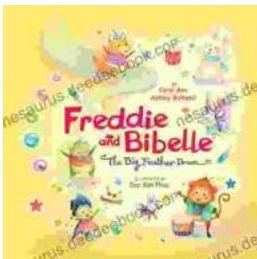
The Boston Police Strike remains a reminder of the complex and often-fraught relationship between labor and authority. It is a story of power, resistance, and the enduring struggle to balance the rights of workers with the need for public safety and order.



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