

A HISTORY OF THE MINE WORKERS' UNION OF CANADA

1925-1936

by

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Abstract

The Mine Workers' Union of Canada was a trade union, centred in the coal fields of the Province of Alberta, which existed between the years 1925 and 1936, and included a membership of between 2,000 and 4,000 mine workers during that period. The formation of the union came about as a result of the break-up of District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America in 1924-1925. From the onset, its leadership was composed of differing elements, from conservatives who opposed the U.M.W. of A. for nationalistic reasons, to members of the Communist Party. The M.W.U.C. was one of the founding members of the All Canadian Congress of Labour in 1927, and its President, Frank Wheatley, was a Vice-President of the Congress until his ouster from the miners' union in 1930.

Early in that year the Communists, led by Harvey Murphy, began a drive to have the M.W.U.C. disaffiliate from the A.C.C.L., and join the new revolutionary trade union central, the Workers' Unity League. They were apparently successful, for in May of 1931, the union's membership voted by a 73% margin to affiliate with the W.U.L. Later that year the Communist Party of Canada was outlawed and the M.W.U.C. itself was declared to be an "unlawful association" in the courts. Anti-communist and anti-union sentiments on the part of employers led to long and bitter

strikes, the most important of which took place in the Crows' Nest Pass in 1932. Finally, after six years of intense struggle on both the industrial and political fronts, the Workers' Unity League was disbanded by the Communist Party. In June of 1936, the membership of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada voted to return to the U.M.W. of A., and the union passed into history.

Resumé

Le Syndicat des Mineurs du Canada (M.W.U.C.) était une organisation ouvrière qui fut active entre les années 1925 et 1936. La plupart des militants de cette union, qui comprenait de 2,000 à 4,000 membres, travaillèrent dans les mines de charbon de la Province d'Alberta. Le syndicat fut formée après la rupture du District 18 des Mineurs Unis d'Amérique (U.M.W. of A.) en 1924-1925. Les éléments radicaux et conservateurs du syndicat partagerent le pouvoir dans le mouvement, à cause de leur opposition commune contre le syndicat International de John L. Lewis. Le M.W.U.C. fut un des premiers membres du Congrès pan canadien du Travail, qui fut institué en 1927. Le Président du M.W.U.C., Frank Wheatléy, fut un vice-président du Congrès jusqu'à sa défaite lors des élections syndicales de 1930.

En février de cette même année, l'organisateur principal du parti Communiste en Alberta, Harvey Murphy, mis sur pied une campagne au nom de la nouvelle centrale des syndicats révolutionnaires, le "Workers' Unity League". Au mois de mai, 1931, les membres du Syndicat des Mineurs voterent par une majorité de 73% de s'affilier avec le W.U.L. Quelques mois après, le parti Communiste était proscrit par le gouvernement de R.B. Bennett, et le M.W.U.C. était stigmatisée comme une "association illégale" par un juge Saskatchewanais. Au cours des années 30, les sentiments anti-communistes et anti-syndicaux

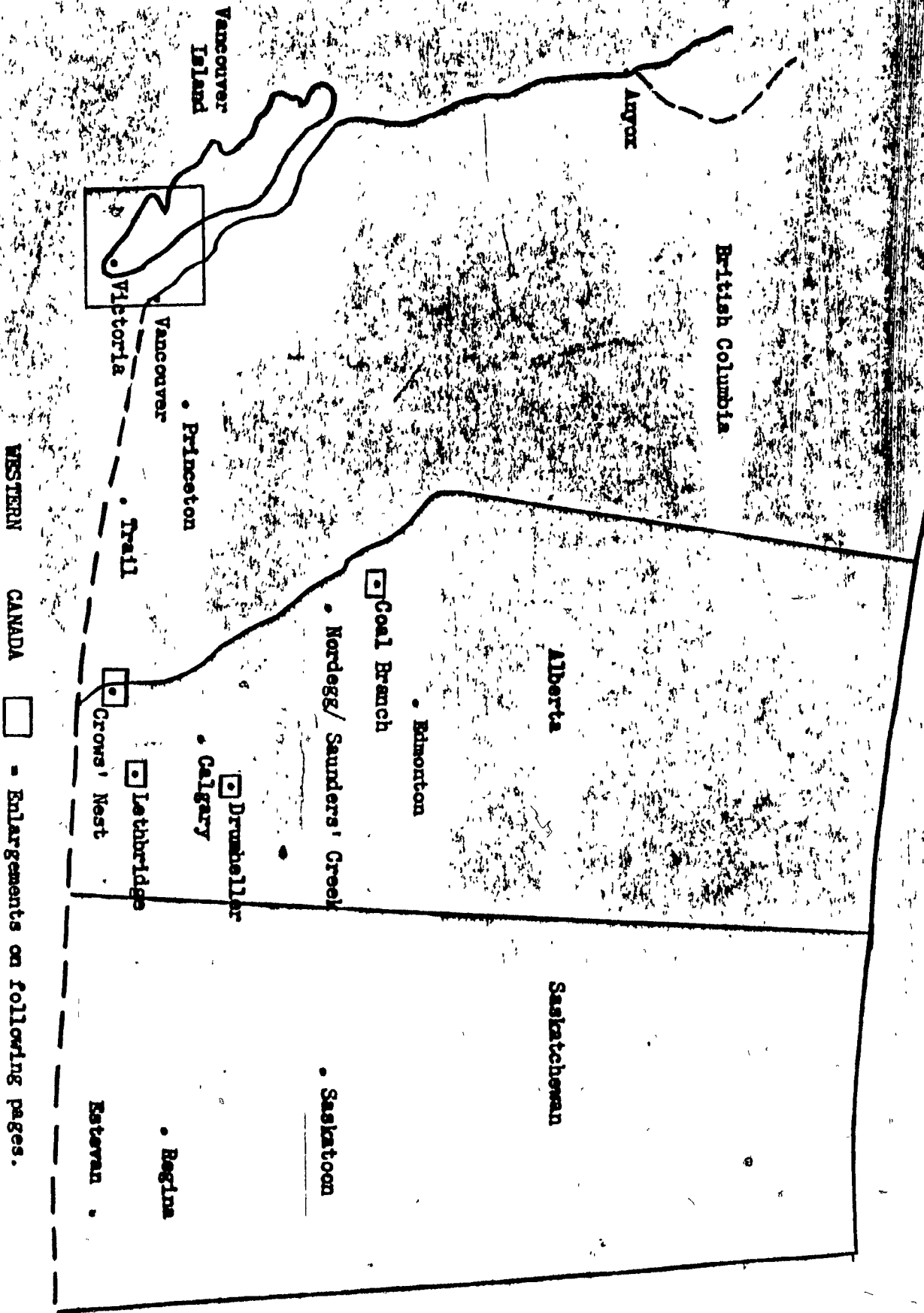
des employeurs de l'industrie minière provoquèrent des grèves longues et durs, telle la violente grève des mineurs dans le Crows' Nest Pass en 1932. Finalement, après six ans de luttes industrielles et politiques, le W.U.L. se destitua. En juin de 1936, les membres du Syndicat des Mineurs du Canada voterent pour un retour au syndicat des Mineurs Unis d'Amérique.

Preface

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the veterans of the miners' movement, without whose help my task would have been considerably more difficult, and the result much poorer. To Professors Richard Rice and Carman Miller of McGill University, and especially to Professor John Thompson, my thesis advisor, also go my thanks for the help and encouragement they have extended to me over the years. I am also grateful to Mrs. Ruby Napier of McGill's History Department, and to Miss Bobbie Stundon, my indefatigable typist. Finally, I should like to mention the name of the late Professor Howard S. Weinroth, to whose memory this work is respectfully dedicated.

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MAPS



WESTERN CANADA [dashed line] - Enlargements on following pages.

Mainland British Columbia

Cumberland

Esquimalt & Nanaimo R.R.
(C.P.R.)

Vancouver

Wellington

Nanaimo

Reserve
Extension

Ladysmith

VANCOUVER ISLAND

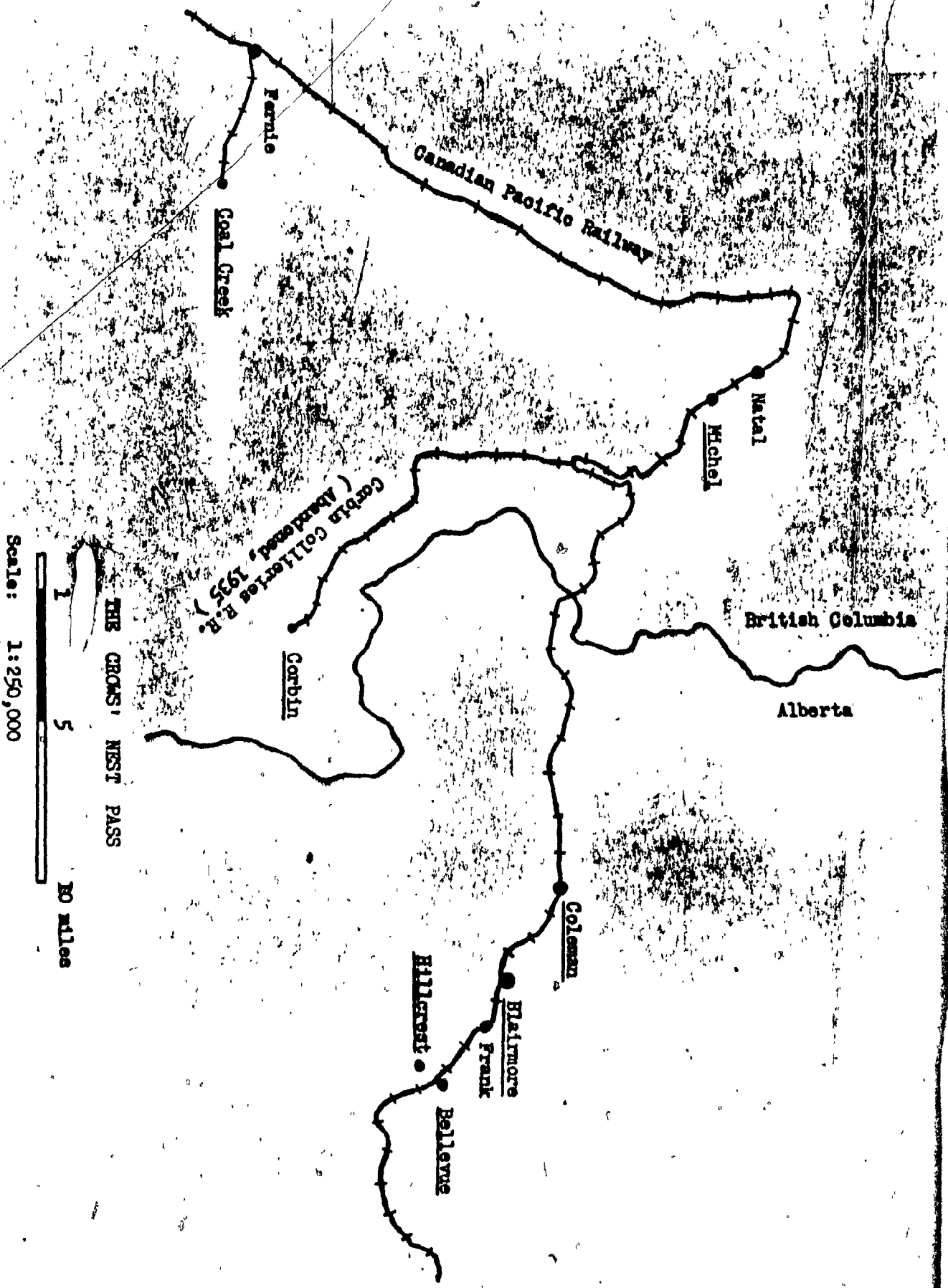
VICTORIA

State of Washington

Nanaimo - Site of Coal Mine

10 20 miles

Scale: 1:1,000,000



Scale: 1:250,000

10 miles

THE CROSS' NEST PASS

Corbin-Colleries R.R.
(Abandoned, 1935)

Canadian Pacific Railway

British Columbia

Alberta

Fernie

Coal Creek

Natal

Michel

Corbin

Coleman

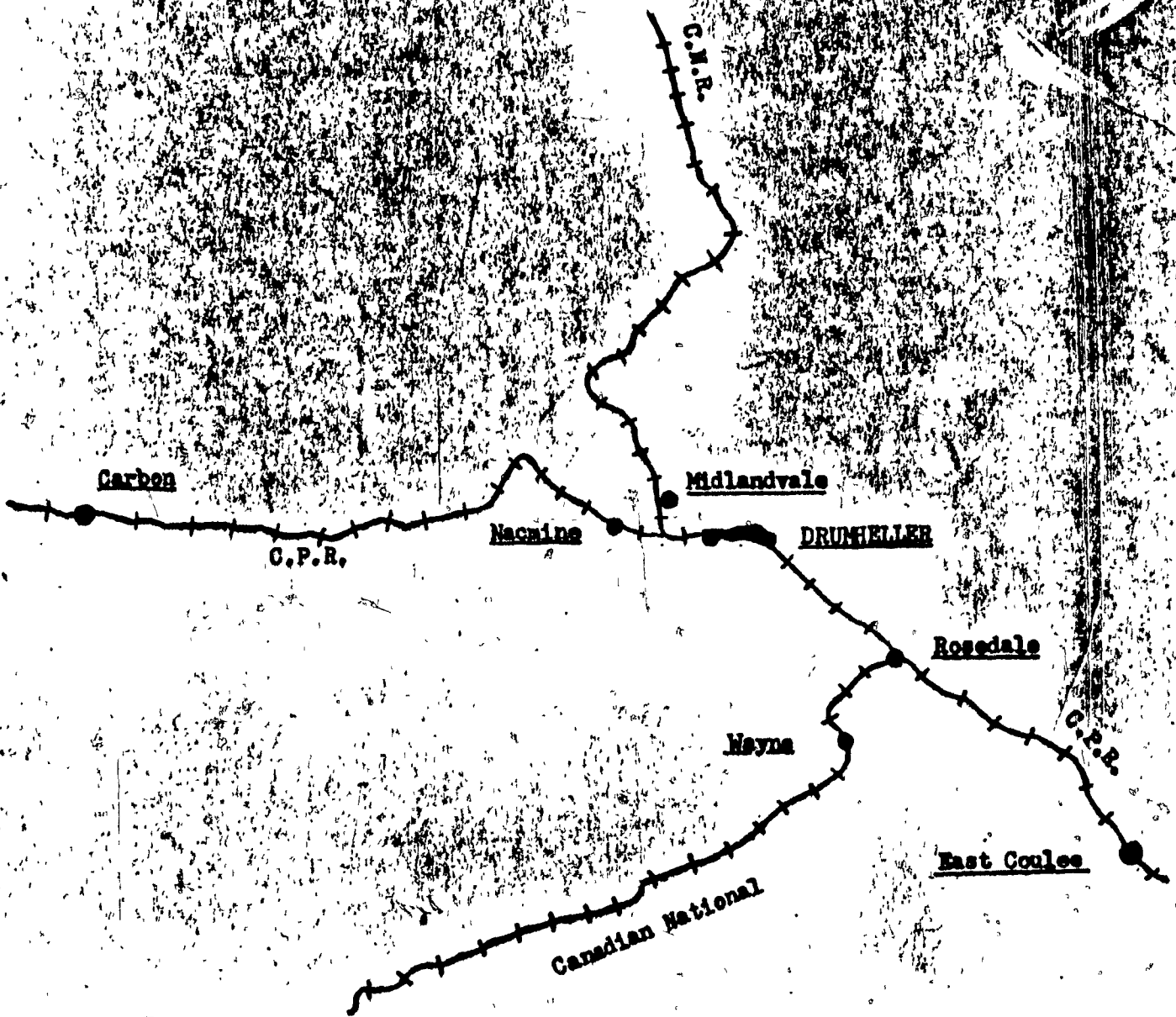
Blairmore

Frank

Hillcrest

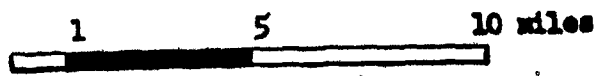
Bellevue

To
Edmonton



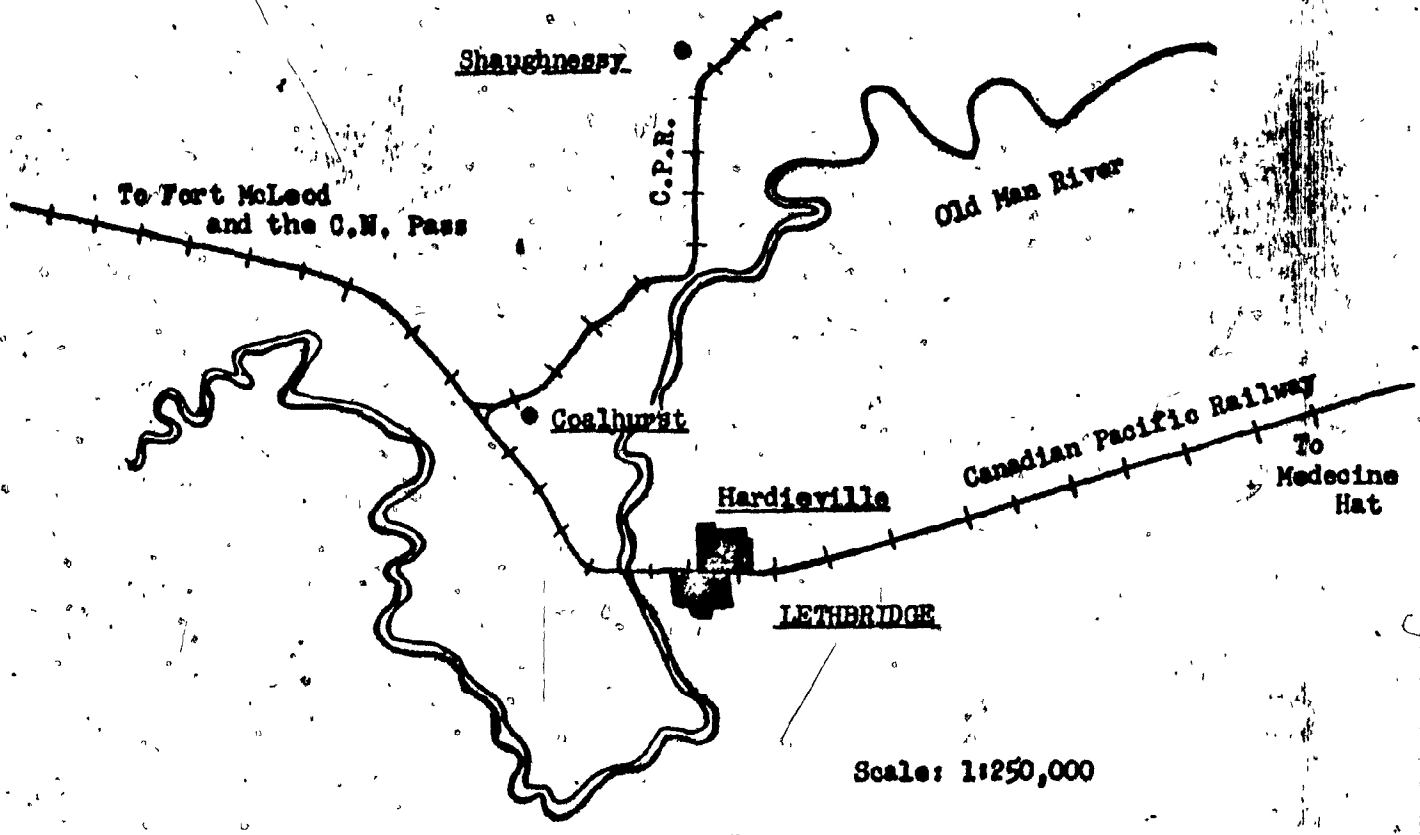
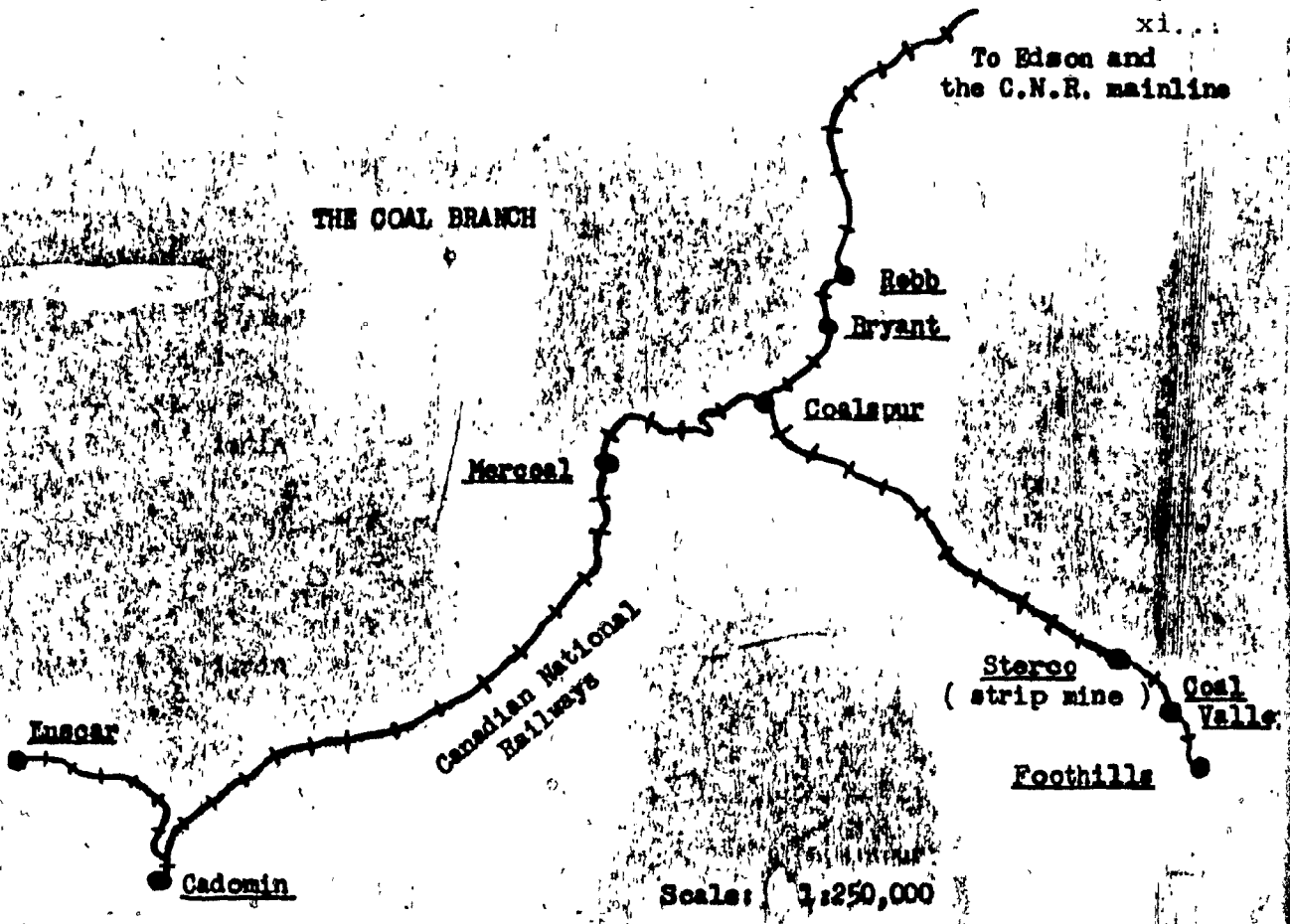
To
Calgary

THE RED DEER VALLEY



Scale: 1:250,000

To Edison and the C.N.R. mainline





" To hell with your rotten old props... We've now
got a prop that will really protect us. "

Worker cartoon, September 10, 1933

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Abbreviations

W.F.M. Western Federation of Miners
I.W.W. Industrial Workers of the World
U.M.W. of A. United Mine Workers of America
W.C.C.O.A. Western Canada Coal Operators' Association
O.B.U. One Big Union
C.P.C. Communist Party of Canada
U.F.L.T.A. Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association
M.W.U.C. Mine Workers' Union of Canada
B.C.M.A. British Columbia Miners' Association
A.C.C.L. All Canadian Congress of Labour
W.U.L. Workers' Unity League
C.I.O. Congress (Committee) of Industrial Organizations

PAC Public Archives of Canada
PAO Public Archives of Ontario
Glenbow Archives - Archives of the Glenbow Alberta Institute,
Calgary

INTRODUCTION

I

The main intention of the thesis which follows is to chronicle the history of a labour organization, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, during what is commonly known as the "dark age" of labour organization in this country, that period between the suppression of the One Big Union movement and the emergence of the C.I.O. The story of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada is but one chapter in the history of the Western miners' little known but significant contribution to the development of the working class movement in Canada. The M.W.U.C.'s chief constituents -- the coal miners of Alberta -- were among the prime movers in the One Big Union. As members of John L. Lewis' United Mine Workers of America, they played an active role in the C.I.O. movement and the Canadian Congress of Labour. Prior to 1919, organized first under the Western Federation of Miners and then by the U.M.W. of A. the Western miners were among the most active trade unionists in the country. I chose the era of the M.W.U.C. because it sheds some light on a subject which has not only provoked a measure of scholarly interest, but which also has been prone to confusion and misinterpretation: the question of Canadian working class radicalism in general, and the role of the Communist Party within it in particular.

Unfortunately, much of the literature which exists on the

subject of Communism in Canada is highly subjective, if not polemical in nature. While the shortcomings of both Communist and anti-Communist writers are at once inevitable and understandable, such cannot be the case with objective scholarly work. The two monographs which deal with the history of Communism in Canada (William Rodney's Soldiers of the International, and Ivan Avakumovic's The Communist Party in Canada) give a distorted view of the movement, and suffer much for having been written "from the top down". Here we may find detailed examination of developments on the leadership level, yet precious little about the relationship of the C.P.C. to the lives of ordinary Canadians. Questions such as who supported the movement and why are rarely brought up. Perhaps it is assumed that those who did rally around the Party, with the exception of the intellectuals, were simply "down and outs", and as such, easily "duped". It is unfair, however, to discount the ideas and experience of any group on such grounds.

Rodney fails to follow up his promising introductory remark that "no account of the ethnic groups that came to this land... can ignore the communist¹ movement." With the exception of a superficial discussion of Communist activity in the Nova Scotia coalfields, his work pays little attention to Communist involvement in the working class movement. The Alberta miners, who were described by a leading communist in 1925 as "our most militant supporters", are relegated to two footnotes in this study of the C.P.C. in the 1920's.² Avakumovic's broader study follows the same general line of interpretation. Billed as the

standard work on the history of the C.P.C., it makes no mention of Blairmore, Alberta, the first and only town in Canada to elect a Communist or quasi-Communist municipal administration. The book makes only vague and often misleading references to the part played by the Communists in the miners' movement. An explanation of "the riot at Esteven (sic) Saskatchewan" in terms of the activities of "Communist agitators (who) did not shrink from using violent language and physical force to put their views across" is but one example of the lack of depth in the author's analysis.³ The current scholarly interest in the radical Left in Canada is an encouraging sign, but a broad understanding of the phenomenon will only come about as a result of careful studies at the local and trade union level.

The Mine Workers' Union of Canada was conceived, nurtured, and finally liquidated by members of the Communist Party. It was probably one of the more credible "mass organizations" which ever came within the Communist sphere of influence. At the very least, it is hoped that this essay will help provide a realistic view of the Communist movement "in action" at a grass-roots level. The extent of the Communist influence among the miners will be dealt with in this context. The relationship of radicalism to factors such as economic conditions and ethnicity will also be examined, in an attempt to clarify the generalizations which have been made on these points. The Mine Workers' Union

of Canada, a supposedly revolutionary organization for most of its history, offers a fruitful field for the student of the radical movement of the period.

The M.W.U.C. was, of course, no mere instrument of Communist propaganda, but an industrial weapon wielded by workers in one of the West's key industries. During the first half of the 1930's the union participated in over 40 strikes, involving most of its membership, which ranged between 2,000 and 4,000 in that period. In an era of crushing economic depression, the membership of the M.W.U.C. fought back against the "starvation programme" of the employers and the state with the only weapon at their disposal. Their struggles in the uphill battle for survival involved some of the bitterest social conflict of the inter-war period. Time and time again the forces of the state were called to the aid of the propertied interests in the coalfields, a practice which led to bloodshed in several instances. As we shall see, fundamental democratic principles, such as the right of the mine workers to organize under the union of their own choice, were consistently violated by the authorities. The manner in which the remnants of the U.M.W. of A. were pampered and coddled by the ruling elite at the expense of more militant Canadian organizations in Alberta, for example, must give second thoughts to those who view labour history in simplistic black and white terms. The comforting leftist vision of a clear cut struggle between the black-hearted villains of the employing class and the lily-white knights of the trade union movement will not fit the reality of class relations in the coalfields.

The existence of revolutionary ideology and leadership within the miners' movement is a key factor in understanding the intermittent industrial warfare which plagued the Western coalfields during the period under discussion. The authorities -- backed by the International Union, in instances where it still exercised a degree of influence -- reacted vigorously and negatively to the activities of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. As one commentator has pointed out, "the smashing of this union was accompanied by some of the most brutal atrocities in Canadian labour history."⁴ In most cases they seem to have either convinced themselves that industrial problems in the coalfields had political and not economic causes; or perceived that the union posed a genuine political threat to their own class interests.

However, the question of radicalism has, I think, more importance than simply as a complicating factor in industrial relations. We must ask ourselves whether the revolutionaries had any significant impact upon the working class movement, above and beyond their ability to ensconce themselves in the leadership positions of a particular trade union. Radical leaders come and go, often leaving nothing behind but a personal memory. Sometimes they provide either the most effective or the only leadership available to rank and file workers interested in improving their material conditions through organization. During the period of the Workers' Unity League, and again under the C.I.O.,⁵ Communists organized tens of thousands of Canadians. From these facts alone, however, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions concerning the political orientation of the Canadian

working class. As Harvey Murphy, probably the most successful Communist labour leader in Canadian history, remarked of the Hamilton steel workers in the late 1920's: "They wanted a union, any union. They didn't give a damn what its name was, or what it was." ⁶ The Western coal miners of the inter-war period -- or at least those in the older and more established centres -- present us with a different case. Long before anyone in Canada had ever heard of Lenin or the Communist Party, these men had raised the slogans of the class struggle in the coal pits. Because of the existence of a working class tradition tracing itself back through decades of organization and independent political action, the Communist movement here cannot be written off as a "nine-day wonder" attributable to the talents of a few silver-tongued agitators. For this reason it is deserving of more than a passing glance by the historian.

II

Political radicalism, in conjunction with a high degree of industrial militance, seems to have been a persistent theme in the history of all of Canada's major coal mining areas. Organizations such as the Socialist Party, the Western Federation of Miners, the I.W.W., the O.B.U., the Communist Party, and even the C.C.F./N.D.P., have all had their day in the coalfields of Vancouver Island, the Crows' Nest Pass, the Red Deer Valley, and

Nova Scotia. During its heyday, coal mining was the most strike-prone industry in the country. Stuart Jamieson, a Canadian specialist in the field of industrial relations, attempts a brief theoretical explanation of the phenomenon in Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966. He finds Clark Kerr and Abraham Seigel's theory of the "isolated mass" applicable to Canadian coal mining. Centred in isolated, one-industry, company-dominated coal towns, the miners are said to have tended to develop "a consensus of sentiment that was hostile to the employers, particularly where these were absentee owners." To quote Kerr and Seigel, "the strike for the isolated mass is a kind of colonial revolt...a substitute for occupational and social mobility." Jamieson makes other valid points as well, including the role played by chronic underemployment in the mines and the tendency of mining towns to become "amongst the worst 'pockets of poverty'" during periods of depression, in provoking industrial conflict.

However, Jamieson's statement of "the fact that coal mining historically has been, to use a popular phrase, a 'sinkhole for unskilled labour', drawing on newly arrived immigrants and displaced workers from other industries" will not get us very far. Although the immigration argument proves very tempting in the case of areas like the Crows' Nest Pass, it is rendered useless as a general explanation by its inapplicability to the mining

communities of Cape Breton or Vancouver Island. As for the unskilled labour assumption, it might not prove such a "popular phrase" today if uttered within earshot of the oldtimers in a waterhole of any of Canada's surviving coal towns. Like the wage cutting arguments of the coal barons of old that mining was a matter of "mere shovelling", it fails to take account of the basic nature of the industry: the varied skills and trades involved in the mining of coal; and the complex organization of the labour force therein. More importantly, it fails to take into consideration what economic historian Carter Goodrich called the "peculiar psychology of the industry", and the fact that the mine workers traditionally regarded themselves as the "autocrats" of industry.⁸ It is this fact which played an important role in shaping the consciousness of the miners and in determining their response to the challenge of industrial capitalism.

During the period of which we speak, the key element in the workforce in a coal mine was a group called the "contract men"; those actually working at the coal face who were, except in unusual circumstances (when doing "dead work" in rock or drilling around giant fossils called "niggerheads", which are common in the substrata in the Red Deer Valley), paid by the ton for the amount of coal they produced. The principal method of extraction was the "room and pillar" technique, by which a two or three-man team would be assigned a "place" in a room and more or less left to its own device there for weeks, or months, perhaps longer. There

were no straw bosses breathing down the necks of the miners. The only supervision was the daily visit of the fireboss or pit-boss, the company's representative underground, whose job was not so much to oversee production as to maintain the safety of the mine. Even so, it was by their own skill and care that the men at the face -- "the frontline troops of coal production" -- protected or risked their own lives.⁹ The experienced miner was, among other things, an expert in timbering, pick-work, as well as the handling of explosives in the often deadly, methane-laden atmosphere of the coal mine. The contract man had almost invariably worked his way up to his post over a number of years, running the gamut from picking slate or bucking coal in the chutes above ground through hauling timber and laying track underground, finally working as a helper to an experienced man at the face. Only then would he be eligible to take examinations for a provincial miner's certificate. Small wonder, then, that the miner saw himself as a skilled craftsman, and tended to develop a strong sense of independence and self-reliance; in fact "an independence which is at times embarrassing to his leaders, his employers, and the community."¹⁰

According to the statistics for the Province of Alberta, those working at the face, including helpers, accounted for just over one half of the total number of wage earners in the coal mining industry and two thirds of those employed underground.¹¹

As Goodrich argues, the "indiscipline" of this group also characterized, to only a lesser extent, the other classes of mine labour. These people, who were paid in the form of a daily, or "dotal" wage, were generally known as "company men", as distinguished from the sort of "independent petty contractors" (to quote Goodrich) at the face. ¹² Many, of course, were skilled or semi-skilled workers. Of the 8,000 mine workers in Alberta in 1925, 950 were haulage workers, 150 manned the pumps and fans, 450 were timbermen or roadmakers, and 500 were mechanics, engineers, firemen or carpenters. Although the company men, especially those classed as general labourers, were subject to more supervision and industrial discipline than the contract miners, they, too, went about their tasks in a largely independent fashion -- at least those who worked underground. In The Miner's Freedom, Goodrich poses what he terms "the special riddle of the industry: how can you boss a man that you can't see?" ¹³

If the nature of the work encouraged a democratic spirit amongst the mine workers and discouraged the development of an obedient, cap-doffing labour force, it also engendered a special kind of group solidarity. Each man knew, as he entered the pits with the rest of the shift, that this day might be his last. In the early days of mining in the Crow, before the First World War, entire shifts had been wiped out by major mine disasters at Fernie, Bellevue and Hillcrest -- "accidents" which had cost the

lives of over 300 men. Although major disasters became a rarity with improved technology and the enforcement of safety regulations, death or crippling injury continued to lurk in the shafts and tunnels beneath the surface of the earth. Until the advent of large-scale strip mining in recent years, every ton of coal extracted its toll of human life. As David Frank remarks in the Nova Scotian context: "The hardship and peril connected with coal mining bred an endemic 'radicalism' among the coal miners: 'blood on the coal' helped shape the miners' attitudes to the coal operators..."¹⁴⁰

III

In short, certain aspects of the industry itself provided conditions favourable to the development, at an early stage, of a collective sense of working class independence in the coal-fields. During its brief tenure in the West, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada sought to use these foundations as a base for the building of a class conscious political and industrial movement in the mining communities. Standing in the way of these aspirations were a number of factors: the opposition of rival elements within the working class movement, the implacable hatred of the employers and their allies in Government, the unwillingness of workers to risk what little they had in a time of economic depression, and the internal divisions along ethnic (or "racial", to use contemporary terminology) lines. The degree to which the

organization was successful in attaining its goals is the major theme of my thesis.

The study will be divided into two parts, each representing a definite stage in the history of the organization. Part I begins with an introduction to the crisis in District 18 in 1925, during the course of which the M.W.U.C. was founded, and continues through the latter 1920's, when the union came under the sway of the non-Communist moderate, Frank Wheatley. In the realm of industrial conflict, Part I will mainly be confined to the Drumheller (Red Deer) Valley, which experienced strikes in 1925, 1927, and 1928-29. Part II is inaugurated by the triumph of the Communist-led Left Wing at the leadership level in 1930, and the deepening of the economic depression in the coalfields. Both factors contributed to an intensification and broadening of the activity of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. In this section the focus will shift to widely disparate geographical regions: Northern Alberta, Southern Saskatchewan, Central and Coastal British Columbia. During the mid-Thirties, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada also expanded its activities to the metal mining sector, and led unsuccessful strikes in Quebec, Manitoba and Northern B.C. Not all of these areas have received equal treatment. The main thrust of my research was directed towards the Crows' Nest Pass, which experienced a prolonged strike in 1932 that threw into bold relief the main issues under discussion:

radicalism, ethnicity, and the response of the miners to economic degradation. The material on the Pass, then, may be regarded as a "case study" of sorts, as I was fortunate enough to have been able to supplement the documentary evidence available with the fruits of oral research conducted in the area. While recognizing the incomplete nature of the study, I am fully in accord with the sentiment expressed by one scholar that "as the history of the coal miners' revolt against industrial capitalism in Canada is written, we shall find much to learn."

NOTESIntroduction

- 1 William Rodney, Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada 1919-1920 (Toronto, 1968), "Preface."
- 2 Ibid, p.122n
- 3 Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party of Canada: A History (Toronto, 1975) p. 69.
- 4 Lorne and Caroline Brown, An Unauthorized History of the R.C.M.P. (Toronto, 1973) p. 69.
- 5 See Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism and Canadian Labour (Toronto, 1973).
- 6 Interview: Harvey Murphy, September 22, 1976 at Toronto.
- 7 Stuart Jamieson, Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-1966 (Ottawa, 1968) pp. 97-98. C. Kerr and A. Seigel, "The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike", cited in Jamieson.
- 8 Carter Goodrich, The Miner's Freedom: A Study of the Working Life in a Changing Industry (Boston, 1925) p. 17.
- 9 The Report of the Royal Commission on Coal (Ottawa, 1946) p. 295.
- 10 Ibid. Quotation from Robert Drummond, Recollections and Reflections of a Former Trades Union Leader, cited in David Frank, "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry, Cape Breton 1922" in Essays in Canadian Working Class History, edited by Greg Kealey and Peter Warrian (Toronto, 1976) p. 167.
- 11 Coal Statistics of Canada 1925, p. 87.
- 12 Goodrich, op.cit. p. 31.
- 13 Ibid, pp. 49-50.

14 Frank, op.cit p. 167

15 Ibid, p. 184

PART ITHE TWENTIESChapter I Exit United Mine Workers of America

I

The break-up of District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America in the year 1925 constitutes one of the more interesting chapters in the convoluted history of Canadian labour. Indeed, it was dubbed "the strangest fight in the history of the Canadian labour movement" by one contemporary.¹ One cannot hope to understand the event through a simple "labour versus management" perspective, since the story is an unfolding of a series of contradictions and ironies. At one point, the workers deserted the U.M.W. of A. because it would not accept wage reductions, at another because the union had accepted wage reductions without consulting them. Labour bureaucrats and Communist militants accused each other of "class collaboration", each with some measure of justification, as the once powerful trade union organization disintegrated almost to the point of no return. Out of the chaos emerged the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, and for this reason, it is necessary to give a brief account of the events which led up to the crisis of 1925 in District 18.

The demise of this organization was rooted in what is certainly a significant and superficially puzzling paradox. In the

early 1920's members of the U.M.W. of A. District 18 were amongst the most highly paid industrial workers in the country. Yet many, probably a majority, harboured resentment rather than loyalty towards the organization which had elevated them to this status. In a word, the U.M.W. of A. in District 18 -- that area of jurisdiction which covered the province of Alberta as well as the coalfield on the British Columbia side of the Crows' Nest Pass -- was a house divided against itself. Like most such structures it was bound to fall, which is precisely what happened in 1925.

Such, of course, had not always been the case. In 1903, the organized miners in the Crows' Nest Pass had willingly joined the United Mine Workers, disaffiliating themselves from its rival, the Western Federation of Miners, in the process.² During the next decade and a half, the U.M.W. of A. militantly defended the interests of its growing membership in the District. Before the war, U.M.W. of A. strikes in the field were endemic, and it was to short circuit the miners' efforts to better their collective lot through direct action that the foxy Mackenzie King³ devised the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act in 1906-1907. As a result of intermittent strike action during 1916-1917, the U.M.W. of A. was one of the first unions to win for its members cost of living indexation to compensate for the rampant inflation of the time. By April of 1918, the basic datal rate in the coal mines had increased by 45% over that of the 1915 contract.⁴

Despite the relatively generous treatment which the mine workers received at the hands of the government -- which assumed control over the operations of the industry for the duration of the war -- they were nevertheless moving leftwards on the crest of a wave of "rising expectations" which characterized the era. The miners had always been prone to radicalism. As early as the 1880's, we hear of an Alberta mine owner complaining of the "strong socialistic elements" amongst a group of Hungarian mine workers from Pennsylvania.⁵ Drawn from every corner of Europe, often routed through coal and metal mines in the United States, the miners of Western Canada brought with them established working class traditions and political ideologies.⁶ These grew well in the coalfields, where the ideas of the class struggle ideologists were the facts of everyday life. By 1914 District 18 was a "militant, sometimes radically socialistic group,"⁷ and a strong supporter of the Socialist Party of Canada, the country's leading standard-bearer of the Marxist creed. With the war, there came on the scene a whole new set of factors influencing the political complexion of the workers: the inflation and widely publicized profiteering, idealist propaganda on the part of certain elements of the ruling classes, the Russian revolutions of 1917; discrimination against "alien enemies", and the persecution of radical groups, especially those catering to the "foreign" element. These developments, familiar to the student of the Winnipeg General Strike, played a similar role in the

coalfields at War's end to create a situation of extreme class polarization. The miners, led by P.M. Christophers, President of District 18, found themselves in the vanguard of a revolutionary working class movement -- the One Big Union -- by early 1919.

They could not have been more out of step with their International union, the United Mine Workers of America, if they had bought stock in a Harlan County coal mine. Although the U.M.W. of A. had fought some of the bloodiest class wars in North America, and was, in practice, an industrial union, its leadership was possessed by a narrow, even conservative craft mentality. The U.M.W. of A.'s pre-war President, John Mitchell, had personified "class collaboration" by his membership in the National Civic Federation. Its rising star, John Llewellyn Lewis, was to manifest the same ideology, in a far more negative and destructive manner, in the post-war era. The pages of the United Mine Workers Journal throughout the 1917-1919 period rivalled any "boss sheet" propaganda in favour of industrial peace and the idea of harmony of interests between Capital and Labour. More importantly, the Lewis-controlled newspaper was vehement in its vituperation against radicals, draft resisters and bolsheviks. At the same time that Lewis called off a national coal strike with the words "I cannot fight my government", the miners in Western Canada were endorsing resolutions in favour of "proletarian dictatorship" and the political General Strike.

Throughout that year, Lewis and his henchmen were locked in battle with the elected leadership of the District for control of the organization. John L. declared that "under no circumstances" would he "recognize the right of the Western (Labour) Conference to canvass mine workers", and sabotaged the referendum on affiliation to the One Big Union which was being held in the District.⁹ What results became known showed a margin of 97% in favour of affiliation (See Appendix E, Table 1), but the wishes of the rank and file meant little to trade union autocrats of the Lewis type. Further support was shown towards the O.B.U. in the strikes which affected all major coal centres for periods ranging from 60 to 100 days in 1919.¹⁰ The strikers had few "immediate" demands, but rather were trying to enforce recognition of the O.B.U. For the first time, maintenance men who worked the pumps and fans were pulled out of several mines, as the workers declared war on the government and the employers with the "100% Strike."¹¹ The "100% Strike" was contrary to the policy of the United Mine Workers, and was a weapon used by miners' unions only in extreme circumstances, since it put the property of the mine owners (and thus, the jobs of the workers) into jeopardy. The only other time such a technique was used in Canada was during the bitter and violent confrontation in Cape Breton during the 1920's.

Nothing, however, could convince the government, the mine owners, or the U.M.W. of A. to pay any heed to the miners'

demands for the right to organize in the union of their choice. The O.B.U. was a cancer which had to be ruthlessly extirpated from the coalfields, and the U.M.W. collaborated in this endeavour. In December 1919, the International was granted its coveted closed shop, along with a 14% wage increase, in return. Those militants who refused to sign up with what was now widely regarded as a contemptible "scab organization", got their names on the blacklist, with unemployment and discrimination their reward for devotion to principle.¹² Many more, of course, took out the U.M.W. cards, but had no heart in the business. Despite the opposition arrayed against it, the One Big Union died hard in District 18. The early part of 1920 saw O.B.U. strikes for recognition in the Alberta Pass, Drumheller, Wayne, Brule and Saunders' Creek. A General Strike call by the O.B.U. on October 1 met with support in Drumheller, Coalhurst, Nordegg and the B. C. Pass. The Operators' Association was worried enough to re-open negotiations with the American union, and the U.M.W. received another bribe for its continued support against "bol-¹³shevism" in the form of a further wage increase. By 1921 wages in the mines had doubled their 1917 levels and the O.B.U. had been largely smashed, but the U.M.W. of A., for obvious reasons, remained a highly unstable organization.

Moreover, the union's honeymoon with the bosses was now coming to an end. As the price of coal began to drop and the cost of living fell back to that "of the early part of 1917" there was growing pressure for wage cuts. Pleading inability

to compete with non-union coal and alternate sources of energy, the Operators' Association presented demands for reduction ranging up to 50% in early 1922.¹⁴ The miners, on the other hand, had no wish to return to their pre-war status, or to have their wages related mechanically to the cost of living, or to the much poorer standards of the Nova Scotia miners, as the operators suggested. Most critical in their view was the fact that high wages were necessary to offset the seasonal nature of the industry and the evils of "short time" in the mines. In 1921 coal production in Alberta dropped by 15%, and the mines worked less than 200 days on average. Basing their arguments on the theories of classical economics, the mine owners contended that wage cuts would produce full employment, but the workers were not convinced. The problem was a basic one of falling demand which affected the coal industry all over the Western World, not only in Canada. The miners were in fact caught up in a vicious circle, in the words of Frank Wheatley: "the victims of a mismanaged industry."¹⁵

Following Lewis' "no step backwards" policy, U.M.W. leaders refused to budge on the wage issue and were forced into conflict with their late allies, the Western Canada Coal Operators' Association. A five months' strike in 1922, after which the Operators' Association substantially capitulated on the wage issue, failed to resolve the conflict. The year 1923 saw a squeeze on the owners' profits: while production had jumped by 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ % since 1921 in the Province of Alberta, its value had only increased by

2½% (See Appendix A, Table 1). Something would soon have to break: the miners' wages, the stockholders' dividends, or the industry itself.

The U.M.W. continued to enjoy the reputation of a "scab" outfit, devoted to collaboration with the bosses, amongst the militant element. The leadership of this group had by now passed from the hands of the Socialist Party, which had organized and masterminded the One Big Union effort, to the Communists. The Communist Party, which inherited much of the earlier socialist movement's support, especially amongst the foreign language groups, opposed further "dual unionist" activities. Concluding that the O.B.U. had been a failure, they urged the militants to work within the U.M.W. structure, pointing as an example of the success of this tactic the achievements of the "Red Executive" of District 26 in Nova Scotia. The last O.B.U. strike in District 18 occurred in the Drumheller Valley in late 1922, but this by no means signified the end of opposition to the U.M.W. officialdom. At the most grassroots level, there was much rank and file resentment against the International for its failure to come across with substantial financial relief during the District strike. According to one study, a mere \$1,250 was distributed in the District during 1922.¹⁶ The Secretary-Treasurer of the Strike Relief Committee in Drumheller, a Communist by the name of Arthur "Slim" Evans, later of "On-to-Ottawa" fame, took matters into his own hands. In 1922 Evans

refused to turn over per capita payments to "a bunch of pot bellied business agents" at the U.M.W. headquarters in Indianapolis, and gave the money back to the miners instead. He later was prosecuted on charges of "fraudulent conversion", convicted, and sent to the penitentiary for this crime.

The contradictions within the organization came to light in the events surrounding the "general strike" of miners and steelworkers in Cape Breton in July of 1923. The strike was led by Communist Party militants on the Island, headed by J.B. McLachlan, Secretary-Treasurer of District 26. It was smashed by a double blow: by the government, which railroaded McLachlan to prison; and John L. Lewis, who simultaneously deposed the District 26 executive on the grounds that it was involved in revolutionary conspiracy. The militants in Drumheller, led by a Cape Breton Communist, Lewis McDonald, staged a strike in sympathy, while other locals in Alberta demanded that their District executive take similar action. The District President, William Sherman, issued a call for a Convention to consider the matter, but quickly reversed his stand, presumably on orders from Indianapolis. Once more, the wishes of the miners, who felt an instinctive solidarity with their brethren in Nova Scotia, despite John L. Lewis, had been subverted by the International. The Communists, of course, were given further evidence for their case against the "labour fakers". In September 1923, the Secretary of the Operators' Association, R.M. Young, felt

compelled to warn Sherman of the "menace" of "men who hold cards in your organization but who are nevertheless not intrinsically loyal to it."¹⁹

II

Thus, it was hardly as a united body that the District faced a new test against the operators with the expiry of the 1922 contract in March, 1924. Ten thousand mine workers found themselves out on strike again, and the dispute with the coal owners was paralleled by infighting within the union. The militants called for a general 100% strike, with all maintenance men taken off the job, at least for 24 hours. The District Executive refused to consider such a possibility, even when provoked by the operators, who failed to grant the union's request²⁰ for a 10% checkoff for strike relief from these individuals. The strike leaders seemed to be paralyzed by their desire to retain friendly relations with the coal owners on the one hand, and the brutal realities of the economic conflict on the other. As small mines began to re-open at non-union rates along the Coal Branch and in the Drumheller Valley, and the U.M.W. of A. put up no resistance, the strikers began to talk of betrayal. Local unions called for a special convention to deal with the problem, but to no avail. Other Locals expressed their opposition to the International by endorsing candidates of the anti-Lewis, Left Wing "Progressive Miners' Movement" and demanding the re-instatement of expelled militants like Alex Howat and

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and McLachlan.

Even at the onset of the strike, morale amongst the miners had been low. A company spy from the Thiel Detective Agency reported thus to the Secretary of the Operators' Association of conditions in the Crows' Nest Pass:

...as far east as Blairmore I was surprised to find public sentiment so strongly in favour of the operators... among the strikers themselves there are rumours of union men going to work in non-union mines and, I thought, a general disillusionment among their ranks -- a propaganda that it might be well to push along if possible. Everyone was looking forward to a long drawn out struggle of endurance.

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As in 1922, the International claimed inability to distribute regular strike pay. A national relief campaign for the miners netted a few thousand dollars, mainly from District 26 and various Communist Party sources, but this was merely a drop in the bucket. In the Crows' Nest Pass, the miners were quickly reduced to penury and their families forced to subsist on extended credit and handouts from local merchants. On October 24, after seven months on strike, the U.M.W. of A. signed an agreement with the Operators' Association which included cuts of between \$.80 and \$1.17 on daily rates and 12½% on contract men. For many the strike had been an exercise in futility. To have gone back at a loss, after receiving very little material assistance in the fight, was a bitter pill to swallow, and did nothing to further endear the United Mine Workers in the hearts of its membership.

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However, the battle was not yet over. The hopes of the mining community for a return to industrial peace and prosperity were dashed by new demands on the part of the coal owners. Labour had had its strike, now it was the turn of Capital. Within two months the Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company, the largest operator in District 18, with 1,200 men employed in its mines at Fernie and Michel, B.C., closed its pits pending acceptance of further cuts of up to 30% in wage scales. The timing of the dispute was advantageous to the miners, and the Communist element in the District called for an industry-wide sympathetic strike, "as the old glass hit forty below" in the West. ²⁵ The Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company had gambled that the U.M.W. would not fight, and they were right. Left to their own devices and teetering on the brink of starvation, the Fernie miners surrendered on December 10, 1924. A company union, the B.C. Miners' Association, was set up, and signed a four-year contract embodying the operators' main demands. The basic rate for an underground labourer now stood at \$4.25 a day, as opposed to \$6.89 before the 1924 strike: an example of what were euphemistically known as the "New Crow Rates." In a masterful stroke the corporation had seized the opportunity presented by the prevailing mood of defeat, and inflicted a serious blow to trade unionism in what had long been one of its strongholds, the Crows' Nest Pass.

Tim Buck, the head of the Communist Party's "Trade Union Educational League" who spent a good deal of time in District 18 during the crisis, summed up "The Lesson of Fernie" in an article in the T.U.E.L.'s newspaper, Left Wing. Arguing the need to revive "an idealism without which trade unionism becomes a meaningless farce" he writes:

The cut was a reflection of the spirit of the men more than anything else, and the company union is more an effect than a cause... the company union at Fernie, which is today an effect of demoralization, will in its turn be the cause of more. 26

Buck was not far off the mark. After enduring the lock-out for another month, the Michel men capitulated on January 8, 1925, on identical terms as had been obtained in Fernie. The International union had now been all but wiped out in British Columbia.

The psychological advantage gained by the operators in breaking away from the Western Canada Coal Operators' Association contract with District 18 in B.C. was, of course, re-inforced by a potent economic factor as well. Given the increasingly competitive nature of the coal industry in the Crows' Nest Pass, the wage cuts on the B.C. side made similar reductions in the Alberta section almost inevitable, since mines on both sides of the line depended heavily on essentially the same market -- the C.P.R. and its subsidiary, Consolidated Mining and Smelting. With the entire Pass working at non-union rates, the other "steam fields" further north serving the C.N.R. would not be

long in following suit. Further impetus would also be given to the wage cutting arguments of the operators in the lignite fields, who were anxious to lower the costs of production in order to better compete with alternate sources of fuel in the domestic market.²⁷ The Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company -- which was owned by the former holding company for the railroad empire of J.J. Hill, Northern Securities, and the Granby Consolidated Mine and Smelting Corporation -- played an instrumental role, therefore, in driving down the wages of workers in Western Canada's coal mining industry.²⁸

The majority of the Alberta operators, fearful of worker resistance which might jeopardize existing coal orders, acted cautiously, waiting for a more propitious time to deliver the coup-de-grace. Nevertheless, the winter of 1924-1925 was a hard, hard time for the mining community. The "Report from District 18" in the Left Wing reads as follows:

...Coleman, Bellevue, Hillcrest and Blairmore are working less than half time, the Lethbridge field is working every day, but in another month their season will be over, the mines closed until September. Only eight months between pay days... Drumheller is in the same boat as Lethbridge, Canmore is very slack. In the Saunders' Field we lost two of the three mines, at Nordegg it is NINE months since the last ton of coal was loaded.

Mountain Park and Cadomin have not yet re-opened to date and Luscar, Mercoal and Mile 50 will be closing down again in the near future. At Brule...Mr. Bickell offered to reopen the mine if the men would accept another reduction...hunger will be the deciding factor.

Plenty of coal, more mines to open up, twice as many miners as there are jobs, no markets, immigrants coming in by the thousands, terrific struggles for jobs. Liberal-Rockefeller Government at Ottawa, Rich Farmer Government at Edmonton, the more we work, the more in debt we are, misery and suffering are getting beyond our control so --God Save the King!

29.

The Operators' Association convened one of its last meetings in March, 1925. Secretary Young admitted that conditions in the District were "probably worse than at any previous time in its history; adding that the B.C. wage cuts were "a striking indication of what can be done" to resolve the problems. ³⁰ The operators continued to press the propaganda that wage cuts "could result in five days a week work" in the Alberta mines. A final attempt at negotiations came to naught, as union officers refused to countenance any re-opening of the 1924 contract until year's end. For all intents and purposes the Association then dissolved itself, as its members endeavoured to salvage what they could out of the chaos by locking out and extracting local agreements from their employees. The open shop now seemed well within their reach.

Despite the United Mine Workers' adamant policy towards wage reductions, it remained lethargic in its response to the crisis and did little to back up its stand in a concrete manner. Sherman refused to heed demands from locals such as Blairmore to call a strike, and left things to drift from bad to worse. The rank and file, led primarily by the Communists, put up a

show of resistance in a few areas. On March 28, for example, a parade of miners passed through Hillcrest, Blairmore and Coleman under red banners emblazoned with the hammer and sickle and the brave words, "NO SURRENDER, NATIONALIZATION OF THE MINES". In the Alberta Pass, however, the cause had long since been lost. On April 6, Blairmore voted 150 to 98 to accept a slightly higher version of the "New Crow Rates."³¹ Bellevue followed the next day, and Coleman on April 11.

Hillcrest was the last holdout in the area. Here the mine was picketed in an apparently vigorous manner by the militants between April 17 and 24, as the company tried to re-open the pits with strike-breakers and "loyal" employees. The resistance was led entirely by "local officers of the union."³²

According to Tim Buck, President Sherman stopped in the town only long enough to buy \$9 worth of beer for the strikers.³³

Later, when 23 Hillcrest employees involved in the picketing were blacklisted and branded as "Reds" by the company, Sherman disavowed them, claiming that "their actions were not approved of by the United Mine Workers." Although the operators liked to think of the "Reds" in the coalfields as entirely foreign in origin, this group was led by a Britisher named Thomas Price, and included a Nova Scotian, a Newfoundlander and an English-speaking Quebecer in its ranks. The 23 militants were refused work in all the other camps in the Pass, and presumably had to

move far afield to find other jobs in the mines. It was a crushing blow to trade unionism at Hillcrest -- the site of Canada's worst mine disaster in 1914 -- which was not organized again until 1937. It might be noted that Hillcrest Collieries was a creature of the Herbert Holt/C.P.R. interests at this time.

The "peaceful revolution", as the Edmonton Journal called the break-up of District 18, swung into high gear. The brave miners of Nordegg, who had not had a day's work since the beginning of the 1924 strike, voted to leave the U.M.W. by a margin of 192 to 134 on May 8, Canmore on May 11. In the North, along the C.N.R.'s Coal Branch, most of the smaller camps were re-opened on an open shop basis (Foothills since mid-1924) although three key mines -- Cadomin, Luscar and Mountain Park -- remained closed until later in the summer. It was in this context of defeat that the first steps towards re-organization of District 18, outside of the United Mine Workers, were taken in the Pass; where "home locals" with limited check off privileges along the lines of the B.C. Miners' Association had been established after disaffiliation. In this process, the Communist Party played a crucial role, despite its official line of opposing "secessionist movements" from International unions. Earl Browder, for example, thought it inconsistent for the Canadian Party to participate in the organization of a Canadian coal

miners' union in the West while continuing to support the U.M.W. in Nova Scotia.³⁷ Yet the situation in District 18 presented itself as a very special case. An unsigned document, dated at Coleman, Alberta, May 8, 1925, and almost certainly written by Tim Buck, explains:

...the bitterness which has existed against this union (U.M.W. of A.) since the 1919 secessionist movement has produced a peculiar sentiment which may be summed up in the phrase so often heard, "Well, we got it in the neck, but by God we have something to be thankful for, this has rid us of the U.M.W. of A."...Today the men find themselves in the same camp as the boss against the U.M.W. of A., and the combination of circumstances (more than a year without work, morbid satisfaction at the defeat of John L. Lewis, and the fact that they are completely beaten) renders any idea of re-organizing the United Mine Workers out of the question...Because we are opposed to secession, it does not follow that we must stand aside and see the workers of a whole industry (and our most militant supporters at that) completely smashed and demoralized...

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The document goes on to outline the Party's "Plan Z" for the future of District 18. The plan provided for "one of the locals in which we still have some influence" to call a convention of delegates from the home locals, out of which would emerge a new miners' organization: to be called the "Crows' Nest Pass Miners' Union", the "United Mine Workers' of Canada", or, most likely, the "Mine Workers' Union of Canada." The Convention was held, according to the Party's Plan, at Blairmore on June 1, at which time the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was formally inaugurated. Delegates from Coleman, Blairmore, Bellevue, Corbin, B.C., Michel and Hillcrest attended,

although the home locals in the latter two camps did not affiliate.

The new union represented an ideological "mulligan stew". It was comprised of elements which had opposed the U.M.W. of A.'s stand on the wage question, those who had opposed the International for nationalistic reasons, as well as the Communist and non-Communist Left Wing. United Mine Workers stalwarts like Pat Conroy of Drumheller regarded the new union as "notoriously reactionary", and criticized Communist participation therein as purely opportunistic. ³⁹ If abandoning cherished dogmas (on "dual unionism") in order to reflect the desires of the rank and file can be construed as opportunism, then Communist policy in this case probably was. No doubt the Communists accepted the inevitability of working with the "reactionaries" now that the battle over the wage question was over, with the hope of steering the union to a more militant course in future.

The provisional executive of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada reflected the new alliances. Its President was Frank Leary of Blairmore, a Left-leaning non-Communist; its Vice-President a right wing or "moderate" representative from Coleman, John D. Gillis. The important post of Secretary-Treasurer fell to John Stokaluk, a "radical foreigner", also of Coleman. Stokaluk, a Ukrainian, was the leading light of the Communist

Party and Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association organizations in the Crows' Nest area. "Big John" was popular with the rank and file, especially the foreign element, who constituted a majority of the mine workers in the Pass (See Appendix D, Table 1). Stokaluk, however, was no wild-eyed revolutionary, but a cautious comrade and a capable trade unionist, who sought to maintain good relations between the opposing factions within the organization: a style of leadership which would later bring him into conflict with the leadership of the Communist Party. Although the alliance between Left and Right in the Crows' Nest Pass embodied in the M.W.U.C. was to break down during the depression, for the moment all were united against a common enemy, the United Mine Workers of America in their common opposition to the U.M.W. of A. bureaucracy. Leary's first press release made this point clear:

This organization is determined no U.M.W. of A. will be re-organized in the Pass under the present regime. The District officials failed us in a critical hour. Six weeks before the direct settlement of the wage question we urged the District officials to take action. They refused, saying they were acting on instructions from Indianapolis. Separate agreements were therefore negotiated. We will not interfere with existing contracts. We plan to go along quietly, increasing our strength gradually.

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Elsewhere, the "peaceful revolution" continued apace. In the Lethbridge lignite field, the miners voted to accept company terms between June 2 and 9, and another "independent" organization was formed, the Lethbridge Miners' Federation. At the

Galt Mine in Hardieville, a suburb of Lethbridge, the Canadian Pacific Railway extracted exceedingly favourable terms in a three-year agreement which contained daily wage scales 20 cents lower than those obtained in the Alberta Pass. The check off was reduced to 50 cents (as opposed to \$1.00 in Blairmore, Bellevue and Coleman) per day, just in case the "Miners' Federation" should cease to function in the company union capacity. And despite the wage reductions, the old charges, such as 1% of all earnings for the use of lamps, remained unchanged. ⁴¹ The first President of the Miners' Federation was one James Sloan, later President of the M.W.U.C., a Scotsman who had been active in the trade union movement since his arrival in Canada in 1907. Sloan worked his way onto the U.M.W. blacklist in 1919 for the crime of being a "strong O.B.U." in Coalhurst, a traditionally militant camp just west of Lethbridge. ⁴² Like many in District 18, he had not "abandoned trade unionism" in 1925, but had abandoned a particular union and its policies, which had ceased to serve the interests of its membership.

III

Well might the Department of Labour's annual publication for 1925 describe the tangled struggle between the operators, the U.M.W. and the Communist Party in the coalfields as "Confusion in District 18." Where the fight had come to a conflict

between the International and the mine owners, the Canadian miners had lined up, in a sense, with their "class enemies" against the labour bureaucrats. It is significant, however, that where the U.M.W. was not an issue, or where it lined up with the operators against the miners, the "peaceful revolution" was not accomplished without a struggle. For illustrations of this trend we must turn our attention to the events which transpired in the other lignite fields in Alberta in 1925. First, the Edmonton field, which employed, depending on the season, between 200 and 800 mine workers. The Edmonton miners had been smashed by the operators during the 1922 strike, and forced to accept wage scales which were approximately half those of the rest of the District. With the exception of one U.M.W. local (4119), they had been organized into the Edmonton and District Miners' Federation, an affiliate of the diminutive Canadian Federation of Labour. Although loudly denounced as a "scab" outfit by the U.M.W., which refused a 100 dollar donation from the Federation during the 1924 strike, it had fallen under the control of what Tim Buck called "progressive elements (and) developed, within two years... into a militant and aggressive organization." ⁴³ By launching strike action in the summer of 1925, the Federation was successful in paring down employer demands for further wage cuts, no small feat for a supposed "company union". (See Appendix C, page 259):

The main action in 1925, however, occurred in the Drumheller Valley, which experienced a bitter strike which foreshadowed the struggles of the 1930's in several important ways. In the first place the strike marked the final designation of the once proud U.M.W. of A. as a "company union", when, for the first time, the U.M.W. openly sided with management on the bread and butter issues facing the membership (its opposition to the O.B.U., it will be recalled, was combined with demands for higher wages for the membership). Secondly, the strike saw emergence, for the first, but by no means the last time, of "communism" as an issue in industrial conflict in the coalfields. Thirdly, Drumheller in 1925 experienced the kind of violence which was to characterize tragically the struggles of the 30's. For these reasons, the strike deserves closer attention here.

By the early summer of 1925, the U.M.W. leadership had recognized that its stand on the wage issue had been a failure. Further adherence to it could only result in the complete demolition of their organization, whose main strength now lay in the Drumheller Valley. However, in typical fashion, they allowed the rank and file no decision on the matter, and in an abrupt volte-face announced the signing of a new contract with the coal operators (now grouped together as the Red Deer Valley Coal Operators Association) on June 17. The contract provided for a 15% reduction on contract rates, and the basic

"Crow Rates" for datal men. The miners were/indignant, and unlike their confreres in some other areas, put up a stiff resistance to the cuts. One factor, no doubt, was the lack of consultation: not even important local U.M.W. officers like Pat Conroy had been informed of the signing of the contract. Like the other "domestic" or lignite coal miners, the Drumheller men worked 40 to 50 days less a year than those in the "steam fields", and felt that high wages were necessary to offset the seasonal unemployment problem. Their only other source of income might be a few weeks work in the fields, for which they would have to compete with the swarms of unemployed who roamed the western prairies during the 1920's. The Drumheller field, one of the last to be opened up in the West, was traditionally noted for its militance, and had been a hot bed of O.B.U. and Communist activities prior to 1925. In addition, the Drumheller Valley possessed a relatively strong and aggressive radical movement which was willing to assume leadership of a fight against both the operators and the U.M.W. of A.

The leader of this movement was a man named Lewis McDonald, alias 'Kid Burns', one of the more interesting characters in the Alberta coalfields. McDonald came from a mining family in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, and had earned his nickname by being favourably compared with the great Tommy Burns while a prizefighter in the United States Navy before the war. He served in Europe during

the Great War, and returned home to become involved in the radical ferment in Cape Breton in the immediate post-war period.⁴⁵ By 1922, he was in the West, breathing the fire of the class struggle into the Drumheller Sub-District of the U.M.W. of A. He seems to have aspired to the position of the J.B. McLachlan of District 18, although he was not quite of the same calibre as the latter labour leader. Nevertheless, he was a fighter, and possessed that quality of raw, reckless courage which did not count for nothing in the hard life of the mining community. He was popular with the miners, as evidenced by his election as check-weighman at various mines in the Drumheller area after being blacklisted for his part in the Cape Breton sympathetic strike of July, 1923. McDonald's chief problem -- and one which caused considerable embarrassment among his superiors in the Communist movement -- was his inability to get along with the ethnic wing of the Party. He managed to combine his radicalism with a fiery nationalism and a fair degree of Anglo-Saxon chauvinism. Later, during the early years of the Depression, he was to espouse a policy of outright racism. During the 1925 strike, however, the Party was able to deliver the support of the ethnic groups, particularly the Ukrainians, who made up 11% of the labour force, to the McDonald faction. Moreover, McDonald's problems with the ethnics was not as great a disability in Drumheller as it might have been elsewhere. In 1925, it

was the only major coalfield in Alberta to have a clear majority of British, Canadians and Americans employed in the mines. (See Appendix D, Table 1). Doubtless McDonald's latent nativism only reflected the ideas and prejudices of the rest of the Anglo-Saxon community at the time.

A bitter opponent of William Sherman, the ambitious McDonald seized the opportunity presented by the odious U.M.W. contract to engineer the creation of a new organization, the Red Deer Valley Miners' Union, after June 17. Its executive included Joseph Fletcher, Robert Hall and John Jenkins, but not McDonald, who declined nomination.

McDonald's refusal to serve in an official capacity seems to have been part of the new union's general strategy of avoiding the "Communist" label. Right from the start, the union's opponents attempted to obscure the real issues at stake -- wage cuts and the right to a Canadian union -- in a smokescreen of political rhetoric. Said Sherman of the secession:

...the present situation in Drumheller has been developing for the past two years. Outside influences operating through an organization known as the Workers' Party (Communist Party of Canada) have strenuously tried to destroy the U.M.W. of A. Their campaign has been so guarded as to

prevent expulsion...the Workers' Party was conspiring to destroy the international trade union movements. Our policy has been to force them to come into the open and the present situation at Drumheller is the final outcome of such a policy.

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The daily press, which had applauded the actions of miners in other areas in quitting the U.M.W., was less than unqualified in its support of the Drumheller secessionists:

...of course, every public-spirited citizen prefers seeing an all-Canadian union in the field but when a Canadian union allows Communists to take an active part in its program, it does not represent Canadianism at all...Elimination of Reds would go a long way in winning public sympathy.

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The miners of District 18, of course, had had "little" "public" sympathy" during their years of struggle in the West, and could probably get along just as well without it now. The important question is the degree of sympathy that the "Communist" Red Deer Valley Union elicited from the miners themselves, a factor which is, unfortunately, rather hard to measure. Of the 1,600 miners employed in the field, only 800 participated in the referendum of June 21, the results of which are produce below (Appendix E, Table 2). The referendum was conducted very hastily, and may have been blocked by the U.M.W. in several locals. Many mine workers, moreover, may have been out of the district seeking temporary employment at the time. While the Red Deer Union claimed 90% support for its strike call of June 23, the operators estimated that only half of their workers participated.⁴⁸ The truth perhaps lies somewhere in between, pointing to the probable conclusion that although some workers remained loyal to the U.M.W., the majority did not. The Calgary Herald opined that the new union "seems to have the majority." Conroy's statement that he could have been crowned "King of Drumheller" had he abandoned the U.M.W. of A. would also seem to bear this out.⁵⁰

Although many mines were completely idle at the time of the strike, others were open for developmental work, and were heavily picketed by the supporters of the Canadian union. An important point of conflict was at the A.B.C. (Alberta Block Coal Company) mine, part of the empire of Jesse Gouge. Gouge was the largest operator in the Valley, a strong supporter of the U.M.W., and staunch opponent of "communism" in the coal-fields. On June 25, a minor riot broke out at the A.B.C. gates, as U.M.W. personnel sought to cross picket lines, and Drumheller was invaded by a strong detachment of Alberta Provincial Police. On June 26, two of their number fired upon a group of four or five strikers camped on the high ground surrounding the mine, grievously wounding 21-year-old Lambert Renners. A.E. Smith describes the shooting in his autobiography, adding the not implausible opinion that Tim Buck, who helped organize the strike, was the actual target of the police:

...numerous police were sent into Drumheller. They practised ugly methods of intimidation. Scabs were imported, some even coming from the Old Country. Many of these, to their credit, never entered the mines...One night without warning (the incident took place in the early hours of the morning) the police took a shot at one of the pickets in the glow of the bonfire they had lit to keep warm. Louis Renners (sic) fell, shot in the back. He was arrested and handcuffed despite the fact that he was severely wounded...It had remained a secret until now, that the man standing beside the fire beside Louis that night was Tim Buck. The police had hoped that Tim was the man who dropped to earth at the crack of their rifle shot.

There is no way to verify Smith's charges, although the rest of his account is largely accurate. Given the prevailing anti-communist hysteria being whipped up in Drumheller, the Communists had good reason to hush up Buck's role and to keep him "underground". Contemporary newspaper accounts made no mention of his presence. The police claimed that the group had been throwing rocks at them at the time of the shooting. They excused their brutal treatment of Renners in dragging him to jail instead of the hospital by stating that they did not "discover" the damage until later. Not for three weeks did it become known that the lad would indeed recover from gunshot wounds in the back and abdomen. ⁵² Immediately following the shootings, the hills around the A.B.C. mine were occupied by police and tear gas was used to disperse further attempts to picket the Gouge property. As one reporter noted: "the authorities are evidently working on the assumption that the new miners' organization is not a lawful one and therefore has not the right to picket." ⁵³ The response of the strikers to these events is well described by union spokesman John Brooker:

We fought overseas, but not against ourselves, why should police use guns to shoot our boys, and parade rifles and machine guns against us who are Canadian citizens.

54

Paradoxically, the Valley Union's staunchest supporters were the war veterans, a group not traditionally sympathetic to militant trade unionism in the Drumheller area. The veterans, who were almost entirely Anglo-Saxon, had played an

instrumental role in breaking up in an extremely violent manner the "foreign dominated" O.B.U. movement some years before. ⁵⁵ Conroy, for one, thought it strange indeed that the Drumheller Communists should march with the Veterans' Association under the Union Jack and a banner reading "We Defended Canada 1914-1918: We Desire Justice and a Canadian Union." Not so incongruous perhaps, when one considers the inclinations of Party personnel like McDonald, a war veteran himself, who was instrumental in mobilizing his confreres behind the strike; and Jenkins, whose statement that the veterans were men who "had fought for civilization" would have been anathema to the C.P. leadership. The veterans, of course, were not the same men who had so enthusiastically tarred and feathered the radicals of 1919. Years of strikes and unemployment had taken their toll, and this time around they would not allow themselves to be used as employers' pawns in the fight against "communism." On the other hand, while supporting the new union, the veterans' Association stoutly denied any revolutionary intentions, and took an increasingly active role in union affairs in order to demonstrate to the public that "the 'Red' element in the Valley was not in control." ⁵⁶

"Red" or not, the strike continued, on an only slightly diminished level of savagery. On July 23 Sherman was mauled, although not badly injured, in a fight with McDonald outside the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple. As the operators' desire

to step up work in the mines, connected with experimental shipments of Alberta coal to the Ontario market in 1925, increased, so did the running battle on the picket lines at the A.B.C., Atlas, Midlandvale, and Rosedale mines. Of one episode we read:

(the returned men)...tired of suck holing to a scab and the boss, lets go over the top with the best of luck...cars carrying scabs riddled with stones, many of the police couldn't see...THE MINERS WERE MAD - 500 men ready to go and 75 women cheering them on with the result that the doctor was very busy and the garage will be busy too one imported scab at the middland mine is dying...as Jim (McLachlan) would say, 'I was not able to be present but heartily approve of the event'...

57

The new union, however, was unable to assert its will against the economic realities of the situation, the apparatus of the state, and the implacable hostility of the coal operators. After one unsuccessful attempt, Jesse Gouge got an injunction preventing 36 named union members from picketing the Drumheller mines on August 25, and by mid September, the organization had "ceased to exist", and the strike collapsed. ⁵⁸ Five hundred miners in the Wayne area regrouped themselves as the "Wayne Mine Workers' Union of Canada", and signed an agreement under that designation with 8 companies in that field. Other mines, following the lead of Gouge, signed with the U.M.W., or went open shop. In all cases, the proposed pay cuts were implemented. Aside from the suffering of families whose members spent varying periods behind bars (approximately 75 of these went for trial, although only McDonald and a young man named Cecil Boone were convicted); the dispute was capped by the tragic exodus of

scores of blacklisted militants. It was the Drumheller strike of 1925 which spurred the creation of the Communist legal aid organization, the Canadian Labour Defence League, which was to prove of inestimable value to the M.W.U.C. during the 1930's.⁵⁹ Most importantly, the division of the miners of the Valley into weak and divided organizations had destroyed their solidarity and militated against all attempts to collectively improve their conditions for over a decade.

The operators' campaign had been triumphant throughout the District. In August the wage cuts were finally implemented along the Coal Branch, although the biggest mine, at Mountain Park, remained with the U.M.W. of A., as did Brule on the C.N.R. main line. The International, however, scarcely remained as a credible force. By summer's end, its entire executive had resigned, the affairs of District 18 being placed in the hands of International Board Member Bob Livett from Coleman. Livett, along with Angus J. Morrison, ruled directly without election on behalf of the International for the next 11 years. By Livett's own count, the union had been reduced from 34 locals with 8,500 members to six locals with 1,500 members in one year. As the Drumheller events had proven, the U.M.W. now differed little in practice from the other "home locals" and company unions in the District. It was, as Paul Phillips remarks,⁶¹ "labour's darkest hour" in the West.

IV

The fledgling Mine Workers' Union of Canada, pushed by the Communist Party, tried to step into this appalling breach. Out of the defeated fragments of District 18 the Communists hoped to build no less than "a powerful industrial organization functioning in every coal or metal mining district from Vancouver Island to Wabana."⁶² Stokaluk took the first step in convincing the rest of the executive of the M.W.U.C. to call a "national" organizing convention in September, 1925, and inviting representatives from all the Canadian unions in District 18, as well as from the ore miners of Porcupine, Ontario. He failed, however, to heed the Party's advice to extend the invitation to the dissident Left Wing of District 26. Stokaluk, a man with a genius for maintaining a delicate balance between Party policy and the necessities of his own position in the trade union movement, argued that the presence of the Nova Scotians would "scare the operators" and alienate the right wing element in the M.W.U.C.⁶³

Lewis McDonald, awaiting trial for his many misdeeds of the previous summer, played an active role in the Convention's proceedings (September 28 - October 2), and sat on the committee chosen to draft a constitution for the M.W.U.C. He considered the Calgary meeting, which was attended by 35 delegates claiming to represent 7,000 miners a "good reply" to the "U.M.W. traitors" such as Pat Conroy:

...the convention understood well enough that what is wanted is not a big splash and little or no organization, but a powerful industrial union, embracing every mine worker...given this, with a fighting program and militant leadership, nothing can stop the miners from forging ahead.

64

A new executive was elected which differed little from the old, except for the replacement of Frank Leary by Dai Morgan of Nordegg, as President. The Mine Workers Union of Canada continued to be "all things to all men", in spite of the rhetoric. While the Communists liked to think in terms of a "fighting organization," the Western Canada Coal Review expressed the hopes of the operators for class collaboration:

...the Mine Workers' Union of Canada...has a clear field before it, and may be acceptable to the operators, provided its officers are men in whom both operators and miners have complete trust. They must be willing to see eye to eye with the mine owners for the good of the industry as a whole, rather than the meagre alternative of 'grant our demands or we strike'...

65

The Constitution of the organization was a model of sobriety, designed to answer critics who still believed that the M.W.U.C. was "unCanadian":

We believe that the time is now at hand for the Mine Workers of Canada to form an organization that will be of benefit to all workers, regardless of creed, color, or nationality, and for the purpose of establishing conditions for the workers of the mining industry that are humane. Therefore we have decided to form the Mine Workers Union of Canada for the purpose of establishing by lawful means (emphasis mine) the principles involved in this Constitution...

66

On paper, the Mine Workers Union of Canada looked impressive, with 23 charters granted to the participating locals.⁶⁷ It failed to attract, however, important groups of colliers, particularly the employees of the Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company, who remained unmoved by all appeals to disband the "B.C. Miners' Association" in favour of affiliation. Hillcrest, too, would not affiliate. Of the large camps in the North, Luscar and Cadomin preferred to retain their "home locals" for the moment, while Brule and Mountain Park remained with the U.M.W. of A. The rivalry between the two organizations which was to sap the energies of the miners in the years ahead had only just begun, although at least one local (Brule) decided to accept cards "from any Local Union Secretary properly certified" in order to minimize its effect.⁶⁸

Before year's end, the Mine Workers' Union had suffered an important defeat, and had its organization disrupted by none other than the I.W.W. in the Wayne field. Wobbly organizer Sam Scarlett (who later joined the C.P.C. and worked as a M.W.U.C. organizer)⁶⁹ had come into the field following the debacle of the summer, and provided leadership to miners still unwilling to accept the "new regime" of the operators. The Wayne field was closed on the first of December, while the Midland, Rosedale and Hygrade mines were struck shortly thereafter. Dumbfounded by this breach of contract, the daily press suggested that only

miners "infected with the virus of radicalism" would dare to withhold their labour power in wintertime, causing inconvenience to the operators as well as the "public". The strikers raised demands for a 5% increase in pay, but unfortunately for most, their action brought few results. Frightened by the gruesome spectre of the I.W.W., the operators signed another "sweet-heart" contract with the United Mine Workers. Members of the International received the 5%, but not those of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, who had initiated the strike in the first place. As Livett proudly boasted, "there has been no increase in wages outside the U.M.W. of A." After one week the U.M.W. mines were back in operation, while the Wayne men, having been so shamefully betrayed, stayed out for another two futile weeks of strike and lost pay.⁷⁰ In the aftermath of the strike, the M.W.U.C. check off was abolished at Wayne; the operators prevented organizers from procuring a meeting hall; and the union in that company town⁷¹ practically ceased to exist.

Another affiliate, the Edmonton and District Miners' Federation, also quickly disappeared. With the expiry of the 1925 contract on June 28, 1926, a strike was declared in the field, the Federation demanding the restoration of pre-1925 wage rates and recognition as the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The employers, on the other hand, "were reported to have demanded that the employees sign agreements which would have involved non-union conditions" and a number of Eastern European strikebreakers to enforce them. By summer's end the

strike had been crushed and the Edmonton field too fell into the open shop category. ⁷² The last remaining local of the Federation, at Big Valley, was smashed after the 1926-1927 season, when the operator opened up a new mine taking "great care that only those of strong non-union tendencies were taken on." ⁷³ The creation of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, then, had had no appreciable effect in halting the capitalist offensive of 1925, despite the brave words and high hopes of its founders.

One of these, Lewis McDonald, heard the doors of Prince Albert Penitentiary slam behind him on February 15, 1926. Although his three-year sentence was for common assault on charges stemming from the 1925 strike, the case was predictably political in nature. One Alberta judge went so far as to state that McDonald was in jail because he was a "communist and an atheist" ⁷⁴. Although the M.W.U.C. launched a campaign to have him freed, there were some in the organization who were not sorry to see him go, including John Stokaluk. After five months behind bars McDonald's mood had changed to one of despair:

...trying to take my medicine (sic) like any class conscious worker, 'without squaking' there are times when I almost boil over, not on account of the way I am used inside, but outside... I was glad the North came into the M.W.U. of C. Surely the workers have had enough of that American union, but from reports, I am afraid of the Valley following the lead of Vancouver Island (open shop). You should watch that don't happen... what I sometimes feel afraid of is the isolation of the Western miners union from all others in Canada. We must find connections or die, we cannot have any power by ourselves, we will just become reactionary (sic) on account of our isolation."

FOOTNOTES TO
CHAPTER I.

1. 'Kid Burns' in The Worker, October 17, 1925
2. The Western Federation had organized the employees of the Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company in 1902, following a grim "accident" which killed 120 men and boys. Following the settlement of a W.F.M. strike in 1903, the miners felt that they had been "sold out" by their leaders, and joined the U.M.W. of A. Labour Gazette 1930, pp. 477, 524; Western Socialist (Clarion), February 21, April 17 and 24, 1903.
3. Following a nine months' strike of the Lethbridge miners which threatened to cut off the supply of domestic coal on the Prairies, during the winter of 1906-1907. Jamieson, op.cit. pp. 127-129; Charles Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959 (Montreal, 1967) pp.114-115.
4. From \$2.75 to \$4.01 per day. Labour Gazette 1917, pp.612-615; 1918, p. 367.
5. Howard Palmer, Land of the Second Chance: A History of Ethnic Groups in Southern Alberta. (Lethbridge 1972) p.30.
6. Ibid, pp. 226-227. An inquiry in 1918 revealed that 90.5% of Alberta's mine workers were immigrants of one sort or another.
7. Frank W. Anderson. Hillcrest: 1914, Canada's Worst Mine Disaster (Frontier Book No. 18) p. 11.
8. Saul Alinsky, John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography (New York, 1949) p. 32. For the resolutions of the Western Labour Conference see Tim Buck, Canada and the Russian Revolution (Toronto, 1967) p. 58.
9. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, United Mine Workers of America, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union." March 19, 1919. Transcripts of telegrams exchanged between John L. Lewis and David Irvine, March 18, 1919.
10. Glenbow Archives, Western Canada Coal Operators' Association Collection. File 108. "O.B.U. Activities, Strikes, 1919-1920).
11. District Ledger, Fernie, B.C., May-July, 1919. The strikes were sparked by Order 124 of the Government's "Director of Coal Operations." This order enforced the 8-hour day for all categories of mine labour, and resulted in wage cuts for surface workers and maintenance men in British Columbia, who had previously worked 9-hour shifts.

12. Some of the blacklists may still be found in the Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection Files 82 and 83. For the text of the U.M.W. agreement see the Labour Gazette 1920, p. 72.
13. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection, File 108. Emile Bjarnason, "Collective Bargaining in the Coal Mining Industry in Canada" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Queen's University, 1965), p. 74. An estimated 3,500 mine workers took part in the strike, which finally collapsed on October 25.
14. Labour Gazette, 1922, pp. 479-480.
15. Ibid, p. 661.
16. Frank Karas, "Labour and Coal in the Crows' Nest Pass, 1925-1939" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1972)p. 37.
17. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection "Minutes, Nacmine Local 1559", April 24, July 9, 1922. See Michiel Horn (ed.) The Dirty Thirties (Toronto, 1972), pp. 360, 364.
18. "Minutes, Nacmine Local 1559", July-August, 1923. The sympathy strike movement is discussed in Eugene Forsey, "Economic and Social Aspects of the Coal Mining Industry in Nova Scotia" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1926) p. 174.
19. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection File 81, "R.M. Young to Wm. Sherman". September 10, 1923,
20. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection File 92, "Checkoff 1924".
21. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes: Coleman Local 2633; Brulé Local 1954; Edmonton Local 4119", 1924.
22. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection, File 101, "Detective Agencies", "C.E. Pratt to R.M. Young", April 11, 1924.
23. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, File 19, "Financial Support, 1924 Strike".
24. Interview: Adam Wilson, former mine worker, International Coke and Coal Company, Coleman, Alberta, June 1976, at Calgary.

25. Left Wing, November, 1924.
26. Ibid, January, 1925.
27. For the operators' point of view, see the Western Canada Coal Review, various numbers, 1925.
28. Moody's Industrials, 1925. pp. 135, 1948
29. Left Wing, January, 1925
30. Calgary Herald, March 4, 1925
31. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection, "Clippings Re. Industry 1922-1925" (scrapbook) March-April, 1925.
32. Calgary Herald, April 17, 1925.
33. Left Wing, May, 1925
34. Calgary Herald, May 22, 1925.
35. Canadian Annual Financial Review, 1925, pp. 599, 673, for interlocking directorships.
36. Edmonton Journal, April 13, 1925.
37. Avakumovic, op.cit. p. 45.
38. Public Archives of Ontario, Communist Party of Canada Files: X; 12, 10C2155-7 (Hereafter referred to as PAO, C.P.C. Files)
39. Pat Conroy, "Communists, One Hundred Percent Patriots," One Big Union Bulletin, November, 1925.
40. Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1925, p. 180.
41. Galt Museum, Lethbridge, Alberta, "Agreement Between the Lethbridge Miners' Federation and the Galt Mines, June 3, 1925 - June 26, 1928."
42. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection, File 83.
43. From a 1925 pamphlet entitled "Steps to Power", in Tim Buck, Our Fight for Canada (Toronto, 1959), pp. 56-57.
44. Western Canada Coal Review, July 1925.

45. For this information I am indebted to David Frank of Dalhousie University.
46. Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1925, p. 181; Left Wing, January-July, 1925; Conroy, op.cit.
47. Calgary Albertan, July 8, 1925.
48. Western Canada Coal Review, July, 1925.
49. Calgary Herald, August 21, 1925.
50. Conroy, op. cit.
51. A. E. Smith, All My Life (Toronto, 1949), pp. 83-84.
52. Calgary Herald, June 26, July 17, 1925.
53. Ibid, June 29, 1925.
54. Ibid.
55. See Anne B. Woywilka, "Drumheller Strike of 1919", Alberta History (Winter 1973) pp. 1-7. The high proportion of Anglo-Saxons in the field may well have been related to the discrimination and blacklisting of foreigners following the O.B.U. affair.
56. Conroy, op. cit.; Calgary Herald, July 30, September 23, 1925.
57. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 1, 1A0026-8. Letter to "Comrade Alice", probably written by Lewis McDonald, August 16, 1925.
58. Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1925, p. 182.; Calgary Herald, September 23, 1925.
59. Smith, op.cit. pp. 84-85.
60. Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1925, p. 26.
61. Paul Phillips, No Power Greater, (Vancouver, 1967), p. 96.
62. Buck, "Steps to Power, 1925" in Our Fight for Canada, op.cit.
63. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I, 1, 1A0029-31, "Stokaluk to Buck," September 22, 1925.
64. Left Wing, October, 1925.

65. Western Canada Coal Review, October, 1925.
66. Public Archives of B.C., Constitution of the Mine Workers Union of Canada, "Preamble"; PAO, C.P.C. Files: X; 22, 10C2158-64. Besides McDonald, the other members of the Constitutional Committee were Dai Morgan, James Sloan, Ernest Rees from Saunders' Creek, and J. McDonald of Coleman.
67. Charters were granted to the following: Metal Miners: Porcupine, Ontario; Crows' Nest Pass: Bellevue, Blairmore, Coleman, Corbin, B.C.; Drumheller: Carbon, Elgin, Midwest, Nacmine, Western Gem, Hygrade, Wayne; Coal Branch: Bryant, Lovett and Foothills; Other: Edmonton, Coalhurst, Lethbridge, Nordegg, Saunders' Creek, Saunders' West, Canmore. From Report on Labour Organizations in Canada, 1925, p.252.
68. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection. "Minutes, Brulé Local 1054", December 27, 1925.
69. Tom McEwen, The Forge Glows Red (Toronto, 1974) pp. 58-60.
70. For reports of the strike, see the Calgary Herald, December 2, 3, 7 and 14, 1925; Labour Gazette, 1926, 1928.
71. See Report of the Wayne Conciliation Board, 1928, Labour Gazette, 1928, pp. 827-832.
72. Labour Gazette, 1926, pp. 762, 861, and 943.
73. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 17, 6B0984. Correspondence to The Worker, October, 1927, from John MacPherson of the Big Valley Local.
74. Quoted in The Worker, December 24, 1927.
75. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 1, 1A0034. "McDonald to Roy Reid," July 10, 1926.

I

The legacy of the battling style of Lewis McDonald came to an end in 1926, with the election of Frank Wheatley to the office of the President of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Far from being a radical pariah, Wheatley was the respected head of the Alberta Federation of Labour and a trade unionist of a completely different ilk. Born in Yorkshire in 1877, Wheatley had dug coal since the age of twelve in the Old Country, and fought for the Queen in the South African War before coming to Canada to work in the C.P.R.'s Bankhead mine, near Banff. Wheatley had a strong sense of Victorian morality (he advocated, for example, the abolition of common showers in the miners' wash houses) and is said to have had a manner like a "Methodist preacher". A God-fearing Fabian who thought that outright nationalization of mines was too drastic a step in 1919, Wheatley regarded the trade union movement, not as a weapon in the class war, but as a vehicle for the spiritual and moral uplifting of the worker. His attitude towards the movement is well expressed by a remark made during questioning by the Alberta Government Coal Commission, set up to investigate the miners' quasi-revolutionary outbreak of 1919. Arguing against the barriers of class society which segregated and discriminated against the working man, Wheatley declared that the miner should be able to have the opportunity to "wear a clean white shirt, as a respectable citizen ought to do."¹ It was through

organization, education and self-help, not revolution, that people like Frank Wheatley saw the emancipation of the working class.

Described as one of a group of "Lloyd George Coalitionists" within the Alberta Federation after the First War, Wheatley was one of a minority on the Executive Board of District 18 to oppose the One Big Union.² His popularity in the District plummeted as he predicted failure for the miners' attempt to steer a course through the uncharted waters of the new unionism. The miners, he said in 1919, "are continually trying to improve the status of the whole working class movement, but with a woeful effect on their own material interests."³ Yet Wheatley does not seem to have been active in the smashing of the new union, unlike David Rees, for example, who earned the nickname "Reptile Rees" by passing around the blacklist in the District in 1919-1920.

Above all else, Wheatley was an honest and principled trade unionist. His opposition to the One Big Union was at least consistent. He was not a "turncoat", like William Sherman, who had jumped on the O.B.U. bandwagon when it had seemed irresistible, only to violently disavow the organization after its defeat. Wheatley spoke out against irregularities during the District elections of 1921, which were organized by Lewis' hatchetmen in such a way that the voters were required to write their name

on the ballot. He called for a boycott of the elections, and for this reason, locals at Fernie, Michel, Coleman, Hillcrest, Nordegg, Bankhead and Canmore did not participate in them.⁴ By 1925, Wheatley was the President of the Alberta Federation of Labour, and was appointed as Labour's representative on yet another Royal Commission established to investigate the chaos in the coal industry in that year. The Commission's 391 page Report, while not particularly lucid as to solutions for the problems of the miners, contains an uncommonly thorough examination of the coal industry in Alberta -- a fact at least partly due to Wheatley's intelligence and experience as a practical miner.

The Report was critical of the U.M.W. of A.'s recent record in the District; scoring the International union for prolonging the 1924 strike beyond the point at which anything might have been gained, and "failing to recognize the necessities of the case" with regards to the lockouts.⁵ It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which these sentiments echoed those of Wheatley. He seems to have become convinced at some point, however, of the need for a new organization of miners in Western Canada. At the same time the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was casting about for a "prestige" candidate -- and one without revolutionary affiliations -- to fill its top post. Backed by all factions within the union, excluding the supporters of the imprisoned McDonald, Wheatley was installed as

President in November, 1926. His first act was to sponsor a resolution at the A.F. of L. Convention, which provided for the affiliation of the M.W.U.C. to that body, and thus, to the National Trades and Labour Congress. The success of such a move would have resulted in a fundamental change, however, in the structure of the T.L.C., based as it was on the primacy of International unionism according to the Berlin formulas of 1902. To admit the Mine Workers Union of Canada was to expel the United Mine Workers of America, a step which the Alberta Federation of Labour was not prepared to take. The resolution failed, and Wheatley then resigned as President of the A.F. of L.⁶

In his 1925 pamphlet "Steps to Power", Tim Buck had argued that if rebuffed by the Trades and Labour Congress grouping, a national miners' union in Canada, would be instrumental in setting up a rival union central.⁷ This is, in fact, what happened. Within a few months, the labours of Aaron Mosher of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, Wheatley, and many other trade unionists in Canada, fed up with the "Internationals", bore fruit with the launching of the All Canadian Congress of Labour. (March, 1927). Mosher was the A.C.C.L.'s President; Wheatley the Vice President; an indication of the relative importance of the two men's organizations. Thus the

Mine Workers' Union of Canada -- regarded by some as a company union, by others as a revolutionary conspiracy -- was brought, for a time, into the mainstream of Canadian labour.

This brought no contradictions to a head within the organization. Nationally the Communists gave tacit support to the All Canadian Congress, attracted by its avowed commitment to industrial unionism and its opposition to the labour bosses in the U.S. -- at whose tender mercy the radicals had suffered much during the 1920's. All was harmonious in the miners' union, with McDonald in jail and Stokaluk as the chief Communist Party spokesman. Stokaluk and Wheatley were apparently quite good friends, the older man being said to have treated the big Ukrainian "like a son." ⁸ Everyone remained united against the United Mine Workers' of America, which reached the nadir of its fortunes in District 18 during the late 1920's. Supporters of the national union heaped scorn on the U.M.W. leaders' campaign for a tariff against "foreign" (i.e. American) coal in Canada; and their refusal to take up "Comrade Wheatley's" challenge for a jurisdictional referendum to end the dispute in District 18. Pushed perhaps by Stokaluk, Wheatley himself drifted towards the Left during the late 1920's, raising the slogan of "Nationalize the coal mines", as a first step towards the creation of a "Co-operative Commonwealth". He raised no objections, either, when more militant colleagues presented

the most radical sounding resolutions -- dealing with such topics as the defence of the U.S.S.R. -- to A.C.C.L. Conventions on behalf of the miners.

10

II

On the industrial front, the limited energies of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada were concentrated in the Drumheller Valley. The Valley was also the last stronghold of the United Mine Workers. The feud between the national and International organizations, which had been initiated by the bitter strike of 1925, continued to boil during the latter part of the decade. On Labour Day of 1927, the United Mine Workers picnic at Drumheller was disrupted by supporters of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, who heckled the keynote speakers, James Simpson of the T.L.C. and Robert Livett:

...the once great Jimmy was taken to Drumheller, and here he was howled down by the miners, who wanted none of his antiquated stuff...Then Livett...tried to speak, but that was all the length he got...the miners wanted none of it...

11

Stokaluk and Wheatley had been in the Valley recruiting members for the M.W.U.C., and in October called a strike for recognition in Drumheller. Six mines with 700 employees, none of whom claimed the M.W.U.C., had been previously organized by the U.M.W., were brought out on October 17. Union recognition, argued the organizers, was necessary to halt the speed up system in the mines, which, they said, had been responsible for the

deaths of three Drumheller miners during the previous fortnight. The strike seemed solid until the arrival of Bob Livett, who began to sign up cards for the U.M.W., and encourage the strikers to go back to work. "A score of workers, whose union experience was limited to a few weeks duration, were misled into seceding",¹² according to the highly partisan Canadian Unionist. There was some evidence of the new style of leadership. Meeting Livett on the street, Wheatley politely upbraided him, asking Bob if he thought he was doing the "right thing" by interfering in the strike, instead of altering the shape of his face, as 'Kid Burns' most certainly would have tried to do. Wheatley tried to keep the peace on the picket line as well. As the Canadian Unionist's correspondent noted: "it was only with the utmost difficulty that Comrade Wheatley could restrain the real red-blooded workers from expressing their indignation at this (U.M.W.) betrayal in a corporal fashion."¹³

The M.W.U.C. under Wheatley proved just as incapable of cracking the Drumheller field as the Canadian union of 1925. It was unable to mobilize the miners of the Wayne field to strike in sympathy; while it was claimed that many strike supporters were working in the fields instead of fighting¹⁴ black legs on the picket line. The strike was called off on October 31, its major result having been a further inflammation of the rivalry between two unions. Communist William

Moriarty expressed the views of many when he railed against the "blackleg" tactics of the U.M.W., but without the solid and active support of the rank and file, there seemed little hope of dislodging the International:

I wonder if some of the old timers of the U.M.W.A. ever visualized the day when their organization would have to carry on its work under police protection, with an operator at the elbows of its secretary and president, contentedly blowing smoke rings?

15

For the ordinary worker, the M.W.U.C./U.M.W. of A. feud was a sad spectacle indeed, an indication of the low level to which trade union activity had sunk in District 18 since 1924-1925. Union militant John MacPherson, one of those black-listed from the mine at Big Valley, Alberta, in 1927, wrote a biting commentary on the dismal situation in the District during the Drumheller strike. He reminds us of the brutal fact that approximately one-half of the western miners remained unorganized by either union, and that neither had made a serious effort to remedy this basic problem:

Hoping that the (Mine) Workers Union and the U.M.W.A. would quit their squabbling and get on with the organization of the miners in this Scab district. There is lots of ground for both unions if they are out to organize, which may seem questionable as both these bodies seem to be trying to seize the few miners who are half organized in Drumheller... We need a Union, a miners' union, irrespective of the name of the organization. The open scabbery has been allowed to run long enough.

Judging from the vapouring appearing in the press, one would almost imagine the only trouble facing the workers is between choosing a national or international union. The boss must feel very grateful to these obliging organizations.. The only consolation is that any change must be for the better, working conditions and wages really cannot get worse. We are down so far that the only change we can make is upward so for the love of the C.M.U. and the U.M.W. Let us move...

16

The Mine Workers' Union of Canada, despite the rhetoric which accompanied its formation in 1925, had joined the general retreat of trade unionism in North America during this so-called "decade of prosperity." Productivity in the coal industry in most centres reached unprecedented heights after 1926. Yet the mine workers, disunited, and largely disorganized, had failed to benefit thereby.

In early 1928, as nearly all of the "home local" agreements signed under duress three years previously fell due, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was presented with an opportunity to demonstrate its avowed determination to improve the miners' conditions in a concrete manner. Union leaders, having toasted the "determination of the miners to organize 100%" at their last convention, pressed forward demands for a universal "district agreement" for all M.W.U.C. Locals, to replace the local pacts under which most had worked since 1925. Despite the Union's "respectable" A.C.C.L. front, most operators refused to deal with it, prompting the M.W.U.C. to call a

general strike vote in April, 1928. Contrasting the mine owners' demands for higher tariffs against foreign coal with their refusal to bargain with a national miners' union (or worse still, their preference for the International); Wheatley descried the "prostitution of patriotism by capitalists with nothing but the most sordid commercial incentive", and bravely declared that a District strike was "inevitable."

17

The clash, however, did not materialize on any wide scale. While on the one hand the operators were broadly satisfied with existing wages and conditions, the miners were not yet ready to fight for any improvement, and turned a deaf ear to the calls for strike from the left wing. The renewal of contracts was done locally, piecemeal, and largely on the operators' terms. In the Crows' Nest Pass, the mining companies were not prepared to extend formal recognition to the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, although meagre concessions were granted to the "committees of employees" which dealt on the miners' behalf. Under contracts extending to 1930 the minimum rate for surface labour was raised from \$4.20 to \$4.45 a shift by the McGillivray Creek, International and West Canadian coal companies, thus giving a small break to the lowest paid mine workers. On the B.C. side, the Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company increased its minimum rates by 15 cents per day (from \$4.00 to \$4.15 for surface labour, for example) as well in 1928, under completely open

shop conditions.

In Lethbridge the leading employer, the C.P.R., "absolutely refused" to negotiate with the men "as a local of the M.W.U.C." after which the right wing element in the local union made an unsuccessful attempt to have Lethbridge disaffiliate from the central body.¹⁹ As the 1925 contract ran to its close (June 26, 1928) the miners and the C.P.R. went into conciliation, with the Board reporting favourably to a few of the union demands. It recommended pay increases to the lowest paid workers -- from \$4.00 to \$4.25 as the minimum rate for surface labour, and from \$4.25 to \$4.45 underground -- but no change in contract rates. The checkoff was to be increased from \$.50 to \$1.50 per pay, but without recognition of the M.W.U.C. The Board's Report was accepted by a narrow vote of 212 to 210 by the rank and file,²⁰ and served as a basis of settlement with the C.P.R.

The Canmore local, which had one of the best contracts in the District, with minimum rates of \$4.45 for outside labour and \$4.65 inside managed to get it renewed, with small increases, but only after a lengthy strike called to protest the firing²¹ of two men wrongfully accused of violations to the Mines Act. Companies at Nordegg, Saunders' Creek, Bryant, Robb, and Luscar, also signed with the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in 1928. The Canadian Unionist attributed these successes to the "careful policy of rank and file administration" in the M.W.U.C., as opposed to its International rival. The U.M.W. signed

agreements in only two camps in the North in 1928 -- Mercoal and Mountain Park -- its local at Brulé having been disbanded in the same year after the permanent closure of the Brulé mine.

III

Drumheller witnessed the return of a familiar face in January of 1928, with the release of Lewis McDonald from prison, after serving two-thirds of his three-year sentence. McDonald tried hard to mobilize support for the good old cause in Drumheller, but could find little. He discovered to his dismay that all the English speaking comrades in the Valley had since left or been driven away, with the one exception of his wife Maggie. As usual, he did not get on well with the Ukrainians, whom he found sadly lacking in militance. He was pessimistic about the prospect of a general strike in the area: "I must say I never seen Drumheller so God Damn Dead in my life, really I feel sure they will all scab on the rest of the District." ²²

Nevertheless, McDonald was elected checkweighman by the men of the Atlas mine, despite their employer's threat to close down operations rather than have the Communist on the premises. The bluff was called and McDonald assumed his duties of representing the interests of the contract miners at the tippie, the first ²³ job he had held since before the 1924 strike.

McDonald's career as a trade unionist was fast coming to an end. Nominated for Vice President at the M.W.U.C. elections in November, he was opposed by both Wheatley and the C.P. Machine. Secretary-Treasurer Stokaluk rallied his ethnic following against his candidature, and ensured his defeat. Disgusted by what he rightly felt to have been a betrayal at the hands of the Communists, McDonald quit the Party and left the labour movement, turning instead to the philosophy of right wing nationalism, of which we shall hear more in another context.

24

The decade would see one last battle in the Valley, with or without "Kid Burns." The dispute came about as a result of a revival of trade unionism in the Wayne field, which had been largely disorganized since the failure of the I.W.W. strike of December 1925 (see above, p. 51). This, in turn, was related to the resistance of the contract miners in the field to the introductions of the "screened rate of payment" for coal by the mine owners. Management's plans consisted of a proposal to pay the miners only for such coal as would pass through a 1½ inch screen at the tippie, instead of on a straight "run of the mine" basis of weight as previously. The "screened rate of payment" was a typical example of the "speed up" phenomenon. In order to maintain his accustomed wage levels, the miner would either have to dig a good deal more coal at the face,

or waste time smashing up larger chunks of the product before shovelling it onto the car. On the other hand, the operator would either have his coal "cut to size" underground for sale to the customer, or receive significant amounts of oversized coal gratis.

In response, the miners organized themselves as Local 17 of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, and applied for a Conciliation Board to air their point of view on the matter. The Board reported that "the men were alarmed and fearful of the effect of this change on their earning power, and were unmistakably opposed to its introduction." Under the auspices of the Board, and "with a great deal of reluctance and still with evidence of suspicion", the miners' representatives did, however, indicate a willingness to compromise on the point. The screens would be installed and the miners would be paid at the prevailing U.M.W. of A. rates, plus an extra 4 cents per ton as compensation. The men, however, insisted on the recognition of their union as added insurance, citing the fact that "abuses had crept in, rates were autocratically reduced (and) men were discriminated against" under the open shop regime. This the operators flatly refused, while the Board proposed a compromise whereby checkoff and meeting privileges be granted to local committees of employess, but without recognition of the M.W.U.C. The Conciliation Board's Report was rejected by the miners, and a strike was declared on August 16. Reflecting the operators!

point of view, the Western Canada Coal Review bemoaned the miners' new-found determination to fight for their collective rights:

Contrasting the growing prosperity of the Alberta coal industry of recent years and its freedom from labour trouble, with the uncertainty of former days, it is difficult to understand the attitude of the Wayne miners in calling a strike... While concurring with the Board's recommendation for a strong union with individual agreements at each mine (the operators) maintained their policy of refusing to recognize the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Apparently this is the real point at issue, though it seems no valid reason for a walkout...

26

In October, at the start of the domestic coal season, two operators of the six affected had bowed to union demands and signed agreements with the M.W.U.C. providing for continuation of payment on a "run of the mine" basis. The others held firm, gambling their winter's coal orders on the inability of the mine workers to enforce the stoppage. Recruiting for strike breakers centred on the army of unemployed who roamed the prairie after the completion of the 1928 harvest. Many of these were in fact British miners, the "refuse" of the devastating coal strike of 1926 and its grim aftermath of mass unemployment. Some of the Old Country miners in the Drumheller district had been clamoring for return passage home since August, but the governments involved paid them no heed, and many were presented with the unenviable choice of blacklegging or a very uncertain dole. The cynical practice of dumping unemployed

27

74...
British miners in Alberta continued well into 1929, much to the disillusionment of Frank Wheatley, who had trusted the Labourite "reformist" Ramsey MacDonald to put an end to it.²⁸ At any rate, an undetermined number of these functioned as strike breakers during the Wayne strike, as well as a group of "Hungarians, to whom unionism means nothing."²⁹ The black-legs were issued with 60-day certificates which enabled them to legally work underground at the coal face, and closely guarded by the police, who prevented any communication with the strikers.³⁰

Wheatley opposed direct action which would have resulted in the kind of violence which characterized the 1925 strike. He continued to lobby with the federal and provincial governments for the withdrawal of miners' certificates to strike breakers, repatriation of unemployed miners, and the cutting off of immigration to the strike zone, but to no avail. The use of the blacklegs inevitably provoked outbreaks of violence on the picket lines, during which union officers, strikers, as well as company goons were arrested. One striker named James Rafferty was bludgeoned to death by security guard Gottlieb Reimer after making the mistake of trespassing on company property on Christmas Day.³¹ Evictions of strikers from company houses and the threat of same contributed to the bitterness of the strike. To the Mine Workers' Union of Canada the Wayne strike was a baptism of fire, which proved it was no

company union.

A salutary warning to other coal operators that a national union possess a fighting spirit and a stamina that are not to be trifled with, and which bribery, cajolery and threats can do nothing to undermine, and which only hunger and privation can hope to thwart.

32

In February, after intervention by a group of local businessmen who could see only the destruction of the town as a result of a prolongation of the dispute, a settlement was finally reached. Strikers at two mines accepted by a vote of 270 to 59 the introduction of the screened rate of payment in return for full recognition of the M.W.U.C; while two other mines signed similar agreements with the U.M.W., which had broken an earlier pledge to stay out of the dispute. In the end, all sides paid a high price for the dispute, as the fortunes of the industry in Wayne never recovered from the losses of 1928-1929, and declined precipitously during the 1930's.

IV

As the decade drew to a close, the M.W.U.C. could hardly look with a great deal of satisfaction at the accomplishments of its first five years in the field. The union had failed to reorganize District 18 and regain the lost wages and conditions of its membership, let alone organize the country. Outside of Alberta, it had only locals at Corbin, B.C. and Westville, Nova Scotia, and an attempt to begin the awesome task of organizing Vancouver Island in 1928-1928 had proved fruitless.

Quite apart from the large number of mines which remained "open shop" after 1925, the M.W.U.C. constituted only a "paper organization" in many of its own areas of jurisdiction, especially in the important area of the Alberta Pass. For the miners, the decade which had followed the crushing of the O.B.U. had been a heartbreaking story of struggle, defeat, and finally, quiet resignation.-- a retreat on almost all fronts which the M.W.U.C. had proved unable to halt. Frank Wheatley, writing on the state of the western coalfield at the end of his tenure as M.W.U.C. President, sounded a gloomy note indeed:

...the mine workers know that no industry can hope to succeed when it is conducted by the methods prevalent in the Alberta coalfield. Profits cannot permanently be secured, or bankruptcy avoided, by crucifying the workers. For the miners and their dependents, the mismanagement of the coal mining industry is fraught with tragedy. In their humble homes the producers of so much of the nation's wealth, have few of the comforts, and none of the luxuries of civilized life. The children, ill-fed and barely clad, are often unable to go to school on wintry days, it would be a crime to send them -- better an illiterate child than a dead one...the mine workers on the job are reluctant to exert economic pressure which might have the effect of bringing about a shut down. Consequently conditions drift from bad to worse. As misery loves company, the mining communities have split into racial groups. This segregation is not of course conducive to the development of a true Canadian citizenship, it leads rather to a general demoralization of the workers, and the prevalent discontent is largely a reaction to the conditions which exist.

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Insecurity, underemployment, poverty, ethnic segregation; all these problems had begun to plague the coal mining

community of the West long before the stock market crash of late 1929. With the onslaught of the worst Depression Canada had ever seen in 1930, these problems would get far worse. However, the lid was soon to blow off the superficial calm in the coalfields. Alluding to the growing discontent amongst the miners, Wheatley had argued for the establishment of yet another Royal Commission to look into the problems, and to propose plans which could be implemented to put the coal industry back on its feet. He was sadly out of joint with the times. As the industry took a dangerous slide towards near total collapse, class antagonisms would sharpen, and the miners, having little left to lose, would increasingly resort to strike action. For the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, the changed conditions would bring forth new and aggressive leadership, personified by spokesmen of the Communist Party and its programme of struggle, "class against class". The line of moderation pursued by the Wheatley regime had failed the test, and a new one was in the offing.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

1. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Report and Evidence of the Alberta Coal Commission, 1919." Evidence of Frank Wheatley, pp.224-225.
2. The remark was made by David Rees, who also opposed the O.B.U., but for apparently different reasons. Gerald Friesen, "Yours in Revolt". Labour/Le Travailleur, No.1, 1977, pp. 139-157, p. 143.
3. District Ledger, July 11, 1919. This issue also contains some biographical material on Wheatley. Apparently the militants in the Banff area tried to have him suspended from the union for his attitude.
4. Glenbow Archives, Operators' Association Collection, File 92. "R.M. Young to O.E.S. Whiteside", July 26, 1921. A list of O.B.U. leaders in File 83 includes William Sherman of the Fernie local.
5. Glenbow Archives, Report of the Alberta Coal Commission, 1925, p. 192.
6. See Report on the Alberta Federation's Convention, Nov. 22-24, in The Labour Gazette, 1926, p. 1206
7. Buck, "Steps to Power" in Our Fight for Canada, op.cit.
8. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 15, 1A0784-91. "Minutes of the meeting of the District Bureau of the Communist Party of Canada, Alberta District, April 9, 1930."
9. Canadian Unionist, June-September, 1927.
10. Ibid. February, 1929.
11. Canadian Unionist, September, 1927.
12. Ibid., November, 1927.
13. Ibid. There were, nonetheless, minor outbreaks of violence, the most serious of which was the explosion of two dynamite blasts on company property in the strike zone. The striking union thought it a "shameless frame-up", probably the work of the U.M.W. of A. The police claimed they could find no clues as to the suspect and the investigation went no farther.

14. Worker, November 12, 1927.
15. Ibid, November 5, 1927.
16. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 17, 6B0984. John MacPherson to the Worker, October, 1927.
17. Canadian Unionist, December, 1927. April, 1928.
18. Galt Museum, Lethbridge, Agreements, 1928-1930: "Between International Coal and Coke Ltd. and Its Employees"; "Between McGillivray Creek Coal and Coke Ltd. and Its Employees"; "Between the West Canadian Collieries and Their Employees"; and "Between The Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company and the R.C. Miners' Association."
19. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union", March 24, 30, 1928.
20. Galt Museum, Agreement Between the C.P.R. and Its Employees at the Galt Mines, 1928-1930.
21. Labour Gazette, 1928, pp. 454, 577 and 701.
22. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 17, 6B1012. "Kid Burns to Annie Buller, April 24, 1928."
23. Ibid: VI; 19, 6B1035-9 "Kid Burns to Annie Buller", October 10 and 25, 1928.
24. Ibid: I; 15, 1A0809-10. Malcolm Bruce, "Statement on the Stokaluk Case", May 16, 1930.
25. Labour Gazette, 1928, pp. 829-830.
26. Western Canada Coal Review, August, 1928.
27. Calgary Herald, August 28, 1928.
28. Canadian Unionist, September, 1929.
29. Ibid, February, 1930.
30. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 17, 6B1044. "Kid Burns to Annie Buller", November 22, 1928.
31. Calgary Herald, December 27, 28, 1928; Labour Gazette, 1929, p. 276.

32. Canadian Unionist, February, 1929.
33. Labour Gazette, 1929, pp. 15-17, 135 and 276; Western Canada Coal Review, February, 1929
34. Interview: Ben Lowther, former mine worker and fireboss, Atlas Colliery, East Coulee, Alberta; July 8, 1975, at East Coulee.
35. Canadian Unionist, February, 1930.

THE THIRTIESChapter 3 The Workers' Unity League 1930-1932.

I

The upper echelons of the Communist leadership had been far from happy with the state of affairs in the Mine Workers' Union of Canada during the last years of the Wheatley regime. Citing the "exhaustion" of the workers as the underlying cause, the Internationale was dismayed by the lack of militancy on the part of Canadian miners, and the apparent decline of Communist influence among them during the late 1920's.¹ Beginning in January, 1929, the "International Committee of Revolutionary Miners" in Moscow exhorted Canadian comrades to redouble their efforts in the coalfields, with a view towards uniting all the country's miners, coal and metal, into a single industrial organization.² The new Leftist policy of "Class against Class" adopted by the Internationale in 1928 began to reflect itself in the Canadian contest, and the support which the Communist Party had given initially to the All Canadian Congress of Labour gradually evaporated. A Trade Union Educational League circular sent to the M.W.U.C. leadership prior to the Congress Convention of 1929 stated that the "high hopes in which many militant trade unionists throughout Canada heralded the inception of the A.C.C.L. have been severely shaken", and urged the miners to "bring the A.C.C.L. back to the path of reality and the class struggle".³ However, by late 1929 the Party

had already given up on the Congress, as it prepared to launch its own union central, the Workers' Unity League. Tom McEwen, former Secretary of the W.U.L., writes:

This 'pure Canadian' A.C.C.L. was no more interested in organizing the unorganized in Canada than were the A.F.L. craft unions. Its attitude of unconcern towards a growing army of jobless workers was equally as callous as that of the Trades and Labour Congress... its leading lights like Mosher... vied with the T.L.C. for 'equality', 'recognition' and 'respectability' in the Establishment scheme of things... rarely, if ever, did it do more than pay lip service to the organization of unorganized workers. That meant strikes, picket lines, struggle -- which neither the A.F.L.-T.L.C. nor the A.C.C.L. hierarchy had any stomach for,

The formation of the Workers' Unity League was therefore, in essence, the formation of a new revolutionary trade union centre, given the authority by its founding convention to charter union locals, councils and regional federations... To provide a trade union structure, organization and policy, designed to mobilize the full strength and maximum unity in any and all economic and political struggles. And to regard the strike as labour's key weapon in determining the social and economic returns for the sale and use of its creative labor power. 4

The man chosen by the Party to bring the message of the Workers' Unity League to the miners was a fiery young revolutionist named Harvey Murphy, later of the B.C. District of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. A life-long Communist and labour man, Murphy was one of the few working class leaders in this country to combine revolutionary zeal with a passionate commitment to the trade union movement.

Through a career in the labour movement spanning over four decades Murphy was at the centre of many a battle, and ultimately was to earn the respect of friend and foe alike. Unfortunately, he has yet to receive due recognition in the history

5

of that movement.

Although only twenty-four years old at the time of his appointment as District Organizer for the Communist Party in Alberta, the short, bald-headed Murphy had already acquired the reputation of "having a way with the workers" and being a "crack labour organizer".⁶ Born in Kitchener in 1906, he was introduced to trade unionism during the brief episode of O.B.U. inspired industrial union agitation which swept through southern Ontario after the war. His family moved to Toronto, the centre of the fledgling Communist movement in Canada, in 1921. In 1924 he went to Illinois, where he became involved in the "Young Progressive Miners' Movement", part of a larger movement within the U.M.W. of A., led by John Brophy and the Left Wing, to oust the Lewis machine. Later he returned to Canada, working in the auto industry in the border cities. As an official in the A.C.C.L.'s "Automobile Workers' Industrial Union" in Windsor he was embroiled in the first unsuccessful attempts to organize in this sector. In 1928-1929 Murphy gained some prominence in labour circles by his leadership of the strike of riveters at the Hamilton steel plant.⁷

The manner in which he assumed leadership of the 600 unorganized workers at the steel plant is typical of the Murphy style. When he first arrived at the factory gates the men who had walked out were being urged to give up the struggle by a

foreman named Flaherty. Murphy stood up and took a vote: "All those in favour of telling Flaherty to go to hell raise your hands". They all did, and the young organizer was in command for the duration of the six-week strike. The tactics of the picketers were aggressive, including the use of "a bounteous crop of small hard apples" as ammunition in fights with scabs and police, and the greasing of nearby trolley tracks in order to, in Murphy's words, "bugger up the transportation into the plant".⁸ In the end, according to Tom McEwen, the steel workers won a few concessions and gained valuable experience which was to stand them in good stead in later years.⁹

Murphy first travelled west in the 1920's, as part of the annual harvest excursion army which roamed the Prairies in search of work in the wheatfields. His purpose in late 1929 was more missionary in nature: to wean the rank and file of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, as well as District 18 of the U.M.W. of A. and the home locals, away from the "labour fakers", and to line them up into the W.U.L. ranks. The task was not as simple as might seem, for the Communist Party organization in Alberta was not united behind the endeavour. Very soon Murphy came into sharp conflict with, in McEwen's words, the "little tin God" of the Crows' Nest Pass, "Big John" Stokaluk, who had recently returned to the Province after several months absence, probably on ~~Ukrainian~~ Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association business.¹⁰ Throughout 1930, the C.P. in Alberta was rent with

division between the supporters of Stokaluk (the right) on the one hand, and those of Murphy and national headquarters (the left) on the other.

The root cause of the conflict between Stokaluk and Murphy -- and, to a certain extent, Stokaluk and Lewis McDonald as well -- can be found in the basic make up of the Communist movement in Western Canada. The C.P. had not sprung, Athena-like, from the body of the proletariat following the inspirational example of the October Revolution. It had developed, logically enough, from the pre-war socialist movement in the West, which had been composed, in the main, of two major groupings. The first of these was the Socialist Party of Canada, an elite group of Marxist ideologues from the Anglo-Saxon community which had provided the leadership during the upsurge of revolutionary activity within the trade union movement in 1918-1920. Christophers of District 18, R.B. Russell of the Winnipeg railway shops, and Ginger Goodwin of the Trail mine and smelter workers' union had all been members of the Socialist Party. The other strain of the socialist movement derived from the ethnic "mass organizations", such as the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association (formerly the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party) and the Finnish Organization. These organizations, which grew out of the experience of the most exploited sections of the Western Canadian working class, the "foreign" or non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants, had a cultural and social as well as a

political dimension. Throughout the West the Communist Party and its related organizations did in fact provide a vehicle for the collective expression of the social and cultural aspirations of people so often segregated from the "mainstream" by barriers of geography, language, economic status, and prejudice. Moreover, they also played the role of benevolent societies, providing essential social services to the immigrants, as well as providing a centre for trade union and political activities. It was this element which provided the "rank and file" of the Communist Party. In Alberta in 1930 95% of the C.P. membership was "foreign" in origin, although most of the leaders were Anglo-Saxon. Within the miners' movement, a probably exaggerated estimate of Party membership at the time of Murphy's arrival stands at 600, of which 400 were to be found in the "mass organizations."

Communist involvement in the day to day life of the immigrant was, therefore, an integral part of its structure in Canada. A leading apostle of anti-communism, Watson Kirkconnell, saw it as one of the Party's strongest points. In the 1940's he argued for the banning of the "mass organizations" on the grounds that they concealed their true seditious character "under the guise of cultural, educational, and athletic activities, in order to lure more flies into the web". As for the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association, which was by no means restricted to Ukrainians only, he wrote that it was "the largest,

oldest and most subversive of them all." ¹⁴ Daniel Lobray, an ex-member of the Association, declared that it was "more influential and harmful than the Communist Party itself, for ¹⁵ without the former the party was powerless to do anything."

The power and influence of the "mass organizations" was regarded with mixed feelings by many revolutionists themselves. Emphasis on the "foreigner" obviously led to sectarianism and the isolation of the Party along national lines, something which Anglo-Saxon Communists regarded as fatal to the organization. Moreover, the "mass organizations", having at least some members who were not primarily attracted through political commitment, tended at times towards "right deviation". Both McDonald and Murphy decried the conservative tendencies of the U.F.L.T.A. in Alberta. They viewed the accumulation of property and benevolent funds by the organization as incompatible with participation in the revolutionary movement, Party loyalty, and militancy within the Mine Workers' Union. Backed by the U.F.L.T.A., Stokaluk refused to co-operate with Murphy and resisted the Party's plans for the M.W.U.C. -- disaffiliation from the All Canadian Congress and the ousting of Frank Wheatley -- as reckless adventurism. For his part, Murphy denounced the U.F.L.T.A. as a "proven right wing bunch" and tried hard to recruit "good fighting Anglo-Saxons who have no Temples or W.B.A.'s (Workers' Benevolent Associations) to look after," ¹⁶ into the Party ranks. The fight within the radical ranks in

the miners' union was a microcosm of a larger struggle within the Communist Party which accompanied the inauguration of the new militant line of "Class against Class". Throughout Canada in 1929-1930 Communists were distracted by the clash with the entrenched "right wing" in the ethnic associations.¹⁷

Lewis McDonald had gotten nowhere in his struggle against the Stokaluk faction within the union during the 1920's. One reason, no doubt, was the fact that his critique reflected his own contempt for the "foreigners" as much as any ideological considerations. Although Murphy may have valued an English Communist more highly than a "Uke", there is no doubt that his major motivation was ideological in the battle with the "right wing". Later on, Murphy became the major spokesman for the foreign community in the Crows' Nest Pass, and there is little evidence of the same kind of extreme chauvinistic tendencies as characterized McDonald in Murphy's makeup. More important in his success against "Big John" was the support of the national leadership, backed by the weight of the decisions of the Internationale. From December, 1929, when McEwen, acting on Murphy's advice, barred Stokaluk from undertaking organizational work in Drumheller, the latter's status continued to decline. Demands by various Communist and U.F.L.T.A. groups in Alberta for Murphy's recall fell on deaf ears at Toronto C.P. headquarters. At one point Stokaluk and almost all of the Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association comrades in Coleman were expelled from the Party for their truculence. Eventually, however,

the national leadership realized it could not smash the ethnic associations without destroying itself in the process, and a compromise between the warring factions was worked out. In Alberta Stokaluk and his supporters were ultimately reinstated, although Murphy and the W.U.L. policy remained.

The Communist minority, however, was not Murphy's main audience. He had to reach the rank and file of the union, who held the votes which could alone overturn the Wheatley regime. He spread the gospel of the class struggle and the Workers' Unity League far and wide in every major mining town in Alberta, living on the few dollars that the miners traditionally contributed to speakers at their Sunday afternoon gatherings. Wheatley, he said, was a "good leader for miners who are standing still as a row of fence posts."¹⁹ Appealing to the rebellious traditions of the workers, he reminded them that "the whole history of the miners of this district is one battle against the leaders of the movement."²⁰ His message was tough, direct, and increasingly in tune with the times, as economic conditions grew worse during the winter of 1929-1930. The tone of his rhetoric sometimes had to be checked by headquarters. After reading one of Murphy's despatches from Alberta, Tom McEwen replied:

Murphy, I would like to ask you...about 'hunger marches' and the damn fool demand...for the abolition of the Alberta Provincial Police. If you can tell me that the tempo of the miners in District 18 is such that they are prepared to follow up this demand, then you have a revolutionary situation unparalleled in Canada...

While bemoaning the inactivity of many of the C.P. branches and their preoccupation with "cultural work" in these reports to Toronto, Murphy was sanguine about the possibility of success:

...the situation for the Party in the mining fields is splendid, and the miners are for One Miners' Union in Canada, and union with Nova Scotia, they want leadership and we must supply this...the machine inside of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada is weak and with a real fight we can smash them.

22

The "real fight" began in earnest in February, at a Mine Workers' Union of Canada Scale convention in Calgary. Murphy and Jan Lakeman of the Edmonton C.P. branch were present, and played a conspicuous role in the proceedings. James Sloan, the Secretary of the Lethbridge local, a Left Winger but not a Party member, kicked off the debate by presenting a "Unity" resolution to the Convention, on behalf of the "Miners' Section of the Workers' Unity League":

...with the present chaotic organizational condition... united action of the miners is practically impossible... today the operators are on the offensive, and are preparing to still worsen the working conditions and to lower our already too low standard of living...only by united action of all the miners in this district can we successfully reply to the attacks of the coal operators...Only on the basis of a Militant Fighting Programme and leadership can we unite the miners once more into one fighting union...We resolve that at once a call be sent out to all miners for a Mass Rank and File convention...that will bring together all miners regardless of what union they belong to...to bring forward such a programme and leadership that will successfully rally all the miners to put up a united struggle.

23

The resolution, which was correctly perceived as "Communist-inspired" by the M.W.U.C. leadership, was designed to polarize sentiment on the W.U.L. question, by appealing to the miners' very real desires for leadership in the fight against the effects of the depression. A miner from Canmore expressed a prevalent viewpoint when he asked: "What difference does it make where the resolution came from, as long as it offers some ground for the miners to fight on?"²⁴ The W.U.L. paper, the Western Miner, which first appeared on February 20 in Lethbridge, stressed the fact the members of the growing opposition movement within the M.W.U.C. were all "proven fighters" as well as socialists. It accused Wheatley, as well as Bob Livett, of being a collaborator, of turning the union into a "sales agency" for the coal interests. Citing the experience of 1925 -- when the miners eventually capitulated on the promise of wider markets which failed to materialize -- it argued the bankruptcy of the policy of shelving demands in the interests of the "industry".²⁵

The present leadership poisons the spirit of the miners (their) talk of wages being so low that the operators will not reduce them lower' ... is foolish because the operators know no pity, they have proven that many times in the past...there are hundreds of miners working in this district for wages ranging from one to two dollars a day.

26

The W.U.L. campaign was generally well received by the M.W.U.C. membership, especially in the Northern camps, and approximately one-half of the union's locals endorsed the

proposal for a "Unity" convention. Matters came to a head with the surfacing of an "anti-Communist" backlash in Lethbridge, the largest local in the district with over 600 members, and the headquarters of the Miners' Section of the W.U.L. Although not a traditionally militant centre, the leadership of the local had been in the hands of "progressives" since 1925, and the Party had paid it close attention in preparation for the Communist offensive of 1929-1930. Thanks to John Hladun, an ex-Communist who "confessed all" to Maclean's Magazine during the Cold War, we have a rare, though probably overly cynical account of the Party's activities there. Hladun, a native-born Manitoban of Ukrainian extraction, was sent to Alberta shortly before Harvey Murphy, and was installed as secretary of the 24-man Party branch in Lethbridge -- all but four of whom were coal miners.

...the party had already prepared a card index of almost all union men...I was able to find out who was known to entertain 'progressive', if not Communist views, whose social consciousness would be likely to be stimulated by the judicious application of a few free beers.

Fortunately both George Rozza (sic), president, and Jimmy Sloan, secretary of the union local, were already sympathetic toward the party, although neither was a member... My line was always this: any successful social movement needs a political dynamic; Communism, whether or not all its points of dogma were beyond debate, was the kind of creed which aroused men to action. In short, Communism was a weapon which no conscientious trade union official would refuse to use...

Although Hladun claimed that he became virtual "boss" of the Lethbridge local, the evidence shows that the reaction of the miners to the new militance remained highly ambivalent. Conscious of their extremely precarious position as employees of the C.P.R.'s declining coal department, they voted down the Left's proposal for strike action when the 1928 contract expired by a vote of 278 to 142.²⁸ Greatly relieved, the Lethbridge Herald saw the vote as a "pronounced victory for Frank Wheatley.. and a repudiation of the radical propaganda propounded by the extremist wing in the miners' ranks."²⁹ A meeting on April 22, which was attended personally by Wheatley, ended in a riot, during which Sloan and Rogoza were physically ejected from the union hall by the "anti-red" element. The militants charged that the "reactionaries" were reverting to the tactics of the universally despised John L. Lewis.³⁰ Stokaluk, the man in the middle, saw the incident as vindication of his stand on the Unity League:

...Sloan and party members were in control of that local for years...it is clear that there is something wrong with the present policy. I believe that unless somebody will come up here, investigate everything, and change the present dictatorial policy (of Murphy) ...the party will be discredited to such extent that it will be a long time after to get the confidence of the miners again.

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The fiasco demonstrated a degree of militant opposition to the Communists and their allies in the local, yet the rank and file seem to have been generally apathetic, as the low attendance at union meetings at this time suggests. Murphy claimed

that Lethbridge was "the most reactionary local in the district"; and made an interesting sociological observation by attributing this, in part, to the fact that it had "the only mine that is located in a city."³²

Nearby Coalhurst, an homogenous coal town with an unusually high "foreign" population, presents us with a different picture. With as many Party members as the city of Lethbridge, Coalhurst also boasted a militant, tightly knit M.W.U.C. organization,³³ in contrast with the former. Following the Lethbridge riot, the Coalhurst local issued a strongly worded resolution which condemned those "who are trying to break or run the union by brute force" and demanded a vote of recall of Frank Wheatley, in accordance with the M.W.U.C.³⁴ Constitution.

Meanwhile the resignation of Frank Leary had led to the election of Jimmy Sloan as Vice President; in his words "a victory for the fighting policies of the Workers' Unity League."³⁵ Enough locals endorsed the Coalhurst resolution to make a recall vote mandatory, and the result of the June 17 ballot was the removal of Frank Wheatley from the union's top job, and the temporary elevation to that post of Jimmy Sloan. A League supporter had once charged Wheatley with being a "fatherly old stick in the mud."³⁶ His opponents could accuse him of little else.

In his own way, Wheatley had made an honest, though cruelly unsuccessful attempt to better the lot of the Alberta miner. Unlike John L. Lewis, he made no attempt to subvert the will of his constituents, and accepted the result gracefully. He returned to a quiet retirement in his home town of Canmore, and left an uncertain future in the hands of another breed of labour leader.

The right wing made a final attempt to stem the tide by presenting a well-known "moderate", Bill White of Coleman, as candidate for President in the district elections in August. The vote was close, but Sloan was returned by a margin of 58%. White gained a plurality only in his home town and in Wayne, a local dominated by a fervent anti-Communist, Al Lievers. Lethbridge, which had voted 200 to 167 against the recall of Frank Wheatley, narrowly supported its "favorite son", although 40% of the membership did not bother to vote at all. The records show that of a total membership of 3,985, locals representing 3,673, participated in the election; and of these 74% cast their ballots. Only 43% of the M.W.U.C. members had thus actively supported Sloan's candidacy. The other members of the new executive, Secretary-Treasurer Major Hyslop and Vice-President Ludwig Maurice, were both left-leaning non-Communists from the Crows' Nest Pass.³⁷ By no stretch of the imagination, then, can the miners be seen as having been converted "en masse" to the radicalism of the C.P. and the Workers' Unity League. Nevertheless,

by mid-1930 they had taken decisive steps towards the transformation of their union into a "fighting organization". In the words of Jimmy Sloan:

Our union stands at the most critical stage in its history and the miners all over the country are looking to us for a lead...we must, if we hope to remain as an organized force, break with the policies of the past and mobilize our whole membership throughout the District on the basis of the Class Struggle.

38

II

The first signs of renewed vitality on the part of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada were seen in the North, along the C.N.R.'s "Coal Branch", a region which Andy den Otter has characterized thus:

In politics and labour relations the Coal Branchers advocated moderation...Working and living conditions were adequate and good relations existed between managers and workers, so that no chronic unrest prevailed...Any deviation from the course of moderation --such as the One Big Union and the United Mine Workers of Canada (sic) -- were quickly corrected by the more conservative United Mine Workers of America aided by the owners and the government.

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During the 1920's the Branch had indeed remained relatively quiescent. In 1925 Communist organizer Roy Reid had worked strenuously to bring the large camps in the region -- Luscar, Cadomin and Mountain Park -- into the M.W.U.C. movement, without success:

...If only we had a few dependable English-speaking men here, but we have not got them. Its a rather bad situation...There is a most damnable state of apathy in the minds of the men here, they seem to agree alright, but feel helpless...

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By 1929, however, the M.W.U.C. did however have four locals in the district: at Luscar, Foothills, Bryan (Mile 32, Lovett Branch) and Robb (Mile 33, Lovett Branch), which accounted for roughly one half of the region's 1,000 coal miners. The only strike in the post-1925 era had occurred at the Lakeside Coal Company at Robb in 1927, which was resolved in favour of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The camps of the North were, almost without exception, closed "company towns", where the capitalists, for better or for worse, exercised extraordinary power over their working people.⁴¹ As den Otter notes, sentiment in favour of the M.W.U.C. tended to be found in camps with relatively poorer working and living conditions.⁴²

Ethnicity also appears to have played some role in determining the miners' response to their situation. The nearby towns of Foothills and Coal Valley, situated on the Lovett Branch, where "gross mistreatment, if it happened at all, occurred," are a case in point. Foothills, a M.W.U.C. camp, had a majority of Ukrainians, while the Coal Valley mine, which remained open shop, had a management whose policy was to maintain a majority of "French Canadians and Roman Catholics."⁴³ Mercoal, a centre of conflict in 1930, possessed a "Ukrainian section set apart

from the main townsite, something foreign to the Branch."

Luscar and Mountain Park were reported to have been dominated by Welshmen; Cadomin by Nova Scotians. Of the latter group Reid wrote in 1925:

Most of the Cadomin delegates were pillar men, old-timers in that camp and English speaking men of undoubted ability and questionable Unionist principles. They are a Masonic bunch of Elks, etc... you can see we have to work with some strange material here.

The 1928 agreements along the Coal Branch expired in early 1930. The Luscar local (Number 24) of the M.W.U.C. decided to try the route of Conciliation to achieve redress of their grievances. The Conciliation Board, whose Chairman noted that "the officials of the company and the employees appeared to be on friendly terms", eventually found in favour of the miners' demands for wage increases averaging approximately one cent per ton, and the dispute was settled without a strike. However, the M.W.U.C. was unable to enforce the findings of the Board in its other camps in the area, leading some unionists to lament the "hundreds of dollars" which had been spent during the proceedings.

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Murphy's "Unity" campaign found a good deal of support amongst the divided miners, and a "Sub District Unity Convention" in April, 1930 brought together representatives from the M.W.U.C., the home locals, and the Mountain Park branch of the U.M.W. of A. However, the leadership of the other U.M.W. local, at Mercoal, refused to support the call for "Unity" --

an action which precipitated an open split in its ranks.

A meeting of the Mercoal local on April 2 resulted in a minor riot, with the ejection of "Unity" supporters from the Union hall. According to a spokesman for this group, Milan Kokovitch, the majority of the local's members were determined to join the Mine Workers' Union of Canada and to "wipe out and bury to memory the remains" of the International Union. The report, however, was vigorously denied by the U.M.W. supporters George and Walter Mitchell, who claimed that their organization was "carrying on as strong as ever, despite disruption." ⁴⁹ The dispute came to a head in mid-June, when the operator renewed its agreement with the U.M.W. without a vote being taken on ratification, and a strike against the U.M.W. check off ensued. It might be noted at this point that the operator, the Saunders' Ridge Coal Company, was a subsidiary of International Coal and Coke, one of the larger companies in the Alberta Pass. ⁵⁰

It is difficult to judge precisely how many of the 80 mine workers on the Mercoal payroll supported the strike. Estimates range from 30 (by the employer) to 70 (by the M.W.U.C.) A proposal for a jurisdictional referendum in the camp by Chris Pattinson, Labour Party M.L.A. for Edson, was accepted by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, but not by the International -- an indication that the U.M.W. of A. was not sure that it would

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 win. Nevertheless, the United Mine Workers had the whole-hearted support of Saunders' Ridge, and more importantly the Alberta Government and its police force.

The only outside agency on which the strikers could rely was the Mine Workers' Union of Canada/Communist Party alliance. John Hladun penned the first appeal for aid on behalf of Workers' International Relief:

The struggle of the Alberta miners against the coal operators and the corrupt bosses' union known as the United Mine Workers' of America is growing sharper every day...With the exception of a few stools, company tags and scabby minded officials of the (International) union, the rank and file began this fight... a response of the rank and file to the revolutionary Left Wing movement...under the leadership of the Workers' Unity League. THE MERCOAL MINERS MUST WIN.

52

The strike received widespread support from miners in other Coal Branch camps, many of whom were idle or working short time during this first summer of the Great Depression. Charlie Starrs, Secretary of the new M.W.U.C. local at Mercoal, reported thus to Hladun in late July:

Our ranks are growing rapidly as we have other Coal Camps who are fighting with us now (Foothills, Robb and Bryant) leaving us with a massed picket of men well up in the hundreds...this is a fight against all elements of the present day Capital (sic) system to keep a split in the ranks of Militant Workers...Other mines working with half crews while the other half is on our picket line are as follows: Luscar, Cadomin and Mountain Park.

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With an undertermined number of its members spending their free time on the Mercoal picket line, meetings of the U.M.W. of A. local at Mountain Park at this time were stormy sessions indeed. One report claimed that feelings against the International were so high that Bob Livett carried a pistol on his person in the area. If this seems like an exaggeration, the reader is reminded that when the leadership of the Luscar local was cleaned out in 1931, one of the charges levelled at outgoing Secretary Sam Vining (a strong "anti-Communist") was that he and "his Welsh friends" had been plotting the assassination of Livett the year before.

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On Wednesday, July 23 the massed picket at Mercoal had the effect of preventing a handful of blacklegs from going to work, in spite of the presence of a number of Royal Canadian Mounted Police on the scene. A strike supporter from Robb, Mike Krypan, writes of the event:

...we were on the ridge facing south to the mine entrance. Some R.C.M.P. were escorting some men, about ten or twelve, to work. We were shouting "Scabs go back"... Peter Maticevich and another in a brown leather coat jumped between the police and the scabs. A commotion started and we thundered "Hura-Hura" and started pushing, fist fighting, throwing rocks... some of our men got hurt.

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It was at this point that the support of the Provincial Government's police was crucial to the mine owners and the U.M.W. of A. As in Drumheller during the 1920's, the Brownlee

U.F.A. regime forcefully demonstrated its true colors as a partisan of Capital and the International unity in any struggle with a Canadian miners' organization. A call was put through to Edmonton, and the next day a large contingent of Alberta Provincial Police arrived in Mercoal. A miner from Foothills, who had arrived the previous day to help out the strikers, remembers the "invasion:"

Around four in the afternoon we went to watch the train come in, only it was not the regular train. It was a special crammed full with Provincial Police... my estimate was close to a hundred (the Edson Jasper Signal placed the number at 120). They were armed and also carried night sticks. However, they did not bother us, at least not then...we went to the hall to retire for the night. There was no light as the power had been cut off (by the Police). We went to sleep, but not for long. Around two in the morning the police came and woke us up by poking us with those blasted night sticks. When we were all awake they warned us to be out of Mercoal by daylight. We were out at daylight....

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Outraged by these events, the usually "conservative" Anglo-Saxon miners of Cadomin voted 3 to 1 in favour of affiliating with the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. They expressed their disillusionment with the U.F.A. government in a resolution passed unanimously on July 27:

...we as mine workers did think that a change from the old time political parties to a Farmer Government...was for the better, and now to our sorrow we are to be clubbed into a foreign organization (U.M.W. of A.) UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE Provincial Government...we protest most bitterly against POLICE and MACHINE GUN interference in our choice of home union (and) demand immediate withdrawal of police and machine guns.

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Both Harvey Murphy and Jimmy Sloan participated in the Mercoal strike. The Communists were effusive about this "classic" struggle, which included a military occupation by the Police and the eviction of the strikers from their company-owned houses. As the first test of the Workers' Unity League in the mine fields of Alberta, they desperately wanted a victory at Mercoal. A second appeal by Workers' International Relief read as follows:

They are fighting: against the labour fakers of the reactionary U.M.W. of A.; for the Unity of the miners against the traitors...against the attacks of the millionaire mine bosses...against the brutal Provincial Police...now, this week, they have been thrown out of their miserable shacks..Their wives and children are without shelter. Do not let them starve...The miners are fighters -- Help them fight! Help them win! Every day counts! Every cent counts!

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Although the Workers' International Relief was able to raise considerable amounts of money, food and clothing for the strikers, their struggle was doomed by the disruption of picketting and "rounding up" of leading militants by the Police. Although miners everywhere along the Branch were sympathetic to the Mercoal men, a Sub District Convention in mid-September rejected the idea of a general strike in the region. As Charlie Starrs of the Mercoal local put it: "(I am) believing the Miners afraid to strike." ⁵⁹ Well they might be. The strikers paid dearly for their determination to fight for basic democratic rights. Two miners were given six-month sentences

for their strike activities; two others got three months, and another pair got two months in jail. At least five of the convicted men were "foreigners", and it is reported that two of these, Pete Maticevich and Jack Tomicich, were also deported. Jimmy Sloan was arrested, but was let off with a two-year suspended sentence.

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By late autumn there were only eight "hard core" militants still collecting strike relief in Mercoal. Of these, seven had foreign names, another indication that it was the Slavic miners who played the leading role in the struggle. The one exception was George Mitchell, oddly enough an early opponent of the secessionist movement at Mercoal.

The last of the group was cut off in mid-November, thereafter to tread the heartbreaking, though well-worn path of the blacklisted trade unionist. After trudging around various camps in the Coal Branch looking for a job, one of those blacklisted wrote: "at Hinton I got the same answer...no work for you Botrakoff...impossible for me to get work on this coal branch or the Lovette Branch..." Botrakoff further reports that he has four young daughters "and my wife will become a mother again within a month." One shudders to think what befell this working class family during the winter of 1930-1931.

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In summing up, the Western Miner concluded that the strike had been defeated through the combined efforts of the U.F.A.,

the Labour Party, the operators, and the U.M.W. of A.:

"A united front of scabherding, railroading and jailing of strikers." ⁶³ Delegates to the Fifth Convention of the Mine

Workers' Union of Canada resolved that "never in the history of the District has there been such an open display of police terrorism." ⁶⁴

Yet the events in the North in 1930 were but a foretaste from the bitter cup from which the miners were to drink in the years ahead. The struggles of the "Miners' Section of the Workers' Unity League" had only begun.

III

The 1930 Convention of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada met nearly a year after the Wall Street Crash. For the miners, conditions had hardly been ideal in the 1920's. This new depression, which resulted in a drop of 20% in Alberta coal production in 1930 alone, only dragged them deeper into the economic pit. In his annual report Sloan commented:

...despite all the promises and shouts that the country is prosperous etc., and that the depression will soon be over, better times to come etc., in reality the conditions are growing worse, and the exploitation increases daily.

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Communist appeals for "class struggle policies", delivered by fraternal delegates Murphy, Lakeman and James Farbey (of the Young Communist League), could not have come at a more opportune time. The proposal to disaffiliate from the All Canadian Congress of Labour passed with only three dissenting votes.⁶⁶ However, the idea of formally affiliating with the Workers' Unity League was more contentious, and was left in the hands of a referendum to be held at some future date.

While the delegates pondered the future of their organization there appeared on the floor some ghosts from the past, in the persons of Lewis McDonald and Dai Morgan, two of the "founding fathers" of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Having dropped the use of the name "Kid Burns" in a bid for respectability, McDonald had by 1930 moved far to the right. He

supported the election of R.B. Bennett, and had eliminated the Left Wing aspect of his nationalist creed altogether. McDonald and Morgan were at the Convention to drum up support for a new organization, the self-styled "Canadian Defenders", which preached nativism as the solution to the problems of the Canadian working class. McDonald's new platform included giving preference of employment to "native and English-speaking citizens...compulsory speaking of the English language, and deportation of agitators."⁶⁷

The Convention heard him out, but was in no mood to make an alliance with such a "fascist" organization as the Canadian Defenders. Nevertheless, the Defenders represented a strain of thought -- not necessarily or exclusively bourgeois in origin -- that was to persist within the miners' ranks during the Depression. Nativism, or the idea that one part of the mining community, namely the Anglo-Saxons, could somehow escape the ravages of economic dislocation by shifting the burden onto the shoulders of the "foreigners" constituted a potent, though obviously divisive ideological force in the miners' movement. It presented a serious threat indeed to the Mine Workers' Union, which not only depended upon the cementing of loyalties along class and not national lines for its existence, but by its relationship with the Communists had laid itself open to charges of "foreign domination". The conflict would come out into the open in the Crows' Nest Pass in 1932, as we shall see in a forthcoming chapter.

The "fascists", of course, were not the only group opposed to the growing relationship between the Communist Party and the miners' Union, as evidenced by secession of the Lethbridge Local by a vote of 339 to 288 in December, 1930.⁶⁸ The move was engineered by supporters of the traditional Labour Party organization in the City, a bitter opponent of the Communists. The Western Miner, for what it is worth, hypothesized that the miners' reasons for rejecting the M.W.U.C. at this time were more practical than political; and that their action was largely motivated by fears of reprisals stemming from the introduction of the job-eliminating shearing machine into the Galt Mines.⁶⁹ At any rate, the Lethbridge secession caused consternation in Moscow, which urged Canadian comrades to concentrate "all possible forces" in the coalfields to defeat the "reactionary offensive."⁷⁰ Tom McEwen thought that the Lethbridge miners had given the Communists a "strong warning" against the fallacy that "through mechanical control of the 'head' of the M.W.U.C., they could hope to "hope to control the entire body."⁷¹

The split did not signal a reversal of the trend towards militancy in the M.W.U.C, not even in the lignite field. In Shaughnessy, the miners struck in mid-season during the winter of 1930-1931 in an unsuccessful attempt to protect their union organization. The previous September a dispute at this camp had been settled through a compromise worked out by the

Federal Department of Labour's trouble-shooter in the West, F.E. Harrison (See Appendix C, page 261). This time Harrison was unsuccessful in mediation, as the employer, the Cadillac Coal Company, seems to have been bent on smashing the M.W.U.C. The strike commenced on January 15, following the firing of four miners who refused to speed up production. It was, as James Farbey lamented, "a hell of a time to strike in a lignite field",⁷² especially considering the widespread unemployment in the Lethbridge area. While attempts at mass picketting were foiled by police action, the number of black-legs increased from 2 to 39 within a month. By early March, even the scabs were going on short time, and the M.W.U.C. local at Shaughnessy was no more. The coal company established a home local and even drew up a "collective agreement" with this body. The most important article of the new contract was the "yellow dog" clause, forbidding the employees at Shaughnessy from affiliating with a "real" trade union.⁷⁴

The Communists played no role in either the conduct or the instigation of the Shaughnessy strike, which ended in complete defeat and humiliation for the union. Indeed, the winter of 1930-1931 seems to have marked a real low point in Communist activity in the coalfields. Murphy and Hladun were in Moscow, while Stokaluk was still "hived up" in Coleman, inactive, and in a state of semi-disgrace with the Party. The Western Miner

which had been edited in 1930 largely by Harvey Murphy, did not publish between January and April of 1931. The supporters of the Workers' Unity League had to work hard to defeat a resolution from the Nordegg local calling for the recall of the district officers. The Nordegg miners, who usually could be relied upon to support the policies of the Left Wing, complained of mismanagement of union finances and the Shaughnessy strike. ⁷⁵

Nevertheless, the Communists came out fighting in the Spring, in preparation for the referendum on the W.U.L. question, which was scheduled for May 11. The Western Miner was revived and once again took the offensive for the Left. Even the boycotting of the paper by Lethbridge printers "under pressure from the operators and the Catholic Church" failed to prevent the appearance of 2,500 copies of the pre-election edition in mimeographed form on May 7. ⁷⁶ The re-awakening of the radical movement can be partially attributed to leadership factors. The Party brought in one of its "top guns", Malcolm Bruce from Vancouver, to campaign on behalf of the Workers' Unity League, with positive results. Bruce, who was jailed later in the year along with the rest of the Communist leadership in Canada, was an experienced and effective orator and organizer. During the early 1920's he was one of the most popular radical speakers in the Cape Breton coalfields. Brought to trial in 1923 on

charges of making derogatory remarks concerning the Union Jack at a mass meeting in Glace Bay, he was acquitted because the prosecution could not find a single miner to testify against him. ⁷⁷ More important was the active support of John Stokaluk, who finally rehabilitated himself in the eyes of the Party by performing "yeoman work" in the W.U.L. campaign. ⁷⁸ Along with Stokaluk, of course, went the "radical foreigners" and the U.F.L.T.A.

The Communists did not pull any punches in their propaganda. The Western Miner advertised the Workers' Unity League openly as:

...the Canadian section of R.I.L.U. (Red International of Labour Unions, Moscow), pledged to a programme and policy of revolutionary struggle for the complete overthrow of capitalism and the institutions of exploitation, and the setting up of the state power of the workers and poor farmers through a workers' and farmers' state.

79

Their energetic "vote hustling" paid off handsomely, as the miners voted 73% in favour of affiliation to the W.U.L. on May 11. (See Appendix E, Table 4). Support for Leftist policies seems to have increased considerably since the district elections of the previous summer, although the non-participation of the Lethbridge local probably resulted in the loss of a number of anti-W.U.L. votes. Even Lethbridge, however, became caught up in the swing towards the Left. The local decided to participate in the Communist-led May Day parade,

although the miners did vote to march under the Union Jack and not the Red Flag. Union militants like Andrew Walker, Secretary of the home local, began to agitate for re-affiliation to the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Within a month a referendum vote at Lethbridge had decided the question in favour of the M.W.U.C.⁸⁰ The re-affiliation of Lethbridge indicates a seasonal dimension to the political behaviour of the miners, at least in this lignite camp. It is reasonable to assume that when the mines closed down in March the miners got hungrier and thus more militant, and it is not coincidental that both votes for disaffiliation in 1930 and 1931 took place in December, when more steady work could be obtained in Lethbridge.

IV

In late June, the Secretary-Treasurer of the M.W.U.C. sent in the union's first per capita of \$60 to the W.U.L.⁸¹ headquarters. The miners were now officially committed to the Communist alliance, a link whose consequences were demonstrated almost immediately with the inauguration of a national campaign against the Party by various levels of government during the summer of 1931. In early July repressive measures were taken against the Alberta Communists, with the raiding of their Calgary offices. Most of the Party's leading militants in the Province were arrested, including James Farbey, Phil Luck and John O'Sullivan -- all of whom had

7
been active in the miners' and unemployed workers' movements. Those who were not caught in the dragnet subsequently "took to the high timbers", and the Party's activities were thus temporarily disrupted in Alberta.⁸² Following the arrests the chief of the Alberta Relief Commission, A.A. McKenzie uttered musings to the effect that "communists" should not expect to receive public assistance. This prompted one English-speaking Drumheller militant to ask: "When will these fools ever learn that our voice is the voice of tortured humanity, and that their persecution can never stamp out the spirit of revolt?"⁸³

Soon afterwards, R.B. Bennett delivered what he hoped would be the final "deathblow" to the revolutionary movement by reviving that infamous piece of legislation, Section 98 of the Criminal Code. Section 98 (which provided for jail terms of up to five years for persons advocating "violent overthrow" of the government) was created by the Borden regime to suppress radical activity in 1919, and seems to have been a distinctively "Tory" response to working class challenges to the established order. The Liberal Party regimes in Ottawa and Nova Scotia had used traditional sedition laws to exorcize the chief radical demon of the 1920's, J.B. McLachlan, and Section 98 was struck off the books by Mackenzie King in 1936.

Under Bennett, however, the legislation was a powerful weapon in the hands of the employers and the state. With the cooperation of the Conservative Henry government of Ontario, Bennett effectively "delegalized" the Communist Party on August 22, 1931. The Party headquarters in Toronto were sacked and eight leading Communists -- including Tim Buck, Tom McEwen and Malcolm Bruce -- were arrested. All were subsequently convicted and sentenced to five year jail terms, under Section 98. While the authorities justified their actions as a defence of the democratic political system, they seem to have been directed more against working class militancy in general, and the growing strength of the Workers' Unity League in particular. Not suprisingly, members of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada took a dim view of the proceedings. The Cadomin miners expressed a common perspective when they informed the Prime Minister that they considered Section 98 as simply "a vehicle to remove all militant workers, and so destroy all militant working class organizations."

84

The implications of the intensified climate of repression in Canada were shown to the miners in a clear and frightening manner by the atrocities committed in the South Saskatchewan coal field in September, 1931. The story of the Estevan strike and massacre has been told elsewhere by Stan Hanson, thus obviating the necessity for a lengthy treatment here.

85

Briefly, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had --

at the request of a committee representing the 600 colliers of the Bienfait/Taylorlton area -- established its first Saskatchewan local in August of 1931. The "fighting President" of the M.W.U.C., Jimmy Sloan, had been involved in the effort, along with Communist organizers Annie Buller, Martin Forkin and James Bryson. Citing disinclination to associate themselves with the "Red Internationale of Soviet Russia", the local coal operators refused to consider the miners' modest demands for a living wage and more humane conditions at home and at work. The Mine Workers' Union of Canada thus declared a general work stoppage in the area on September 7.

On September 29, a mass protest parade of the strikers and their families was stopped on the outskirts of the town of Estevan, a riot ensued, and three Ukrainian mine workers were shot dead by the R.C.M.P. In their report to Ottawa, police officials painted a lurid, though fanciful, picture of the workers marching on the town "carrying red flags and armed with clubs." The Report justified the killings by claiming that the reds had somehow "opened fire" first -- presumably with their clubs.⁸⁶ These charges have been fully and adequately dealt with by Hanson, and we shall not dwell on them here. What is important in this context is the response of the rest of the mining community to the massacre. This response was instinctive, unequivocal condemnation. Mass meetings were convened in every coal

town, and protests poured into Bennett's office. Many of these protests, written on forms supplied by the Canadian Labour Defence League, or couched in terms of the "Party line" can perhaps be dismissed (as Bennett himself surely dismissed them) as propaganda. Others, such as the following from the generally conservative mining community of Luscar, Alberta, cannot. The document speaks for itself:

...there are very few Communists in Canada, but there are hosts of working men abounding who are suffering real hunger, ...the conditions are eating away the vitality of the strongest of men, and they don't have to be communists when the grieve over their misfortune but such conditions does (sic) make them desperate, and to trifle with their grievances is a deadly error... the shooting of those Estevan men...has filled us with horror, and the disclosure of living conditions... have shocked the whole of civilization, its no good to try to hide it, by advancing unsatisfactory excuses, (i.e. the Reds), the best thing for the good of the country is to rectify it and commend the Camdian union for taking action at the cry of distress that went up which was ignored by the U.M.W. of A. (which) promised to help them if the poverty stricken miners would bear the expense of an organizer. This goes to prove that the only organized body of men that has the welfare of the working class at heart is the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, and the backbone of that Organization are not Russians but real Canadians and British born workers, who are not willing that such display of cowardness (sic) and cruel injustice should be allowed to pass unheeded and unavenged, indeed vengeance is calling loudly in this case.

We beg to present this protest with all respect to our present government, expecting immediate action to further the ends of justice, and ask that the campaign and the agitation against the Mine Workers' Union of Canada be discontinued as its power is based upon justice and compassion, we are not infidels but God-fearing people the most of us...

Deepening Depression and outrageously "insensitive" government, were pushing even "free born Englishmen" into the radical camp. Of course, the Estevan massacre provided strong supporting evidence to the Communists' theories about the nature of the class war. It would not soon be forgotten. Cecil Boone, the radical bard who had served time with Lewis McDonald as a result of the Drumheller strike, summed up the events in song:

(In a little mining village
 Scarcely noticed on the map
 Bourgeois guns were turned on workers
 And their Life Blood there did sap

No one dreamed of such a slaughter
 In that town of Estevan
 That armed thugs with guns and bullets
 Would shoot men with empty hands

Three more martyrs for the miners
 Three more murders for the boss
 Brutal laws to crush the workers
 Who dare fight for freedom's cause.

88

A crowning piece of irony was the announcement by McDonald that the Canadian Defenders Organization was willing to place its services at the disposal of the forces of "law and order" to aid in the smashing of the strike. Although the threat was never carried out, the M.W.U.C. promised that "we have the express decision of 1,400 unemployed workers of Winnipeg to beat the four hundred miles to Estevan...if Kid Burns goes in with his crew of gangsters." It is the last we shall hear of this mercurial character. McDonald later moved to the coast, became an activist in the Canadian Legion

and died a respected citizen of Vancouver.

The Estevan strike resulted in the arrest of most of the organizers involved, including Jimmy Sloan, along with scores of ordinary workers. Ludwig Maurice and Major Hyslop tried to organize a general sympathy strike of the M.W.U.C. for October 7, but without notable success. Operators in the Pass, Canmore and Lethbridge districts prudently kept their mines idle on that day. According to contemporary reports, only a group of non-unionized miners at Medicine Hat, where James Bryson was well known for his work among the unemployed, closed operations in observance of the day.

91

The Saskatchewan strike itself came to an end on October 8. Professing of the "usual malarky" about sympathy for the miners, the authorities managed to convince them to go back to work pending an investigation into their grievances. While a slight improvement of the miners' abysmal conditions was effected, the authorities whitewashed the R.C.M.P. and ground out large doses of "class justice" to serve as a stern warning to the militants. While most of the accused received fines, short jail terms and suspended sentences, Annie Buller, and the venerable Sam Scarlett eventually served two and one years respectively.

92

The case of "Rex vs. James Bryson" had a particular impact, as the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was

cited as an "unlawful organization" under the terms of
 Section 98. ⁹³ Opponents of the union played the judgment
 for all it was worth, although the Western Miner remained
 confident that "the slanderous attacks of the boss press"
 would not "get the desired effect of throwing (the miners)
 into a panic." ⁹⁴ Said the newly elected Secretary-Treasurer
 of the M.W.U.C., John Stokaluk:

Only a small percentage of the members of the union
 were ever members of the Communist Party, but any
 actions taken by the workers are always interpreted
 as Communism. The mine operators would love to
 see our organization illegal...particularly at this
 time when...the union...is preparing for new agree-
 ments for the betterment of conditions...

95

In Alberta, the official campaign against the Mine Workers'
 Union of Canada had a negative effect only amongst its most
 fickle supporters, the employees of the Galt Mines in Lethbridge.
 On the advice of Labour M.L.A. Andrew Smeaton -- a gentleman
 whom the Communists regarded as the archetypal 'yellow socialist'
 -- they voted for the second and last time to secede, by a
 margin of 275 to 259 in December. ⁹⁶ Another casualty was the
 union's only local in the East, at Westville in Pictou County,
 Nova Scotia. The local had been organized in 1928 after a
 split with the U.M.W. of A., by Dan Livingston, former
 President of District 26, who had been deposed from office
 along with McLachlan in 1923. The press reported that the
 Westville miners had returned their charter after "learning
 that the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was affiliated with the

red Internationale", but it seems that there was a more immediate reason. The local branch of the Canadian Legion had declared the M.W.U.C. to be 'dual' to their organization, thus depriving union members of access to what was probably the centre of Westville's social life. Barred from the Legion Hall, the thirsty miners were forced to abandon the Canadian union. Unfortunately, Dan Livingston "could not be reached for comment."⁹⁷

The Mine Workers' Union of Canada had not long to live in Saskatchewan. Here the operators would not acknowledge the existence of any form of organization, let alone a "revolutionary" trade union. The workers had no previous experience in trade unionism, while the union had to collect its own dues and thus maintain a relatively high level of interest on the part of the rank and file. As Sloan told the local leaders, "there's lots of hard work ahead for you yet boys, lots of hard work."⁹⁸ There was sporadic strike action in the field during the winter of 1931-1932, but this is the last we hear of the organization. The Estevan miners do not seem to have been fully organized again until 1939, by which time the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was "only a memory" in the field.⁹⁹

NOTES

CHAPTER III

1. Avakumovic, op.cit., p. 49.
2. See the "Appendix" of Agents of Revolution: A History of the Workers' Unity League. (Office of the Attorney-General of Ontario, Toronto, 1932 (?)).
3. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 12. T.U.E.L. Correspondence re A.C.C.L. Convention, October 22, 1929.
4. Tom McEwen, op.cit. p. 141.
5. For Murphy's role in the fight between the Communists and the C.C.F., 1945-1950, see Irving Abella, Nationalism, Communism Canadian Labour. op.cit. and "Communism and Anti-Communism in the B.C. Federation of Labour" in Western Perspectives, I, edited by David J. Bercuson, (Toronto, 1974)
6. John Hladun, "They Taught me Treason", Part I, McLean's Magazine, October 1, 1947, p. 83.
7. Interview: Harvey Murphy, September 22, 1976 at Toronto. Also PAC, David Millar Collection. Transcripts of Interview with Harvey Murphy, 1969, Part I, p. 7.
8. Interview: Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
9. Tom McEwen, op.cit. p. 144.
10. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 11, 1A0560-1. "McEwen to Murphy," February 19, 1930. Stokaluk had resigned from the M.W.U.C. Executive, his spot as Vice-President being taken by former President Frank Leary.
11. Avakumovic, op.cit., Chapter 1; Rodney, op.cit., Chapter 1; Don Avery, "The Radical Alien and the Winnipeg General Strike", in Carl Berger, editor, The West and the Nation: Essays in honour of W.L. Morton, (Toronto, 1976) pp. 202-232.
12. Avakumovic, op.cit. p. 66.
13. According to Hladun, "They Taught me Treason", op.cit.
14. Watson Kirkconnell, Seven Pillars of Freedom (Oxford U. Press, 1944) pp. 69-70

15. Ibid., p. 98
16. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 15, 1A0798-9. "Murphy to McEwen," April 24, 1930.
17. Avakumovic, op.cit. pp. 49-50
18. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 15. File on "Expulsions, 1930; "Stokaluk Case".
19. Western Miner, March 21, 1930
20. Ibid., April 4, 1930.
21. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 11, 1A0560-1, "McEwen to Murphy," February 19, 1930.
22. Ibid.: I; 11, 1A0549-51, "Murphy to 'Stewart'", January 28, 1930.
23. Western Miner, February 20, 1930.
24. Ibid., March 21, 1930.
25. Ibid., February 20, 1930.
26. Ibid., March 6, 1930.
27. Hladun, "They Taught me Treason", op.cit.
28. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union", April 15, 1930.
29. Lethbridge Herald, April 9, 1930.
30. Western Miner, May 8, 1930.
31. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 15. 1A0796. "Stokaluk to Central Committee", April 24, 1930.
32. Ibid.: I; 15. 1A0798-9, "Murphy to McEwen", April 24, 1930.
33. Ibid.: I; 15. 1A0819-22, "Murphy to 'Stewart'" n.d. The Dominion Census of 1931, Volume II, pp.467-477, shows 62% of Coalhurst's population as foreign, as opposed to 34% in Lethbridge, or 45% to 60% in the Alberta Pass towns. Coalhurst must also have had a high proportion of single men,

as evidenced by the fact that in 1930, 450 of its 950 inhabitants were M.W.U.C. members.

34. Western Miner, May 8, 1930; Lethbridge Herald, June 17, 1930.
35. Western Miner, May 30, 1930.
36. Ibid., March 21, 1930.
37. Results of the election in PAO, C.P.C. Files: X; 22, 10C2075,
38. From the "District President's Report" to the 1930 Convention of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Ibid: X;22, 10C2066-9.
39. A.A. den Otter, "A Social History of the Alberta Coal Branch" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1967). Introduction.
40. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 1, 1A0021-2. Report from Roy Reid, August 10, 1925.
41. den Otter, op.cit. p.34.
42. Ibid. p. 181.
43. Ibid. pp. 45-46.
44. Ibid. p.203.
45. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 1, 1A0023-25. Report from Roy Reid, August 12, 1925.
46. Report of the Luscar Conciliation Board, 1930, Labour Gazette, 1930, pp.880-883.
47. From the "Minutes of the 1930 Convention of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada", PAO, C.P.C. Files: X;22, 10C2079-2110, 10C2095.
48. Western Miner, April 18, 1930.

49. Ibid, May 8, 1930.
50. Alberta Mines Branch Annual Report, 1925, pp. 216,285.
51. Labour Gazette, 1930, p.907; Western Miner, June 27, 1930; Toni Ross, Oh the Coal Branch! (Edmonton, 1976), p. 94.
52. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 12, 1A0692
53. Ibid: I; 12, 1A0654-5, "Starrs to Hladun", July 28, 1930.
54. Ibid: III; 34, 3A2273-5. James Adams, Luscar Local Union "Report", July 27, 1931. The Western Miner of September 18, 1930, carries a report of Livett brandishing his pistol at hecklers at a Mountain Park union meeting.
55. Cited in Ross, op.cit., p. 286-287.
56. Ibid, pp. 212-213. See also Edmonton Journal, July 25, 1930.
57. Cited in Ross, op.cit. p. 94.
58. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 12, 1A0653
59. Ibid: I; 12, 1A0659, "Starrs to Hladun", September 17, 1930.
60. Western Miner, November 29, 1930; Ross, op.cit. pp.286-287
61. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 12, 1A0663-71.
62. Ibid: I; 12, 1A0669-70, "Tony Botrakoff to Joe Boulet", November 14, 1930.
63. Western Miner, November 29, 1930.
64. "Minutes of the 1930 Convention", op.cit.: 10C2095.
65. From the "District President's Report", op.cit.
66. James Dornan of Corbin, Sam Vining of Luscar, and George Worman of Wayne. "Minutes of the 1930 Convention", op.cit. 10C2090.
67. Ibid.10C2094.
68. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union" December 10, 1930.

69. Western Miner, January 19, 1931.
70. Agents of Revolution, op.cit. p.5.
71. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 19, 3A2004-6. "McEwen to Farbey", January 12, 1931.
72. Ibid: VI; 19, 3A2014. "Farbey to McEwen", January 28, 1931.
73. Ibid: VI; 19, 3A20 20-35.
74. Galt Museum, Lethbridge, Argreement Between the Cadillac Coal Company and Their Employees, March 31, 1930. The home local was instructed to "not affiliate with any union or branch of union."
75. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI, 19: 3A2077, "Fred Bray to McEwen". March 23, 1931. Vice-President Maurice especially was cited for "misappropriating union funds." He resigned later in the year.
76. Western Miner, May 7, 1931
77. David Frank and Don McGillivray, "Working Class Culture in Cape Breton in the 1920's". Lecture given at McGill University, February 10, 1977.
78. PAO, C.P.C. Files: III; 32, 3A2139-40. "Bruce to McEwen", May 2, 1931.
79. Western Miner, April 27, 1931.
80. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union", June 2, 1931. The vote 303 to 191.
81. PAO, C.P.C. Files: III, 33, 3A2257. The \$60 was based on a 2-cent monthly per capita tax, based on a paid-up membership of 3,000. Lower "per capita" would not seem to have been a motivation behind the switch from the A.C.C.L. to the W.U.L. The yearly cost of affiliation to the latter at the above rate would be \$720 per annum; while the cost of belonging to the A.C.C.L. in 1929-1930 was \$840. "Minutes of the 1930 Convention", op.cit. 10C2122.
82. Ibid: III; 34, 3A 2265, IV; 32, 4A2505.

83. Ibid: VI; 37, 4A2639-41. Letter from "J.W." of Newcastle Mines, July 10, 1931.
84. PAC (microfilm) Bennett Papers: Volume 139, 92742.
85. Stan Hanson, "Estevan, 1931", in On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada (Toronto, 1974), edited by Irving Abella, pp.33-78, Hanson's "Estevan Strike and Riot, 1931" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1972) is also quoted extensively in Lorne and Caroline Brown's "Unauthorized History..." op.cit. pp.69-76.
86. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 42; 267264, "T.S. Belcher, Ass.Comm. R.C.M.P. to R.B. Bennett", September 30, 1931. At the ensuing trials, the prosecution produced a broken rifle as "evidence" to back up this false accusation.
87. Ibid: Volume 421, 267388-9. "David Davies, Luscar Local Unit 24, M.W.U.C. to R.B. Bennett, October 8, 1931". After a campaign of U.M.W. "disruption" in 1932, the Luscar local seceded from the M.W.U.C. The result of the W.U.L. referendum in Luscar was the closest in the district: 72 for, 64 against.
88. To be sung to the tune of "Kevin Barry". Canadian Miner, January 30, 1932.
89. Western Miner, October 12, 1931.
90. Lewis McDonald became known for his "good works" in Vancouver and was named that city's "Good Citizen of the year" in 1958. He spearheaded the building of the Community Centre in Mount Pleasant, was a friend of Chief Dan George, and was made Honorary Chief of the Burrard Tribe. He died in March 1962, at age 70. A tribute to McDonald in the Cape Breton Post (Jan. 12, 1976) makes note of his leadership of a miners' strike in Thorburn, Nova Scotia, but no mention of the Drumheller events, McDonald's jail term, or his membership in the Communist Party.
91. Lethbridge Herald, October 5,7, 1931.
92. Hanson, "Estevean: 1931", op.cit.
93. PAC; Bennett Papers: Volume 421: 267408-9, "W.J.Perkins to the Attorney-General of Saskatchewan", December 3, 1931.
94. Western Miner, December 12, 1931.

95. Ibid.
96. Ibid, December 31, 1932.
97. Lethbridge Herald, October 6, 1931. Report on Labour Organizations in Canada, 1931, pp. 199-200.
98. Canadian Miner, March 12, 1932.
99. Hanson, "Estevan, 1931", op.cit. p. 78

Chapter Four: "The Great Pass Strike of 1932"

I

Because of the tragic killing of the three Saskatchewan mine workers, the Estevan struggle is the best known episode in the history of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Yet the Saskatchewan experience was essentially a short-lived and unsuccessful attempt at organization amongst a people outside of the "mainstream" of Canadian labour, not dissimilar from many other strike struggles led by the Workers' Unity League during the Depression. The Communists seem to have had no long term effect in the field, and the Estevan miners remained just as isolated from the rest of the miners' movement after the strike as they had been before. Aside from the creation of martyrs from those who were killed or imprisoned, and a general exacerbation of class antagonisms, the struggle had little direct impact on the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The strike in the Alberta Pass in the following year had a greater significance. It was the largest, longest, and most bitter struggle that the union ever conducted, involving one-third of its membership and the fate of its first and strongest Sub District. A smashing defeat here would probably have resulted in the complete dissolution of the organization within a very short time. From a more general historical perspective, the strike and its aftermath are not without interest. As indicated in the Introduction (p.13), these

events provide a concrete illustration of the broader themes under discussion in this paper: radicalism, ethnicity, and the response of the working class to economic degradation.

Unlike the isolated coalfield of Estevan, the Crows' Nest Pass had always been the centre of the "class conscious idea" in District 18. Although the field at Lethbridge opened up a decade before, the Pass was the first to be organized, by the Western Federation of Miners in 1902. The Pass miners left the W.F.M. for the United Mine Workers in 1903 not as a result of any objection to its radical politics, but because they felt that they had been "sold out" by their local leaders in a strike struggle (Above, Chapter 1, footnote 2). They were the first Canadian miners off Vancouver Island to gain a political victory, with the election of Socialist Party candidate, Charlie O'Brien¹ to the Alberta House for the riding of Rocky Mountain in 1908. Along with Drumheller, the Pass was a major bulwark of support for the new unionism of 1919, although, as elsewhere, the miners were forced to abandon it under duress. The returns from the Pass camps in the O.B.U. referendum are the most complete we have, and these show an overwhelming majority in favour (Appendix E, Table 1) of the radical union. The point is clinched by the election of the head of the miners' section of the O.B.U.,² Paul Christophers, in Rocky Mountain in 1920. After the strikes of the early 1920's, of course, the miners were definitely

beaten, and the attempt to regroup in the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was by no means an unqualified success. The M.W.U.C. locals in the Crows' Nest Pass retained many of the characteristics of the original "home locals" after 1925, and the union was never strong enough to engage in any meaningful collective bargaining with the mine owners. One writer goes so far as to state that the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was a "paper organization" and that "the period between 1925 and 1935 saw the abandonment of labour unionism" in the Crows' Nest Pass.³

These assertions are less than precise. The response of the Crow miners to the Depression of the 1930's was not monolithic, and differed widely from camp to camp. After a period of increasingly aggressive radical activity during the period 1930-1932, Coleman came under the sway of "crypto-fascist" forms of leadership, while Blairmore swung further towards the Left. Corbin exhibited a high degree of union militance in 1935, but seems to have been unaffected by radical politics. Michel never seemed to have been able to make up its mind on the question of affiliation to the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Hillcrest and Fernie, B.C. remained fairly passive throughout the period. The kind of labour unionism which emerged in the Alberta Pass during the early 1930's was very different from that espoused by either the home locals or the United Mine Workers organization. Economic

conditions prevented the union from pursuing "normal" trade union objectives, and forced the miners to re-direct their energies. In some respects the M.W.U.C. in the Crows' Nest Pass was not a trade union at all in the ordinary sense, but rather a movement of a different order; a movement of resistance, both political and economic, against the capitalist regime, a rear guard action to preserve the last shreds of working class independence in a period in which this independence came under relentless attack from all quarters. Yet it was not simply a "class movement". Aspects of class and ethnicity, sometimes complementary, sometimes conflicting, intertwined in its evolution, until the volatile mixture finally exploded in the course of the "great strike" of 1932.

As was seen in Part I, the M.W.U.C. at no time represented more than one half of the 3,500 coal miners on both sides of the provincial line in the Crows' Nest Pass. The home locals of 1925 constituted two distinct categories: those that had been initiated by the coal companies (Fernie, Michel and Hillcrest); and those which had been formed by the mine workers themselves (Coleman, Blairmore, Bellevue and Corbin).⁴ The latter group had at least tried to alter their home local/company union status through affiliation with the M.W.U.C., while the former had not. Some correlation, perhaps coincidental, can be made between the capital structures of the companies involved and

their ability to retain absolute control over their employees. Hillcrest Collieries was, by 1925, an adjunct to the Herbert Holt/C.P.R. empire; while the mines at Fernie and Michel were controlled by large scale American railway and mining capital. Corbin Collieries, on the other hand, was the personal domain of the Corbin family of Spokane. The operations at Coleman, International and McGillivray mines, were independently owned until they were swallowed by the C.P.R. in the early 1930's.⁵

West Canadian Collieries (Blairmore and Bellevue), which even a militant of 1932 characterized as "an honourable company" presents us with a special case. A subsidiary of a French multinational company which controlled the coal industry of Indochina as well as the French interest in the Suez Canal, West Canadian had historically been noted for its ability to attract "the pick of the miners" in the Crows' Nest Pass. Its representatives in Canada were, in the main, educated French technocrats such as Georges Visaac, inventor of the "Visaac Coal Gig", and prior to the Great Depression, large amounts of capital had flowed into its Canadian operations.⁶ The 1925 Coal Commission found West Canadian's Greenhill colliery at Blairmore to have exemplary safety and working conditions, and lauded the fact that one could stand erect anywhere within it -- a fact due as much to the large coal seams at Blairmore (up to 12 feet in height) as to the company's engineering policies. It also noted with

approval the introduction of the compressed air pick into the Greenhill mine -- an innovation, however, which was not regarded with the same unanimous approval by the employees.⁷ Although West Canadian, in common with the other operators in the Pass, never officially recognized the M.W.U.C. as a bargaining agent, and dealt with the M.W.U.C. Local as a "committee of employees", it is significant that its sister company, Big Horn and Saunders' Creek Collieries,⁸ was one of the very few coal companies in Alberta to do so. Nevertheless, West Canadian Collieries was to bear the brunt of the class conflict of the 1930's, and its employees were destined to gain the reputation of being the most militant proletarians in the country.

Labour relations at the Greenhill mine began to sour in 1928-1929, when the company's production and profits first began to sag, and a tough new underground manager was installed at Blairmore. Under the direction of Harvey Blake, cost-cutting techniques such as the removal of pillars to get "100% recovery" were put into practice. Taking the pillars -- those parts of the seam usually left largely untouched to secure the roof -- may have meant "good places" and high wages (as much as \$50 a day) for a few favoured contract miners, but it also entailed a general decline in the safety standards of the mine.⁹ Blake's greatest sin, however, was his prejudice against foreign nationalities. The contract system had always opened itself to the playing of

favourites, as it was traditionally the prerogative of the boss to assign "places", good or bad, to the contract men. Blake played the game, not only by the usual criterion, but on the basis of ethnicity. In the late 20's he imported 50-odd Welsh miners -- part of the unemployed "refuse" of 1926 who had been lured to Canada by way of the harvest excursion -- into Greenhill and gave them good places to try to ensure their loyalty. This provoked widespread resentment amongst the other employees, who already were competing for available work. Blake made no secret of his ultimate intentions. His reported boast that he would make Blairmore a "White Man's Camp" seared the soul of that community, and laid the foundations for future conflict.

The use of the words "White Man" underlines the key element of ethnicity without which one cannot hope to understand the evolution of class relationships in the Crow during the 1930's. Our first consideration, of course, must be empirical. The 1925 Coal Commission reported the following ethnic breakdown in the Alberta Pass, the term "British" being used to include the small number of native English Canadians amongst the mine workers: British, 44%; Slovak, 23%; Italian, 14.5%; French and Belgian, 7%; Russian, 2%; Other Europeans, 8.5%; and Americans, 1%. (See Appendix D, Table 1). Having failed

to locate the primary data on which the Commission's findings were based, a further breakdown on a local basis can only be achieved through reference to the reports of the Dominion Census for the various municipalities involved. This is imprecise, not only because many of the coal camps are not listed separately in the census reports, but also because one cannot assume that all the inhabitants of a particular municipality are coal miners or their dependents. Nevertheless, these reports will have to suffice.

The most significant information which can be gleaned from the census data is that which relates to a comparison between the towns of Coleman and Blairmore, Alberta. Roughly similar in size, and both dependent on the coal industry for their existence, these two neighbouring towns drifted further and further apart during the Depression on political and trade union issues. The facile conclusion of one student, who attributes Blairmore's greater militance to the fact that Harvey Murphy "spent a great deal of his time in that town" simply does not provide a satisfactory explanation. ¹¹ The oral tradition of the Crows' Nest Pass stresses instead the role of ethnicity in determining this phenomenon. Veterans of both sides of the conflict feel that Blairmore's tendency toward the left can be partially attributed to the relative preponderance of Italians, Slovaks, Finns and Scandinavians in that town; while Coleman's

conservatism was influenced by the relative preponderance of Anglo-Saxon and Polish elements there.

12
 These opinions are borne out by the available data. The Census of 1931 found a higher proportion of Italians, Slovaks, and Finns/Scandinavians in Blairmore than in Coleman; and more Poles and Anglo-Saxons in the latter town (See Appendix D Table 5). The most telling statistics which emerge are the percentages of those belonging to the "British Races" in the two towns. In Blairmore they were in a minority, and made up only 40.6% of the population. In Coleman their position was reversed, the "British Races" having 54.4% of the total. This situation is illustrated as well by the religious make-up of the two towns. Protestantism (Anglicans, Presbyterians and United Church), the religion of the "White Man", had the allegiance of 53.8% of Coleman's inhabitants in 1931; 42.7% of Blairmore's. 52.9% of the people of Blairmore were Roman Catholics, the religion of the "foreigner" 41.6% in Coleman. 13
 The religious dimension is not without relevance to our discussion of Communism and the miners' union, as we shall see later.

II

In 1930 the Communist Party organization in the Alberta Pass was small and definitely dominated by the "foreign element". From the spotty reports in the Communist Party manuscripts, it

would seem that the Blairmore Branch had twelve members, "all of whom are Finns, etc." while Bellevue had four of unspecified origin. Coleman had a much larger contingent, which included Stokaluk's Ukrainian Farmer Labour Temple Association group, as well as a handful of Anglo-Saxons recruited by Harvey Murphy (seven out of forty-seven).¹⁴ There were two women worthy of note in the revolutionary movement in Blairmore: Anna Apponen, a Finn whom Murphy described as "the best female revolutionist in the Party"; and Mary North, who founded the Women's Labour League (an affiliate of the W.U.L.) in the town in 1930.¹⁵ Despite the appearance of the odd Anglo-Saxon, Communism was widely regarded as a strictly "foreign" phenomenon in some working class circles. Evan Morgan, the Welsh Secretary of the M.W.U.C. local at Blairmore described the foreign mine workers as "80% Communists" and suggested that the government "charter a boat and ship them to Russia." as a solution to the unemployment problem in May, 1930.¹⁶ The earlier working class unity which had been forged by the O.B.U. period and the Socialist Party had broken down with the collapse of these organizations and divisions of the working class political movement into Communist and Labour Party factions, Christophers, for example, drifted far to the right during the late 1920's, and became a determined enemy of the Communists.

The relative strength of these opposing factions was demonstrated by the results of the Alberta election in Rocky Mountain in June, 1930. Harvey Murphy had done his best to get a Communist nominated by the miners, instead of a representative of the traditional Labour Party organization. A meeting of the Coleman miners' union did in fact endorse Communist Rock Sudworth, a crusty Yorkshireman whose name appears on the O.B.U. blacklist of 1919, as their candidate by a two to one majority. Led by Christophers, however, whom Murphy said was "wild" over the Sudworth nomination, the Labourites insisted on running one of their own, Joe Stubbs, in the election.¹⁷ The division, of course, only benefited a third candidate, running as an independent, who squeaked by with under 50% of the total vote (See Appendix F, Table 1). The Communists seem to have been content with defeating the Labour Party in the Pass mining towns, 671 to 494. Their only other candidate in the province, John O'Sullivan -- another ex-O.B.U. leader -- received only 200 votes in Drumheller.¹⁸ The turnout was generally low. Many workers may have been job-seeking elsewhere, while some of the "foreigners" perhaps did not have the right to vote. The general trends, however, were significant. Sudworth came in last in Hillcrest and his own home town of Coleman. The only town which cast a Communist majority was Frank, a village one mile east of Blairmore, which had also a majority of Czechs and Slovaks amongst its population.¹⁹ Similar results were forthcoming in the union

elections of August, 1930. The W.U.L. candidate for President received healthy majorities in Blairmore and Bellevue, but was defeated in Coleman (See Appendix E, Table 3).

As the Depression deepened, economic conditions went from bad to worse in the Crows' Nest Pass. Between 1929 and 1931 coal production at Blairmore, Bellevue and Coleman dropped by approximately one half.²⁰ At the same time the total wage bill for the industry in the Alberta Pass had been cut by almost 60%, while the number of days worked in the mines dropped by 40%.²¹ Even in 1929, the Pass camps had worked only 175 to 200 days. Underemployment, the curse of the coalfields throughout the inter-war period, reached unprecedented heights in inverse proportion with the C.P.R.'s dwindling appetite for steam coal. By March, 1931, the West Canadian Collieries had introduced the split shift or "stagger system", by which work crews would be divided in half. Thus if the mine worked two days a week, each man would get one days work.²² One of the "petty tyrannies" indulged in by the operators was their habit of never letting the workmen know in advance when the mine would be open. Instead, the miners would have to wait for the mine whistle -- two blasts work, three blasts, no work -- each and every morning to find out. Only the Hillcrest management kept a regular weekly schedule, a fact which is reported to have had much to do with the loyalty

exhibited by their employees during the 1930's.

While the part-time mine workers scraped a meagre living from what seemed to be a dying industry, the unemployed and the destitute were thrown on the tender mercy of the relief authorities. The suggested expenditure for local officers was \$4.24 a month per family, for a diet of the poorest grades of flour, rice, porridge, beans, sugar and prunes.²⁴ The youth and the single men had the hardest time obtaining relief or employment, like their confreres in other parts of Canada during the Great Deperession. Bennett's solution to the problem, the relief camp, was very shortlived in the Crows' Nest Pass, whose people were not accustomed to "slave labour". The sole camp in the Alberta Pass at Passburg, near Bellevue, was broken up shortly after its establishment in 1931, after its inmates went on strike to protest conditions.²⁵ It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that the radical appeal was confined to the footloose single men. Unlike many mining camps in the Province of Alberta, the labour force in the Pass towns was mainly sedentary. In 1930, 70% of the mine workers at Blairmore, for example, were married men.²⁶

Private and religious philanthropy proved unequal to the task presented by the collapse of the coal industry. By 1931, it is said, they had "exhausted their funds to assist the unemployed miner."²⁷ Moreover, the whole idea of charity was

resented by the miners, who rightfully regarded themselves as responsible for much of the nation's wealth, and who felt degraded by becoming economic "basket cases". The appearance of Red Cross relief posters in the Pass brought forth an angry reaction, expressed in class terms, by Andrew Dow, Secretary of the Coleman local:

The workers of this or any other country do not require any Red Cross Society; neither do they require red tape to either clothe their families or feed them; the gathering of second-hand clothes is not necessary for our workers...the trouble is that they are only allowed to produce...when they can produce profits for the parasites who rob and exploit labour.

28

All of this contributed to the growth of the Communist movement. After the 1930 election the Labour Party in the Pass seems to have largely collapsed, and the Anglo-Saxon leadership, which had supported it, split into two camps. Some, like Andy Dow, made common cause with the Communists in a "united front" of the Left. Others bided their time, waiting for a more seasonable moment to seize the initiative, and drifted further to the right. With the re-emergence of Stokaluk in early 1931, the support of the U.F.L.T.A. and the ethnics was secured to the Party once more. During the W.U.L. referendum, all three locals voted for the Communist proposal: Bellevue by 66%; Coleman by 67%, and Blairmore by 92% (See Appendix E, Table 4). The May 1 demonstration of 1931 was the biggest that the Pass had seen

in years. Two thousand people were present, and "listened attentively to the message of May day, which only the revolutionary movement leads today". A traditional holiday for the miners, the union used its influence on the local school boards to give the children of Blairmore and Coleman the day off as well. The Red Flag flew from the speakers' platform, on which sat not only Malcolm Bruce and John Stokaluk, but Archie Fraser, a well-known trade unionist from Coleman, and Evan Morgan, whose views on "communism" seem to have mellowed considerably in the previous

29

year. The Communists committed only one "faux pas" at the celebration, when Malcolm Bruce delivered a Marxist tirade against the stagger system, for which he was "roundly criticized without exception."

30

The miners had determined that an equal sharing of the work, however slim the pickings might be as a result, was the only way to deal with the situation, and if they had to hang, they would surely hang together.

The events at Estevan spurred another flurry of "agitation" in the Pass. Mass meetings were held in protest, at which speakers like Andy Dow declared that the miners "asked for bread" but were "given bullets" instead. All the camps took strike votes, but, as indicated above (page 118) the mine whistles blew "no work" on the appointed day. At Coleman the militants went ahead with their picketting anyway.

31

As the third year of the Great Depression opened, the uneasiness of the miners was increased by rumours of impending wage reductions, spurred by demands of operators in the Drumheller Valley and Nova Scotia for further pay cuts in early 1932. Although the rumours were denied by company officials, there can be little doubt that idea of cuts was uppermost in the corporate minds in the Crows' Nest Pass field as well, as the 1930 contracts came up for renewal. West Canadian's George Visaac, in private correspondence with the miners' Progressive Party representative in Parliament, George Coote, had written on the subject thus in 1931:

...this depression will not end until we have seen a thorough deflation. We must be able to reduce our selling price. We have done it already to a small extent, by reductions in costs and a reduction of ten percent in the salaries of all our officials. We must go further.

32

In an ominous tone reminiscent of the Poor Law Commissioners in England during the "hungry thirties" of the 19th century, Visaac suggested that the miner could afford to cut out items such as orange juice from his diet, and that Canadians in general would be better off if they ate more bread.

In January, 1932, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada convened a "United Front Wage Scale Convention", which included Left Wing delegates from the U.M.W. of A. camps as well as those from the M.W.U.C. Among those present were Sam Scarlet, out on

bail pending trial in Saskatchewan, and Harvey Murphy, now returned to the District following his travels overseas. The Convention resolved to hold a general strike in Alberta if wage cuts were imposed on any of the province's miners. ³³ A referendum on the question ultimately returned a majority in favour of such action. However, before the ballot was taken, the Crows' Nest Pass had been plunged into an industrial war of its own making. This struggle would prove to be the sternest test of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada.

As a result of the activities of the "United Front" movement, which will be dealt with further in another context in Chapter 5, there was much talk of a "district strike" in 1932. The idea of a "district strike" was probably pure chimera, as it had been ever since 1926. Nevertheless, the rhetoric contributed to the portrayal of the dispute which broke out in the Pass as a Communist conspiracy by the enemies of the miners. While the spread of "Red" ideas in the previous two years was not irrelevant to the events which were to transpire, the Pass strike was launched by the rank and file as a result of long standing local grievances. It cannot be attributed to the evil genius of Harvey Murphy, or any of the other "outside agitators" so deservedly hated by the bosses. The strike had been foreshadowed by walk-outs in Coleman on January 27 and between February 2 and 8 to reinforce demands for sharing of the work equally amongst all

employees -- the most important grievance in the coal mines
34
during the 1930's.

The long awaited showdown between the Mine Workers' Union of Canada and the operators in the Alberta Pass was sparked by an incident which occurred in the Greenhill mine at Blairmore on the afternoon of February 22, when a mine worker named Jim Zemek refused to come to heel when ordered to speed up his departure from the pits by fireboss Danny Rees. Several unprintable words were exchanged between the two, and when Zemek refused to apologize for this, he was summarily dismissed. That night the members of the Blairmore local union held an emergency meeting, and voted to strike "until our comrade is re-instated." As yet, there was little suggestion of a split along ethnic lines. Indeed, the strike call was moved and seconded by two Welshmen, Turner and Wormesely, both of whose names are to be found on the scab list in later months. Harvey Murphy was "miles away" at the time, and played no part in the inauguration of the strike. 35

The origin of the strike was described thus by a local militant:

For the last twelve months during which West Canadian Collieries operated, their employees, particularly in the Blairmore mine, were tyrannized over and subjected to many indignities by certain officials. The breaking point was reached when an attempt was made to compel a lad to abuse himself before a number of bosses because he answered back when his boss swore at him. The strike was called to protest this despotic action, as well as

to insist that a verbal agreement...to the effect that work be equally divided, be observed by management.

36

On February 24, one day after the Blairmore walkout, the Bellevue local struck in sympathy, 630 coal miners were now off the job. The head of the Crows' Nest Pass Sub District board, Joe Krkosky, from Blairmore, pressed for a work stoppage in Coleman, which finally came about on March 18, following the "closing of the places" of 12 men, at one of the mines. The next day miners at the other colliery ceased work in sympathy. According to the Labour Gazette's statistics, there were at this point some 1,255 employees of the three coal companies -- West Canadian, International, and McGillivray Creek -- involved in the dispute. The mood seems to have been one of extreme militance although many of the rank and file strikers were unclear as to the specific issues at stake, as Harvey Murphy admitted later.³⁷ To the middle class Coleman Journal, the strike was "a test of strength between operators and the workers as to who shall run the mines".³⁸ In the final analysis, the strikes which were sparked by the Zemek firing seem to have been the collective expression of a people fed up with the kind of lifestyle imposed on them during the Great Depression.

Although West Canadian did in fact offer to rehire Zemek

shortly after the strike began, settlement of the dispute was delayed by a complicating factor -- the expiry of the 1930 contracts on March 31. It became obvious that the operators had seized the opportunity presented by the strike to eliminate the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in the Pass and replace it with "home locals" more to their taste. All three companies now insisted that their employees formally "renounce" the M.W.U.C. before negotiations leading to a renewal of contracts could begin. The M.W.U.C. and the W.U.L. were communistic, and therefore illegal. Georges Visaac moaned that West Canadian would be placed on the C.P.R.'s blacklist if he treated with the union, while other officials curtly declared that the strike was "political" and that its leaders -- especially Harvey Murphy -- were not interested in "economic" issues. ³⁹ The Coleman Journal, referring to the "Disunity League" as a "mushroom organization" declared that there could be no "sidestepping" around the fact ⁴⁰ that "democratic government or dictatorship is the issue".

To this kind of propaganda the miners' union replied:

The bosses say it is only a question of reds -- "Leave the Workers' Unity League and we shall have no quarrel" ...the miners are too wise to be taken in by the bosses' foxy tactics. They are going to stick to their ace card, their militant W.U.L. union.

41

Despite these brave words, the workers were not of one mind, for the strike was more than a simple labour-management dispute. Political questions and ethnic splits continued to

divide the miners. In Coleman, a strong and vocal anti-communist element, headed by "older and saner" Anglo-Saxon leaders such as Dave Gillespie, William White and Bill Lees, was very much in evidence. So far, we have devoted little attention to the conservative group, however, its importance in the conduct of the strike cannot be overestimated. Reflecting on the events of 1932, a former Coleman mine worker explained his reasons for opposing the strike:

We had our own union which was good (before affiliation in the W.U.L.) It was agreeable to us, it was agreeable to the Companies, and we were getting along fine. We had picnics in the summertime. We had money in the bank... Sometimes we didn't have to pay our fifty cents a month. We had money, eh, and we had no troubles. But the Communists were there, trying to take over... we were against Communism.

This individual held bitter memories of the hunger and hardship endured by the miners during the strikes of the early 20's, and saw no point in having a repetition of these. To him the "home local" set up, under which the union became a kind of mutual aid or social club, was the best that could be obtained given the state of the trade. The ousting of Wheatley and the affiliation of the union to the militant Workers' Unity League had created a situation in which it seemed imperative "to get that damn union out of there."⁴²

The conservative group in Coleman drew most of its support from the "True Blue British" element, as well as the Polish

community of that town. Unlike the other national groups in the Crows' Nest Pass, the Poles seem to have been inclined more towards conservative nationalism than to left wing radicalism during the 1930's.⁴³ As early as April 8, the right wing seems to have commanded considerable support in the Coleman local. On that day the local meeting featured a debate on the merits of the strike between Murphy and Dow on the one hand, and Gillespie and Lees on the other. After the meeting the mine workers voted 319 to 218 in favour of the latter's proposal for a re-consideration of the strike mandate.⁴⁴

At the other camps, however, the Left Wing remained firmly in the saddle. Ninety per cent of the union members at Blairmore and Bellevue had voted in favour of the United Front" strike on April 1; as opposed to 82% in Coleman (See Appendix E, Table 6). May Day 1932 saw the "biggest demonstration in the history of the Crows' Nest Pass", when the schools were again closed to allow the children to join their folks at a monster rally in Blairmore. The solidarity of the West Canadian strikers was quickly put to the test, as the Company began to sign up men for work and announced its intention of breaking the strike at Bellevue on Wednesday, May 4. On Tuesday night, the two sides lined up for what would prove to be the most savage class conflict which the Pass had seen in years. While 300 pickets

maintained an all-night vigil at the pithead, Inspector Duncan of the R.C.M.P. (the Alberta Provincial Police was disbanded on April 1, 1932) moved in with 75 "heavily armed" members of the Force. When the mine whistle blew "work" the next morning they, along with a number of blacklegs estimated at between 25 and 50 faced the picketers. Upwards of 1,200 men and women, from the mining towns, grimly determined that the cause of the union should not fail, manned the line at the height of the confrontation. Blairmore Army veterans Bill Knight and Sam Patterson drilled the strikers in military formation, while Murphy took command of the operation. The ranks of the strikers were swelled by unemployed sympathizers, some of whom were recruited off passing box cars by John Stokaluk.

In the battle which ensued, batons were used freely on the "formidable array of pickets", the most "active and noisy" of whom, wrote the Calgary Herald, were women. In return the Mounties were assailed by missiles of various kinds, their eyes stung by large amounts of pepper thrown about by the angry miners' wives. "Hand to hand scuffles between the constables and members of the mob" took place, but the Mounties did not use any firearms, perhaps to avoid the public outcry which had followed on the heels of the Estevan riot six months before. The fight continued unabated until the morning of May 6, when the sound of three blasts of the mine whistle brought forth a great cheer

from the strikers' ranks. Admitting defeat in its attempt at "scabherding", West Canadian Collieries further announced the "indefinite closure" of the Bellevue mine on May 12. Along with at least two women who were badly battered by the Police, over a dozen picketers were arrested for the crime of unlawful assembly. A crude attempt by the authorities to decapitate the strike leadership by dragging Murphy off to Lethbridge to face similar charges on May 13 was foiled by the Canadian Labour Defence League, which posted the \$2,000 bail required for his release.⁴⁵

After their defeat on the picket line, the enemies of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in the Pass turned to more subtle means of smashing the strike, by means of a campaign of "political racism" modelled after that of the Committee of 1,000 during the Winnipeg General Strike. Like the bourgeois of Winnipeg in 1919, the union's opponents sought to break up the strike under the guise of a noble crusade to preserve the British way of life from "bolshivism" and, even worse, "foreign domination."⁴⁶ An organization calling itself the Klu Klux Klan reared its ugly head, claiming responsibility for a fiery cross which appeared on a hillside near the Blairmore cemetery on the night of Friday the 13th, along with a sign reading "Beware Reds."⁴⁷ Asked about Klan activities in 1932, an anti-communist replied, "Yes, there were a lot of those fiery crosses. They were as

harmless as could be, but they scared the hell out of the Communists, let me tell you." ⁴⁸ The crosses may have been "harmless", but the idea behind them had the effect of further polarizing the mining communities on national and political lines. This polarization was especially evident in Coleman, where "goon squads" began to roam the streets. The prevailing atmosphere is well described in the following passage:

There was a bunch of us that used to run around. Young English and Scottish and Welsh fellows... We were gangs. We went around with lead pipes up our sleeves and silk stockings filled with sand in our pockets and our heavy mine boots. We were ready to defend ourselves if they ever started anything... we were damned well ready.

49

Meetings of the Coleman local union were rocky sessions indeed, as the community split down the middle on the issue of the strike. The leading militants amongst the Anglo-Saxons, Rock Sudworth, Andy Dow and Archie Dow and Archie Fraser, were drowned out by the rising chorus of the anti-communists, who were moving more and more towards a violent rightist position, heavily tinged with the racism of the Klan. On May 14, yet another ballot at Coleman resulted in a 292 to 237 victory for the "Whites." The Mine Workers' Union of Canada then organized a meeting to urge the miners to reconsider their decision to return to work. En route to the gathering from Bellevue, the car carrying Joe Krkosky and John Stokaluk was pierced by an

object which they claimed was a "22" bullet, although an opponent suggests that it could have been a "little wee rock"

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from the Frank Slide. Arriving at the Community Hall in Coleman, Stokaluk blamed the incident on K.K.K. gunmen. An eyewitness reports that:

Stokaluk stood up at this meeting...he was running this thing down and he said that it was probably the K.K.K. that had done it. There was one chap who stood up and said that he was K.K.K. and he was damn sure the K.K.K. didn't do it. And John says, "You mean to tell me that you're K.K.K.?", and the fellow says, "Yes." Well, I thought old John would die by fright. He turned as white as the driven snow, honest to God.

The meeting ended in a riot, after the so-called moderate element threw Stokaluk and his supporters out of the room. The fiasco has been described as "the beginning of the end for Communism" in Coleman, and was in fact, the last meeting of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in the town. Our report continues:

...it was shortly after that the riots started...it came to blows in the community hall...I was standing behind a guy who picked up a chair and hit a fellow by name of Sandy Irvine over the head. Sandy got up and let this Russian have it -- this big Russian, I forget his name. But oh, that was a riot! There were guys bouncing out of doors and jumping down the basement and out the chutes...But the cops were all out there and they moved in...

51.

On May 23, the Coleman right wing organized its own home local, the Coleman Miners' Association, whose bylaws specifically excluded members of the Communist Party from holding office,

and signed a renewed agreement with the two Coal Companies. Three days later the Association's members marched through the town of Coleman into the pits guarded by a large number of the R.C.M.P., but were unmolested. The M.W.U.C. had already declared the Coleman strike to be at an end, and advised its supporters to sign up for work before it was too late. The "scabby home local", to quote Stokaluk, had won the day. The tragic aftermath of the Coleman strike was the discrimination of approximately 125 "known Communists", who were refused employment and who did not return to the pits, if they returned at all, until World War II. The Companies, it must be remembered, were always eager to dispose of surplus colliers during the Depression, and as Cousins notes, "There was much unfairness...and many were jobless who had little to do with union activities."⁵³

The K.K.K., with its open and vicious brand of political racism, appears to have ceased to function at this time, but it was replaced by a more respectable variant on the same theme, which called itself the "Citizens' League". Its avowed aim was to "oppose any person, organization, who or which in any manner teaches sedition or revolutionary theories."⁵⁴ Its founding committee of eleven included Coleman's Mayor, the editor of the Coleman Journal, a Protestant clergyman, as well as Lees and Gillespie from the home local. Although there was overt nativism in its platform, it is significant that all eleven were "True

Blue British." Unfortunately, no list of those blacklisted as "Communists" exists, but from all reports, the vast majority of them were of "foreign" origin, for the strike at Coleman had degenerated to a large degree into a racial conflict between what Harvey Murphy called the "White Men and the foreigners". All the members of the U.F.L.T.A. were included on the blacklist. ⁵⁶

Although the newspapers claimed that "the Reds are ready to call it a day" in the Pass following the Coleman debacle, this was not to be. The posting of a list of 70 "Communists" who would not be rehired under any circumstances by West Canadian Collieries stiffened the resolve of the strikers, and quashed any hopes for a settlement. In the face of the "anti-Red" hysteria being whipped up by the Blairmore branch of the Citizens' League, the mine workers stood their ground. In a pathetic attempt to imitate the mass demonstrations of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, the local bourgeois staged a "Patriotic Parade" on the Queen's Birthday, May 24. The "respectable" citizenry, including delegations from the I.O.D.E., the R.C.M.P. and the Boys Scouts, rallied behind the West Canadian Collieries Band, and listened to a defiant speech from Mayor Farmer, who assured his audience that Blairmore was "not as Red as some would like to believe."⁵⁷ To the union, the "respectable" element was composed of "a number of small town businessmen whose vision and ideas extend as far as their cash register... If it were not

for the miners the whole kit and caboodle of them would help-
58
lessly starve."

The opposition continued to hammer away at the old themes. According to the Blairmore Enterprise, less than 1% of the strikers were English, despite the fact that the strike committee was predominantly English and the rôle played by the English on the picket line. 59 Along with the despised foreigners, the "White men" had manfully taken their place in the fight against the scabs and police. The Anglo-Saxon minority was, of course, split on the issue. At Bellevue, a committee of three, "True Blue British" all, tried to establish a new home local, but with little initial success. In response the strikers elected new committees to represent them, wisely choosing men who were neither Party members nor Eastern Europeans. 60 Although 17 of the 21 names on the West Canadian union scab list are English or Welsh, the members of this community did not line up as a body behind the home local. There is probably no way of determining why some of the Anglo-Saxons remained impervious to the arguments of the operators and their allies, while some did not. Included in the strikers ranks were an old timer who had once owned the Blairmore Hotel, a number of Blake's Welshmen, and Evan Morgan, one of the most prosperous miners in the town. For many quite simply, the working class instinct of "sticking with the union"

took precedence over the nativist ideas which seem to have triumphed in Coleman.

The militants, of course, carried on a vigorous campaign against the sophistries of political racism:

The committee of miners has no luck negotiating with the operators, who 'will not consent to an agreement which prohibits discrimination'. Several men whom they decided to discriminate have fought overseas. What does the Citizens' League think of that? They yell for English speaking people to join the Citizens' League... If they are so enthusiastic about things British why do they champion a group of foreign coal operators who treat our boys in this way... I am English myself, but... if the Union Jack is to be disgraced by the type of people who wave it around at Citizens' League meetings, I would rather see a red flag flying in its place.

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Much bitterness was stirred up by the adherence of the supposed spiritual leaders of much of the Anglo-Saxon community in Blairmore, the Anglican and United Church clergy, to the League. The miners' paper described them thus:

Wolves in sheep's clothing, preaching peace and good will towards men while organizing fascist organizations... heedless of the cries of the ragged and hungry kiddies, and finally blessing and sanctifying the murderous attacks on the picket line.

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The Roman Catholic priest in Blairmore, Father Harrington, on the other hand, abstained from the anti-union campaign, and is remembered as one who helped preserve some sense of social sanity during the crisis. During one of his addresses to the

strikers, Murphy denounced the Protestant ministers, but declared that his statements "had no bearing on the Catholic priest, who has remained neutral, and who is respected among many miners." ⁶³ Harrington, of course, was only reflecting the feelings of his parishioners, the Italian and Slovak workers who were also Murphy's strongest supporters, by not endorsing the League. In Coleman, however, the Catholic leadership remained true to its anti-communist stereotype, and swung some support, especially amongst the predominantly Polish congregation of the Holy Ghost Church, to the strike-breaking element.

In the other camps, the non-Anglo-Saxon majority was nearly unanimous in support of the strike. The sole exception to this might be the French community, which held a special kind of status at West Canadian, and which supplied a few miners to the home local. The French, of course, were considered to be "white men", and played the same kind of ambivalent role as did the English. Although three of the 21 names on the scab list are French, it was a Frenchman, Gaston Bazille, who claimed the honor of being the first striker to be arrested on the picket line. ⁶⁴ The other groups -- the Italians, the Slovaks, the Finns and Scandinavians -- were the most militant in holding out against the coal company, and Blake's alleged "White man's camp" declaration became a powerful rallying cry amongst these people. When the homes of company personnel were picketed by the strikers,

an official named J.R. Smith wrote to R.B. Bennett complaining of "organized boeing parades" by the "foreign element." This interpretation is lent some credence by the testimony of a native Canadian striker, who refused to take part in such demonstrations. Urging the Prime Minister to take further action to smash the strike, Smith argued that Communist propaganda "might possibly be innocuous in a community where there was a larger percentage of English speaking people," but not in Blairmore. A striker recalls an incident which demonstrated the potential for violence under the circumstances. While making a speech at a union meeting Murphy was heckled by a group of Anglo-Saxon home localers. Observing the Italians and Slovaks present wrapping up rocks in their handkerchiefs, Murphy advised the home localers to "leave now, or you'll all be dead men" -- a word to the wise which the latter quickly acted upon by making themselves as scarce as possible.

There were positive aspects to the strike, at least among the ranks of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Women's Auxiliary member Julia Johnson, for example, thought that the strike was having a salutary effect on relations between the traditionally segregated national groups:

It is just wonderful to see the spirit of good fellowship in Blairmore... In this struggle for right, racial and personal prejudice has been swept aside... We are one big happy family.

The work of the Women's Auxiliary itself was pointed to with pride by the strikers. Early on, Murphy had criticized the lack of participation by the women folk, calling it one of the worst features of the strike. He realized that a negative attitude on the part of the miners' wives, whose devotion to the union principle could be easily undermined by maternal instincts towards the "ragged and hungry kiddies", would prove fatal to union solidarity. The union made every attempt, over the objections, no doubt, of more traditionally-minded male workers, especially from some of the foreign communities, to mobilize the women. By mid-June, the Women's Auxiliary in Blairmore had 76 members, and a miner's wife could write that "This strike is different from any other. Before, everyone was idle, now everyone is busy -- it is a question of the right to live." 69. The women not only involved themselves tirelessly in the more mundane aspects of relief work, but proved their determination to win a better way of life for their children, on the picket line and during the marches and demonstrations which became an almost daily occurrence in the Pass during this period.

The union tried hard to involve the entire working class community, young and old, male and female, employed and unemployed, in the struggle. It organized a "youth wing" of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, and a "Miners' Children's Club" as well. There were dances, picnics, sporting events and other

social activities for the strikers, their families and sympathizers throughout that long summer of 1932. Only hunger could beat the strike at West Canadian, as the Communist Party weekly, the Worker pointed out in its appeals for relief. The bulk of the relief funds came from other Alberta miners. On the first pay day following the defeat at Coleman, the Hillcrest home local contributed \$100, the U.M.W. of A. local at Mohawk, \$52.39, Coleman's contribution of \$83 was based on an assessment of \$1 on all M.W.U.C. members -- an indication that only 83 of the union's 237 supporters (as of mid-May) had been rehired to that point.⁷⁰ The most important aid given to the strikers was contributions of food from supporters of the Farmers' Unity League in the Lethbridge, Vegreville, Red Deer and Sylvan Lake districts. The most generous contributors are said to have been the "Doukhobours and the radical Finns" of the F.U.L., the agrarian equivalent of the Workers' Unity League.⁷¹ Like Workers' International Relief, and the Canadian Labour Defence League, the W.U.L. and the F.U.L. were, of course, simply "front" organizations for Communism. Yet it seems ironic that the miners seemed to have received a greater degree of organizational and material aid from the revolutionaries than they ever did from the "pure and simple" union movement. This fact is of no mean importance in understanding the degree of influence exercised by the Communists within the miners' organization.

One Communist theory which was lent credence by the facts was the portrayal of the "new" social democratic movement, the C.C.F., as a tool of the capitalists. A fact which is often overlooked in examinations of the political evolution of Alberta during the 1930's is the affiliation of the old U.F.A. government to the Co-operative Commonwealth movement in 1932. The C.C.F. was thus discredited from the onset in the Province as a progressive force for social change, and the Communists poured scorn on its pretensions in that direction by pointing to the strike breaking record of the Brownlee government. The response of the Provincial government to the 1932 strike in the Pass was similar to its actions in Drumheller and Mercoal in previous years: the police were sent in, and leading militants arrested. On July 18, Brownlee brushed off a delegation from Blairmore which had trekked in to Edmonton to present the miners' case, and subsequently issued an edict prohibiting parades and demonstrations in the Crows' Nest Pass. The Communists denounced the law as "fascist" and a portent of things to come if the C.C.F. was to gain power nationally. On July 19 the union organized a parade in defiance of the edict, during the course of which 100 people were arrested.

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By mid-August tensions began to mount, as the people of the Pass braced themselves for another round of open confrontation between the opposing sides in the dispute. Although the

Greenhill mine remained closed, a large number of maintenance men and a handful of scabs were working in Bellevue, digging coal for the market. As part of the informal agreement worked out in May, the union had allowed the maintenance men to enter the pits, but not to dig coal. Claiming that this agreement had been violated, strike leaders began to make preparations for "100% picketing" at the Bellevue mine. Inspector Duncan, loath to repeat the experience of May 4-5, came to the rescue by negotiating a truce and prevailing upon the Brownlees government to intervene. The Premier did personally visit the strike zone, and met with representatives of union and management. In a letter to Brownlees dated August 22, Visaac made the proposals which laid the basis for a settlement. He declared that the list of Communists had been "torn up", and that the strikers would be rehired as soon as conditions of the trade permitted. The Province agreed to provide relief for those not immediately put back on the payroll. A new agreement renewing the wages and conditions of the 1930 contract was to be signed jointly by representatives of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada and the scab home local. The former organization, true to the W.U.L. policy of collecting its own dues directly, and not through the boss, voluntarily surrendered the checkoff. ⁷³

While the British element amongst the strikers seemed to greet the proposed settlement favourably, the "radical foreigners" were not so enthusiastic about going back to work.

Murphy's powers of persuasion were pushed to the limit in convincing these workers to vote in favour of the compromise,⁷⁴ but in the end, he was successful. On Labour Day, 1932, the great Pass strike finally came to an end, although it was months before some of the strikers got back on the West Canadian payroll. By today's standards, it might seem that the workers gained nothing at all for their pains. However, it must be remembered that it was the operators who had provoked and prolonged the strike by their desire to rid themselves of the radicals and the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Moreover, many miners' strikes during the period did not end with a settlement of any sort, but rather a total defeat and smashing of the union, followed by wholesale blacklisting and dispersal of the workers involved. The union's main objective was to maintain the status quo, and this had been achieved. It was in this context that the radical press painted the Crows' Nest Pass settlement as a tremendous victory for the working class.⁷⁵

The settlement of the strike, of course, did not resolve the conflicts which had underlain it. It left behind a vast residue of bitterness, not so much between workers and management -- for this had always existed -- but between opposing elements within the working class. A Blairmore man recalls that members of the Mine Workers' Union would refuse to pack an injured home localer out of the pit, and vice versa, for some

time after the strike. Even more telling is a statement that Stokaluk is reported to have made following the death of a Scots home localer in Coleman: "Well, there goes another one of those so-called white bastards".⁷⁶ For the Coleman blacklistees, there was the unenviable choice between destitution at home or "hitting the road", for none was rehired until World War II. At least one of these unfortunate individuals experienced sweet revenge by marching through a picket line set up by striking firebosses in Coleman years later.

In the town of Blairmore at least, the employers' attempt to rid themselves of the Communist menace failed miserably. During the course of the strike the majority of the workers in this town had found a new sense of purpose, solidarity, and self-esteem. During the municipal elections of February, 1933, in the Pass, they took advantage of the democratic system which their enemies had so vehemently espoused in the course of the strike, to seize control of the city government. While the radical candidates were snowed under by the Citizens' League in Coleman, Blairmore elected, by a small majority, almost the entire "Workers' Slate" nominated by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The Workers' Slate included representatives from all the nationalities in the town and the turnout was the heaviest in the town's history. The inhabitants of the humble shacks along the banks of the Old Man River all came out to exercise

their right to vote, some for the first time. One 80-year-old Italian woman, who could not speak a word of English, brought a lump of coal to the polling station to demonstrate her desire to vote with the miners. Mine carpenter Bill Knight was elected Mayor, along with all the others on the ticket with the exception of Sam Patterson, who lost a post on the School Board to the Citizens' League candidate by four votes. (See Appendix F, Table 3).

The new administration was not specifically Communist, although the Communist Party and the Mine Workers' Union of Canada were its major props, and "Communism" became a major issue in the election campaign. Harvey Murphy, the most notorious Red of them all, was appointed Blairmore's Town Solicitor. The people of Blairmore had not suddenly become starry-eyed revolutionists, yet the old "Red Scare" tactics of the employers and the middle class had ceased to be effective. The Workers' Town Council in Blairmore is a rather unique phenomenon in Canadian history. Although there were Labour municipal administrations in Cape Breton during the early 1920's, none matched the "Red" hue of the Blairmore government in 1933. A correspondent in the Worker writes:

The long struggle... had been a university training in class consciousness to the three hundred miners and their families. The divisions along national lines ("White men" and "foreign") were wiped out. And very sharp divisions were drawn on other lines -- class lines

...Blairmore has "gone Red" -- it is a Union camp... (the miners) are actually "running the town", as far as it is possible under the capitalist system for workers to run any town... That is why Blairmore is hated, denounced, and held up as a terrible example on the one side, and hailed, loved and held up as an inspiration on the other.

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A history of the Workers' Council of Blairmore is beyond the scope of this essay, although it might be useful to list a number of its first accomplishments. It uncovered what was alleged to have been graft in the previous administration of the "respectable" element in the town. It collected unpaid taxes from prominent citizens, while resolving not to send the bailiff to the homes of workers with taxes in arrears. Useful relief projects were sponsored, as opposed to the degrading "make work" tasks which the unemployed had previously been subjected to. Flower boxes were placed down the main street of the grimy coal town (Hwy. 3), the result being dubbed "Tim Buck Boulevard" by Council. The "Tim Buck Baths" were set up in a local school, and proved to be a great boon to the workers and their families, many of whom could only clean up during a weekly visit to the colliery wash house. Of course, when Tim Buck actually visited the town following his release from prison in late 1934, a civic holiday was proclaimed. Blairmore also got its first public park, which was laid out between the main street and the railway tracks on land obtained by the Canadian Pacific Railway, and

which became commonly known as "Red Square". In the nature of vindictive "class legislation", there were a couple of cases. The Council required an expensive dog license for pure bred canines, but not for the mongrels which graced the miners' homes. In a more serious vein, apartment dwellers were struck off the municipal voters' list, in a move directed against company officials, who lodged themselves in the Greenhill apartments. Argued before the Supreme Court of Alberta, that body found in favour of the Council, since tenants did not possess the right to vote in other municipalities.

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The actions of the Workers' Council symbolized what were the workers' greatest gains from the 1932 crisis, a sense of self-respect and collective independence -- important commodities in an era characterized by depression and hopelessness. The miners had proved themselves able to "stand the gaff", and had survived the trial with their heads held high. Our observer continues:

Here it is the business men who walk past depressed and sullen, the scabs who won't walk boldly, but slink home to grouch and plot. Even the Mounties...lose their habitual arrogance when they walk the streets of Blairmore. There has been no revolution in Blairmore, as is loudly proclaimed by its enemies...All that has happened is that the miners...have won the respect and fear of the exploiters.

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NOTES TO

CHAPTER IV

1. Martin Robin, Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930. (Kingston, 1968) p. 108.
2. Tim Buck, Canada and the Russian Revolution (Toronto, 1967), p. 60. In response to a question by a worker at a campaign meeting as to why a self-professed syndicalist should seek elected office, Christophers is reported to have replied that he "needed a meal ticket."
3. Frank Karas, "Labour and Coal in the Crows' Nest Pass". (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1972). p. 15.
4. Ibid, p. 52.
5. See above, Chapter 1, Notes 28 and 35. By 1935 the C.P.R.'s mining subsidiary, Cominco, had acquired a controlling interest in both the International and McGillivray Mines in Coleman, although trade unionists had accused the C.P.R. of financial manipulations in the area for several years prior to this. Western Canada Coal Review, April/May, 1935. Corbin Collieries, founded by Mr. D.C. Corbin, does not seem to have been listed on contemporary stock exchanges.
6. Interviews with, and materials in the possession of, Charlie Drain, former mine worker, West Canadian Collieries, and M.L.A. (Social Credit, Rocky Mountain). August 30, 1975, June 24, July 1, 1976, at Blairmore.
7. Ibid. For an account of the Commission's visit to Blairmore, see Calgary Herald, May 22, 1925.
8. Galt Museum, Lethbridge: Agreement Between M.W.U.C. Local Unit 8, and the Big Horn and Saunders' Creek Collieries, 1930-1932.
9. Interviews: Charlie Drain, op.cit. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 19, 3A2048-9. "Gilmore to McEwen" Re Coleman pillars, February 26, 1931.
10. Interviews: Alrik Tiberg, former mine worker, West Canadian Collieries, and Blairmore City Councillor, June 25, 1976; at Blairmore; Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
11. Karas, op.cit. p.79. This fact is nonetheless true. Murphy's interest in Blairmore was not entirely political, as he

developed a close friendship with a local girl, Isabel Rae. They were married in 1934.

12. The reported size of the Ukrainian community, 7 in Blairmore and 11 in Coleman, as of 1931, is however too small. Howard Palmer, op.cit. pp.77-78, also doubts the accuracy of census data for Ukrainians in Coleman. In 1921 there appeared 22 Ukrainians in the town. The 1931 figure of 11 may be supplanted by some of the 40 individuals listed as Russians. The Census of 1941 reported 48 Ukrainians and 68 Russians in the town. Dominion Census, 1921, Volume II, pp.522-523; Ibid, 1931, Volume II, pp. 466-467; Ibid, 1941, Volume II, pp.480-481.
13. Dominion Census, 1931, Volume II, pp.672-673.
14. PAO, C.P.C. Files: VI; 19, 6B 1086, I; 15, 1A0819-22. The turmoil in the Coleman branch is reflected in varying reports of its strength ranging upwards of 19 members.
15. Ibid: I; 15, 1A0819-22; I; 11, 1A0601, VI; 19, 6B1086. Mrs. Apponen, whose husband was crippled in a mine accident, seems to have moved to Sudbury, however, before the 1932 strike.
16. Glenbow Archives, Hon. G.G.Coote Papers, Box 14, File 131. "Morgan to Coote", May 23, 1930
17. PAO, C.P.C. Files: I; 11, 1A0606-12, "Murphy to McEwen", May 19 and 22, 1930.
18. Western Miner, June 27, 1930
19. Frank had 154 Czecho-Slovaks, or 57% of the total population. Its workers would have been employed in Blairmore. Dominion Census, 1931, Volume II, pp. 466-467.
20. Production fell by 54.8% in Bellevue, 47.4% in Blairmore, McGillivray Mine, 41.5%, and International Mine, 51.7%. Percentages as calculated from figures in Karas, op.cit. p.163.
21. As quoted from a speech by George Coote in the House of Commons, April 7, 1930, cited in the Canadian Unionist, May, 1930.

22. Glenbow Archives, Coote Papers, Box 14, File 151, "Morgan to Coote", April 27, 1931.
23. Public Archives of Alberta, Edmonton. Oral History Collection. Phonotape 73,468. Interview of Thomas E. Morgan, former mine worker, Hillcrest Collieries.
24. Karas, op.cit. p.82. The carbohydrates were expected to be supplemented by the fruits of the miners' gardens and hunting. As for the latter, however, the Pass was almost completely depleted of game during the 1930's and miners who had guns usually sold them for a little ready cash.
25. Western Miner, October 12, 1931. The relief camp strikers were packed off to Three Sisters, near Banff, by truck in the middle of the night for their pains. Interview: the late Joe Svoboda, former C.P.R. employee and W.U.L. organizer, August 31, 1975, at Frank, Alberta.
26. "Morgan to Coote", May 23, 1930. op.cit.
27. Karas, op.cit. pp. 86-87..
28. Canadian Miner, January 13, 1932.
29. PAQ, C.P.C. Files; III; 32, 3A2134-6.
30. Ibid: III; 32, 3A2139-40, "Bruce to McEwen", May 2, 1931.
31. Lethbridge Herald, Oct. 8, 1931. The protesters marched behind a black flag. Not all the Coleman workers participated, however, as Dow was obliged to "denounce those who stood on the corner" during the parade.
32. Glenbow Archives, Coote Papers, Box 14, File 15, "Visaac to Coote", July 31, 1931.
33. Canadian Miner, January 30, 1932.
34. Bjarnason, op.cit. p. 126.
35. Interviews: Charlie Drain; Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
36. "Alberta Miner Reviews Strike", in the Worker, June 25, 1932.

37. Murphy "Some Lessons of the Crows' Nest Pass Strike", Canadian Miner, April 21, 1932.
38. Cited in Karas, op.cit. p. 94.
39. "Alberta Miner Reviews Strike" op.cit., Labour Gazette, 1932, pp. 501-502; Canadian Miner, April 21, 1932.
40. Quoted in the Fernie Free Press, May 6, 1932.
41. Worker, June 11, 1932.
42. Interview: Adam Wilson, op.cit.
43. Interview: Alrik Tiberg, op.cit. Palmer, op.cit. pp. 66-67.
44. Fernie Free Press, April 15, 1932. Yet they seem to have voted for a continuation of the strike shortly thereafter.
45. This account has been gleaned from reports in the Calgary Herald and Lethbridge Herald, May 4 - 5; Canadian Miner, May 14, 1932; and the Worker, May 7 and 21, 1932. Interviews: Charlie Drain, Joe Svoboda, op.cit.
46. See Avery, op.cit. for the Winnipeg example of these trends.
47. Lethbridge Herald, May 14, 1932. For background of the Alberta K.K.K. see Howard Palmer "Nativism in Alberta 1925-1930", C.H.A. Historical Papers 1974, pp. 183-212.
48. Interview: Adam Wilson, op. cit.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid. Calgary Herald, May 18, 1932; the Worker, May 21, 1932.
51. Interview: Adam Wilson, op.cit.
52. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, File 136, "Bylaws of the Coleman Miners' Association, May 23, 1932."
53. W.J. Cousins, "A History of the Crows' Nest Pass" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1952,) p. 111.
54. Fernie Free Press, June 17, 1932.

55. Ibid. Names as follows: Morrison, Larke, Gillespie, Lees, Anderson, Pattinson, Barnes, Halliwell, Harvey, McBurney and Beart.
56. Cousins, op.cit. p. 111; Interview, Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
57. Lethbridge Herald, May 26, 1932.
58. Canadian Miner, July 9, 1932.
59. Cited in Karas, op.cit. p. 99.
60. Lethbridge Herald, June 17, 20, 1932. McLafferty, McLean and Rhodes founded the Bellevue home local. The new Left Wing committees included Knight, Patterson, Robert Home and Ralph Wootin (Blairmore), and John Magdall, Wm. Cox, John Crawford and M. Comin (Bellevue).
61. Canadian Miner, July 9, 1932.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Canadian Miner, November 29, 1932. Worker, June 3, 1933. Bazille was named town electrician under the Workers' administration.
65. Interviews: Charlie Drain, op.cit.
66. PAC, Bennett Papers; Volume 141; 93151, "Smith to Bennett", June 27, 1932.
67. Interviews: Charlie Drain, op.cit.
68. Canadian Miner, July 9, 1932.
69. Worker, June 11, 1932.
70. Ibid., June 18, 1932.
71. Ibid., August 13, 1932; Interview: Harvey Murphy, op.cit.

72. Ibid; Worker, July 23, 1932. The Communists called the anti-parade edict a "high expression of fascist dictatorship". PAC, Bennett Papers; Volume 140, 93185. All of those who were arrested during the course of the strike received suspended sentences after pleading guilty to charges of "unlawful assembly", "watching and besetting", etc. Only Murphy pleaded not guilty, for fear of setting a bad example. He received a fairly light sentence of three months, and spent the winter of 1932-33 in the Lethbridge jail.
73. Worker, August 13 and 27, September 3, 1932; Calgary Herald August 22, 1932; Labour Gazette 1932, pp.960-961; Karas, op.cit. p. 102.
74. Interviews: Charlie Drain, op.cit.
75. Worker, September 10, 1932. The Canadian Miner, Sept. 10, was less enthusiastic, calling it a "partial victory."
76. Interviews: Charlie Drain; Adam Wilson, op.cit.
77. "Blairmore, A Union Camp", by J.W., Worker, June 3, 1933.
78. Ibid, Interviews: Charlie Drain; Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
79. "Blairmore, A Union Camp", op.cit.

I

It could well be that the spirit of militance manifested by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in the Crows' Nest Pass strike of 1932 -- a strike fought over the issue of discrimination of "Reds" or union activities -- made many coal operators think twice about trying to impose wage cuts on their employees during the early Thirties. At least, that is what the supporters of the Canadian union claimed, and Harvey Murphy declares with pride that the M.W.U.C. "never took a wage cut during the Depression."¹ The U.M.W. of A., on the other hand, did suffer wage reductions, in both its Canadian districts. District 26 took a cut of 12 and one-half percent in March, 1932. Rank and file militants argued that their leaders had sold the miners out to Dosco, and created a new, left wing opposition union on the east coast called the Amalgamated Mine Workers' of Nova Scotia.² No doubt M.W.U.C. supporters in the West were hopeful of a similar split in District 18 when the Drumheller coal owners presented U.M.W. of A. leaders with demands for a 20% reduction in contract rates and a \$1.00 cut in day rates in early 1932. At the time, the U.M.W. represented about 1,400 of the 1,800 mine workers employed in the Drumheller Valley. While the radicals began to mobilize support for a strike struggle against the impending cuts through the "United Front" movement, Bob Livett and Angus Morrison of District 18

sought to utilize their political clout in Alberta by fighting the cuts through the mechanism of Conciliation.³

It was a close call for the U.M.W. of A., since during the prolonged period of negotiations and government intervention, the M.W.U.C. began to make some inroads in an area traditionally known in Left Wing circles as "the iakers' stronghold." Almost two hundred Drumheller miners participated in the "United Front" strike ballot of April 11, 1932. The leader of the Rosedale local, Roy Berlando, defected to the M.W.U.C., and for a brief time, brought the local's membership along with him. After Berlando was expelled by Livett for having attended meetings of the "United Front," the local resolved to have "nothing more to do with the United Mine Workers of America," although it was whipped back into line shortly after. In Drumheller, where 60% of the mine workers were Anglo-Saxon, the charge that the M.W.U.C. was dominated by foreigners was one reason why the Canadian union did not receive more support.⁵ While John Stokaluk could usually be relied upon to rally the ethnics, the M.W.U.C. brought in a Nova Scotia Communist, Murdoch Clark, to mobilize the English-speaking element. Clark, who had been blacklisted by Dosco for his activities against the leadership of District 26, was an effective organizer who nursed a passionate hatred for the "U.M.W. babystarvers."⁶

A major confrontation in 1932, however, was avoided by the capitulation of the coal owners on the wage question before the onset of the domestic coal season. The Conciliation Board found in favour of the employees, and eventually the operators were persuaded to drop their demands for reductions. A new open-ended contract, which could be revoked by either party after March, 1933, was signed by the U.M.W. and the major operators by early autumn. The only strike in the field was conducted by a local of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in Wayne, after the employer tried to check-off union dues for the U.M.W. of A. The strike was led by John Stokaluk and Murdoch Clark. Like previous disputes in the area, this one was characterized by the distribution of large amounts of "free booze" and the use of gangster-style tactics against the strikers. At one point, U.M.W. goons were successful, it seems, in administering a beating to "Big John" Stokaluk, who was waylaid and rendered unconscious after leaving a M.W.U.C. meeting. Of his Ukrainian comrade Clark wrote:

The brutal beating about the head has not dimmed the brain of this fearless exposé of the...subversive tactics of that reactionary American union, the U.M.W. of A. and its allies -- the coal operators...neither has the bludgeoning stilled his tongue...if that alien organization...believes it can crush the Canadian union by such means, then it is sadly mistaken.

8

In the end, the strike came to a conclusion after a vote was taken amongst the miners. Despite the alleged participation

of U.M.W. scabs in the ballot, the proposal to join the U.M.W. of A. was defeated 81 to 55. The M.W.U.C. however, was not officially recognized, and henceforth was obliged to collect its own dues⁹ in Wayne.

In the spring, wage cuts of 12% were finally agreed to by the U.W.M., and the M.W.U.C. tried to defeat the move by reviving the "United Front" movement. During the summer slack period the United Front conducted a strike of 600 miners in Drumheller, Wayne and East Coulee, with the support of U.M.W. militants such as James Craig of local 222.¹⁰ In August the strikers, most of whom were seasonally unemployed, were cut off government relief, and with the re-opening of the mines resistance to the wage reductions largely collapsed. Doubtless, many of the workers harboured bitter memories of the futile strike of 1925 and decided that as far as bucking the triple alliance of the U.M.W., the operators, and the government¹¹ was concerned, "the game was not worth the candle". U.M.W. dissidents remained in the International, demonstrating their continuing opposition through gestures such as demanding that John L. Lewis expel Livett and Morrison.

In East Coulee, a recently developed, non-union coalfield thirteen miles down-river from Drumheller, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada did sign local agreements in 1933.¹² These

presumably did something to improve the prevailing unsatisfactory conditions, and workers at the Atlas and Murras collieries were organized as Local Unit 29 of the M.W.U.C. This local was still operative in 1935, when the U.M.W. was awarded a wage increase in the Drumheller region and the M.W.U.C. lobbied, successfully, on behalf of the East Coulee miners. 13

After 1933, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was confined to the periphery of the Drumheller coalfield and concerned itself with local issues such as the collection of unpaid wages from some of the smaller operators. Despite active propaganda and evidence of U.M.W. collaboration with the bosses, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had basically failed in its objective of mobilizing the miners of the Red Deer Valley region in the class war during the Depression. With a few exceptions, the workers seemed unwilling to undergo the rigors of a rebellion along the lines of the 1925 strike. Their reluctance to do so can be attributed to several interrelated factors: the genuine loyalty of many workers to the International union, impossible economic conditions, the absence of dynamic local leadership (especially in the Anglo-Saxon community), and, perhaps most importantly, simple prudence. The militant struggle of 1925 had been crushed, at a high cost to the workers involved, by the triple alliance of business, government, and International trade unionism. There was probably no reason to suppose that another movement would not experience the same fate.

II

In an interview following the 1933 strikes, John Stokaluk indulged in some traditional Communist soul-searching ("self-criticism") and outlined various problems which the M.W.U.C. as an organization had faced since affiliation to the Workers' Unity League. He may have been thinking ruefully of the loss of his own Coleman local when he suggested that the organization's chief mistake had been a "mechanical application of militant policy:"

We did not sufficiently patiently convince the masses of the miners of the correctness of our policy, but placed it before them in a dictatorial manner...preparing for district strikes and neglecting concrete local problems and grievances.

Stokaluk, of course, was no dogmatist, and had actively opposed the implementation of what he considered to be a rigid unrealistic revolutionary line within the union in 1930. There was a good deal of truth in his assertions. Amongst its traditional following in Alberta, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had experienced severe losses since joining the Workers' Unity League. Lethbridge (1931) and Luscar (1932) were two important locals which had seceded from the union, not as a result of catastrophic strikes, but because of "political" differences. Not wishing to be accused of opportunism, the leaders of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had laid down their policy of class struggle uniformly throughout the district. In most

locals, the union's politics had not occasioned any great divisions, but in others, conservative leaders had used the issue of Communism as a lever to pry the membership away from the Workers' Unity League. Only in exceptional cases, notably Blairmore, had radicalism really taken root. It could perhaps be argued that the political orientation of the union acted as an albatross around its neck in organizing in some areas, such as Drumheller, where the labour movement was dominated by right wing stalwarts of the Alberta Federation of Labour/Labour Party grouping.

Like other W.U.L. organizations, the M.W.U.C. was very active in organizing, on a short term basis, the unorganized, the desperate, and the "politically unsophisticated". The experience in southern Saskatchewan in 1931-1932 was a good example of this trend. Here, however, the implacable opposition of the operators prevented the "bureaucratization" of the union through formal or informal recognition, and the organization fell apart, having failed to retain the necessary enthusiasm and allegiance of its constituency. In the words of Stokaluk, "we failed to find the means of consolidating the union organizationally after strike victories."¹⁵ The Mine Workers' Union of Canada, with its cadre of dedicated Communist organizers, appeared in many fields during the early 1930's, but did not

always succeed in leaving behind a permanent organizational base. Whether this was due, as some historians suggest, to the W.U.L.'s emphasis on politicization as opposed to organization, is a debatable question.¹⁶ As we shall see, it also had a lot to do with the attitudes of the employing class.

The lignite field at Princeton, B.C., which employed 550 mine workers in 1930, had never before been organized, but in 1932-1933 it saw a burst of activity by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The origins of the organization at Princeton can be traced back to a gruesome mine accident in 1930, during which 46 miners were buried alive at the Coalmont Collieries. The mine's single entrance, a 3,000 foot shaft, was rendered impassible by an explosion, and only one man on the shift¹⁷ escaped with his life. Following this "accident", Tom Cacic -- one of the Communist Eight imprisoned in 1931 -- tried to organize a W.U.L. nucleus in the area, but was soon forced to flee by the local coal owners. Living up to Cacic's vow that "we'll be back", Communist organizer Arthur "Slim" Evans came to Princeton in September, 1932, after a 10% wage cut had brought¹⁸ home to the workers the desirability of unionization.

On November 27, 200 miners employed by the Tulameen and Wilson collieries ceased work, demanding recognition of their pit committees and restoration of the old wage scale. The strike

was conducted vigorously by Evans, and a running battle with police and blacklegs ensued. After the strikers had succeeded in blockading the road to the Tulameen mine with fallen timber, the authorities took decisive action. Evans and four other strike leaders were arrested and jailed on December 17. Evans was charged not with obstructing traffic, but with advocating the overthrow of the Government under Section 98, and was refused bail. This denial of Evans' right to bail was appealed by the Canadian Labour Defence League, and eventually heard in the B.C. Supreme Court. In handing down his decision in the negative, Chief Justice Morrison asked "Why should he be released to cause disturbance at this critical time?" He seemed to have no illusions about the economic and political nature of the prosecution of the radical leader ¹⁹

Although a compromise was reached at Tulameen, the conflict was resumed shortly after as a result of the miners' refusal to work on Christmas Eve. Harry Hayes and three other members of the M.W.U.C. executive were fired, and charged with "failing to maintain positions of trust" under the B.C. Coal Mines Regulations Act, and "ceasing work without notice" under Federal labour law. ²⁰ This kind of persecution is indicative of the extent to which the authorities were prepared to go to smash trade unionism and the spectre of radicalism which they believed lay behind it during this era. An organization calling itself

the Klu Klux Klan also appeared in Princeton, burning crosses and issuing dire threats of retribution against the Communists. From the pulpit came similar "anti-Red" propaganda, which led the Communists to warn the miners of "the strike breaking activities of the Church of England and United Church parsons during the Crows' Nest Pass strike."²¹

Ultimately the strike at the Wilson colliery was broken, but an agreement was signed at Tulameen. The miners' demands were substantially granted, and charges pending against the employees were dropped. This camp was struck again at the end of the season, when the operator tried once more to impose a 10% wage reduction. The M.W.U.C. local at Tulameen remained until early 1935, when the mine was closed temporarily, only to re-open under the open shop. Evans was sent to prison for his pains, his second incarceration for activities in the miners' movement.²²

By 1933, then, the leaders of the M.W.U.C. could boast that "No longer can our union be referred to as an Alberta union."²³ A further expansion into the Coast Province occurred in February 1933, with a strike of copper miners and smelter workers at Anyox operations of the Granby Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company. Here the nucleus of the organization was a score of U.F.L.T.A. members whom the Communists had been

trying to "line up" in a unionization drive ever since 1931.²⁴ Anyox, situated at the bottom of the Alaska Panhandle, was a totally isolated camp where the workers' existed at the tender mercy of the mining company. A labourer could earn \$2.40 to \$2.60 a day there in 1933, that is before deductions for room and board of \$1.10 a day. Three times in the previous year wage scales had been slashed, with no corresponding decrease in the company's charges. According to the Labour Gazette a recent order forbidding single employees from moving out of company boarding houses and all purchases outside the company store, was the "immediate cause of the strike."²⁵ Harvey Murphy of the M.W.U.C. was on hand to lead the struggle, and the events which followed the cessation of work on February 3 were, in his words, nothing less than "fantastic." While the men awaited word from the Company's head office on their demands, His Majesty's Canadian Ship Malaspina was despatched to the scene with more than 60 armed policemen.²⁶ At the point of a gun the strikers were "deported" to Prince Rupert and Vancouver, where the destitute applied for government relief. Thus supported, they carried on the strike from these two points by picketing boats putting out or arriving from Anyox. Prospective scabs were packed in piano boxes before embarking. Murphy recalls being picked up by the police whenever a picket line battle at the Prince Rupert waterfront seemed in the offing, and describes the brutal manner in which the strikers'

ranks were slowly depleted by the authorities:

I remember being picked up on the street without any notice or warrant and taken to the police station... he said "sit there", while they went through these folders..."oh, no, we've got the wrong man", so I'd be released. That was a regular procedure. That's what they'd do...This lawlessness of the police. They had no business...Then there was the deportation of workers. Scores were deported to Czecho-Slovakia or Italy or where-ever to get rid of them. But the worst thing was the Englishmen...the Government wouldn't give them a trial as British subjects and just shipped them back to Britain...

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Needless to say, the strike at Anyox was completely smashed. Its only positive result was a ten-cent a day reduction in the price of board for the employees of Granby Consolidated. It is interesting to note that, according to the Labour Gazette, it was the better-paid miners (who earned \$3.25 a day) who were the most active in the affair. Many of their places had been taken by smelter workers who did not support the union, and who took advantage of the strike to get more lucrative jobs underground. The element of intense competition for jobs in the metal mines, and the lack of solidarity between miners and other workers -- as well as between different ethnic groups -- was to plague all attempts of the M.W. U.C to organize in this sector. A Mine Workers' Union of Canada strike at Rouyn-Noranda in 1934 was a dismal failure, aptly described by Evelyn Dumas as "The Foreigners' Strike" because of the indifference

towards the union displayed by English and French Canadian workers.²⁹ A more effective strike in Fliñ Flon, Manitoba, during the summer of 1934 was broken through the "conciliatory" actions of the Provincial Government. Under the settlement that was reached in this case, minor concessions were gained by the workers, but 170 activists were left blacklisted, without hope of jobs.³⁰ The acceptance of such a settlement underlines the lack of solid trade union principles and experience amongst the workers in the metal mining sector. The Mine Workers' Union of Canada made no further attempts to organize the hard rock miners. This sector was not organized until after long, hard battles in the 1940's by the Mine Mill and Smelter Workers' Union, led, in the West, by none other than Harvey Murphy.

III

There was one domain of the open shop in which the Mine Workers' Union of Canada did have lasting accomplishments to its credit. This was on Vancouver Island, whose colliers can be counted among the pioneers of the Canadian working class movement. Educated in the school of class conflict under the regime of the infamous Dunsmuir clan (1860-1910), they were the first workers in the country to elect revolutionary socialists to public office during the B.C. elections of 1903, after the crushing of a strike for recognition of the Western Federation of Miners.³¹ The climax of their fifty-year campaign for

unionization came during a violent and unsuccessful strike on behalf of District 28 of the U.M.W. of A. in 1912-1914. Following this debacle, the miners abandoned their efforts to organize. Despite a flurry of O.B.U. activity in 1919, Vancouver Island remained aloof from the epic struggles which characterized other Canadian coalfields during the post-war period. A week-long strike of 1,000 unorganized Nanaimo miners against the wage cuts of 1925 was evidence of renewed vigour, but accomplished nothing.³² In 1928 Malcolm Bruce published a labour sheet in Nanaimo called the Coal Miner and set up locals of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, but these died still-born.³³ Throughout the 1920's, company unionism and industrial "harmony" reigned supreme on the Island.

From a sociological perspective, the coal camps on the Island were more akin to the closely knit, homogenous mining communities of the east coast than to others in the West. Here, Anglo-Saxons, most of whom came from families who had dug coal for generations in the Old Country, or in B.C., were a distinct majority. Floating populations of "foreigners" were conspicuous by their absence. The 1931 Census showed Anglo-Saxon majorities of 82% and 57% in Nanaimo and Cumberland, respectively. Leaving aside the Oriental peoples, a special case, the figures read 87% and 85% for Nanaimo and Cumberland, respectively.³⁴

The largest European ethnic group were the Italians, who came to the Island during the period of expansion before the Great War. Practically the only new-comers were the Yugoslavs, who had been imported to the Island with the express purpose of short-circuiting attempts at organization during the 1920's. Ironically, this group became one of the strong points in the unionization drives of the 1930's. ³⁵

Of all the regions dominated by the coal industry in the West, Vancouver Island suffered most from the post-war depression, despite depressed wage rates and absence of "union interference" in management. From 1925 to 1934 all the indices of the coal industry on the Island show a steady and inexorable decline. By that time production had fallen by 68% since 1925. However, the burdens of the coal crisis were, of course, unevenly shared. In the same period employment fell by 89%; total yearly wages by 150%. The Island's other major industry, logging, picked up much of the slack during the latter 20's, but in the 1930's the unemployed or underemployed miner's only alternative source of income was relief or charity. However, as one miner put it, "the worm and even the worker will, in time, turn." ³⁶ By 1931, there was an active unemployed movement in Nanaimo, whose existence led the Commissioner of the R.C.M.P. to urge Bennett to investigate signs that "the Communists are at work in a coal field that has hitherto defied them." ³⁷ In

the same year, the seeds of organization were sown by W.U.L. organizers in the South Wellington mine, south of Nanaimo.

At this time the mining communities of the Island lived under the open corporate "dictatorship" of its two major producers: Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd., which operated mines at Cumberland, South Wellington and Extension; and the Western Fuel Corporation, which operated the Reserve and Nanaimo mines. Although these operations maintained the illusion of being separate entities, they had in fact been part of the same corporation since 1928.³⁸ As a result of the spy and blacklist system used by this outfit to weed out trade union agitators, the organization carried on by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada assumed a rather conspiratorial nature. For this reason, the following account has been drawn largely through reference to the oral tradition.

During the early 1930's, as in the mid-19th century, unions in the Island pits were broken down into "block committees", or cells of five or six workers, who were not necessarily aware of the identities of fellow members in other groups. At the top were the full time Communist Party/Workers' Unity League personnel, practically the only people in the community who could engage in organizational activity without the fear of permanent blacklisting by the coal barons. Included in this group were

the names of Tom Shaw, Tommy Lawrence, Joe Armitage, Bob Kerr, Jack Pearce and Ronny Holmes. During their visits to the Island, these organizers lived from hand to mouth on whatever "Moscow Gold" the impoverished miners and their sympathizers could spare. Among the latter group were people like the two Yugoslav Communists who ran the Eagle Hotel in Nanaimo, and "Old Doc" Ockendal, who kept union documents out of enemy hands by carrying them around in his folding table. Without the efforts of the "Reds", it is acknowledged, the task of organizing the Island could hardly have got off the ground.

According to the oral tradition, the first mine to be organized by the Mine Workers' Union of Canada on the Island during the 1930's was at South Wellington, in 1931. By 1933, it seems that the union had signed up the majority of the men here and was active in "overt" agitation like the chalking of slogans on company property, as well as "covert" organization. However, the South Wellington mine was closed, and its employees were transferred to Western Fuel's Reserve operation. The union's secretary, Thomas Greenwell, along with other trade unionists, continued their organizational activity, and before long Reserve too fell under the sway of the M.W.U.C. Despite precautions, the company "picked up the names somewhere along the line" and rid itself of this viper which had been nursing in its breast by a practice which was standard amongst anti-union operators in the West. The mine was closed, only to

re-open a few months later, at which time known militants were not rehired. Even the police chief of Ladysmith acknowledged the fact that the mine had been closed for "political" purposes. The blacklistees were now permanently unemployed, a lesson which was not lost on the more cautious of the miners.⁴⁰

Further up-Island, at Cumberland -- where the miners had not struck since that black day in August, 1918, when the martyred trade unionist Ginger Goodwin had been laid to rest in the town cemetery -- the M.W.U.C. had better luck. With the aid of the W.U.L., local militants like James "Shakey" Robertson, who was later to become one of the leaders of the C.C.F. movement on the Island, organized a branch of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in 1933. It published its own newspaper, The Tipple, and by 1934 was out in the open, ready to fight for the amelioration of the miners' Conditions. The union took on the cause of the unemployed and led a fight for the reduction of utility rates in the town. As in other camps, the miners' union saw their cause as one of the community as a whole against absentee exploiters. Appealing for community support, W.S. Atkinson declared:

Our fight is a fight for the Island. You know who the man in authority is. You know who says whether we shall eat or not...This Island is being slowly but surely strangled, inside of a month I believe there will be two more mines closed...I claim there should be more coal mined than there is...

Rebutting corporate claims that the mines were being operated on a philanthropic basis, and at a loss, trade unionists could quote statistics that showed Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd.'s net profit for 1933 was \$110,526: a small profit to be sure, if we can believe the figures, but a profit nonetheless.⁴²

With the expiry of the miners' "collective agreement" with CC(D) Ltd. in October of 1934, the M.W.U.C. faced its first test. A dispute sparked by demands by 120 men on the haulage crews for an increase in wages became generalized, and led to the holding of a strike vote on October 31. This showed a margin of 264 to 222 against such action although union leaders challenged the accuracy of the balloting, "since even Colonel Villers' (General Manager, CC(D) Ltd.) cook and gardener were brought into it."⁴³ Apparently, "discontent, fomented by discrimination" led the union to pull the strike anyway on November 5, by which time the haulage men had scaled down their demands by half to 5%. The rest respected the picket line, and an open meeting held at the Oddfellows' Hall drew 269 mine workers. Here it was decided to issue permits allowing the maintenance men to continue their work unmolested. A few days later, one of the strike leaders, James Donnelly, reported that the union membership had grown to 280, from only 83 three months before.⁴⁴

According to the union, granting of the demands of the haulage men would have cost "36 lousy dollars a day" to the company, but it is obvious that it was pushing for a renewed agreement with improved conditions for all the workers. Frustrated by the refusal of "loyal" workmen to break the strike, Colonel Villers left Cumberland in a huff on November 10. He left behind a renewed agreement to be signed by the strike committee before November 30, after which time the mine would be shut down permanently. His manner was haughty, but represented a grudging acceptance of the workers' right to have a say in the determination of their lives. In the context of non-union Vancouver Island, this was a significant accomplishment for the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. Villers' material concessions included the following: wages for the haulage crews were to be increased from \$4.22 to \$4.30, the rate prevailing at Nanaimo; rents for company housing were to be cut by one twelfth; charges for mine lamps, timber, gloves, powder, and coal for home use were reduced; and recognition was to be extended to a committee to investigate charges of discrimination.⁴⁵ On November 20, the strikers voted to accept and the strike committee signed the agreement on November 22. John Hunt of Western Fuel acted for CC(D)Ltd. in the proceedings.⁴⁶ Villers was still in Victoria, and was unavailable for comment. It must have been a bitter pill to swallow. Several months later it was reported that only 5 of the 500 CC(D)Ltd. workers

at the Cumberland Mine were to be seen not wearing the badge
of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada on their pit clothes. ⁴⁷

Encouraged by the success of their up-Island brethren, the militants began to organize at Western Fuel's Nanaimo operation, the strongest non-union territory in the region. In early 1935, they launched a mimeographed sheet called We Too, which eventually reached a circulation of 500-600, and a readership much larger than this. ⁴⁸ Unlike many other "Communist" inspired" publications of the period, We Too steered clear of radical rhetoric and propaganda. Clearly the organizers of the union wanted to avoid sectarianism which would divide rather than unite, while retaining the fundamental class basis of the organization. In its first issue, We Too billed the M.W.U.C. as:

A class instrument to protect our interests, one that is PROGRESSIVE, that can change its tactics in accordance with the changing conditions of the struggle, one that will strive for the greatest unity of the workers, employed and unemployed, irrespective of their nationality, creed or politics.

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It stressed the futility of "humble supplication and pleading" and urged the readers to change Nanaimo's reputation as a "scab town". Ed Webb, a M.W.U.C. activist and later the President of the Nanaimo U.M.W. of A local, appealed to the "civic pride" of the miners:

No one can come into Nanaimo, wave a magic wand, and say "You're Organized". It doesn't work out that way. But if we are prepared to get together, to put aside these feelings of mistrust, we too can have something to say as to how these mines shall be run. The leadership is there, and time and time again the Mine Workers' Union of Canada has shown that it has the correct line. We ourselves have witnessed it on the Island... Now we need you... then we can have a camp that we will be proud of.. We will not have to hang our heads when someone from Cumberland comes to town and speaks of the Union.

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Although the We Too was avidly read (and the bosses did their best to keep their names out of it), the Nanaimo local of the M.W.U.C. never gained strength or confidence enough to come "above ground" and challenge the operators. Nevertheless, the slow but sure resurgence of working class independence must have troubled the coal barons. In the summer of 1935 they counter-attacked in the union's stronghold of Cumberland, by serving notice of the introduction of the piece-work system on certain classes of labour which had been previously paid a datal rate. Taking up the challenge, the M.W.U.C. announced a mass meeting to be held on August 6 to discuss the issue. The company then informed the miners that the mine would be hoisting coal on that day, and "suggested" that the union postpone their meeting. The meeting was held as planned, but no attempt was made to prevent the handful of men who objected from going to work. CC(D)Ltd. called the action a strike in breach of contract and warned that further resistance would result in permanent

mine closure.

When the mine whistle blew on August 12, the union returned to the pits, but 25 or 26 men found themselves discriminated against. The miners, fearful of the employer's threats, applied for conciliation, placing the fate of the blacklisted men at the tender mercy of the government. In a three-man Conciliation Board, the employers' and employees' nominees almost always cancelled each other out, leaving the ultimate power of decision to the Chairman, who was (after 1925) an appointee of the Provincial Government. The Board's long delayed majority report gave no succour to the miners. The Chairman, J.A. Russell, seems to have implicitly agreed with Villers' assertion that the blacklistees had received only their just desserts, on account of their having been influenced by "outside agitators who have visited Cumberland for the purpose of creating disturbances where harmony has existed between the Company and, at any rate, the majority of its employees." The Board found no evidence of discrimination, suggesting that "it may well be" that none of the men who were not rehired were "suitable for any particular vacancy". Its conclusion that "the employer has approved of the system of collective bargaining for many years" added insult to injury, since CC(D)Ltd. and its predecessors had never recognized a union in all its long history of exploitation.

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The unfortunate trade unionists were rehired at the

company's convenience. Many, like others blacklisted for participation in the Mine Workers' Union of Canada on the Island during the Depression, did not get back into the pits until the recognition of the U.M.W. of A. in 1937-38. At least one, Sam English, left Cumberland for the Crows' Nest Pass.

The Mine Workers' Union of Canada on the Island remained fairly quiet after this defeat, although the Cumberland local and the nuclei in other centres continued in existence. For reasons which will be discussed later, the W.U.L. organizers were, by the spring of 1936, working on an entirely new endeavour: the resurrection of the United Mine Workers of America. In the referendum held on June 30 of that year, Cumberland voted 237 to 5 in favour of joining the International body, and the M.W.U.C. was dissolved. The U.M. W. of A. was recognized in Cumberland in 1937, and in Nanaimo the following year. Although the Canadian union is now all but forgotten, it was this organization that broke the ground for the U.M.W. of A. In some cases it was the same personnel operating under a different banner which assured the Lewis union of success. As in other C.I.O. unions in the country, the Communists played a crucial role in the formation of the organization. Writing of the raising of the U.M.W. charter in Nanaimo, Tom McEwen suggests that:

No doubt the shock would have been as severe to John L. as it was on the Dunsmuir coal operators, had he known that a member of the Communist Party, and not even a coal miner, was hanging up the Charters of that Great Union in union halls deliberately by-passed by his own high salaried lieutenants...

The organization of the United Mine Workers, however, took place in a quite different climate than had the efforts of the M.W.U.C. a half decade earlier. After nearly a century of open shop rule, the employers capitulated without a fight in the late 1930's. In November, 1938, District 18 finally signed a contract with the Canadian Collieries and the Western Fuel Corporation: the first comprehensive collective agreement which workers in the coal industry on the Island had ever enjoyed. ⁵³

IV

To conclude our examination of the activities of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, it is necessary to return to the Crows' Nest Pass, although this time to the B.C. side of the provincial line. While the M.W.U.C. dominated, at least until the secession of the Coleman local in 1932, the Alberta Pass, and always claimed the allegiance of the local union at Corbin, it had relatively little impact on the coalfields on the other side of the line. Part of the reason can be found in the strength of the major operator in the area, the Crows' Nest Pass Coal Company, which held control over the mining towns of Fernie and Michel, B.C., through its favoured company union, the B.C. Miners' Association. Another factor seems to

have been the relative poverty of these towns, as compared to Corbin and the Alberta Pass. Statistics for the B.C. Pass (which included the fairly prosperous centre of Corbin) show that the region had not enjoyed the modest recovery shown by the coal industry elsewhere during the late 1920's, and, relative to the Alberta Pass, had declined further in the early 30's, and experienced no significant recovery during the middle period of the decade. Of the two camps under discussion, Fernie was by far the worst off. During the period 1930-1935 Michel worked an average of 191 days a year, Fernie 122. During 1932, the Fernie mine hoisted coal on only 76 days. With the stagger system in effect this would have translated itself into 33⁵⁴ shifts for each mine worker. Mine closure was averted only through the agitation of the townspeople, with help from H.H. Stevens, M.P. for the area, and an influential member of Bennett's Cabinet. As one writer accurately notes, the lack of militance in Fernie can be attributed to a mine management⁵⁵ "sympathetic to the idea of ceasing operations completely."

Nevertheless, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada made repeated attempts to capture the B.C.M.A. locals, both under the Wheatley and W.U.L. regimes, During the summer of 1931 Malcolm Bruce toured the field, and ballots were taken on the question of affiliation to the M.W.U.C. at both camps. Although the M.W.U.C. emerged with a 66 vote edge in Michel, the results

were negated "after charges of stuffed ballot boxes...the news of the tragic Estevan strike and the threats of employers." 56
After the 1932 strike in Alberta, further efforts were hampered by the R.C.M.P., which did its best to prevent Harvey Murphy from crossing the provincial line to organize in the Coast Province's domain. 57 However, important contacts -- between the Italian communities of Blairmore and Michel, for example -- and underground nuclei remained active. The climax of their efforts came during the spring of 1934.

The M.W.U.C. annual picnic of that year was a gala affair. A 20-car train was chartered from the C.P.R. and 1,200 miners and their families from Lethbridge and the Alberta Pass were carried into Michel on May 1, 1934, where they were met by approximately 1,800 supporters from B.C. The speeches, games and other festivities were held in Michel's "Karl Marx Park", a piece of ground donated to the union by a local dairy farmer, Phillip Musil. 58 One union member described the event as the high point of the history of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. 59 One wonders if the happiness of these people on that one bright day of the Depression would have been dampened had they known that staring down at them was the barrel of a machine gun, 60 manned by B.C. policemen, hidden in a nearby barn.

Shortly afterwards, the Michel M.W.U.C. came out into

the open, and presented its demands that the B.C.M.A. check-off be discontinued and that available work be shared equally amongst all employees, some of whom had been recently laid off. On May 22, they voted by a 224 to 131 margin to strike, the opposition being a group which the Blairmore Enterprise called "English-speaking workers."⁶¹ Dire warnings by management that the C.P.R. would take its coal business elsewhere caused uneasiness amongst the strikers, however, who returned to work after four days. The settlement was a "compromise" so ambiguous that both the M.W.U.C. and the B.C.M.A. claimed victory. The company agreed not to discriminate and to fill vacancies with the laid off men, but it is not clear what became of the union dues issue.⁶² The mines at Fernie and Michel continued to work under the B.C.M.A. contract until 1937.

The Crows' Nest Pass experienced its most violent and tragic labour strife of the 1930's in the small company town of Corbin, B.C. in 1935. Oddly enough, Corbin does not exactly fit the model of ever-increasing poverty and unemployment which characterized other camps in the Pass during the Depression. Alone among the mining towns of the Crow, Corbin showed an actual increase in production, output per man, and employment during the early 1930's.⁶³ The prosperity of the mine workers is also demonstrated by the number of automobiles registered in the town, which rose from 50 to 110 in the period 1929 to 1935.⁶⁴ The Corbin Miners' Association was not traditionally noted for

its radicalism.' Its representative at the 1930 M.W.U.C. Convention, James Dornan, was one of only three delegates who voted against the proposal to disaffiliate from the All Canadian Congress of Labour. Dornan also was accused in the W.U.L. press of being sympathetic to the "fascist" Canadian Defender group.⁶⁵ The rank and file voted for the W.U.L. in 1931 by a margin of only 54%, the lowest percentage among the Pass locals. As the town was unincorporated, no ethnic breakdown of its population is available, although on the slimmest of evidence it might seem that the "True Blue British" were the dominant group. The local's executive was always Anglo-Saxon, and although the Fernie Free Press charged that the militants of 1935 were mostly foreigners, only 8 of the 22 individuals brought to trial for strike activities in that year had non-Anglo-Saxon names.⁶⁶

Corbin's relative prosperity can be attributed to its ability to produce coal for the Canadian Pacific Railway at a lower cost than neighbouring mining centres. While wage rates remained slightly lower than in other Pass mines, the shallow seams of coal at Corbin contributed to a high level of productivity, and consequently lower costs of production. In 1920, almost 2,000 tons of coal were hoisted per man underground at Corbin; by 1932 the figure still stood well above 1,000.⁶⁷ Thus, while Corbin Collieries continued to turn large profits, its employees were assured of steady work and income, even

during the deepest depths of the Depression. The capitalist system, however, could not ensure the continuity of such "idyllic" class relations. The shallow seams of coal at Corbin, once the boon of the town, turned out to be its curse, as the operator decided to take maximum advantage of these by introducing strip mining technology into the area in 1933. During the 1920's and 1930's, coal miners in North America reacted strongly and negatively to the idea of strip mines, and not for ecological or ascetic reasons. For the underemployed coal miner of the inter-war period, often locked in a losing battle to defend his wage rates, conditions, and craft traditions, the strip mine represented quite literally an open pit of misery and degradation. In an uncharacteristic but highly significant act, striking miners in Herrin, Illinois, had slaughtered a gang of "scabs" operating a blackleg strip-mining operation, back in 1922, and no jury could be found that would convict the killers. When Corbin's open pit, the "Big Showing" went into operation in 1933, the miners saw it as the beginning of the end of their way of life. In an interview with David Millar, one old timer summed up their feelings:

the Big Showing...meant that all these miners in Corbin would be up, out of a job, if they started to go at it in a wide open manner, applying steam shovels for everything they did. So that, in the Depression, I guess the miners resisted this method of production -- it did them out of a job you see...the point was that the strip mining was going to wipe them out altogether, coal miners and the community.

As Adam Bell, Provincial Deputy Minister of Labour in the Pattullo Government noted in his investigation of the Corbin events of 1935:

I could readily see that the strike had not developed overnight, but had arisen out of circumstances and conditions retroactive over a period of at least two years, when the company had started to operate the Big Showing.

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In July 1933, underground work at Corbin ceased entirely for 30 days, partly as a result of damage caused by a fire in the Number 4 Mine, and partly because of the Company's apparent desire to shut down these operations altogether. In August, the union shut down all production in protest, until "the company agreed to carry on development and maintenance" work underground. Although underground work resumed at a reduced pace, "recurring rumours that operations were to be concentrated at the Big Showing and that lay-offs were imminent circulated through the small community and maintained a dangerous emotional pitch. Within a year, Corbin Collieries proposed a 4% wage, while the union was raising demands for sharing of the work, a clear indication that all was not right in the town.

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The breaking point was reached on Saturday, January 19, when the Secretary of the Corbin Miners' Association, John Press, was fired for quitting early, a common practice amongst contract miners. The union charged discrimination, on the grounds that Press "was accompanied by five or more men from that particular

shift at the time of his discharge," who had not been likewise treated.⁷³ On Monday, the miners failed to show up for work, demanding the Secretary's re-instatement, along with redress of a list of accumulated grievances. These included the installation of a man trip at the Number 6 mine to save the men a walk of half a mile up and down a steep grade; and the repair of company houses. The striking miners complained of leaky roofs and walls which were incapable of keeping out the snow driven by the high winds which characterize the Crows' Nest Pass area. The company made some counter-proposals, but the miners, having concluded that the offer represented "only a trap from which there was no escape,"⁷⁴ rejected them.

Thomas Uphill, the Labour Party representative for the area in the Provincial Assembly, intervened in the dispute. By mid-April he reported that a tentative agreement had been reached, but charged that it had been vetoed by the Spokane, Washington, headquarters of the company, which seems to have had its own ideas on how to resolve the impasse.⁷⁶ The strip mine would be re-opened, with or without the consent of the Corbin Miners' Association, and the machine of class oppression was thrown into high gear to crush the recalcitrant workers. On April 17, the two opposing sides confronted each other. On the one hand was a contingent of Provincial Police, variously estimated at between 30 and 60 men, a handful of prospective scabs, and a formidable -

looking bulldozer, which was busy "clearing the snow" on the mountain ledge which led from the main road to the Big Showing. On the other were 250 men and women from the mining community, determined to defend their way of life on the picket line. The centre of the ensuing battle, which took place on the ledge from which there was "no escape", was the bulldozer: the machine, the instrument of the miners' economic oppression, now transformed into a physical combatant. The cat smashed through the picket line, crushing the legs of several women who were at its head. A "regular Donnybrook", such as had followed the Estevan massacre in 1931, ensued, as the enraged workers tried to exact vengeance for the crime. Sixteen policemen and perhaps forty strikers (the latter were not hospitalized) were injured before the "riot" could be quelled and "ringleaders", including the union executive, dragged off to jail. ⁷⁶ There were no recorded deaths as a result of the fracas, although according to the Canadian Labour Defence League, one of the injured women suffered a miscarriage. ⁷⁷

The other side of the tale was given by Inspector John MacDonald of the B.C. Police, who argued that the driver of the cat had "floored" his machine only after having been stunned by a flying rock. ⁷⁸ He also added that "this is not a coal miners' strike, but a deliberate attempt by the Communists of Blairmore to gain a footing in the Corbin area." ⁷⁹ Blaming

the incident on the Communists may have been convenient for the authorities, but the charge in this case was unfounded. Even Harry Stevens, by now an independent reformer, understood that "agitation" was not the cause of the Corbin dispute. He warned Acting Prime Minister George Perley that "it is a mistake to assume that the workers are always wrong, for knowing these men as I do, I am convinced that almost to a man they are earnest, hardworking citizens."

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The response of the strikers' fellow workers was, of course, negative. The "Princeton Workers' Protective Association" declared that the repression signified that there was "no limit to the extent" to which the government would go "in its mad attempts to subjugate the toiling people to poverty and want." According to a Women's Auxiliary in Calgary, the Corbin events caused "wonder in the minds of people who had hitherto looked upon the police as guardians of law and order." The Fernie and District Unemployed Association pointed out "the fallacy of drafting in the Provincial Police to protect a property already destroyed by the operators:"

It is odious to us as Canadians and repugnant to our thoughts, that the Provincial Police is at the beck and call of a foreign corporation...the action of the Attorney General in this matter is so rank the rankness thereof reaches the high heavens...

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The bulldozer incident may perhaps have been an unfortunate accident. The occupation of the town which followed, however, was not. On April 18, a party of R.C.M.P. was brought in from Lethbridge, bringing the total number of armed government forces in the area to 85, according to the Lethbridge Herald.⁸² Traffic through the Crows' Nest Pass was routed through police roadblocks while communication between Corbin and the rest of the world was completely cut off. In the town itself the strikers, many of whom were suffering from broken bones and other wounds of the picket line battle, were either unwilling or unable to venture out of doors. Yet the government's actions were not undertaken solely for the benefit of the operator, and indeed Corbin Collieries did not press its advantage by trying to re-open the strip mine again. The authorities, especially the so-called "New Deal" administration of Premier T.D. Pattulo in Victoria, seem to have had a real fear that revolution was in the offing in B.C. during the spring of 1935. Said the Premier when questioned about the Corbin events: "There is a great deal of Communistic propaganda circulating in British Columbia at the present time of a most insidious character, which the public at large does not fully appreciate."⁸³ Pattulo was not entirely off the mark. The Coast Province was at this time seething with discontent. Along the docks there were repercussions from the "general strike" along the U.S. Pacific seaboard,

as W.U.L. unions prepared for their own life or death struggle with the employers in the B.C. longshore industry. More spectacular was the struggle of the relief camp strikers in Vancouver, whose fight, led by Arthur Evans, which was soon to reach a climax with the On-To-Ottawa trek of June, 1935. As far as the Crows' Nest Pass was concerned, there was talk of a "revolutionary army" being raised in Blairmore for the purpose of liberating the Corbin area by force.

The news of Corbin did in fact have an electric effect in Blairmore, as can be well imagined. The most radical elements in the town did speak of taking Corbin by storm, although the idea was not specifically Communist inspired. According to the left wing poet, Dorothy Livesay, the most strident demands for action at this time came not from the miners' union, but from the unemployed youth of Blairmore. They had spent most of the Depression hanging around local poolrooms, flat broke, bored and with no hope of ever getting a job. Like the young men in the relief camps in 1935, the youth of Blairmore wanted to do something which would prove to the world and to themselves that "we still have some fight left in us yet." At any rate, the militants of the Alberta Pass did march, with Harvey Murphy and the Mine Workers' Union of Canada men at the head. Along the ten weary uphill miles to the Great Divide they made the mountains echo to the strains of Joe Hill's "Pie in the Sky",

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the "Red Flag", and the "Internationale". Their only weapon was their spirit of resistance. At the B.C. border, they were met by a party of R.C.M.P. armed with a loaded Lewis gun. Desperate revolutionaries though they were, the miners' leaders decided to negotiate. Faced with the possibility of a massacre much worse than that at Estevan, both the union and the red coats compromised. While the "army" would have to stay in Alberta, a ten-man delegation, including that number one undesirable citizen, Harvey Murphy, was escorted into Corbin. Murphy burned with indignation at what they found:

There was terror in Corbin...When we got there we found the town locked up. The doctor was out of medicine, and all kinds of people were hurt... There was just this narrow roadway and the police had this wired. That's why the doctor was out of medicine for these injured women. They were locked in, and the R.C.M.P. was in charge with this bar. And it was only when we got through that we got those people out of their houses.

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A few days later the anti-union Fernie Free Press reported the most "wonderful change of attitude" on the part of the miners, which it attributed to their tangle with the forces of law and order. Previous to this, it claimed, the miners had booed and shouted at the Police, but now they doffed their caps, their "change of view" being "most apparent and respectful." ⁸⁷

In spite of the government, which chose to treat the Corbin strike as an apprehended insurrection, Communism seems to have

played no part in the dispute, at least from the point of view of the mining community. The union executive was not particularly "Red", the community produced no such self-styled saviours as the Alberta Citizens' Leagues, and the miners remained united as one man. The strike could certainly not be blamed on the foreigners, except perhaps the "foreign" coal company. The "reformist" Labourites, led by M.L.A. Thomas Uphill (there were Uphills in the ranks of the strikers as well), lined up 100% behind the "revolutionary" M.W.U.C. On April 23, Uphill, Murphy and James Dornan pleaded the case of the miners together in Victoria. To Murphy it was a little ironical to be received by Attorney-General Sloan, on account of his "persona-non-grata" status in the east Kootenays. At all events, the arguments of the workers' representatives fell on the deaf ears of the "New Dealers" in vain. Sloan subsequently dismissed all charges concerning abuse of police power in the Crows' Nest Pass as "sheer nonsense."
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Labour relations at Corbin became even more embittered as a result of these events. Even after the troops were withdrawn, there was no hope of compromise. Arguing the need to fill outstanding orders with the C.P.R. or lose that business entirely, Corbin Collieries proposed that the strip mine be re-opened immediately, and the miners' grievances be submitted to a Conciliation Board, whose report would be binding on all parties.

Convinced that the operator was intent on blacklisting all active unionists (and that the government appointed chairman would side with the management), and sceptical about the company's promise to resume underground operations in due course, the miners refused to go along. In May the operator announced that the C.P.R. orders had been lost, and that the mines would be permanently closed. The miners may have thought that Austin Corbin was bluffing, but he was not. The mines were shut down, and later the rail link with the C.P.R. mainline was torn up. Sixteen months after the beginning of the strike, the Blairmore union local was still assessing \$2.00 a month from each member for Corbin relief (this without a check off), but by this time the community was starting to disperse. Having no luck finding work in other Pass camps, the miners went further afield: to Vancouver Island, Nordegg and the Coal Branch. Twenty families of Slovaks from Corbin started new lives by taking up homesteads in the Peace River country, although miners in general, and Anglo-Saxon ones in particular, seem to have exhibited little enthusiasm for the pioneer life during the Depression. Corbin itself became a ghost town, a monument perhaps to the colossal class bigotry which characterized the era of its destruction.

NOTES TO

CHAPTER V

1. Interview: Harvey Murphy, op. cit.
2. Paul MacEwen, Miners and Steelworkers, (Toronto, 1976), Chapter 13.
3. "Report of the Drumheller Conciliation Board," Labour Gazette, 1932, pp. 753-760.
4. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection. "Minutes, Local 2817," April 1932.
5. Interview, Ben Lowther, op.cit.
6. Nova Scotia Miner, various issues, 1930.
7. Labour Gazette, 1932, pp. 958-959.
8. Canadian Miner, October 15, 1932.
9. Ibid; Labour Gazette, 1932, pp. 1166-1167, (conflicting reports.)
10. Labour Gazette, 1933, pp. 498-499, 589-590; Worker, August 26, 1933.
11. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes Local 222", November 27, 1933.
12. Worker, September 2 and 16, 1933.
13. Labour Gazette, 1935, p 1089.
14. Quoted in the Worker, September 16, 1933.
15. Ibid.
16. See James D. Leach, "The Workers Unity League and the Stratford Furniture Workers," Ontario History (March, 1968) pp. 39-48; Conversation with Professor Terry Copp, Sir Wilfred Laurier University, June 2, 1976.
17. Western Canada Coal Review, August, 1930.

18. Worker, January 31, 1933.
19. Quoted in the Vancouver Sun, December 28, 1932.
20. Labour Gazette, 1933, pp. 33-34.
21. Worker, January 7, 1933.
22. See footnote 17, Chapter I. Evans was sentenced to one year for "criminal sedition" at Vernon, B.C. on September 15, 1933.
23. Canadian Miner, April 24, 1933.
24. PAO, C.P.C. Files: IV; 35, 4A 2385-6, "Drayton to McEwen", April 11, 1931.
25. Labour Gazette, 1933, pp. 274-5.
26. Worker, February 18 and 25, 1933.
27. Interview, Harvey Murphy, op.cit. Also the Worker, March 4, 11 and 25, April 5 and 8, 1933.
28. Labour Gazette, 1933, p. 384
29. Evelyn Dumas, The Bitter Thirties in Quebec (Montreal, 1975), Chapter 2.
30. Labour Gazette, 1934, pp. 623-625; 737-739.
31. See Ross McCormack "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in B.C." B.C. Studies, (Spring, 1974) pp. 3 - 27.
32. Report B.C. Department of Labour, 1925, pp. 38-39
33. Canadian Unionist, March, 1928.
34. Dominion Census 1931, Volume VII pp. 486-489. In that year there were 259 mine workers of Oriental extraction in the B.C. coal mines, many of whom worked in Cumberland and had done so since the turn of the century.
35. Interview: Dusty Greenwell, former mine worker, Nanaimo mines; and Archie Greenwell, former mine worker, South Wellington and Reserve mines, July 6-7, 1976, at Vancouver.

36. We Too, March 23, 1935.
37. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 139 ; 92795. "J.H. MacBrien, R.C.M.P. Commissioner, to Bennett", Oct. 21, 1931.
38. Western Canada Coal Review, September, 1928.
39. Interviews: Dusty and Archie Greenwell, op.cit.
40. Ibid.
41. Nanaimo Free Press, November 9, 1934.
42. We Too, April 10, 1935.
43. Nanaimo Free Press, November 9, 1934.
44. Ibid, November 7, and 9, 1934.
45. Ibid, November 10, 1934.
46. Ibid, November 22, 1934.
47. We Too, June 29, 1935.
48. Interviews: Archie and Dusty Greenwell, op.cit.
49. We Too, February 16, 1935.
50. Ibid, May 18, 1935. The writer of the anonymous article was identified by Dusty Greenwell.
51. "Report of the Cumberland Conciliation Board" Labour Gazette, 1936, pp. 12-24; Jamieson, op.cit., p.222
52. Tom McEwen, op.cit. p. 217.
53. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, File 36. Agreement Between C.C.(D) Ltd. and the Western Fuel Corporation, and District 18, U.M.W. of A., November 18, 1938.
54. Days worked from Karas, op.cit. p. 169
55. W.A.Sloan, "The Crows' Nest Pass during the Depression: A Socio-Economic History of Southeastern B.C., 1918-1939" (Unpublished M.A.Thesis, University of Victoria, 1968) P. 87.

56. Ibid, p. 85.
57. Interview: Harvey Murphy, op. cit.
58. Ibid. An account of the picnic can be found in the Lethbridge Herald, May 4, 1934.
59. Interview: Charlie Drain, op.cit.
60. Such was the case, according to an informant cited in Karas, op.cit., p. 112.
61. Ibid, p. 115.
62. Press and other reports are vague and contradictory on this point. The mine workers probably gained the option of having their check off to the B.C.M.A. discontinued. Lethbridge Herald, p. 115; Sloan, op.cit. p. 86; Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union", May-June, 1934.
63. From 1929 to 1932 output per man increased in Corbin by 15%, while falling by 22% in the Alberta Pass. From 1929 to 1933, production increased by 29% and the number of mine workers employed increased from 191 to 253. From tables in Karas, op.cit. pp. 163-169.
64. Sloan, op.cit. p. 88.
65. Western Miner, September 18, 1930.
66. List of names in the Fernie Free Press, May 17, 1935.
67. To be precise, 1,897 tons per man in 1920 and 1,131 tons per man in 1930. This would compare favourably with Blairmore (763 t.p.m. in 1930) or any other Pass mines.
68. See McAlister Coleman. Men and Coal (New York, 1943) p.120.
69. PAC, David Miller Collection, Transcript of Interview with Bill Brown, Part II, p. 47.
70. Adam Bell, "Report Re Strike of Coal Miners Employed by the Corbin Collieries, May 18, 1935," Report, B.C. Department of Labour, 1935, pp. 62-67. Hereafter referred to as the "Bell Report."

71. Sloan, op.cit., p. 90.
72. The wage cut was withdrawn after a one-day strike. Labour Gazette, 1934, pp. 811-812.
73. Bell Report, p. 63.
74. Ibid.
75. Uphill claimed that the company was "determined to discriminate against (the) majority of old employees," and predicted "serious trouble" on April 16. Fernie Free Press, April 19, 1935.
76. Bjarnason, op.cit., pp. 123-124. A resolution from the Hamilton Branch of the Hungarian Workers and Farmers' Club notes that 44 workers were injured and 31 arrested. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 421; 267336.
77. Ibid. Volume 421; 267360.
78. Cited in Sloan, op.cit. p. 92n.
79. Quoted in the Fernie Free Press, April 26, 1935.
80. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 421; 267334, "Stevens to Perley", April 30, 1935.
81. Ibid.: Volume 421; 267328-331. The protests from Princeton, Calgary and Fernie are but three of 800 resolutions on Corbin in the Bennett Papers.
82. Lethbridge Herald, April 18, 1935.
83. Quoted in the Fernie Free Press, April 16, 1935.
84. Dorothy Livesay, "A Coal Camp in the Mountains," Daily Clarion, May 5, 1936.
85. Interview: The late Joe Svoboda, op.cit.
86. Interview: Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
87. Fernie Free Press, April 26, 1935.
88. Ibid.
89. Palmer, Land of the Second Chance, op.cit.; p. 194.

I

With the destruction of Corbin, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had lost another local. Despite the organization's strenuous activities outside of Alberta during the W.U.L. era, it had, by 1936, only one functioning local outside the province, that at Cumberland, B.C. Links with Fernie and Michel were tenuous at best, while locals in the B.C. interior and in Saskatchewan, not to mention the metal mining centres, had ceased to exist entirely. Within Alberta, the early years of the Depression had been ones of steady decline, at least on paper. While membership in 1930 stood at almost 4,000, M.W.U.C. Vice-President Peter Barclay reported a membership of only 2,000 to the Alberta Coal Commission of 1935.¹ The Depression had taken a heavy toll on almost all trade unions in Canada. Unlike many, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada had not taken the crisis "lying down", but it had fallen far short of the goals set in 1930, and Tom McEwen's claim that the organization included 90% of the workers in the Western coal industry at the time of its demise does not stand up to reality.² The United Mine Workers of America, on the other hand, had experienced moderate growth since 1932. While maintaining cordial relations with the coal operators it

had held on to most of its membership in the Red Deer Valley, and made gains in the Edmonton field and along the Coal Branch. District 18, of course, had not had to face the opposition of the state forces, and had not led a single major strike in a decade. Nevertheless, the organization suffered a blow with the ousting of its political allies, the United Farmers of Alberta, during the provincial election of 1935.

These developments perhaps meant less to the rank and file than to union leaders and political parties. In 1935 the Depression was only half over, and there would be no steady work for miners anywhere until after 1940. The Lethbridge field, the first to be developed in Alberta, was dying a slow and agonizing death. In March of 1935 the old Number 6 mine in Hardieville hoisted its last ton of coal. Not even the suggestion by Prime Minister Bennett, facing re-election as a candidate of "reform", that the closure be delayed until "more seasonable times" could dissuade the C.P.R. from its plans to open up a new mine, which could be operated at a lower cost and with smaller crews, in Lethbridge.³ For the next year there would be only developmental work for small numbers of men employed in the C.P.R.'s coal department. The experience seems to have added a more militant tinge to the Lethbridge miners' union, but there was little they could do to stop the "march of progress" in the industry. They had "kept their noses clean" for several years, but had received

No thanks from their bosses. One member's declaration that anybody who would vote for Bennett "would sell his grandmother for a glass of beer" aptly sums up their feelings of disgust and betrayal.⁴ In nearby Coalhurst, coal mining came to an abrupt and sudden end when, on December 9, 1935, the mine blew up,⁵ killing 16 workers. It never re-opened, and thus another loyal local of the M.W.U.C. passed out of existence.

Some leaders blamed the ever-worsening conditions on lack of organizational unity and the crippling rivalry between the two unions, neither of which had organized more than 1/4 of the workers in the industry. Enoch Williams, a Nova Scotian ex-Army officer, coal miner and veteran trade unionist was engaged by the M.W.U.C. as an organizer at this time. Years later, he described what he saw in the Alberta coalfield:

...I took a speaking tour all over and I saw the bloody conditions. All of us. Part of us was the United Mine Workers of America, part of us in the Mine Workers' Union of Canada and all that...And I thought here, "What's these proud miners is now out there with their wives picking bloody enough coal to cook their beans off the refuse dump. My god, what a hell of a drop to what we used to think we were"...I says it's no damn good. They've got too much money, and we can't afford to go on the way we are -- we're just amounting to nothing...and we're hindering the rest of them.

6

Curiously enough, it was the Communist Party which provided the way out of the dilemma, through an abrupt "volte face" it

performed on the issue of trade union unity in 1935. The origins of the shift in policy can be traced to the 7th Congress of the Communist International held in that year, and the changes in Soviet policy which preceded it. Without belabouring the complexities of the issues involved, what the new policy consisted of was a concept known as the "Popular Front." This idea held basically that because of the growth of European fascism, there was now a basis of unity between all "progressive" forces in society, and that it would not do for Communists, for reasons of doctrinal and organizational purity, to stand in the way of this unity. Instead of denouncing liberals, labour bureaucrats, social democrats and idealistic Christians as misleaders and opportunists, the Communist movement was now expected to join with these elements in common cause. As we have seen, the Mine Workers' Union of Canada was not as "sectarian" as might be expected from a Communist-dominated organization. As part of the Workers' Unity League, however, it was subject to the directives of the Communist Party, and therefore to the Communist Internationale.

The first halting steps towards implementing the new "unity" line can be found in a document entitled, "Unite the Canadian Trade Union Movement: An Open Letter and Appeal from the Workers' Unity League", dated February 28, 1935, six months

before the convening of the Internationale in Moscow. It was signed by J.B. McLachlan, President of the W.U.L. and Tom McEwen, Secretary of the organization, who had been released from prison, along with Malcolm Bruce, Tim Buck and company, only three months before. The document makes no mention of unilateral dissolution of the W.U.L., but rather calls for the merger of the A.C.C.L., W.U.L., Catholic unions, Railway Brotherhoods and A.F. of L/T.L.C. into "one all inclusive labour union federation:"

Our vital interests, our happiness and security, our future is at stake. Let us speed up the work to unite our ranks to defend and improve our common interests, to meet and defeat the new attacks of capital.

7

Within the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, the Communists were still talking in such "motherhood and apple pie" terms at least as late as September, 1935, when the organization met in its Tenth, and last, national Convention. The "real keynote" of the Convention was struck by the speech of Tom McEwen, who spoke of the growing organic unity within the miners' movement. As proof, he cited as examples instances in Nova Scotia, where U.M.W. members had refused to go down into the pits unless members of the Amalgamated Mine Workers' Union were also allowed, and home locals in Alberta, which had assessed themselves for strike relief in Corbin. McEwen stated that "if broadened out (the movement) will lead to organizational unity... and eventually a Federation for the whole of Canada, from East to West, from Nova

8
Scotia to Vancouver Island." Out of the Convention came resolutions for an organizational conference for a "National Federation of Miners" to be held in March, 1936, which would include representatives from all three branches of the industry: East Coast, West Coast and the territory of District 18.
9

Had such a conference ever been held, it would have probably consisted of good Left Wing delegates from every mining camp in the country, who no doubt would have heard a lively speech by McLachlan denouncing John L. Lewis as the obstacle to the unity of Canadian coal miners. Fine resolutions would have been passed and the delegates would have gone home, full of fighting spirit, but without having accomplished a great deal. Perhaps, through time, a vigorous left-wing-dominated national union, joined by the unaffiliated home locals and the large number of non-union miners yearning for any sort of organization, would have driven the U.M.W. "quislings" from the land. The times were not propitious for an all-out attack on the operators for an improvement of wages and conditions, but they were becoming more so. During the "fighting 40's", such a union would no doubt have become a real power in Canadian labour and a strong force for the left wing within the trade union movement in the Taft-Hartley era. This, however, was not to be the case.

II

The Communists, because of "lack of sufficient bargaining power" with the rest of the trade union movement" and "their eagerness to apply Popular Front tactics in the trade union field" found an easier and quicker method of achieving "unity".¹⁰ By early 1936 it was decided that the Workers' Unity League would be unilaterally disbanded, and that its unions and local should get themselves back into the A.F. of L/T.L.C. fold. Factors within the American trade union movement made such a move more practicable than might be imagined. The A.F. of L. Convention of 1935 had an impact on the Left in Canada equally as important as that of the Communist Internationale. John L. Lewis, the man who had crucified the One Big Union and the McLachlan executive in District 26 years before, had been transformed into the new messiah of the working class. The C.I.O. was a magnet which attracted not only rank and file workers, but Communists and "fellow travellers" all over North America. Lewis, the prophet of anti-Communism in the 1920's, now issued a tacit welcome to the radicals.¹¹ With the help of the Reds and President Roosevelt, "the great I am" would be propelled on the crest of a wave of mass organization during the second half of the decade, which would crown him "Czar" of American labour.

Lewis' friends in Canada's District 18 were not slow in following the leader's line. During the first months of 1936

the United Mine Workers' Journal ran a series of articles by Albert Allen, long time union official in Drumheller, extolling the benefits of the International and the disabilities of "dualism" in District 18. The propaganda was standard, but with important differences. The leaders of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada were accused of "flapdoodlization" of patriotism, but the national union was not, as previously, vilified as a "scab organization." Nowhere in the articles was there any mention of Communism or Communists.¹² At long last it appeared that the old hatchets might be heading for a decent burial. The most important initiatives, however, came from the Communists through the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. The Alberta Federation of Labour, the body which Frank Wheatley had quit in disgust because of its failure to recognize the M.W.U.C. ten years before, was approached, and a Unity Convention, consisting of delegates from the two rival organizations as well as the home locals, was arranged for May 10-11, 1936. Twenty-nine delegates assembled at Calgary on the appointed day to hammer out the details. Enoch Williams recalls the atmosphere at the beginning of the Convention:

We had one great union meeting here and boy was it hot. They were on one side of the Hall, and we were on the other and boy! They were hollering at one another and all the rest of it.... Eventually one fellow got up there and he said "Come on, come on, lets get down to brass tacks. Let's get down to business here and not fight among ourselves. What can we do to get back

into an organization? Right now I don't give a damn which one it is. But the United Mine Workers' seems to offer the best conditions. Let us bury the hatchet, and let us get at it."

13.

The gentleman to whom Williams refers may well have been Tom McEwen, who played an instrumental role at the Convention in getting the locals of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada admitted intact into the U.M.W. of A. ¹⁴ The International could have insisted on re-admission on an individual basis, and such an insistence would have resulted in either a breakdown in negotiations or a humiliating surrender on the part of the Canadian union. However, Livett very prudently did not press the point, and after the Convention went to see Lewis personally in Washington ¹⁵ to make sure the W.U.L. conditions would be acceptable. There was, of course, some resistance from the representatives of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, many of whom, of course, had spent the previous decade locked in mortal combat with the U.M.W. McEwen recalls the dissenting voice of one "grand old fighter from the Drumheller Valley, who endorsed the idea of miners' Unity, 'but not with some of the so and so's running the U.M.W.'" ¹⁶ A Nanaimo man whose father attended the Convention remembers a story told to him about an incident which took place on the second day, when one delegate was found to be absent. The missing delegate, a Ukrainian in a rather advanced state of inebriation, suddenly appeared at the door. Those

present were expecting a scathing denunciation of the International's leaders, but were relieved when the man addressed the Convention as follows: "President McEwen, President McEwen, as long as you tell me to unite with the (expletive deleted) I will."¹⁷

The incident also illustrates the profound influence and respect which the Communists commanded amongst the miners: the key element in understanding the manner in which the M.W.U.C. was persuaded by McEwen, Murphy and others to disband itself. The Communists' move, however, was not a complete "ukase". Through a referendum held on June 30, the rank and file of the M.W.U.C., as well as of the home locals in which the Canadian union exercised a degree of influence (Lethbridge, Fernie and Michel) had an opportunity to express their views on the matter. The vote, whose results are listed in Appendix E, Table 7, showed a strong majority in favour of affiliation with the U.M.W. The only negative vote came from Fernie, and was probably motivated more by the fear in that camp that unionization might lead to mine closure than any sentiment in favour of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. After experiencing ten years of "dual unionism" and a steady decline in conditions, the miners seemed to have accepted the idea that the two were somehow linked and that organizational unity was a prerequisite for any improvement. District 18 moreover, had recouped the losses in Drumheller in 1933 with a new

contract in 1935, and could no longer be accused of "wage cutting."

This was in sharp contrast to what transpired in District 26. The dissolution of the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia was not carried out as smoothly as had been the case with the M.W.U.C. Here the open breach with the International was only four years old, and the wounds resulting from the split were still raw. District 26 had not regained the 1932 rates, and there would be no wage increase for Dōsco employees until 1937. Moreover, the District's leading radical, J.B. McLachlan, who was also President of the W.U.L., could not stomach the idea of going back, "cap in hand" as it were, to John L. Lewis. He approved in principle of the ideal of unity, but not at the expense of destroying organizations which had been built at such a cost in sacrifice by miners who had refused to "bend the knee" to the "labour fakirs". From bitter experience McLachlan had learned that no matter how progressive the latter might appear to be, they would never allow the unions to be used as an instrument of revolutionary class struggle. The "Unity" movement was not completed until 1938, and only after much bitter infighting, including the resignation of McLachlan from the Communist Party. 18

It is ironic that developments in Europe and the United States, factors largely extraneous to Canada, should have resulted in the liquidation of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, which

had been founded for the purpose of ending foreign interference in the affairs of coal miners in this country. From the point of view of the development of an indigenous labour movement in Canada, the dissolution of the W.U.L., including the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, was, to quote Irving Abella, "a crushing blow."¹⁹ The All Canadian Congress of Labour was understandably bitter at the manner in which the Communists had first taken the miners out of what they considered to be the "legitimate" national labour movement, and then delivered them, lock, stock and barrel, back to the Americans. The Vancouver A.C.C.L. paper, Labour Truth, wrote that the co-operation of the Communists with John L. Lewis "has been perplexing to many of our people:"

We have been watching with some misgiving, the long arm of the A.F. of L., the United Mine Workers of America, and other American institutions, reaching out for control of our Canadian labour unions...recently the membership of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada in Eastern B.C. and Alberta, under the same (Communist) influence, also withdrew from the Workers. Unity League and threw in their lot with the U.M.W. of A., and now the trap is laid and the bait hung out to swing miners in the Western part of the province over.

The writer went on to detail the mismanagement of the Island strike of 1912-1914 by the U.M.W. of A. and to accuse the International union of being motivated by a desire to "throttle" the Vancouver Island coal industry for the benefit of American miners and operators.²⁰ Such charges are probably fanciful.

The organization of the Island in District 18 was due to the miners' desire for unionization and Communist enthusiasm in the

endeavour, not to any nefarious plotting on the part of the Americans.

After 1936, the radicals in District 18 continued their activities, under the shelter, and, of course, subject to the ultimate authority of the U.M.W. machine, which remained entrenched for many years. Stokaluk, for one, did not find the transfer of allegiance difficult, and emerged as the District Vice President in post-war period. The "Popular Front" resulted in a considerable lessening of "social tension" in many of the mining communities. The long standing feud between national and International trade unionists in the Red Deer Valley finally came to an end. In Blairmore, the radicals came to the conclusion that their hard line approach towards the home localers and local businessmen were only driving these elements into the hands of the "monopolists", and changed their line accordingly. A new "Workers' Slate" for Council included three union miners, one representative from the home local, and two local merchants. According to Dorothy Livesay, the union miners were now making common cause with men "who were previously regarded as 'scabs' and given the name 'fascists' by children on the street."

All the miners employed by West Canadian Collieries had been united within the U.M.W. by November, 1936. Stokaluk and Livett ventured forth together in an attempt to bring the

"Coleman Miners' Association" into the union, but the home local remained impervious to the United Mine Workers' until 1939. The old anti-Communists of 1932, claiming that the Reds were trying to sell them down the river to the Americans, put up a stiff fight against the International. ²³ Hillcrest, on the other hand, resurrected its U.M.W. local without much fuss in ²⁴ 1937.

The 1935 election in Alberta was the final test of the extent of "Red" philosophy in the Crows' Nest Pass. Harvey Murphy was faced, however, with a new and dynamic force in Alberta politics, Social Credit. Murphy improved on Sudworth's 1930 showing by only 295 votes. Compared with the 1930 election Communist support had increased in Blairmore (from 21% to 36%) and declined in like proportion in Coleman (30% to 10%). Bellevue and Hillcrest showed no significant change while the only Communist majority was obtained, as in 1930, in the Czecho-Slovak dominated village of Frank (See Appendix F, Table 2). In the riding as a whole, and to only a lesser extent in the mining towns, Social Credit swept all before it. Murphy came a distant second behind the Socred challenger. Murphy recalls that Socred leader William Aberhart was impressed by his campaign however, and predicted that the Communist would go far politically if he would only abandon Marxism for the "A plus B" theorem. ²⁵

Needless to say, Murphy did not accept the offer. A further indication of the miners' infatuation with Social Credit was shown by the defeat of the long time Progressive Party M.P. for the MacLeod riding, George Coöte, running on the C.C.F. ticket in the federal election later in the year. Only the people of Frank remained sceptical of "funny money", and alone among the Pass communities returned a majority for the C.C.F.²⁶

Having broadened its base of support, the Blairmore Workers' Council continued in power. In 1937 Enoch Williams was elected Mayor, and Blairmore rated high marks at the Communist Party convention of that year. Speaking to the assembled comrades in Toronto, Sam Carr delivered a stirring eulogy to the townspeople:

In speaking of municipal work...one must speak very highly of our people in that now famous mining town of the Crows' Nest Pass of Alberta, the town of Blairmore. Here our comrades have been elected to the administration of the town for a second (sic) time. To Mayor Enoch Williams we wish to express the deepest thanks for what Blairmore has done in the past...the naming of their main avenue "Tim Buck Boulevard" at a time when Tim Buck, by the grace of reaction and R.B. Bennett, was Number 2524, was a mighty slap at the people's enemies. For all that the small town of Blairmore meant and still means to the progressive people of Canada, to Mayor Williams and the people of Alberta, go our thanks.

27

Just as Blairmore had made its mark in the early 1930 s by living the Communist slogan "Class against Class", it made its contribution to the Communists' new preoccupation, the fight against fascism in the Old World. There was, as a local historian put it, always "great sympathy for the underdog" in the town, and on

one occasion the Council drafted a message of sympathy to Haile Selassie, when the Emperor was driven from his throne by Mussolini.²⁸ Two of Blairmore's sons, a Welshman and an Italian,²⁹ gave their lives in the struggle against Franco in Spain. Eventually the Workers' Town Council, a reminder of the class war of 1932, became entrenched as the regular municipal administration, and gradually "things settled down into careful, steady administration."³⁰

III

The miners' movement in the West retained some of the "peculiar psychology" which had marked it in the past, long after the Mine Workers' Union of Canada faded into history. During the winter of 1948, 4,000 coal miners in Alberta went out on a wildcat strike, of which Bob Livett admitted he had "no knowledge... except for what I read in the papers."³¹ The bourgeois press reprimanded the miners thus: "Many unions are guilty of surrendering democratic control to their top officers. In this instance... union members are guilty of a grave lack of discipline, restraint³² and responsibility." During that dark period in the history of the labour movement in this country, when the unions were ripped apart by "anti-communist" zealots within their ranks, the coal miners were one of the few groups to speak out in protest. Locals in the Alberta Pass, for example, had the

audacity to denounce Canadian involvement in the Greek Civil War.³³ At the 1951 Convention of the Canadian Congress of Labour, by which time the majority of the delegates were gloating over the expulsion of Murphy's Mine Mill union along with the rest of the Left, miners' locals at Drumheller, East Coulee and Nanaimo presented hopeless resolutions condemning the expulsions and raids. While the Congress Executive officially endorsed "the fight against Communism in South-East Asia", East Coulee suggested that:

The Congress consider an exchange of workers' delegations with Russia for the creation of a closer friendship and to learn of workers' conditions there, also the Russian delegation could learn of workers' democracy in Canada.

34.

After considering the resolutions, many delegates no doubt concluded that their authors and sponsors were simply dupes of a Moscow conspiracy, an accusation which was levelled at the supporters of a Canadian miners' union right from the day that "Kid Burns" launched the ill-fated Red Deer Valley Miners' Union as a challenge to the arrogant and collaborative U.M.W. of A. machine in June, 1925. As we have seen, the Communists had not a little to do with the evolution of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, from its inception in the mind of Tim Buck, to its dissolution at the behest of Tom McEwen. Lewis McDonald, John Stokaluk, and Harvey Murphy -- quite different individuals, but Communists all -- were major figures in shaping the destiny of

the organization. The M.W.U.C. was, as its opponents charged, "Communist dominated" for most of its period of existence.

This "domination" was enforced, however, not by machine control, but by the democratic process, a situation not comparable to many labour organizations, past and present in Canada. Leaders and national affiliations came and went, subject always to the vote of the rank and file. Locals withdrew as a result of referendum votes amongst their members, and when they did, they were neither raided nor disrupted. The M.W.U.C. cannot be accused of "scabherding" in any instance, unlike its American rival. In every case, subversion of the expressed will of the miners cannot be attributed to the "Reds", but to their opponents.

Yet the "Reds" were always a tiny majority, the majority being as David Davies of the Luscar unit put it, "God fearing people the most of us". Only in one town did radicalism seem to put down solid roots, and Davies' statement does not, I think, exclude the good people of Blairmore. How then, can we explain "Communist domination?" The idea that the "Reds" provided the only leadership for the miners may prove tempting in some cases (Estevan, for example), but in the majority of areas, an alternate leadership was always available. The miners did not join the Workers' Unity League by signing up with the only union around, but as a result of a positive referendum vote, held

after a debate on the question which had gone on for over a year. The fact that the Communists tended to represent embattled ethnic minorities is more helpful, perhaps, but is not universally valid. It cannot explain the events in Drumheller in 1925, Vancouver Island, or Corbin. The western miners were not political neophytes. They had seen various trade unions and political parties, as well as the quasi-revolutionary O.B.U. movement come and go. Although it might be disturbing to those who see the C.C.F. emerging as the only visible trend of independent working class politics in the post 1920 era in Canada, the fact is that in the coalfields the Communist Party's brand of Marxism was a legitimate heir to earlier traditions. The miners may not have been revolutionaries, but when undergoing an attack as a class, it was to the "revolutionaries" that they turned for help. It was the miners' deep-rooted "class consciousness" that enabled the Communists to exercise the influence that they did.

It is possible that the miners' interpretation of the catastrophe which befell them in the inter-war years was an illusion; that there was no "class struggle", as the radicals suggested, only a "sick industry". This, of course, was the interpretation of the employers, and, with the benefit of hindsight, some of the militants of the 1930's might, today, tend to agree. Yet if we employ E.P. Thompson's definition of class "as defined by men as they live their own history," the

earlier ^{or} working class analysis remains valid. It is possible to view the simple faith in the radical ideal that motivated the men of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada as naive or anachronistic. We can accuse the miners of a "grave lack of discipline, restraint and responsibility" in trying to fight the economic and social system in which they lived. It would, however, be unwise. The fight for an independent, progressive, and effective miners' movement in Western Canada during the 1920's and 30's was, without a doubt, one of history's lost causes. Nevertheless, it is part of our history.

NOTES TO

CHAPTER VI

1. Glenbow Archives, C.P.R. Department of National Resources Collection: Box 49, File 537, "Alberta Coal Commission, 1935. Notes on Evidence". Evidence of Pete Barclay, p.40
2. Tom McEwen, op.cit. pp. 147-148.
3. Glenbow Archives, C.P.R. Collection: Box 49: File 536.
Various documents on the closure of Galt Number 6 mine.
4. Ibid. "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Association", September 24, 1935.
5. Lethbridge Herald, December 10, 1935.
6. PAC, David Millar Collection, Transcript of Interview with Enoch Williams, 1969, "Part II", pp.3-4.
7. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 420; 266477
8. Quoted in We Too, September 21, 1935.
9. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union," October 8, 1935.
10. Avakumovic, op.cit. p. 132
11. See Len de Caux, Labour Radical: From the Wobblies to the C. L.O. (Boston, 1970) Chapter 6.
12. U.M.W. Journal, January 1, February 1, 1936.
13. PAC, David Millar Collection, Enoch Williams Interview. op.cit.
14. Tom McEwen; op. cit., p. 149.
15. Daily Clarion, May 13, 1936.
16. Tom McEwen, op.cit., p. 149.
17. Interview: Dusty Greenwell, op.cit.

18. Tom McEwen, op.cit. p. 147; Interview: Tom McLachlan, former President of District 26, U.M.W. of A., August 24, 1976, at Glace Bay, N.S. A rather garbled account appears in Paul MacEwen, op.cit., Chapters 13-14. Contrary to the evidence MacEwen claims that the Communist Party had nothing to do with the demise of the A.M.W. of N.S.
19. Abella, op.cit. p. 3.
20. Labour Truth, September, 1936.
21. Daily Clarion, May 5, 1936.
22. U.M.W. Journal, December 1, 1936.
23. Interview: Adam Wilson, op.cit.
24. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, "Minutes, Hillcrest Local Union", 1937.
25. Interview: Harvey Murphy, op.cit.
26. Glenbow Archives, Coote Papers, Box 17, File 162, "Election results, McLeod Riding, 1935." The Communist policy in 1935 would have been to support the C.C.F.
27. PAC, Bennett Papers: Volume 140; 93737, Transcript of a speech by Carr contained in a pamphlet entitled "Communists at work" (Toronto, 1937).
28. Annie Larbalestier. "The Hungry Thirties", in The Story of Blairmore, Alberta, edited by Wm. Jallep, Eric Price and Vern Decoux (Lethbridge, 1961), pp.64-66.
29. Interviews: Charlie Drain, op.cit.
30. Larbalestier, op.cit.
31. Calgary Herald, January 13, 1948. The Strike later became generalized and lasted for some six months.
32. Calgary Albertan, January 14, 1948.
33. Leslie Morris, Look on Canada Now (Toronto, 1964) p. 74.
34. Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection, File 47, "Resolutions Submitted to the 11th Annual Convention, C.C.L. Vancouver, 1951." Resolutions 3, 10, 23, 24 and 34.
35. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, (Middlesex, Great Britain, 1963), p.11.

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APPENDIX A

"INDUSTRY STATISTICS"

APPENDIX A
Table Number 1

Coal Production and Monetary Value of Same, Province of Alberta,
 1918-1936.

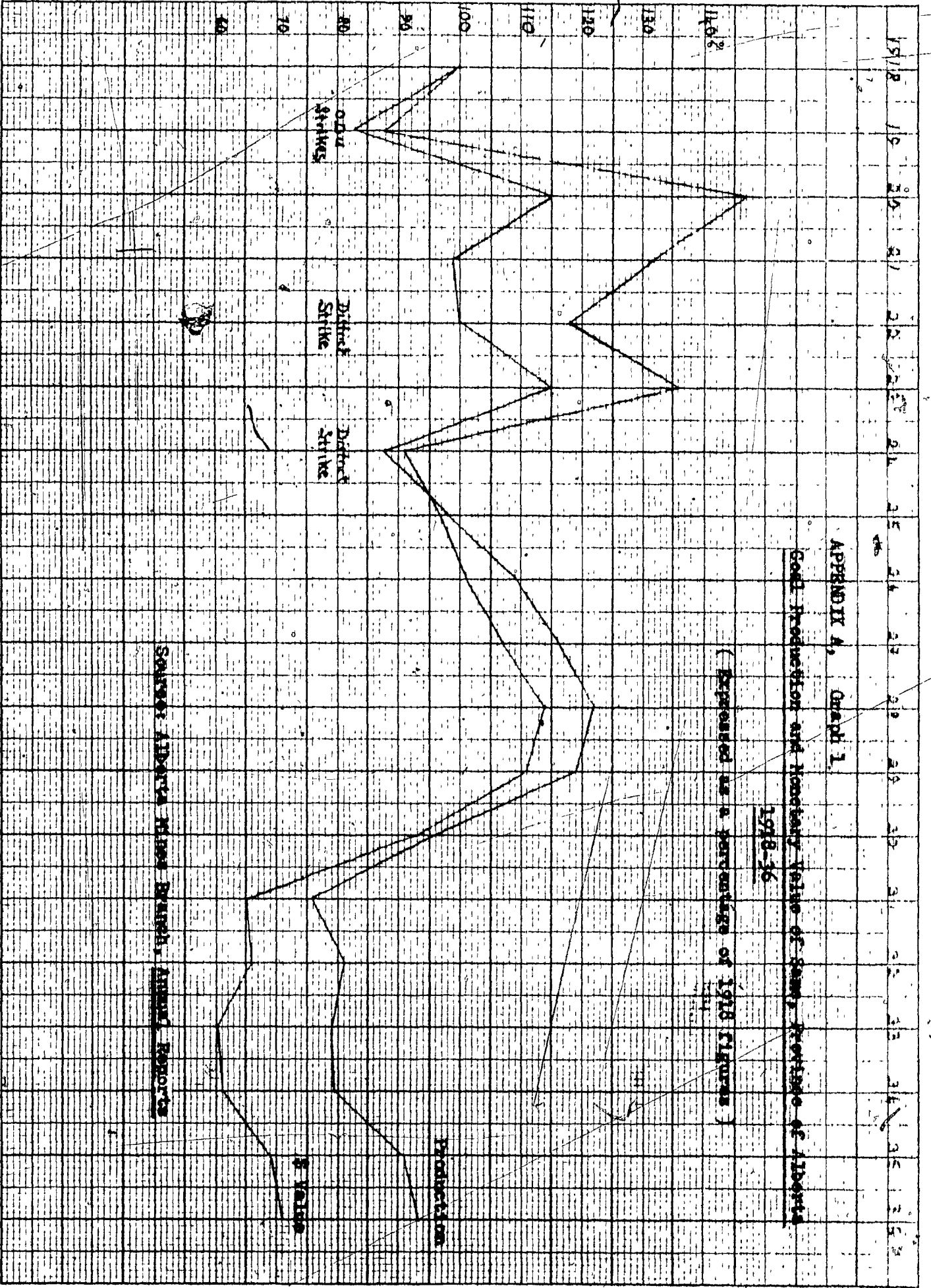
| | <u>Production Short Tons</u> | <u>Monetary Value</u> |
|------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1918 | 5,972,816 | \$20,537,287 |
| 1919 | 4,933,660 | 18,205,205 |
| 1920 | 6,907,765 | 30,186,933 |
| 1921 | 5,909,217 | 27,246,514 |
| 1922 | 5,990,911 | 24,351,913 |
| 1923 | 6,854,397 | 28,018,303 |
| 1924 | 5,189,739 | 18,884,318 |
| 1925 | 5,869,031 | 20,021,484 |
| 1926 | 6,503,705 | 20,886,103 |
| 1927 | 6,934,162 | 21,982,058 |
| 1928 | 7,336,330 | 23,532,414 |
| 1929 | 7,150,693 | 22,928,182 |
| 1930 | 5,755,528 | 18,063,225 |
| 1931 | 4,564,015 | 13,342,675 |
| 1932 | 4,870,648 | 13,526,309 |
| 1933 | 4,718,788 | 12,307,258 |
| 1934 | 4,748,848 | 12,440,616 |
| 1935 | 5,462,894 | 14,094,795 |
| 1936 | 5,696,960 | 14,659,705 |

APPENDIX A, Graph 1.

Gold Production and Monetary Value of Same, Province of Alberta

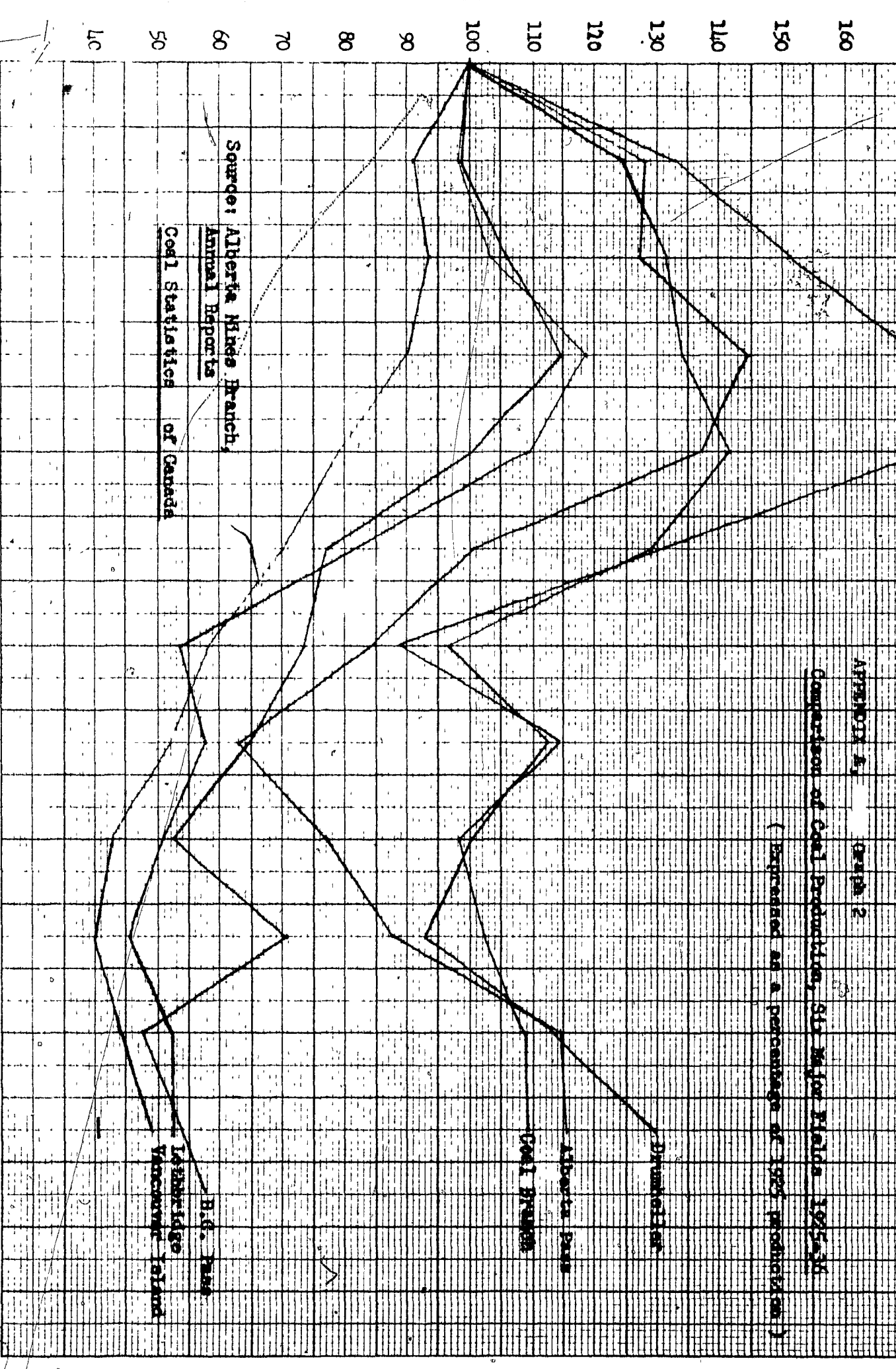
1918-36

(Expressed as a Percentage of 1918 Figures)



SOURCE: ALBERTA MINES BRANCH, ANNUAL REPORTS

1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 1929 1930 1931 1932 1933 1934 1935 1936



APPENDIX A, Graph 2

Comparison of Coal Production, Six Major Fields 1924-36

(Expressed as a percentage of 1925 production.)

Source: Alberta Mines Branch, Annual Reports, Coal Statistics of Canada

B.C. Pass, Laramie, Vancouver Island

| | <u>Production Short Tons</u> | <u>Avg. No. Wage Earners</u> | <u>Avg. No. of days worked *</u> | <u>Man days Worked</u> | <u>Wage Paid \$</u> |
|------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1925 | 1,132,300 | 1,865 | 195 | 347,087 | 1,935,589 |
| 1926 | 1,452,069 | 1,820 | 221 | 417,992 | 2,228,171 |
| 1927 | 1,443,066 | 1,833 | 220 | 445,556 | 2,403,643 |
| 1928 | 1,639,343 | 2,098 | 244 | 506,801 | 2,779,704 |
| 1929 | 1,552,966 | 2,254 | 220 | 490,052 | 2,741,167 |
| 1930 | 1,133,914 | 1,906 | 184 | 366,263 | 2,035,824 |
| 1931 | 951,970 | 1,715 | 147 | 297,743 | 1,536,264 |
| 1932 | 714,352 | 1,340 | 148 | 240,365 | 1,202,631 |
| 1933 | 876,448 | 1,615 | 144 | 281,261 | 1,471,345 |
| 1934 | 991,233 | 1,693 | 155 | 323,420 | 1,707,668 |
| 1935 | 1,297,404 | 1,834 | 199 | 386,491 | 2,100,009 |
| 1936 | 1,310,487 | 1,888 | 186 | 364,545 | 2,090,326 |

Table Number 2

Industry
Statistics,
Alberta Crows'
Nest Pass,
1925-1936Source:
Alberta Mines
Branch
Annual Reports* This figure
is the average
number of days
on which coal
was hoisted in
the mines.

249

| | <u>Production</u> | <u>Av. No. of Wage Earners</u> | <u>Av. No. Days Worked</u> | <u>Man days Worked</u> | <u>Wages Paid</u> |
|------|-------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1925 | 669,119 | 1,214 | 185 | 285,091 | 1,053,037 |
| 1926 | 658,882 | 1,229 | 182 | 288,382 | 1,504,540 |
| 1927 | 695,139 | 1,253 | 183 | 309,307 | 1,636,462 |
| 1928 | 795,855 | 1,375 | 188 | 350,855 | 1,864,789 |
| 1929 | 731,149 | 1,393 | 184 | 324,687 | 1,777,121 |
| 1930 | 545,227 | 1,319 | 167 | 252,976 | 1,351,497 |
| 1931 | 358,361 | 1,212 | 151 | 157,230 | 810,864 |
| 1932 | 386,243 | 1,127 | 155 | 160,564 | 842,440 |
| 1933 | 335,166 | 1,055 | 166 | 141,118 | 712,098 |
| 1934 | 312,677 | 963 | 170 | 123,917 | 623,627 |
| 1935 | 349,676 | 659 | 188 | 112,551 | 650,199 |
| 1936 | 351,564 | 563 | 209 | 127,914 | 613,812 |

Table Number 3
Industry
Statistics
Lethbridge
Coalfields
1925-1936

Source: Alberta
Mines Branch
Annual Reports

| | <u>Production</u> | <u>Avg. No. Employees</u> | <u>Avg. No. Days Worked</u> | <u>Man Days</u> | <u>Wages Paid</u> |
|------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1925 | 1,109,273 | 1,573 | 152 | 308,995 | 2,200,158 |
| 1926 | 1,385,423 | 1,846 | 167 | 392,590 | 2,498,120 |
| 1927 | 1,460,655 | 1,804 | 180 | 415,527 | 2,627,138 |
| 1928 | 1,487,483 | 1,909 | 178 | 430,310 | 2,865,324 |
| 1929 | 1,574,766 | 2,129 | 183 | 468,722 | 3,105,351 |
| 1930 | 1,433,350 | 2,063 | 159 | 399,274 | 2,493,686 |
| 1931 | 1,070,537 | 1,873 | 137 | 290,119 | 1,737,555 |
| 1932 | 1,245,474 | 1,909 | 143 | 334,654 | 1,879,417 |
| 1933 | 1,112,204 | 1,764 | 145 | 288,191 | 1,463,001 |
| 1934 | 1,033,000 | 1,721 | 136 | 277,460 | 1,399,863 |
| 1935 | 1,261,239 | 1,779 | 153 | 328,804 | 1,752,127 |
| 1936 | 1,439,905 | 1,888 | 131 | 300,770 | 2,209,696 |

Table Number 4

Industry
Statistics
Drumheller
Coalfield,
1925-1936

Source:
Alberta Mines
Branch
Annual Reports

| | <u>Production</u> | <u>Avg. No. of Wage Earners</u> | <u>Avg. No. of Days Worked</u> | <u>Man-Days Worked</u> | <u>Wages Paid</u> |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1925 | 1,049,831 | 985 | 210 | 237,778 | 1,804,968 |
| 1926 | 1,208,759 | 1,111 | 232 | 291,010 | 2,383,190 |
| 1927 | 1,388,900 | 1,398 | 240 | 367,593 | 2,590,722 |
| 1928 | 1,620,954 | 1,519 | 230 | 399,329 | 2,839,733 |
| 1929 | 1,559,395 | 1,483 | 236 | 407,065 | 2,760,255 |
| 1930 | 1,242,073 | 1,329 | 206 | 314,086 | 1,975,411 |
| 1931 | 1,637,635 | 1,134 | 160 | 240,256 | 1,476,851 |
| 1932 | 1,163,915 | 1,153 | 187.5 | 290,073 | 1,641,997 |
| 1933 | 1,011,915 | 1,149 | 180 | 202,620 | 1,437,152 |
| 1934 | 1,033,339 | 1,113 | 175 | 258,581 | 1,415,433 |
| 1935 | 1,064,754 | 1,158 | 200 | 294,137 | 1,571,275 |
| 1936 | 1,043,905 | 1,191 | 185 | 281,208 | 1,500,770 |

Table Number 5

Industry
Statistics
Coal Branch
Coalfields
1925-1936

Source:
Alberta Mines
Branch,
Annual Reports

| | <u>Production</u> | <u>Avg. No. of Wage Eanners</u> | <u>Man Days Worked</u> | <u>Wages Paid \$</u> |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1925 | 956,079 | 1,439 | 367,238 | 2,061,086 |
| 1926 | 945,850 | 1,521 | 353,969 | 1,936,642 |
| 1927 | 1,015,669 | 1,548 | 399,951 | 2,275,353 |
| 1928 | 1,097,390 | 1,653 | 450,889 | 2,483,451 |
| 1929 | 962,552 | 1,621 | 363,491 | 2,066,477 |
| 1930 | 738,370 | 1,319 | 248,839 | 1,505,532 |
| 1931 | 707,277 | 1,209 | 208,151 | 1,291,007 |
| 1932 | 621,431 | 1,127 | 181,672 | 1,080,699 |
| 1933 | 502,334 | 712 | 129,851 | 706,233 |
| 1934 | 676,858 | 745 | 170,559 | 905,922 |
| 1935 | 457,149 | 652 | 106,702 | 621,524 |
| 1936 | 514,161 | 571 | 125,279 | |

Table Number 6
Industry Statistics

B.C. Crows' Nest
Pass Coalfield,
1925-1936

Source: Coal
Statistics of
Canada

| | <u>Production</u> | <u>Avg. No. of Wage Earners</u> | <u>Man Days Worked</u> | <u>Wages Paid \$</u> |
|------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1925 | 1,588,248 | 3,470 | 964,810 | 4,588,806 |
| 1926 | 1,456,063 | 3,166 | 868,397 | 4,064,202 |
| 1927 | 1,489,848 | 3,022 | 864,895 | 3,966,136 |
| 1928 | 1,429,746 | 2,849 | 813,847 | 3,705,765 |
| 1929 | 1,254,772 | 2,604 | 722,351 | 3,218,366 |
| 1930 | 1,107,470 | 2,523 | 621,545 | 2,882,883 |
| 1931 | 930,775 | 2,167 | 510,437 | 2,299,544 |
| 1932 | 838,887 | 2,042 | 480,433 | 2,126,479 |
| 1933 | 685,897 | 1,850 | 379,110 | 1,696,290 |
| 1934 | 642,611 | 1,637 | 353,117 | 1,542,675 |
| 1935 | 704,729 | 1,558 | 401,433 | 1,749,629 |
| 1936 | 792,028 | 1,643 | 454,841 | 2,043,606 |

Table Number 7

Industry Statistics
Vancouver Island
Coalfield
1925-1936

Source:
Coal Statistics
of Canada

APPENDIX B

WAGE RATES

| Date | N.S. | | Sask. | | Dist. 18 | | Lethbridge | | Drumheller | | Crows' Nest & Coal Branch | | Vanc. Island | |
|------------|--------|------|-------|------|----------|-------------------|------------|------|------------|------|---------------------------|------|--------------|------|
| | U. | C. | U. | C. | U. | C. | U. | C. | U. | C. | U. | C. | U. | C. |
| Sept. 1921 | \$3.90 | 7.22 | \$-- | -- | \$6.89 | 9.57 | \$ | | \$ | | \$ | | \$4.71 | 8.10 |
| Sept. 1922 | 3.35 | 5.94 | -- | -- | 6.89 | 9.17 | | | | | | | 4.44 | 7.23 |
| Sept. 1924 | 3.65 | 6.98 | -- | -- | 6.63 | 8.46 | | | | | | | 4.36 | 7.09 |
| Sept. 1925 | 3.35 | 6.08 | -- | -- | 4.34 | 7.92 (average) | | | | | | | 3.97 | 6.78 |
| 1926-1927 | 3.35 | 6.44 | -- | -- | 4.46 | 7.42 (average) | | | | | | | 3.97 | 6.88 |
| 1929 | 3.35 | 6.65 | -- | -- | ----- | | 4.45 | (?) | 4.54 | 7.85 | 4.47 | 8.72 | 3.97 | 6.78 |
| 1930-1931 | 3.45 | 6.70 | -- | -- | 4.53 | 7.69 (average) | | | | | | | 3.97 | 6.88 |
| 1932 | 3.25 | 5.80 | -- | -- | 4.53 | 7.61 (average) | | | | | | | 3.97 | 6.40 |
| 1933 | 3.14 | 5.60 | 2.66 | 4.37 | ----- | | 4.45 | 7.17 | 4.20 | 6.23 | 4.47 | 8.17 | 4.14 | 5.70 |
| 1939 | 3.36 | 6.67 | 3.24 | 4.28 | ----- | | 4.85 | 7.95 | 4.85 | 7.79 | 5.01 | 7.85 | 4.60 | 6.60 |

Appendix B, Table Number 1 U = Underground Labour C = Average weighted earnings for contract miners

"Comparative Wage Rates in the Canadian Coal Industry 1921-1939."

Source: Compiled from tables in the Report of the Royal Commission on Coal 1946, p. 303, and "Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada, 1933, p. 33, published as a supplement to the Labour Gazette, January, 1934.

APPENDIX C

"Strikes involving the Edmonton and District Miners' Federation, The Red Deer Valley Miners' Union, the I.W.W., and the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, 1925-1935."

Table 1

Summary

| <u>Strikes Begin- ing in the Year</u> | <u>Number of Strikes</u> | <u>Settled in favour of employers</u> | <u>In Favour of employees</u> | <u>Compromise, partial union victory, or settlement unclear</u> |
|---|------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1925 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 1926 | 2 | 1 | 1 | -- |
| 1927 | 2 | 1 | 1 | -- |
| 1928 | 3 | -- | 1 | 2 |
| 1929 | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| 1930 | 2 | 1 | -- | 1 |
| 1931 | 4 | 2 | -- | 2 |
| 1932 | 17 | 7 | 4 | 6 |
| 1933 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 1934 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| 1935 | 2 | 2 | -- | -- |
| Total | 53 | 22 | 14 | 17 |

Source: The foregoing is based mainly on entries in the Labour Gazette, 1925-35. This information has been supplemented, however, in some cases, by contemporary newspaper and other accounts.

| Date | Approximate No. Involved | Location | Grievance | Settlement |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| 1925 June 25- Sept. 24 | 900 (?) | Drumheller/ Wayne | Against wage reduction and for recognition of Canadian union (Red Deer Valley Miners' Union) | On employers' terms on wage issue. Can. union recognized in Wayne, but not Drumheller, where the U.M.W. remained |
| Dec. 1 -21 | 1,100 | Drumheller/ Wayne | Demands for a 5% increase spread to other classes of labour. Strike led by Sam Scarlett of the I.W.W. | U.M.W. miners received 5% increase, but not those in the Canadian union, which lost check-off privileges. |
| Apr. 20-23 | 140 | Edmonton | Against 13% reduction in wages before expiry of agreement with Edmonton and District Miners' Federation. | In favour of Employees |
| June 30 - August 25 | 400 | Edmonton and Clover Bar | Against proposed wage cuts of 10 to 20% IN NEW CONTRACT. | After government intervention, compromise reached with the Miners' Federation wages cut 5 to 13% |
| 1926 July 1 - August 28 | 140 | Edmonton | For restoration of old rates after expiry of the 1925 contract and for recognition of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. | Strike called off on employers' terms; no recognition. |

| | <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|---------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| 1926 | Dec. 14 | 65 | Coalhurst | For 10% increases for grippers and drivers. | 7% increase granted. |
| 1927 | Oct. 12- 22 | 60 | Robb | For increases in pay and recognition of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada | Demands granted |
| | Oct. 17- 31 | 600 | Drumheller | Against six mines for recognition of M.W.U.C. | Strike called off, recognition not granted. |
| 1928 | March 20- June 5 | 270 | Canmore | Against discrimination of two men accused of violations of the Mines Act, and for an improved contract. | The two men were acquitted in court, and re-instated. A new contract was signed, containing certain increases. |
| | July 30- August 27 | 450 | Coalhurst | Against discrimination of two men for "Loading dirty coal." | The union agreed to have the cases of the men put to arbitration. |
| 1928-29 | August 13- February 18 | 600 | Wayne | Against six operators for recognition of the M.W.U.C. and against the screened rate of payment. | The screened rates were put into effect, although 4 operators recognized the M.W.U.C, two others signed with the U.M.W. |
| 1930 | June 14 - November | 60 | Mercoal | Against signing of agreement between the U.M.W. and the employer. | In favour of employer. The strike ceased to have any effect after mid-July, the strikers received their last relief in November. |

| | <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--|---|
| 1930 | Sept. 10 -27 | 84 | Shaughnessy | Dispute over certain contract rates | The miners agreed to work at day rates after government intervention pending further negotiations. |
| 1931 | Jan. 15- March 1 | 130 | Shaughnessy | Against discrimination of four miners | The strike was broken and the M.W.U.C. local smashed, those returning to work being forced to sign a "yellow dog" contract. |
| | Sept. 8- Oct. 8 | 600 | Bienfait/ Estevan | Newly organized M.W.U.C. local struck for recognition and improved conditions. | After R.C.M.P. terror campaign the miners returned to work, pending governmental investigation of their demands. Some concessions made by employers, but recognition was refused. |
| | Sept. 14- 21 | 110 | Wayne (Ideal) | Non-payment of wages. | Wages to be paid in instalments. |
| | Dec. 7-9 | 165 | Wayne | Against discrimination of 1 man and alleged violations of agreement by employer. | The miners returned to work pending further negotiations. |
| 1931- 1932 | Dec. 12 - March 1 | 80 | Robb (Lakeside) | Against discrimination and employer's demand that miners pay for safety lamps. | The strikers were evicted and the M.W.U.C. local smashed. |

| | <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 1932 | Feb. 15- 22 | 254 | Canmore | Dispute over contract rates | Compromise settlement |
| | Jan. 28 | 70 | Bienfait/ Estevan | M.W.U.C. members at Crescent Colliery struck to force others to pay union dues. | The strike was called off after the offending miners paid their dues. |
| | Feb. 23 | 25 | Bienfait/ Estevan | M.W.U.C. members at another colliery struck to force others to pay union dues. | Mine manager informed the strikers that there was no closed shop in effect, and after 4 hours they returned to work, not having achieved their objective. |
| | Feb. 22- March 2 | 70 | Bienfait/ Estevan | Miners at the Crescent Colliery struck to protest the firing of their checkweighman, an alleged outside agitator. | The strike was lost. |
| | Feb. 23-25 | 150 | Bienfait/ Estevan | In sympathy with above, after arrest of strike leaders | The sympathetic strike was called off after the strike leaders were released on bail. |
| | Jan. 27 | 275 | Coleman | For equal division of work | Compromise settlement |
| | Feb. 2-8 | 550 | Coleman | For equal division of work and against discrimination | Demands not granted |

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| <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| 1932 Feb. 23- Sept. 6 | 630 | Blairmore/ Bellevue | Against discrimination of alleged communists | Compromise settlement with the M.W.U.C. |
| Mar. 18- May 26 | 625 | Coleman | In sympathy with above | The M.W.U.C. local was broken, the majority of the members having voted to return to work. |
| Oct. 3-8 | 135 | Wayne | M.W.U.C. members objec- ted to paying dues to the U.M.W. after recogni- tion had been withdrawn | A referendum proposal to join the U.M.W. was defea- ted 81 to 55; although the M.W.U.C. was not formally recognized. |
| Oct. 7 - 20 | 100 | Carbon, Alta. | Miners struck under the M.W.U.C. for higher wages in various collier- ies. | Compromise agreement signed with M.W.U.C. |
| Nov. 9-14 | 50 | Carbon | For enforcement of M.W. U.C. agreement in certain collieries | Negotiations concluded in favour of employees |
| Oct. 1 - Nov. 11 | 25 | Three Hills | Against reductions of from 70 cents to \$1.25 per ton on contract rates after the intro- duction of new machinery. | The strike was broken |

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1932- Dec. 26 - 1933 : Jan. 2 | 145 | Princeton | Discrimination of four miners who refused to work on Christmas Eve at Tulameen | The discharged men were reinstated. |
| Dec. 17, 1932 - Jan. 3 | 50 | Alexo | Men struck under M.W.U.C. for higher wages and better conditions | The strikers were evicted and returned on the employers' terms. |
| 1933 Jan. 7-16 | 125 | East Coulee | Non payment of wages | The Department of Mines arranged for payment of wages |
| Feb. 1 - Apr. | 400 | Anyox, B.C. (copper) | For restoration of previous wage rates, recognition of M.W.U.C. and improved conditions | The employer made small concessions on the price of room and board, but strikers were "deported" and the union was eventually broken |
| Mar. 9-10 | 240 | East Coulee | Nonpayment of wages | The mine closed for the season, but the Department of Mines got one installment of wages for the men. |
| Apr. 24- Sept. 16 | 600 | Drumheller, Wayne and East Coulee M.W.U.C. (United Front) | Against 12% wage cut negotiated by the U.M.W. and imposed in all camps | The mines were largely closed for the season, and the attempt to fight the wage cuts was unsuccessful. Agreements containing certain concessions, and providing for the payment of back wages were, however concluded at two collieries in East Coulee. |

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|--|--|
| 1933 May 25 | 170 | Blairmore | Hiring of non-M.W.U.C. personnel | Compromise reached |
| May 1 - 19 | 80 | Princeton | Against proposed wage cuts in violation of agreement | Wage cut was withdrawn |
| July 5 - August 14 | 240 | Canmore | Union demands that one miner be given another place due to excessive grades up which he was forced to push coal cars, and grievances over new working conditions | Representative from the Department of Labour found the grade not to be excessive and the men returned to work. |
| Sept. 10-21 | 100 | Wayne | Workers demanded the enforcement of the wage scale prevalent in the district | Demands granted |
| Oct. 11-19 | 85 | Wayne | Same as above, for higher rates for bone work and timbering. | The rates were increased and a compromise reached. |
| 1934 May 22 - 29 | 350 | Michel, B.C. | Miners struck in favour of the recognition of the M.W.U.C. and the equal division of work amongst all employees. | Miners returned to work without gaining recognition of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada. |

| | <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1934 | June 9 - July 14 | 1,073 | Flin-Flon (ore mine and smel- ter) | Miners and smelter wor- kers struck for restora- tion of previous wage scale; and recognition of the M.W.U.C. | After intervention by the Provincial Government, the employer agreed to reduce wage cuts by 50%, but the M.W.U.C. was not recognized. |
| | June 12- August | 500 | Rouyn- Noranda, Quebec (Ore Mine and smelter) | Miners and smelter wor- kers struck for 10% wage increase, and recognition of the M.W.U.C. | By June 20, picketing became ineffective, the union being smashed thereafter. |
| | June 28 - August 27 | 11 | Alexo | Wage reduction | The strike was defeated |
| | August 29 | 140 | Coalhurst | Division of work | Compromise settlement |
| | July 6 - Sept. 20 | 41 | Saunders' Creek | Wage reduction | The wage reduction was defeated |
| | July 19 | 200 | Corbin, B.C. | Division of work, and against wage cuts. | In employees' favour |

| | <u>Date</u> | <u>Approximate No. Involved</u> | <u>Location</u> | <u>Grievance</u> | <u>Settlement</u> |
|------|---------------|---------------------------------|------------------|---|---|
| 1934 | Nov. 5-21 | 500 | Cumberland, B.C. | Demands for increases by haulage men, decreases in prices for coal, rent and supplies | After the employer threatened to close the mine, the M.W.U.C. local accepted a compromise settlement. |
| 1935 | From Jan. 21 | 220 | Corbin | Demands for better working conditions, and equal division of work | The mine was closed permanently on May 7, and the community was dispersed during the next year. |
| | Aug. 7 and 12 | 500 | Cumberland, B.C. | Against introduction of piece rates on datal men, and alleged discrimination | The miners went back to work pending the report of a Conciliation Board, which later found in favour of the employer. |

APPENDIX D
"ETHNICITY"

Appendix D, Table 1.

"Nationality of mine workmen in Alberta by Divisions, 1925"

| | <u>C.N.P.</u> | <u>Lethbridge</u> | <u>Drumheller</u> | <u>Mountain Park</u> |
|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Anglo-Saxon | 45% | 42% | 63% | 42.5% |
| Slovak | 23 | 26 | 10 | 11 |
| Italian | 14.5 | 15 | 3 | 17.5 |
| Ukrainian | n. l. | n. l. | 11 | 10 |
| Fr./Belgian | 7 | n. l. | n. l. | n. l. |
| Serbian | n. l. | n. l. | n. l. | 13 |
| Russian | 2 | 3 | 5 | n. l. |
| Austrian | n. l. | n. l. | n. l. | 2 |
| Finnish | n. l. | n. l. | 1 | n. l. |
| Polish | n. l. | 3 | n. l. | n. l. |
| Other European | 8.5 | 8 | 7 | 4 |
| Japanese | n. l. | 3 | n. l. | n. l. |

n. l. Not Listed. As the figures come from percentages reported from each division, and not absolute figures, no totals can be given.

Source: Report of the Alberta Coal Commission, 1925, p. 180.

"Nationalities of Workers in the Alberta Coal Industry, 1931."

| | British | French | German & Austrian | Other Cen- tral Euro- pean | Dutch | Eastern European | Italian | Scandi- navian | Chinese & Japanese | Indian | Total |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|---------------------|---------|-------------------|--------------------------|--------|-------|
| Total | 3,106 | 141 | 505 | 1,459 | 21 | 1,819 | 678 | 196 | 60 | 16 | 8,176 |
| Owners & Managers | 155 | 4 | 7 | 2 | - | 7 | 6 | 3 | - | - | 188 |
| Foremen & Overseers | 309 | 4 | 6 | 6 | - | 5 | 9 | 7 | - | - | 347 |
| Haulage, Drivers Cagers, etc. | 110 | 4 | 31 | 76 | 1 | 72 | 24 | 16 | - | 1 | 330 |
| Miners | 1,939 | 98 | 341 | 1,062 | 16 | 1,439 | 430 | 125 | 4 | 11 | 5,619 |
| Labourers | 490 | 30 | 107 | 278 | 3 | 258 | 184 | 45 | 28 | 4 | 1,429 |
| Other | 103 | 1 | 13 | 35 | 2 | 38 | 25 | -- | 28 | -- | 263 |

Appendix D, Table 3 "Nationalities of Workers in the British Columbia Coal Industry, 1931."

| | British | French | German & Austrian | Other Central European | Dutch | Eastern European | Italian | Scandinavian | Chinese & Japanese | Indian | Total |
|-------------------------------|---------|--------|-------------------|------------------------|-------|------------------|---------|--------------|--------------------|--------|-------|
| Total | 2,381 | 24 | 107 | 514 | 1 | 290 | 386 | 53 | 371 | 6 | 4,172 |
| Owners & Managers | 36 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 36 |
| Foremen & Overseers | 136 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 139 |
| Haulage, Drivers Cagers, Etc. | 98 | - | 4 | 6 | - | 11 | 4 | 2 | 8 | - | 133 |
| Miners | 1,712 | 20 | 83 | 358 | - | 238 | 293 | 35 | 229 | 3 | 3,004 |
| Labourers | 348 | 4 | 19 | 145 | - | 37 | 87 | 12 | 130 | 2 | 791 |
| Other | 51 | - | - | 5 | 1 | 4 | - | - | 4 | 1 | 69 |

Source: Dominion Census, 1931 - Table 3
 Volume VII, pp. 544-545

Dominion Census, 1931
 Volume VII, pp. 532-533 - Table 2

| | "British Races" | Dutch | French & Belgian | German & Austrian | Finnish | Other Scandinavian | Czech & Slovak | Italian | Polish | Russian | Ukrainian | Chinese & Japanese | Other | Total |
|-------------|-----------------|-------|------------------|-------------------|---------|--------------------|----------------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|--------------------|-------|-------|
| <u>1931</u> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Blairmore | 662 | 3 | 217 | 28 | 37 | 33 | 222 | 297 | 85 | 10 | 7 | 21 | 7 | 1,629 |
| Frank | 59 | - | 27 | 2 | - | 3 | 154 | 7 | 6 | - | - | - | 10 | 268 |
| Coleman | 928 | 3 | 72 | 29 | 13 | 27 | 170 | 185 | 159 | 40 | 11 | 23 | 44 | 1,704 |
| Fernie | 1,589 | 20 | 63 | 137 | 5 | 32 | 124 | 511 | 162 | 20 | 10 | 25 | 34 | 2,732 |

Source: Dominion Census, 1931.
Volume II, pp. 466-467; 482-483

| | <u>Blairmore</u> | <u>Coleman</u> |
|--------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Anglo-Saxon | 40.6% | 54.4% |
| French/Belgian | 13.3 | 4.2 |
| Other W. European | 1.9 | 1.8 |
| Finno/Scandinavian | 4.2 | 2.3 |
| Italian | 18.2 | 10.8 |
| Czecho-Slovak | 13.6 | 9.9 |
| Polish | 5.2 | 9.3 |
| Other E. Europeans | 1.1 | 4.1 |
| Oriental | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Other | <u>.7</u> | <u>2.0</u> |
| | 100% | 100% |

Appendix D, Table 5. "A comparison of ethnic origins of the populations of Blairmore and Coleman, Alberta, 1931."

Source: See Appendix D, Table 4.

Appendix E

"Union Referenda, elections and
Strike Votes, 1919-1936"

| <u>Local Union</u> | <u>For O.B.U.</u> | <u>Against</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% for O.B.U.</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Bellvue | 276 | 14 | 290 | 95 |
| Blairmore | 254 | 3 | 257 | 98 |
| Coleman | 247 | 2 | 249 | 99 |
| Corbin | 54 | 4 | 58 | 93 |
| Fernie | 583 | 23 | 606 | 96 |
| Hillcrest | 313 | 11 | 324 | 96 |
| Michel | 322 | 12 | 334 | 96 |
| Federal | 76 | 1 | 77 | 98 |
| Lethbridge | 213 | 8 | 221 | 96 |
| Cadomin | 71 | 3 | 74 | 96 |
| Mountain Park | 102 | 2 | 104 | 98 |
| Canmore | 193 | 5 | 198 | 97 |
| Wayne | 178 | 1 | 179 | 99 |
| Rosedale | 54 | -- | 54 | 100 |
| Other Locals Reporting | 643 | 8 | 651 | 98 |
| Total | 3,579 | 97 | 3,676 | 97 |

Appendix E, Table 1 "The One Big Union Referendum in District 18"

Source: The District Ledger (Fernie), May 9, 1919

| <u>Local</u> | <u>For</u> | <u>Against</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% For</u> |
|---------------|------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Nacmine | 26 | 19 | 55 | 65 |
| Midlandvale | 142 | 12 | 154 | 92 |
| Atlas | 198 | 76 | 274 | 72 |
| W. Commercial | 147 | -- | 147 | 100 |
| Jewel | 31 | 12 | 43 | 72 |
| Star Aerial | 41 | -- | 41 | 100 |
| Rosedale | 46 | 6 | 52 | 88 |
| Rosedeer | <u>42</u> | <u>7</u> | <u>49</u> | <u>85</u> |
| | 683 | 132 | 815 | 84% |

Appendix E, Table 2.

"Referendum held on affiliation with The Red Deer Valley Miners' Union, June 21, 1925."

Source: Western Canada Coal Review, July, 1925.

Appendix E, Table 3.

The membership of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada (excluding Westville, Nova Scotia) September, 1939; and the results of the District elections for President, August 18, 1930.

Source: PAO, CPC Files: X; 22, 10C2075, 10C2081

Table follows...

Sloan - James Sloan, left-wing candidate for President.

Wright - William White, candidate of the right-wing.

| | <u>Membership</u> | <u>For Sloan</u> | <u>For White</u> | <u>Spoiled</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% for Sloan</u> | <u>%Voting</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Bellevue | 355 | 80 | 12 | 2 | 94 | 85 | 26 |
| Blairmore | 323 | 190 | 75 | 14 | 279 | 68 | 86 |
| Coleman | 534 | 154 | 293 | 23 | 470 | 33 | 88 |
| Corbin | 180 | 98 | 52 | 5 | 155 | 63 | 86 |
| Coalhurst | 452 | 228 | 105 | 10 | 343 | 66 | 76 |
| Federal | 16 | 9 | 6 | -- | 15 | 60 | 94 |
| Lethbridge | 617 | 188 | 171 | 13 | 372 | 50 | 60 |
| Shaughnessy | 37 | 54 | 14 | -- | 68 | 79 | -- |
| Bryan Mile 32 | 23 | -- | -- | -- | --- | | no vote |
| Cadomin | 285 | -- | -- | -- | --- | | no vote |
| Foothills | 102 | 56 | 32 | -- | 88 | 64 | 86 |
| Luscar | 195 | 87 | 35 | 4 | 126 | 69 | 65 |
| Mercoal | 60 | -- | -- | -- | --- | | no vote |
| Robb Mile 33 | 46 | 41 | 13 | + | 54 | 76 | 85 |
| Nordegg | 263 | 111 | 74 | 6 | 191 | 58 | 73 |
| Saunders' Creek | 63 | 44 | 25 | -- | 69 | 64 | -- |
| Canmore | 260 | 177 | 83 | 2 | 262 | 67 | -- |
| Wayne | 174 | 64 | 68 | 2 | 134 | 48 | 77 |
| Total in Locals voting | 3,673 | 1,581 | 1,058 | 81 | 2,720 | 58 | 74% |
| Total Membership | 3,985 | -- | -- | -- | | | |

| <u>Local</u> | <u>For</u> | <u>Against</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% for W.U.L.</u> |
|-----------------|------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Bellevue | 144 | 74 | 218 | 66 |
| Blairmore | 234 | 20 | 254 | 92 |
| Coleman | 294 | 144 | 438 | 67 |
| Corbin | 107 | 91 | 198 | 54 |
| Coalhurst | 237 | 42 | 279 | 85 |
| Shaughnessy | 60 | -- | 60 | 100 |
| Cadomin | 134 | 52 | 186 | 72 |
| Luscar | 72 | 64 | 136 | 53 |
| Robb | 17 | -- | 17 | 100 |
| Nordegg | 142 | 41 | 183 | 77 |
| Saunders' Creek | 15 | 9 | 24 | 62 |
| Canmore | 144 | 68 | 212 | 68 |
| Wayne | 127 | 23 | 150 | 85 |
| Total | 1,727 | 641 | 2,368 | 73 |

Appendix E, Table 4, "The Workers' Unity League Referendum,
May 11, 1931".

Source: Report on Labour Organizations in Canada, 1931, p. 175.

| | <u>For M.W.U.C.</u> | <u>For Home Local</u> | <u>Spoiled</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% for M.W.U.</u> |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>March 30, 1928</u> - Under pressure from C.P.R. during negotiations. | 358 | 122 | 2 | 482 | 74 |
| <u>December 10, 1930</u> - After M.W.U.C. withdrawal from A.C.C.L. | 288 | 339 | - | 627 | 46 |
| <u>February 10, 1931</u> - Same as below | 282 | 280 | - | 562 | 50 |
| <u>February 24, 1931</u> - After M.W.U.C. appeals to reconsider | 361 | 336 | - | 697 | 52 |
| <u>June 2, 1931</u> - After affiliation to the W.U.L. | 303 | 191 | - | 494 | 61 |
| <u>January 5, 1932</u> - After M.W.U.C. declared "illegal" in Estevan Trials. | 259 | 275 | - | 534 | 48 |

Appendix E, Table 5. "Lethbridge Miners' Union: Votes on Affiliation with the Mine Workers' Union of Canada".

Source: Glenbow Archives, District 18 Collection. "Minutes, Lethbridge Miners' Union, 1928-1932".

| <u>Local</u> | <u>Affiliation</u> | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> | <u>Spoiled</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Yes</u> |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Bellevue | M.W.U.C. | 189 | 13 | 8 | 210 | 90 |
| Blairmore | " | 228 | 24 | 5 | 257 | 90 |
| Coleman | " | 265 | 57 | -- | 322 | 82 |
| Coalhurst | " | 183 | 78 | -- | 261 | 70 |
| Luscar | " | 126 | 78 | 4 | 208 | 61 |
| Robb | " | 15 | -- | -- | 15 | 100 |
| Nordegg | " | 147 | 74 | -- | 221 | 66 |
| Saunders' Creek | " | 26 | 10 | -- | 36 | 72 |
| Canmore | " | 128 | 121 | 4 | 253 | 50 |
| Wayne | M.W.U.C./U.M.W. | 243 | 3 | -- | 246 | 98 |
| Drumheller | U.M.W. | 158 | -- | -- | 158 | 100 |
| East Coulee | " | 132 | 3 | -- | 135 | 98 |
| Rosedale | " | 132 | 1 | . | 133 | 99 |
| Edmonton | " | 62 | 2 | 1 | 65 | 97 |
| Total | 14 locals | 2,034 | 464 | 22 | 2,520 | 80 |

Appendix E, Table 6
 "United Front Strike
 Vote, April 11, 1932."

The vote was held following proposals for wage cuts in the Drumheller region. The ballot read as follows: "Are you in favour..(of) a General-District Strike in the event of the coal operators trying to put a wage reduction into effect in any camp?"

Source: Worker, April 16, 1932

| | <u>For the U.M.W. of A.</u> | <u>Against</u> | <u>Spoiled</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% for U.M.W. of A.</u> |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| Bellevue | 196 | 42 | -- | 238 | 82 |
| Blairmore | 246 | 14 | 3 | 263 | 93.5 |
| Corbin | 104 | -- | -- | 104 | 100. |
| Fernie | 59 | 69 | 1 | 129 | 46 |
| Michel | 354 | 35 | 9 | 398 | 89 |
| Coalhurst | 68 | 5 | -- | 73 | 93 |
| Lethbridge | 137 | 25 | -- | 162 | 84.5 |
| Cadomin | 100 | 32 | -- | 132 | 76 |
| Nordegg | 143 | 48 | 5 | 196 | 73 |
| Saunders' Creek | 25 | 19 | -- | 44 | 57 |
| Canmore | 114 | 78 | 1 | 193 | 59 |
| Wayne | 77 | 14 | -- | 91 | 85 |
| Cumberland | 237 | 5 | -- | 242 | 98 |
| Total | 1,860 | 386 | 19 | 2,265 | 82 |

Appendix E, Table 7. "The 'Unity' Referendum, June 30, 1936."

Source: Tom McEwen, The Forge Glows Red, p. 150.

Appendix F

"Voting Patterns in the Crows' Nest
Pass during the Depression."

| <u>Poll</u> | <u>Stubbs (Labour)</u> | <u>Sudworth (Communist)</u> | <u>Cruikshank (Independent)</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Labour</u> | <u>% Communist</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Bellevue | 154 | 184 | 113 | 451 | 34 | 40 |
| Blairmore | 86 | 120 | 364 | 570 | 15 | 21 |
| Coleman | 251 | 217 | 236 | 704 | 36 | 30 |
| Frank | 3 | 71 | 36 | 110 | 3 | 65 |
| Hillcrest | 83 | 79 | 181 | 343 | 24 | 23 |
| Total Pass | 577 | 671 | 930 | 2,178 | 26 | 31 |
| Canmore | 120 | 87 | 123 | 330 | 36 | 26 |
| Other Polls | 123 | 28 | 551 | 702 | 17 | 4 |
| Total Riding | 820 | 786 | 1,604 | 3,210 | 25 | 24 |

Appendix F, Table 1

"Returns: Rocky Mountain Riding: Alberta Provincial Election, June 18, 1930."

Source: Lethbridge Herald, June 19, 1930.

| <u>Poll</u> | <u>McNeil (Liberal)</u> | <u>Duke (Socred)</u> | <u>Cruikshank (Independent)</u> | <u>Murphy (Communist)</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Socred</u> | <u>% Communis</u> |
|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Bellevue | 40 | 355 | 25 | 269 | 689 | 51.5% | 39 |
| Blairmore | 116 | 392 | 44 | 314 | 866 | 45 | 36 |
| Coleman | 289 | 748 | 34 | 119 | 1,190 | 63 | 10 |
| Frank | 8 | 64 | 4 | 93 | 169 | 38 | 55 |
| Hillcrest | 15 | 298 | 46 | 93 | 452 | 66 | 20.5 |
| TOTAL PASS | 468 | 1,857 | 153 | 888 | 3,366 | 55 | 26 |
| Canmore | 80 | 315 | 11 | 109 | 515 | 61 | 21 |
| Other Polls | 486 | 820 | 214 | 84 | 1,604 | 51 | 5 |
| TOTAL RIDING | 1,034 | 2,992 | 378 | | 5,485 | 54.5 | 20 |

Appendix F, Table 2

"Returns: Rocky Mountain Riding; Alberta Provincial Election, August 27, 1935."

Source: Lethbridge Herald, August 28, 1935

Results of the Municipal Elections, 1933BlairmoreFOR MAYOR

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----|
| <u>William Knight</u> | (Workers' Slate) | 403 |
| A. E. Ferguson | (Citizens' League) | 380 |

FOR COUNCIL

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----|
| <u>Joe Krkosky</u> | (Workers' Slate) | 390 |
| <u>J. Aschacker</u> | " | 389 |
| <u>Albert Olsen</u> | " | 388 |
| William McVey | (Citizens' League) | 370 |
| P. Montabetti | " | 376 |
| D. Oliver | " | 378 |

FOR SCHOOL BOARD

| | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----|
| <u>Robert Horne</u> | (Workers' Slate) | 438 |
| <u>Sam Patterson</u> | " | 429 |
| <u>Alf Bossetti</u> | " | 434 |
| <u>Sam Bannan</u> | (Citizens' League) | 433 |
| <u>J. E. Gillis</u> | " | 426 |
| <u>J. A. McDonald</u> | " | 301 |

ColemanFOR COUNCIL

| | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|-----|
| <u>J. M. Allan</u> | (Citizens' League) | 652 |
| <u>Arthur Reid</u> | " | 598 |
| <u>George Evans</u> | " | 591 |
| <u>George Hope</u> | " | 542 |
| <u>Frank Barrington</u> | (Independent) | 504 |
| <u>Harold Chamberlain</u> | " | 464 |
| <u>Archie Fraser</u> | (Workers' Slate) | 337 |
| <u>Alice Sudworth</u> | " | 314 |
| <u>Wm. Antrobus</u> | " | 258 |
| <u>J. D. Holly</u> | " | 140 |

FOR COUNCIL

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|-----|
| <u>Wm. Barrows</u> | (Citizens' League) | 346 |
| <u>Wm. Chapman</u> | " | 339 |
| <u>Andrew Harry</u> | " | 307 |
| Walter Blyth | (Workers' Slate) | 92 |
| Steve Danyluk | " | 77 |
| A. Holyk | " | 71 |

Appendix F, Table 3.

Wm. Knight = elected

287...

| | <u>Total Votes Cast</u> | <u>Votes Cast for the "Workers' Slates"</u> | <u>% for "Workers' Slate"</u> |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Blairmore | 5,535 | 3,300 | 60% |
| Coleman | 5,653 | 1,289 | 23% |

Appendix F, Table 3a

Source: Lethbridge Herald, February 14, 1933

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