

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM AND THE
OKLAHOMA COAL INDUSTRY,
1870-1935

By

STEVEN LEE SEWELL

Bachelor of Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1984

Master of Arts
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
1986

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
July, 1992

COPYRIGHT

by

Steven Lee Sewell

July, 1992

INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM AND THE
OKLAHOMA COAL INDUSTRY,
1870-1935

Thesis Approved:

W. Roger Bills

Thesis Adviser

George F. Sewsbury

Richard A. Hines

George O. Carney

Thomas C. Collins

Dean of the Graduate College

PREFACE

The development of industrial unionism in Oklahoma's coal industry was a long and difficult process. First organized under the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, and in the 1890s under the United Mine Workers, the men who worked in the mines of Indian Territory, and later Oklahoma, toiled under some of the harshest conditions in the United States. Not only did they endure working in the most dangerous mines in the nation, but also the miners found little relief above ground. The communities in which the miners and their families lived were classic examples of the company town and all the outrages associated with that system.

These conditions led the miners to turn to unionism so they might have a say in their own working and living conditions. Through unionism the miners sought to improve safety in the mines, to earn a living wage, and to bring about the end of the company town system. At the beginning this seemed almost unachievable. The legal status of Indian Territory put the coal barons nearly beyond the law. In many ways, the coal barons were the law in Oklahoma's coal towns in the early years of the industry. Working in alliance with the authorities, whether they were Indian, state, or federal, the barons had mighty forces at their disposal. They turned to these forces often in their

recurring struggle with the miners. The coal belt of Oklahoma was the battleground for a classic conflict of labor and management. This industrial war, fought over a fifty year period, left many scars on both sides. But despite the long odds, the miners and their unions survived to the dying days of the industry. While Oklahoma's coal industry fell victim to competition, over-production, and the oil and gas industry in the 1920s and 1930s, the union persevered. Even when they were broken and scattered in 1894, and again in the late 1920s, the miners preserved the spirit of unionism. Both times they regrouped and lived on to fight another day. This dogged tenacity was typical among Oklahoma's coal miners. One had to be tough to survive in the mines and under the company town system. To ameliorate these harsh conditions, the miners turned to unionism. Bringing together miners from dozens of diverse nations and cultures, the union provided an umbrella for all those who toiled and lived in the coal towns.

This study will examine the development of industrial unionism in Oklahoma's coal industry from 1870 to 1935. This period encompasses the rise of the industry, its heyday, and decline. After a period of dormancy in the late 1920s, the union experienced a rebirth in 1931. With the onset of the New Deal and the pertinent sections of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the union became a permanent fixture in the coal fields of Oklahoma until the industry played out following World War Two. It is that

period from the beginnings of the industry in the 1870s to the mid-1930s and the advent of the New Deal that this study will examine.

In order to draw the most complete picture possible of life in Oklahoma's coal towns, this study draws from a multitude of sources. The papers of the United Mine Workers local at Krebs, housed in the Oklahoma State University Library Special Collections, provides a glimpse of the era from the perspective of the union local. From this material inferences on the day-to-day functions of the union local can be made. The Peter Hanraty Collection, housed in the Archives and Manuscripts Division of the Oklahoma Historical Society, gives insight into how the union functioned at the district level. Other important sources at the Oklahoma Historical Society were the Choctaw Tribal Papers, which present the Indian side of the story, and the Edwin Ludlow Papers, which offer details of events from the operators' perspective. Another important source was the extensive newspaper collection housed in the Oklahoma Historical Society building. The local newspapers of the coal towns were important in providing detail on the day-to-day life in these communities.

The Western History Collection at the University of Oklahoma was another important source for this study. Housed there are the Franklin Bache Papers. Bache was a leading independent operator in Oklahoma, and his papers give insight into that perspective of the industry.

The Catholic University of America Library Archives house other manuscript collections utilized in this work, including the John Mitchell Papers. Mitchell was president of the union in the 1890s and 1900s, one of the most important periods for the union. Also housed at the Catholic University Library Archives are the Mary Harris Jones Papers. "Mother" Jones often traveled through Oklahoma during this period, offering support and fiery speeches to the union faithful. I am indebted to Archivist Anthony Zito and his assistant, Sister Ann, S. S. J., for making my research at Catholic University a pleasant and rewarding experience.

The National Archives in Washington, D. C. houses federal government papers that were important to this study. Department of Interior records from the period illustrate the federal government's role when strikes occurred. These records reveal the close relationship between the coal barons and the federal government.

An equally close relationship is highlighted in the papers of Oklahoma's governors during the period from 1907 to 1935. Most important are the J. B. A. Robertson and Martin Trapp Papers, both housed at the State of Oklahoma Department of Libraries Building in Oklahoma City. Both governors' administrative papers illuminate their willingness to use the offices of state government to intervene on behalf of the operators.

I wish to express my gratitude to several members of

the Oklahoma State University History Department. I wish to thank Dr. Roger Biles for taking on the responsibilities associated with being my committee chairman. His careful editing, comments, and criticism were essential in the completion of this project. I also wish to thank Dr. Richard Rohrs. His enlightening expertise on historical methods and grammatical details helped polish the rough edges of the text. I am also indebted to Dr. George Carney, who opened my eyes to seeing history from a geographical perspective. Finally, I wish to thank Dr. George Jewsbury, who took time out from his busy schedule to sit on my committee. Thanks also to Brian Schulz for his cartography skills and assistance. I also wish to thank the Oklahoma State University History Department for the gracious awarding of a Ray Estep Fellowship and a Townsend Dissertation Fellowship, which helped finance my research.

I must also thank my parents, Donald and Myrtle Sewell. They provided both moral and financial support during the hard times. Last but not least, I must thank my wife Sharon for putting up with me during this project. Not only did she have to act as a sounding board for my ideas, but she put food on the table while I leaned over the computer keyboard. Without her love and support I might never have finished.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| I. "THE EARLY YEARS: 1870-1893" | 1 |
| Endnotes | 12 |
| II. "LIFE AND WORK IN OKLAHOMA'S COAL TOWNS" | 15 |
| Endnotes | 63 |
| III. "CHALLENGING THE COAL BARONS: THE STRIKE OF 1894" | 72 |
| Endnotes | 104 |
| IV. "THE EFFORT OF THEIR LIVES: THE SOUTHWEST STRIKE, 1899-1903" | 109 |
| Endnotes | 170 |
| V. "THE UNEASY TRUCE: 1903-1918" | 179 |
| Endnotes | 212 |
| VI. "A CHANGE IN THE WIND: THE STRIKES OF 1919 AND 1922" | 217 |
| Endnotes | 262 |
| VII. "GOTTERDAMMERUNG: THE STRIKE OF 1924-1927" | 270 |
| Endnotes | 295 |
| VIII. "FROM THE ASHES OF DEFEAT: THE STRIKES OF 1931 AND 1932" | 299 |
| Endnotes | 327 |
| XI. CONCLUSION | 331 |
| Endnotes | 341 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 342 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figure | Page |
|---|------|
| 1. Railroads and Coal Towns (1900) | 9 |
| 2. Oklahoma Coal Deposits | 17 |
| 3. Major Coal Mining Disasters | 22 |
| 4. Mine Strike-Related Unrest (1870-1935) . . . | 340 |

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS: 1870-1893

Nowhere did the robber barons of the Gilded Age exercise more control over their employees than did the coal operators of what was then Indian Territory. Beyond state government, nearly beyond the federal government, Indian Territory provided an opportunity for the coal barons to create an industrial situation molded according to their own wishes, needs, and philosophy. Easily dominating the rapidly-weakening Indian governments, the robber barons ran nearly unfettered in Indian Territory. The result was an industry that was a horror for those who worked in it. Laboring in isolated company towns, the miners had no say over many parts of their lives. Where they lived and shopped, where they worked, the conditions in which they worked, the wages they earned - the coal barons dictated all. Whenever they questioned the status quo, the miners met resistance from not only the operators, but from the Indian and federal governments. Few places were more suitable for the growth of industrial unionism than the coal towns of Indian Territory.

In 1903, as the miners were in the final stages of a

five-year strike, a union miner put his thoughts into verse. He declared that "I am a union miner living in a union camp.... The capitalist tells me that my needs they are but few.... I want to have a living, so I want a living wage ... I'm a union miner." This attitude was a result of thirty years under the coal barons' lash.¹

The folklore surrounding J. J. McAlester and his role in the origins of Oklahoma's coal industry is present in much of the literature on the topic. Early histories of the state successfully turned McAlester into a nearly mythical character. After the Civil War, McAlester acquired a map revealing the location of valuable coal deposits in the Choctaw Nation. After marrying into the tribe in order to gain legal access to the deposits, McAlester eventually parlayed his good luck and business acumen in the mercantile trade into a fortune. Although the presence of coal deposits in the region had been known for decades, McAlester's contribution was that he was the first to find commercial markets for the product.²

Commercial exploitation began with the arrival of railroads in Indian Territory. When McAlester learned that the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, a southern branch of the Union Pacific, was contemplating building a track through "Cross-Roads," where the California Trail crossed the Texas Road, he promptly displayed a wagon load of the area's coal to officials of the railroad at Parsons, Kansas.

"Cross-Roads," which was later to become McAlester, was where the rising entrepreneur had considerable investments. McAlester planned to convince the railroad's management of the superior nature of the region's coal, hoping it would weigh the scales to his advantage. Congressional railroad subsidies and McAlester's alluring offer of high-quality steam coal made the decision easy for the company's officials.³

First to penetrate the region, the M. K. & T. quickly came to dominate the Indian Territory coal industry. The M. K. & T. was part of a complex web of railroads controlled by Jay Gould. In fact, Gould's domination of the Indian Territory coal industry was so complete that a joke circulating around Wall Street at the time referred to "Jay Gould's railroad, his Territory, and his Indians." Loosely allied with Francis Gowen's Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railway, which opened up the coal fields between McAlester and Ft. Smith, Gould and Gowen were a potent force in the regional coal industry. But their dominance was not absolute. The Choctaw Nation's financial records indicate that by 1883 at least six railroads were doing business in Indian Territory.⁴

The M. K. & T. (Katy) railroad controlled the two largest mining companies in the Indian Territory coal industry. In the early 1870s McAlester sold his Oklahoma Mining Company to a larger concern that he and several

partners had just founded, the Osage Coal and Mining Company. Soon thereafter the Katy acquired an interest in the firm and by 1888 owned it outright. The Osage Coal and Mining Company developed mines at Krebs and McAlester. The company sold its product to the Katy and had a virtual monopoly on commercial coal mining in Indian Territory until 1881.⁵

The second major producer during the 1880s was the Atoka Coal and Mining Company. Also owned by Gould's Katy Railroad, the Atoka Coal and Mining Company operated mines at Savanna and Lehigh, supplying locomotive fuel to Texas railroads that Gould also owned. The company's operations at Savanna ceased after an explosion there killed eighteen miners. The company moved its entire operation at Savanna, including 135 company houses, to Lehigh.⁶

Indian Territory coal production mushroomed in the 1880s. In 1881, when the Atoka Coal and Mining Company was established, an estimated 150,000 tons were produced. By 1887, mines in the Choctaw Nation were producing over 600,000 tons annually. Production totaled over three-quarters of a million tons annually by the end of the decade, a five-fold increase. Development of the Indian Territory coal industry continued on into the 1890s at a rapid pace.⁷

In 1885, after a field survey disguised as turkey hunt, Edward D. Chadrick, a capitalist from Minneapolis, persuaded

another titan of the railroad industry, the Lehigh Valley Railroad, to build a line that would tap the coal fields around Wilburton. The result was the incorporation of the Choctaw, Coal and Railway Company in 1887 and the construction of a sixty-seven mile line between Wister and South McAlester that was completed in 1890. This road permitted development of the coal fields at Wilburton, Alderson, and Hartshorne. Financial trouble due to land speculation and poor management put the firm into receivership in 1891, and the railroad was reorganized as the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf in 1894. Francis Gowen, appointed as the firm's receiver during its financial trouble in 1891, became president of the reorganized C. O. & G. in 1894. Gowen of Philadelphia drew from his experiences in the Pennsylvania coal industry, where the Gowens brought in the infamous Pinkertons to infiltrate the Molly Maguires in the 1870s. The C. O. & G. remained the territory's largest producer until acquired by the Rock Island Railroad in 1902. Its mining subsidiary, the Rock Island Coal and Mining Company, continued to be one of the most powerful entities in Oklahoma's coal industry until the Depression. Other important railroads that entered Indian Territory and its coal industry during this period were the Kansas City Southern, the Midland Valley, the Frisco, and the St. Louis and San Francisco.*

By the turn of the century a well-developed railroad

network criss-crossed Indian Territory. The Fort Smith and Western, associated with Henry C. Frick, entered the Indian Territory from Fort Smith shortly after 1900. The railroad's subsidiary, the San Bois Coal and Mining Company, operated mines at McCurtain, first known as Chant. When the Denison and Washita Valley Railway Company completed a spur between Lehigh and Coalgate in 1889, it allowed the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company to develop coal properties at Coalgate and Midway. Later, the Sante Fe extended its lines to Lehigh and acquired an interest in the Coalgate field, one of the most important in the state. One smaller-scale line was the Split Log Railroad, which ran from Siloam Springs, Arkansas to the Indian Territory coal mining communities of Panama, Poteau, Howe, and Heavener. The railroad traversed a wooded region that supplied lumber for use in the coal industry as timbering material and railroad ties. While local Indians refused to work in the mines, they supplied much of the timber used in the mines.'

Smaller-scale independents operated among the huge railroad-associated mining companies. One of the most successful was Dr. D. M. Hailey, who owned and operated mines at Wilburton and Haileyville. Naming communities after themselves never troubled the coal barons, for they had few inhibitions about trumpeting to the world their role in the development of the region's coal industry.'

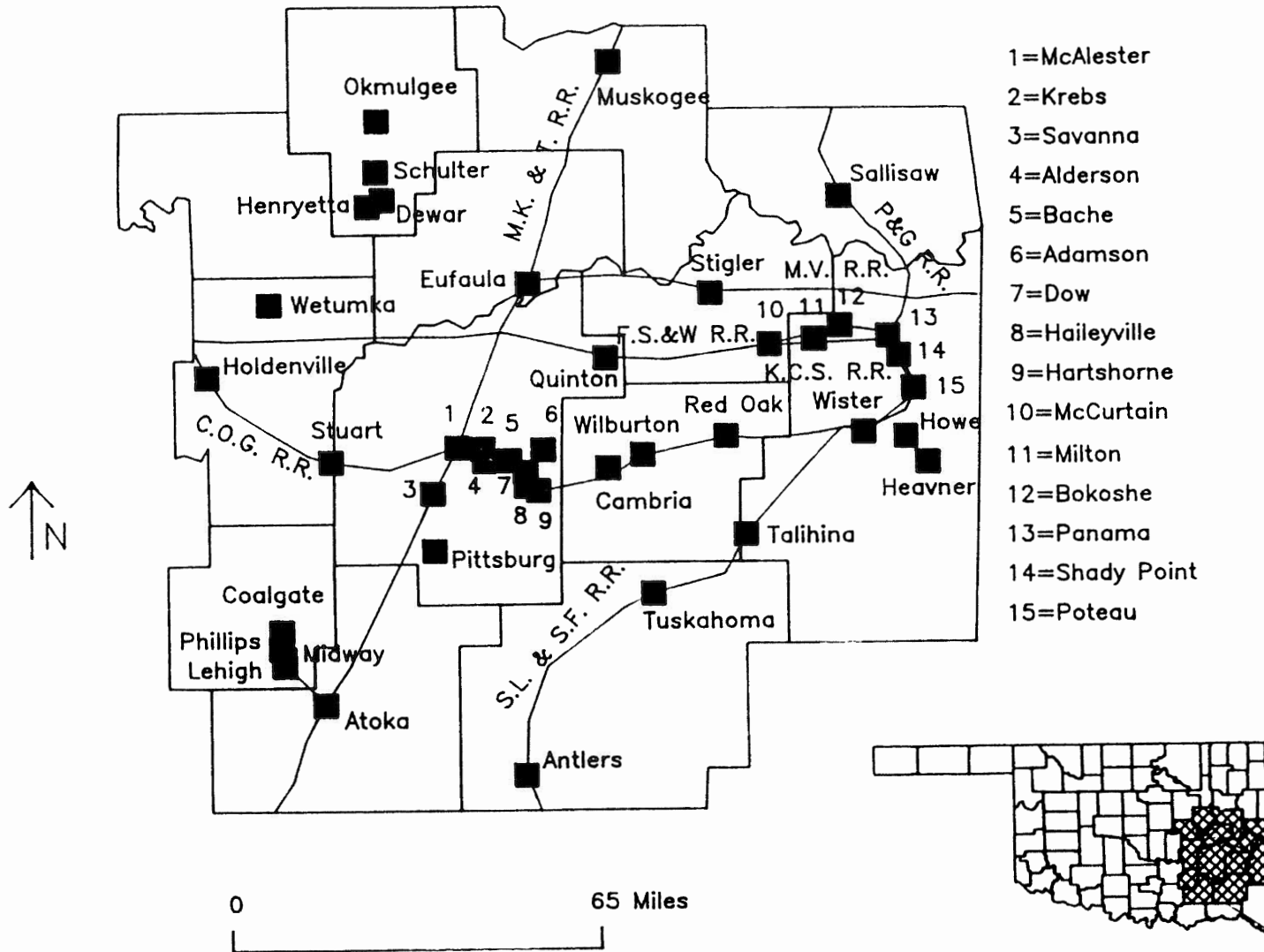
Many Indian Territory coal towns were named after the

owner or operator of the local mine. Haileyville, Dow, Wilburton, Adamson, Alderson, and Phillips are only a few examples. (See Figure 1.) Located on lands leased from the Choctaws, these towns were beyond the reach of government in many respects. One source argues that "these towns were entirely without civil government." In Indian Territory coal towns, the coal barons were the law."

The rapid development of the Indian Territory coal industry resulted in a labor shortage. With local Indians reluctant to work in the mines, operators sent agents to eastern states and Europe to recruit laborers. While the influx of labor drove wages down, many of these new laborers were experienced miners from Illinois, Pennsylvania, and the British Isles. Part of their cultural baggage was a strong sense of industrial unionism."

The first union local organized in Indian Territory was a Knights of Labor assembly at Midway. The local was established in August 1882 by two miners recently arrived from Gillespie, Illinois. The national organization nearly immediately granted a charter to the assembly. The local at Midway was a "mixed assembly," meaning laborers from all trades were welcome, but nearly all its members were coal miners. While the Knights could successfully bring together skilled and unskilled laborers, racial attitudes of the era hampered complete organization of the miners. British and American miners flocked to the Knights locals, but little

Figure 1. Railroads and Coal Towns (1900)



effort was expended to recruit Southeastern Europeans.¹³ Less than a year later, the first strike in Indian Territory occurred. After the operators slashed the wage scale, the miners struck on May 1, 1883. A joint-meeting of the Savanna and McAlester miners was held on the prairie near Savanna. At the meeting a committee was selected to appeal to Chief Jack McCurtain of the Choctaw Nation to intervene in their behalf. McCurtain's response was not what the miners had hoped for. He threatened to have the miners deported unless they called off the strike. McCurtain directed the committee to inform the striking miners to either return to work or "get ready to take an Arkansas bed." The miners then called off the month-long strike and returned to work at the reduced wage scale.¹⁴

Despite this initial setback, Indian Territory miners continued to organize. Additional Knights assemblies were established at Krebs, McAlester, and Savanna, with a total membership of fifteen hundred. Better organized, the miners again struck in 1884. This time they demanded a nine and one-half hour day and a uniform wage scale of \$2.50 a day, an increase of fifty cents over the prevailing rate. Not wanting to derail the increasing production from their mines, the operators immediately acceded to the miners' demands. The victory spurred the miners to continue their efforts to bring all Indian Territory miners into the union.¹⁵

The Knights continued to organize Indian Territory miners for the next decade. There were occasional work-stoppages, and the miners still lacked the capacity to bring the operators to the bargaining table, but the miners' numbers grew throughout the period. By 1889 nearly two thousand miners were in Indian Territory coal mines, most working for the three largest firms, the Osage Coal and Mining Company, the Atoka Coal and Mining Company, and the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company. These miners had organized into ten local assemblies. The Coalgate district was particularly well-organized with at least five assemblies at Coalgate, Lehigh, and Atoka.¹⁶

By the 1890s the Knights were entrenched in many Indian Territory coal towns. The miners continued to bide their time until they had garnered the strength needed to bring the operators to the bargaining table. In the interim, they continued to espouse the virtues of worker solidarity as they brought new arrivals into their union.

In the Spring of 1894 the United Mine Workers launched a nation-wide strike. At the same time the mine operators of Indian Territory announced a wage reduction. Responding to this action, the miners of the Territory, organized under the Knights of Labor, also struck. The result was the first large-scale labor disturbance in the history of Indian Territory.¹⁷

Endnotes

¹ Choctaw Gazette, 7 March 1903.

² Paul Nesbitt, "J. J. McAlester," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 11 (June 1933), 758-764; James Franklin Holden, "The B. I. T.: The Story of an Adventure in Railroad Building," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 11 (March 1933), 637-666; Star-Vindicator [McAlester], 3 February 1877.

³ Michael J. Hightower, "Cattle, Coal and Indian Land: A Tradition of Mining in Southeastern Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 62 (Spring 1984), 7-8; Roy Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1803-1906, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 216; H. Wayne Morgan and Anne Hodges, Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), 151; Philip A. Kalish, "Ordeal of the Oklahoma Coal Miners: Coal Mine Disasters in the Sooner State, 1886-1945," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 48 (Autumn 1970), 331-340; James D. Morrison, "Problems in the Industrial Progress and Development of the Choctaw Nation, 1865 to 1907," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 32 (Spring 1954) 84; J. A. Taff, "The Southwestern Coal Field," United States Geological Survey 22nd Annual Report, 1900-1901: Part III-i (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 386; J. A. Taff, "Progress of Coal Work in Indian Territory," United States Geological Survey Bulletin 260, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), 397; Undated Manuscript, Coal Folder, Box 3, Fred S. Barde Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Betty Poe, (ed.), History of Coal County, Oklahoma, (Coalgate: George B. Hill, n.d.), 12; Angie Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 2nd. ed., (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 117.

⁴ Frederick L. Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 26-32; Morgan and Hodges, Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History, 151; Matthew Josephson, The Robber Barons: The American Capitalists, 1861-1901, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934), 193-199; Document 1223, Minerals, Choctaw Tribal Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Gene Aldrich, "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952, 56-58.

⁵ Hightower, "Cattle, Coal, and Indian Land," 7-8; Morrison, "Development of the Choctaw Nation," 84; Bill Bryans, Historical Narrative for State Historic Preservation Office project cataloging coal mining related properties of Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, 1989, 7-8.

⁶ I. C. Gunning, When Coal Was King: Coal Mining in the Choctaw Nation, (n.p.: Eastern Oklahoma Historical Society, 1975), 11; Mineral Resources of the United States, 1882, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1883), 51-52; First Annual Report of the Coal Mining Inspector for Indian Territory, 53d Cong., 3d. sess., 1894, H. Doc. 1, Serial 3307, 507-509; Document 17949, Minerals, Choctaw Tribal Records.

⁷ United States Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States, 1887, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 244-45; Annual Report of the Oklahoma Department of Mines and Mining, [1932], 4.

⁸ Holden, "The B. I. T.," 645-649; Clyde E. Woolridge, Wilburton, I.T. and OK, (n.p., 1975), 23-25; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 32, 53; Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 124-125; Aldrich, "Oklahoma Coal Industry," 57-58; Joseph A. Taff and George I. Adams, "Geology of the Eastern Choctaw Coal Field, Indian Territory," United States Geological Survey 21st Annual Report, 1899-1900, (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 296; E. F. Hollibaugh, The "Dusky Diamond" Fields: A Tributary to Hartshorne, Haileyville, Gowen, Dow and Craig, (Hartshorne: The Hartshorne Critic Print, 1904), 5; Taff, "Progress of Coal Work in Indian Territory," 397-398; Franklin Bache, "The Arkansas-Indian Territory Coal-Field," The Engineering and Mining Journal, 76 (September 1903); Anthony Bimba, The Molly Maguires, (New York: International Publishers, 1932), 21; J. Walter Coleman, The Molly Maguire Riots: Industrial Conflict in the Pennsylvania Coal Region, (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), 28; Wayne G. Broehl, Jr., The Molly Maguires, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 102.

⁹ L. G. Knox, "Development of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma," M.S. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1949, 26; Pauline King, Haskell County History, (n.p., n.d.), 3-4; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 26; Donovan L. Hofsommer (ed.), Railroads in Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977), 31; Bill Bryans, Historical Narrative for State Historic Preservation Office project cataloging coal mining related properties in Pittsburg County, 1989, 11; Gunning, When Coal Was King, 30; Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 129.

¹⁰Woolridge, Wilburton, 30.

¹¹George H. Shirk, Oklahoma Place Names, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 4, 5, 66, 95, 166; Gittinger, The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 216.

¹²Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 129; Hightower, "Cattle, Coal, and Indian Land," 10; Blessing, The British and Irish in Oklahoma, xx; Edward A. Wieck, The American Miners' Association: A Record of the Origin of Coal Miners' Unions in the United States, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1940), 171; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 70.

¹³Clyde Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939), 4-6; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 28-29; Clyde Hamm, A History of Labor Legislation in Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), 14; Leon Fink, Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 219-223.

¹⁴Indian-Pioneer Papers, 105: 434, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁵Ryan, Rehabilitation, 28-29; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 5.

¹⁶Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 130; Oklahoma Times Journal, [Oklahoma City], 26 April 1894; Jonathan Garlock, The Knights of Labor Data Bank: User's Manual and Index to Local Assemblies, (Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, 1973), 25, 38, 63, 72, 82, 86-87, 166.

¹⁷David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Coal Miners' Union, (Silver Spring, MD: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939), 38-39; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 6.

CHAPTER II

LIFE AND WORK IN OKLAHOMA'S COAL TOWNS

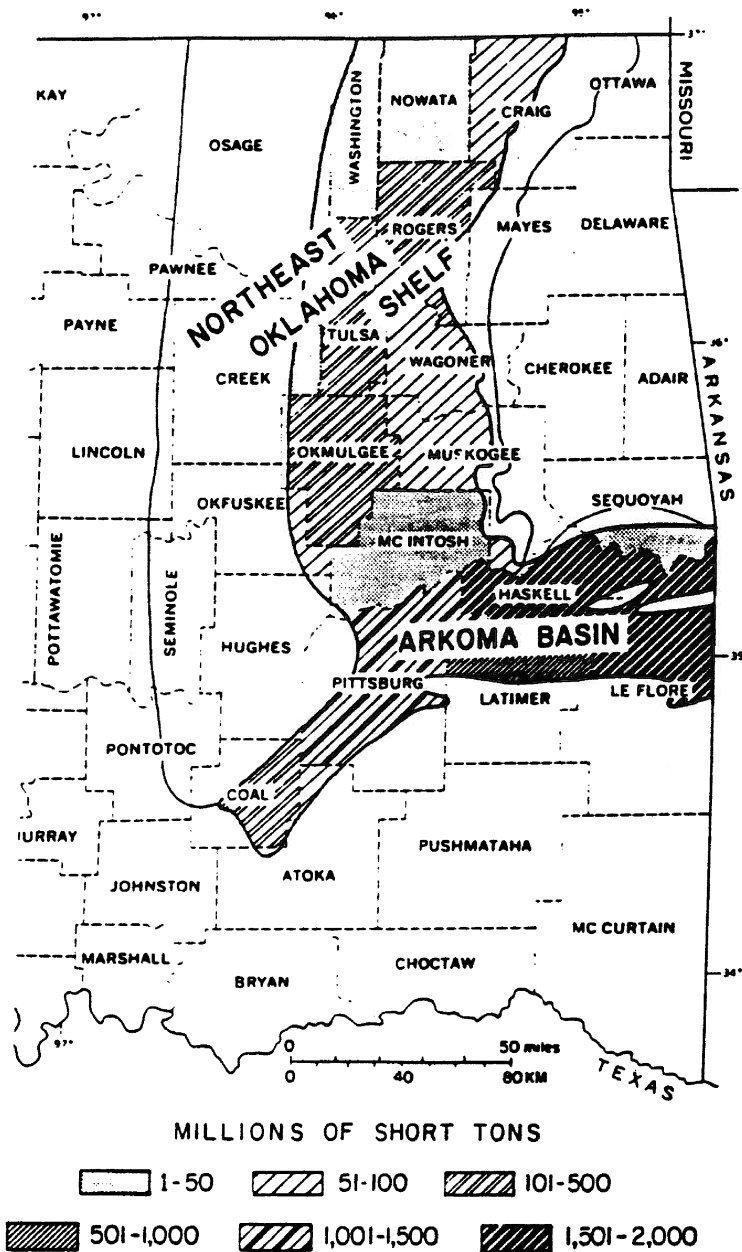
Oklahoma's coal miners worked in the most dangerous mines in the United States. As a result, the miners turned to industrial unionism to improve the conditions they toiled under. Add to their hazardous working conditions the classic outrages of the company town system, compounded by the unique situation that territorial status created and that the coal barons found easy to exploit, and the coal towns of Oklahoma were ripe for the growth of industrial unionism.

Oklahoma's coal belt stretches in an arc across the southeastern part of the state. The center of mining activity ran from Lehigh to McAlester, then turned northeast to McCurtain. (See Figure 2.) With few exceptions, the most notable being the Henryetta district, the lion's share of production came from this region.¹

Oklahoma's coal miners worked in three main types of mines. They worked in strip mines when the coal seam lay just below the surface. Plows and scrappers first removed the overburden, exposing the coal. Miners then broke up the coal with picks and shovels. Then they loaded the coal into

Figure 2. Oklahoma Coal Deposits

OKLAHOMA COAL DEPOSITS



Map outlining boundary of the Oklahoma part of the Western Region of the Interior Coal Province and showing distribution by county of remaining resources of bituminous coal in Oklahoma as of January 1, 1974 (Source: Oklahoma Geological Survey GM-17, p. 10).

railroad cars if it was for industrial use or onto wagons if the coal was for local consumption. If the coal was too far beneath the surface for strip mining, mine engineers sank a shaft to reach the coal seam. Sometimes shaft mines reached six hundred feet underground. If the coal outcropped on a hillside, miners reached the coal with a slope mine, following the coal seam as it went down and into the hill. Slope mines dominated in Oklahoma's coal belt. This was largely due to the hilly nature of the region, but it was a bonus for the account books, because slope mines required far less capital investment than shaft mines and their expensive haulage systems.²

The miners began by driving a "main entry" to reach the coal seam. Employing the room and pillar system, miners opened up side tunnels that veered off the main entry at right angles. They then cut rooms into the coal seam. Huge pillars of coal remained standing between rooms to provide roof support. Miners, typically two to a room, then began the process of blasting down and loading the coal into cars for transport to the surface. The miner began by undercutting the coal using a pick. Because of Oklahoma's relatively thin coal seams, this practice forced the miner to work while virtually lying on his side, often in standing water. Undercutting was a time-consuming process that often took two or three hours. After completing undercutting, the miner hand-drilled a powder-hole.³

Miners prepared a shot-cartridge by wrapping a stick with pieces of newspaper, then withdrawing the stick and filling the paper tube with black powder. After placing the shot-cartridge on the end of a five foot iron "miners needle," he inserted the shot-cartridge into the mouth of the charge-hole. This was a dangerous step, because sometimes gas collected in the charge-hole and the act of inserting the cartridge drove the gas out of the hole and into contact with the miner's open-flame lamp, igniting it. If everything went according to plan, the miner would then tamp in the cartridge with clay, sometimes in the early years with bits of coal, a very dangerous practice. Finally the miner would remove the needle and insert the squib, a portion of wax paper with a small amount of powder at its end that served as a fuse. After lighting the squib, the miner immediately departed for safer regions of the mine. The blast that followed routinely brought down a ton of coal.*

After the blast, the miner cleared away any rock and placed it in "gob" piles along the sides of the tunnels and in worked-out areas of the mine. Then the miner laid rails to his room and up to the face of the coal seam. Only then could the miner load lump coal into the coal cars, placing a metal tag on the car to inform the weighman aboveground who was to be credited for the load. The coal companies paid only for lump coal, sifting it through screens before

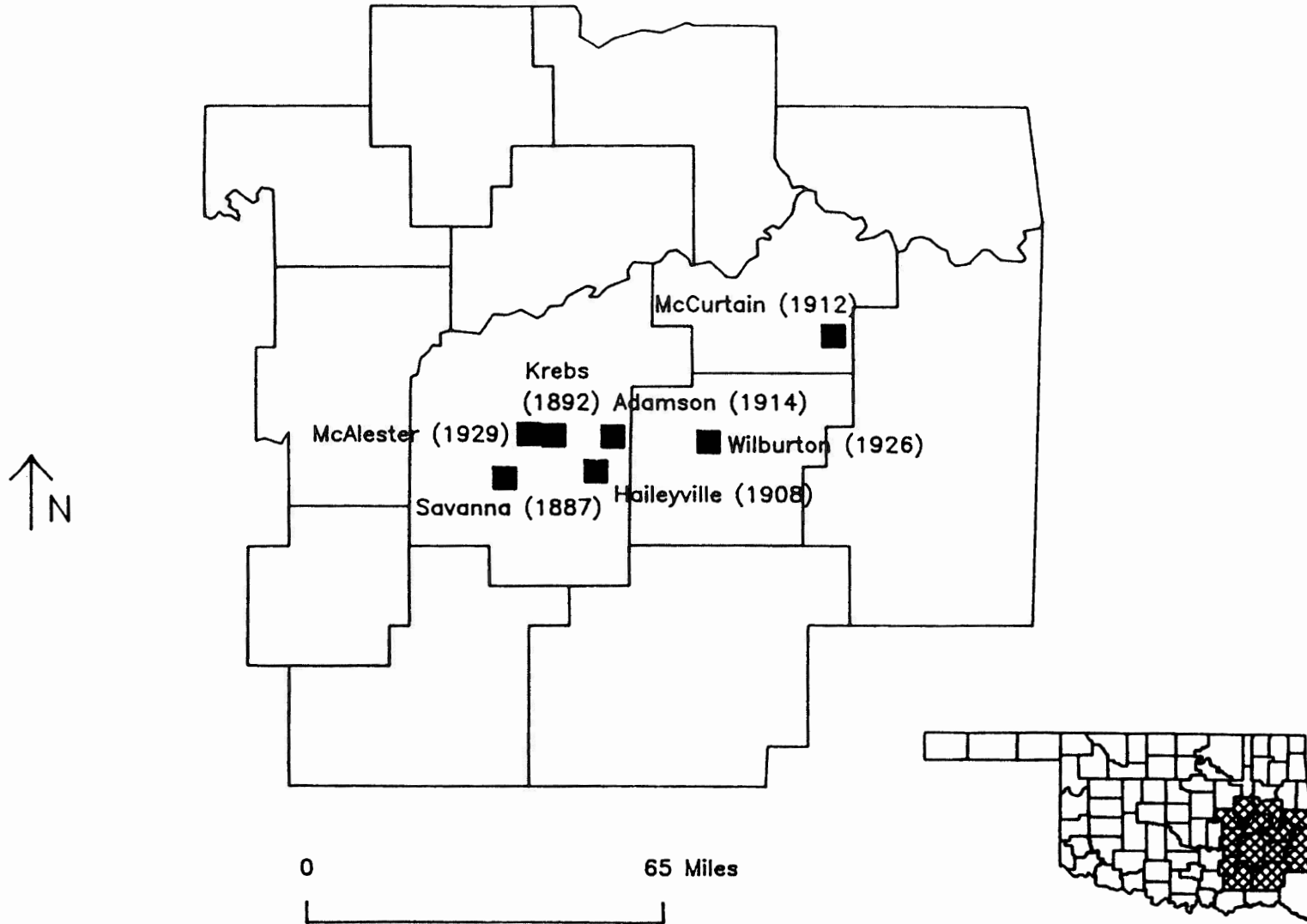
weighing. The practice of paying only for lump coal became a central grievance of the miners' strike of 1899-1903.⁵

Until 1900 Oklahoma's miners worked an average of nine-and-a-half hours daily, 250-300 days annually. Wages amounted to around \$2.50 per day. Most miners worked on a tonnage rate basis. Here lay a core problem that led to many accidents. Miners often ignored safety precautions because the tonnage rate was the basis of the wage system. This compounded an already dangerous situation. Eventually operators began hiring men as "day miners." They earned a flat daily rate. "Day miners" took care of many of the "dead work" tasks in the mine. These included laying of rails, timbering, and haulage, among many other tasks. Miners had long protested performing such jobs when they received no pay for them.⁶

Oklahoma's mines had the highest death rate in the nation per million tons produced. There were ten major disasters prior to 1914 that claimed a total of three hundred lives. (See Figure 3.) This figure is deceiving, as actually over seven hundred miners died in the mines of the district prior to 1914. This is because the term "disaster" is misleading. At least five miners had to die in an accident before it qualified as a "disaster." Most miners died alone or in small groups of two or three.⁷

On January 3, 1910, John Wollock arrived for his shift at the Rock Island Coal Mining Company's Mine Number Five at

Figure 3. Major Coal Mining Disasters



Alderson. He never finished the shift. According to the State Mine Inspector's report, Wollock died when he "was suffocated by afterdamp from an explosion caused by a windy shot." Almost as an afterthought, the three-line accident report noted that Wollock left a wife and six children. Wollock's death was just one of many that occurred during the early days of the coal industry in Oklahoma.⁹ Death or injury could come from a multitude of causes and occur literally in a flash.

In the early years of the coal industry in Oklahoma, ignorance created almost carefree attitudes in the mines. Blasting went on throughout the day, leaving the mines filled with coal dust and powder-smoke. During the 1870s and into the 1880s, miners prepared and fired their own shots, which routinely brought down a ton of coal.⁹ When the procedure did not go as planned, miners resorted to holding "on to the props and rails to keep from being blown away by windy shots at firing time." Miners coined the term "windy shot" to describe an explosion gone awry. Peter Hanraty, one of the first miners in Oklahoma and later a union leader and the state's first mine inspector, recalled that miners would laugh as coal dust from windy shots enveloped them.¹⁰

"Windy shots" occurred when the explosive charge was either under- or over-sized. Improper tamping had the same result. Too often sparks from the blast would ignite

"firedamp," a combination of methane gas and oxygen."¹¹

This led to a far larger and uncontrolled explosion.

"Blown-out shots" caused many accidents and were especially severe when they touched off a secondary explosion of the surrounding coal dust.¹²

Many accidents occurred during shot firing. This was an extremely dangerous vocation, simply the most perilous job in the mines.¹³ During a three-year period in the early 1880s, Pete Hanraty was the only individual among a group of twenty shot firers in the McAlester district who lived to tell about his experiences.¹⁴ The United States Bureau of Mines considered the job so hazardous that "only the most reckless men are willing to act as shot firers."¹⁵

A series of disasters of this type plagued Indian Territory's coal industry in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1885 an explosion at an Osage Coal and Mine Company mine near Krebs killed thirteen men. At Savanna in 1887 a windy shot touched off an explosion that killed eighteen men. Only six died in the initial accident, but afterdamp suffocated twelve would-be rescuers when they entered the mine. Large-scale mining at Savanna ceased after the explosion.¹⁶ A local poet penned "The Explosion" to document the tragedy.

It was ten o'clock at night
When this dreadful thing befell
The camp was wrapped in slumber
When there came that blast of hell.

We knew 'twas an explosion
Oh, Heaven, 'tis No. 2;
And men were buried there alive

Oh, God, what can we do? ...

Ten men, whom we should honor
While heroes we admire;
Unheeding danger's warning
The deadly damp and fire.¹⁷

On January 7, 1892 one of the worst accidents to occur in Oklahoma's coal mines struck at the Osage Coal and Mining Company's Mine Number Eleven at Krebs. In his haste to begin his duties, a shot firer began work while the men of the preceding shift were still in the mine, a violation of guidelines. The subsequent "windy shot" ignited the surrounding gas and coal dust, leading to an explosion that swept the entire mine. One hundred men lost their lives, and injuries crippled another two hundred. The disaster was the third worst mining accident in the United States prior to 1900.¹⁸

The scene left by the blast was hellish. Among the first to view the gory results of the explosion was Peter Hanraty.¹⁹ Three hundred and fifty men had been in the mine at the time of the explosion, most congregated at the bottom of the shaft, waiting for the cage to lift them to the surface. One report stated that "the foot of the shaft is one mass of dead bodies." The Kingfisher Free Press noted that "limbs, arms and headless bodies were stacked in a pile and only five out of twenty-four [found up to that point] could be identified. Six small boys who attended the fans were mutilated so badly that their own parents could not recognize them and they will be buried side by side."²⁰

Miners came from as far as Lehigh, fifty miles away, to act as emergency workers. They carried the injured to company houses and private residences that served as makeshift hospitals.²¹

A local songwriter commemorated the Krebs disaster with the following:

'Neath the ground in the coal mines,
In damp and darkness drear,
Where God's sunlight never shines,
Grim death is watching there.

But duck diamonds we must dig,
To buy the children bread,
In danger work, we cannot beg,
And work is poorly paid.

Death watches for a careless hand,
To light a fatal blast,
He crouches in the crumbling roof
And fires the dreadful gas. ...

Pity the ones left desolate
The children and the wife.²²

Following the Krebs disaster the residents of Indian Territory demanded appointment of a federal mine inspector. Congress had passed an act in 1891 that created the post, but the Harrison administration never filled the position. John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers of America by the end of the decade, applied for the position, but Harrison selected Luke Bryan, who both the Grover Cleveland and William McKinley administrations retained. With support from Choctaw Chief Green McCurtin, Bryan remained the mine inspector for Indian Territory until 1901 when he entered private business.²³

The effectiveness of the office of the federal mine inspector for Indian Territory was questionable. The position produced few concrete results. The inspector's duties were more as a chronicler than as an inspector. The mine inspector annually sent a comprehensive report to the Secretary of the Interior, but it was little more than a listing of the previous year's accidents and production figures. Accidents continued to increase.⁸⁴

Despite resistance from the operators, changes did occur in the shot firing process in Indian Territory mines. Miners had fired their own shots in shaft mines until 1885 and in slope mines as late as 1892, but by 1897 operators employed men specifically as shot firers "in most of the mines that were dusty."⁸⁵ Still, in 1902 The South McAlester Capital reported that operators "do not regard the firing of shots during the day as dangerous to the men at work below."⁸⁶ Despite some operators' views on the subject, they met with the federal mine inspector and the miners on December 1, 1904. In this meeting the operators adopted guidelines regulating shot firing, but for the most part they disregarded these rules due to a lack of an enforcement mechanism.⁸⁷ Strict regulation would come only with statehood.

Explosions were not the only threat to Oklahoma's coal miners, for there were a variety of gases or damps that endangered them. The term "damp" probably derived from the

German word dampf, meaning vapors or gases.²⁸ Methane was a constant threat. Trapped in pockets, methane seeps into mines, occasionally under great pressure. Methane burns with a blue flame. Alone it will not support combustion, but when mixed with oxygen it became "firedamp," a highly explosive mixture that ignited with the slightest spark. "Firedamp" collected near the roof at the face of the coal seam. Miners detected "firedamp" with safety lamps that flared harmlessly when gas was present.²⁹

Another gaseous threat was "white damp." Created in "firedamp" explosions but also during routine blasting, "white damp" was a noxious mix of gases composed mostly of carbon monoxide. "White damp" causes drowsiness, stupor, and acute back pains followed by delirium. A concentration of 1 percent will cause instant death. Miners discovered its presence by the faint smell of violets. When ignited "white damp" also burned with a blue flame.³⁰

More common was "black damp," also known as "choke-damp." Actually carbon dioxide, "black damp" in small doses causes numbness, joint aches, nausea, headache, and choking; greater amounts causes death by suffocation. While colorless and odorless, miners detected it by its "peculiar sweetish taste," but only "when inhaled in large quantities." Miners also occasionally broke into pockets of "stink damp" (hydrogen sulfide).³¹

Miners used the term "afterdamp" to describe the

combination of "white" and "black" damp left in a mine after an explosion. "Afterdamp" caused unconsciousness in seconds and death so suddenly that men died still clutching their tools, even their lunch.³² It was one of the greatest threats miners faced. Chief Mine Inspector Hanraty estimated "that fifty percent of the shot-firers" killed in accidents died "from the effects of afterdamp."³³

Miners surrounded by these gases commented later that they were "amongst the damp." Miners referred to these various "damps" in an almost mystical, spiritual manner. To be "amongst the damp" was to experience something only a miner could. Coupled with the strong, skilled artisanal attitudes miners held about their craft, these beliefs led to a certain aura around the profession of coal mining. Many old miners noted that although they would never want their sons to find employment in the mines, they were proud to have been miners.³⁴

Oklahoma's coal mines were notorious for their high concentrations of explosive methane - so high that many mines often had to be closed due to presence of the gas. One of the most infamous was Rock Island's Mine Number Eight near Hartshorne. The State Mine Inspector's reports referred to the mine as "one of the largest mines in the district," but also "one of the most gaseous." Year after year the mine inspectors referred to the mine as "very gaseous." With this omnipresent danger, it was only a

matter of time before an accident occurred. In 1910 a methane gas explosion there killed ten men.³⁵ Finally, after repeated accidents, the operators abandoned the mine, unable to overcome the problem of inadequate ventilation. One miner recalled that those who worked at the mine did it at great risk as "it was full of gas."³⁶ One mine superintendent noted that "ventilation was always a problem."³⁷

In those early years ventilation was rudimentary. Some mines had only "natural" ventilation. Other mines had a furnace at the bottom of the shaft that created an updraft that pulled dangerous gases out of the mine, but a burning furnace in a coal mine was an obvious fire hazard. When a miner detected gas in a particular room, the miner brushed out the gas with his coat or a piece of canvas. But most often the remedy was simply to mark off the area as "gassy."³⁸

Many miners believed that proper ventilation with large exhaust fans would reduce the possibility of gas explosions in the mines. They noted the relationship between poor ventilation and explosions.³⁹ The sound of the exhaust fans, which could be heard twenty-four hours a day in the coal towns, provided "constant assurance" to the miners' families.⁴⁰ Some miners contended that many operators were reluctant to invest in ventilation systems, ignoring one mine engineer's argument that "the safest mine is the

cheapest."⁴¹

Mine inspectors' reports corroborated this opinion. They were littered with references to inadequate ventilation. In 1909 the Chief Mine Inspector's report on the Adamson Coal and Mining Company's Mine Number Three noted that "the condition of this mine is bad. There appears to be no effort made to conduct the air to the working faces.... The whole mine shows that the management has been very careless or utterly incompetent." All too common in the Mine Inspectors' reports were comments such as "ventilation bad in this place" and "bad condition, not sufficient ventilation." One mine in Henryetta had "no ventilating system" as late as 1910.⁴² Mine inspectors had the authority to levy fines, but penalties for violating federal ventilation regulations certainly provided little incentive for mine operators to comply with the law. The fine for such a violation was "not to exceed five hundred dollars."⁴³ With fines so light, operators had little compulsion to adhere to regulations.

Insufficient ventilation led to disastrous methane gas explosions. One of the worst occurred at McCurtain on March 20, 1912. On that day a blast ripped through the San Bois Coal Company's Mine Number Two, the seventh explosion at the mine in the decade since it opened. Each resulted in fatalities.⁴⁴ Witnesses reported that a fifty-foot tongue of fire and smoke erupted from the mine's entrance.

Miraculously, several miners survived by jumping into a side-room as the explosion rumbled by.⁵ The Oklahoma Miner reported: "At 9:05 o'clock a.m. without a moments warning, and in the winking of an eye, 73 sturdy men were swept into eternity by the awful explosion."⁶ The McAlester Democrat noted that the "disaster whiffed out the life lamps of seventy-five miners." Somehow twenty-five lucky survivors "were rescued from the black pit of death."⁷ One, a sixteen year old boy, began to recount the experience to his rescuers when abruptly "a pallor spread over his face" as he fell dead.⁸

Rescuers found nightmarish scenes as they entered the mine. Twenty bodies, "blackened and mutilated almost beyond recognition," were brought past "rows of grief stricken relatives, who clamored for a view of the dead." As the rescue operation stretched into the following day, those involved discovered much to their own distress that they had been "trampling over the mangled forms of three men since yesterday without knowing it."⁹

The San Bois disaster left McCurtain "in mourning, there is scarcely a home that some relative was not a victim of the disaster, the most appalling in the history of the southwest." With their men dead, over three hundred women and children became homeless, evicted from company housing. Towns in the McCurtain vicinity responded to the tragedy by collecting money for a disaster fund.¹⁰ Local sources

raised \$38,000, including \$15,000 from the Carnegie Hero Fund. The San Bois Coal Mining Company wrote checks to the survivors the same day as the disaster, then declared bankruptcy.⁵¹

Eventually government regulations and union pressure forced mine operators to install exhaust fans. Though exhaust fans greatly improved ventilation and reduced the likelihood of explosions in the mines, they never completely eliminated the danger. The inherent dangers of coal mining precluded this objective from ever being obtained.

Oklahoma's coal mines had the reputation as the most dangerous in the United States, partially due to certain practices of both the operators and miners. Fierce competition in the regional coal market led operators to redouble their efforts to reduce costs, often ignoring safety concerns in the process. The result was a wage system that promoted production at the expense of safety. Wages based on a tonnage rate adversely affected safety. Miners had little incentive to spend time engaged in "dead work" such as timbering and undercutting of the coal seam, both vital safety precautions for which they received no pay. The policy of "robbing" the mine's support pillars to fill rush orders worsened an already dangerous situation.⁵²

Nonpayment for "dead work" led to a practice called "shooting from the solid." The only preparation for blasting the coal down was to drill holes for the explosive

charge. No effort was made to undercut the coal to enhance the effectiveness of the charge. Often instead, "unusual charges of powder [would] weaken the roof and pillars" in the mines. This led to an abnormally high number of cave-ins and rock falls, the leading causes of death in the mines. In one of the worst accidents of this type, a cave-in at Adamson in 1914 killed thirteen men, "permanently entombing" them.⁵³ The United States Bureau of Mines reported in 1911 that "shooting off the solid ... has been responsible for more accidents to miners and more loss of property than almost any other mining practice."⁵⁴

An additional drawback of "shooting from the solid" was that it pulverized a large part of the coal. This greatly increased the possibility of coal dust explosions. By the turn of the century the dangers of "shooting from the solid" became recognized nation-wide, and the practice fell into disuse. Still, as late as 1913, 80 percent of Oklahoma's coal was "shot off the solid." By 1929 production by this technique amounted to only about 20 percent of the state's output.⁵⁵

All too often planned explosions in the mines went awry and ignited coal dust near the charge-hole. This was far worse than a firedamp explosion, which normally only affected a localized area in the mine. Coal dust explosions created a rolling explosion effect. The initial blast lifted great clouds of coal dust. The explosion would feed

upon this dust as it continued along the mine's tunnels, preceded by a shock wave that warned miners to dive into an opening before the flame swept by. Coal dust explosions traversed "miles of rooms and entries," and often "wreck[ed] structures at the entrance to the mine."⁵⁶ In an accident at Wilburton in 1904, "a sheet of flame was seen to shoot out of the mouth of the slope to a height of over a hundred feet." The explosion hurled two one hundred pound blocks of coal three hundred feet from the mine's entrance.⁵⁷

Miners could be far from the starting point of an explosion and still feel its terrible effects. On March 12, 1903, W. S. Burgess and his son Jess prepared a shot charge in Great Western Coal and Coke Company's Slope Mine Number Two. They were over a thousand feet away from the charge when an explosion ignited by a "windy shot" outran them. "The force of the explosion threw both men with such force that Jess was killed instantly," his "head crushed to jelly." His father fared little better, so severely injured that he died two hours later.⁵⁸

Spectacular explosions that took many lives captured newspaper headlines, but accidents that resulted in the death of an individual or a small group were more common. In one example from 1909, William Hutchinson, a fifty-three year old Scotsman, prepared a shot-charge in the McAlester Coal Mining Company's Mine Number Six. After lighting the fuse, Hutchinson moved on to the next room to prepare a

charge there. Unfortunately for Hutchinson, the coal pillar between him and the first charge was inadequate for protection from the blast. The shot blew through the pillar and the flying coal hit Hutchinson with such force that he was thrown across the room and "almost completely disembowelled."⁵⁹

Carelessness caused many accidents. One engineer survived a trip into a mine in 1910, but in the process of examining the machinery that lowered men down the shaft, he leaned forward just as miners below called for the cage to be lowered. It was, "catching Mr. Greene's head and killing him instantly."⁶⁰ In another accident in 1910, Hugh McLary was preparing a shot-cartridge when a spark from his open flame lamp ignited the powder. The Mine Inspector's report noted that "it is almost useless to moralize on this accident, as it has occurred so often in the past in different places, and I wonder why men grown old in the mines will still insist on making up the cartridges with a flaming torch on their head, but such is the fact."⁶¹

In the mines a moment of thoughtlessness could result in instant death. This occurred at the Milby and Dow Coal Company's Mine Number Nine in November, 1911. While sinking a new shaft, two men died when they connected a shot-charge to electrical wires still attached to a battery. The Superintendent of the Mine noted that "the accident was a strange one ... the engineer ... must not have disconnected

the wires from the switch."⁶²

Inadequate training was a contributing factor in many mine accidents. In the 1870s mine operators faced a labor shortage. Most local Indians refused to work in the dark, damp, and dangerous mines.⁶³ As a result, operators hired immigrants to fill their need for labor. The first were from the British Isles. Part of their cultural baggage was a strong sense of industrial unionism. Not happy with such a labor pool, mine operators began hiring eastern and southern European immigrants in the 1880s. One repercussion of the mine operators' decision to alter the ethnic composition of their work force was a loss in personnel with experience in mining.⁶⁴

In 1908, 43 percent of miners in Oklahoma had previous experience in the industry, but only 9 percent of the Italians did, and they comprised the largest immigrant group in the mines. A Mine Inspector's report from the period noted that "most of the operators in the Indian Territory have suffered from a lack of skilled miners, and have had to put in their places ignorant and inexperienced men."⁶⁵ This shift to inexperienced personnel compounded what were already extremely hazardous conditions in Oklahoma's coal mines.⁶⁶

Immigrants responded to the dangerous working conditions by forming mutual aid societies. In the early years of the coal industry in Oklahoma, operators provided

no form of accident or death benefits, so miners created their own institutions to deal with these needs. Italian immigrants created the La Minature, Viltorio Emanuel III, and Christiforo Colombo fraternal and beneficial societies. Among other benefits, disabled miners received compensation for up to a year following an injury. Other ethnic groups in the mining communities also formed social and fraternal orders: Slovaks established the First Catholic Union. Mexicans organized a National Beneficial Society, and the Poles founded the National Polish Society. Surprisingly, the mutual aid societies were seldom a platform for political activity. One source characterized those who created them as "church-centered people who had no taste for radical politics."⁶⁷

Miners also responded to their dangerous working environment by turning to unionism to improve conditions. Safety concerns were a central component of contract negotiations. The by-laws of the United Mine Workers called for actions "to reduce to the lowest possible minimum the awful catastrophes which have been sweeping our fellow craftsman to untimely graves by the thousands."⁶⁸

Statehood and the poor safety record of Oklahoma's coal mines led to the establishment of a Chief Inspector of Mines in 1907. The first individual to occupy this office was the long-time Oklahoma labor leader and miner, Peter Hanraty. But establishment of the position did little to improve

safety conditions in the mines. In the year ending on June 30, 1912, there were 103 fatalities in Oklahoma's coal mines. The result was 30,610 tons of coal mined "for every man killed."⁶⁹ The President of the Oklahoma School of Mines lamented that "one man is killed on the average, in the Oklahoma Coal Fields, every week, and one man is crippled every day that the mines operate! The number of widows and orphans and cripples in this district would make an army."⁷⁰

Eventually strict enforcement of mining laws lessened the dangers of the occupation. At the same time, the United Mine Workers continued to press for improved safety in the mines. Under pressure, the operators came around to the view that "the safest mine is the cheapest." "Shooting off the solid" fell into disuse. Slowly mine operators improved ventilation, installed water sprinklers, and implemented the practice of spreading inert rock dust throughout the mine, all of which reduced the likelihood of disastrous explosions. Mining officials found shale dust an especially effective fire retardant. Piled upon elevated planks in the mine, an explosion's shock wave knocked the dust into the air, stopping the advancing flame that followed. A Bureau of Mines Inspector, writing in the mid-1920s, noted that although the value of "rock dusting" had been documented for at least ten years, the "coal-mining industry of this country did not seek to adopt the practice until

recently."⁷¹

Mechanization and a switch to the long wall method of mining coal in the 1920s reduced reliance upon the dangerous room and pillar method, which was prone to cave-ins.⁷² Despite its advantages, mechanization was a double-edged sword for the coal miner. Though it eased physical demands on the miner, it robbed men of their jobs as machinery replaced them. Mechanization also created new dangers. Miners often lost arms and legs to the whirling blades of the machines. Hanraty lost both his legs in such an accident.⁷³ Another type of accident made common by mechanization occurred when the red-hot blades of a mining machine came in contact with and ignited pockets of methane gas. In one such accident, the gas flared, burning off two black miners' ears; only their clothing and hard-hats prevented more severe injuries.⁷⁴ Electrification added a new element of danger in mining. Contact with the 250 volt lines that brought power to the mining machines meant instant death.⁷⁵

Medical treatment for those injured in the mines was woefully inadequate for the first quarter century of the coal industry in Oklahoma. Miners usually received medical care from the coal company doctor. The companies deducted \$1.00 per month from the miners' wages to pay the doctor's salary. Until the 1890s no hospitals existed in the coal towns. A drug store established in Krebs in 1885 doubled as

a make-shift hospital. Hokey's Drug Store stocked vaseline in five hundred-pound lots and iodine in ten-pound amounts, and ordered linseed oil fifty barrels at a time.⁷⁶

The horrendous disaster at the Osage Coal and Mining Company's Mine Number Eleven in 1892 overwhelmed Hokey's Drug Store. The accident killed one hundred men and injured two hundred more. Responding to the need, Bishop Francis Key Brooke of the Episcopal Church appealed for funds. After an anonymous donor contributed the necessary money, Bishop Brooke established All Saints Hospital in McAlester.⁷⁷ Beginning as an emergency measure capable of caring for about a dozen patients, the hospital grew to a hundred bed facility by 1900.⁷⁸ In 1896 a local newspaper, with unabashed boosterism, proclaimed that "South McAlester ... has the finest and best hospital ... in the territory."⁷⁹ By the end of 1899 the hospital had provided treatment for more than one thousand patients.⁸⁰ A September 1914 patient roster listing "two Mexicans, two Russians, six Negroes, two Assyrians, three Italians, one Australian, one Bulgarian, one Greek, one Englishmen, two Germans, one Canadian, and three Indians" illustrates the wide range of nationalities who worked in Oklahoma's coal mines.⁸¹

After statehood, efforts by private humanitarian organizations as well as both the state and federal governments helped improve safety in the mines of Oklahoma.

The Mine Rescue Association, acting in conjunction with the American Red Cross, gave lectures throughout the coal fields.⁸² The state established a School of Mines at Wilburton and placed rescue trucks equipped with fire-fighting apparatus in the coal district.⁸³ The federal government contributed a railroad car stocked with mine rescue equipment and assumed control of a mine rescue station in McAlester. The rescue station, privately funded in 1910, was one of only six in the United States at that time.⁸⁴ The problem was that these efforts focused primarily on treating accident victims instead of on prevention.

Since the earliest years of the coal industry in Oklahoma, operators, miners, and government inspectors wrangled continuously over who was responsible for the many accidents that plagued the state's mines. Mine operators denied any responsibility at all, arguing that "the miner is responsible for his own safety."⁸⁵ Chief Mine Inspector Hanraty noted that "some cowardly corporation officials, when they have an explosion, claim that the explosions are the acts of God." Hanraty went on to state that "here in Oklahoma we have too much respect for God Almighty to blame Him.... Corporations should be held responsible for the death or injury of every one of its employees."⁸⁶ Miners not surprisingly placed blame for many accidents on the mine operators, contending that they failed to invest

sufficiently in ventilation and other safety practices."⁷

Whenever a major accident occurred in the mines, the usual ritual was for management and labor to point a finger at each other in assessing blame. An explosion on December 17, 1929 at McAlester killed sixty-one men in the Old Town mine. The operator blamed the accident on a miner lighting a cigarette, arguing that the miner's match touched off a gas explosion."⁸ But the widow of a miner killed in the disaster alleged in a \$25,000 lawsuit that the operators violated many safety regulations. The lawsuit's most serious allegation was that the main ventilation fan was inoperative at the time of the explosion. In 1931 a McAlester court awarded \$75,000 dollars to the families of those killed in the disaster. After legal fees and court costs were deducted the families of the sixty-one who died received \$53,000 dollars."⁹

Miners sometimes looked to the metaphysical to explain accidents. On Christmas Day, 1902, The South McAlester Capital reported:

The days of superstition are not passed. Monday only about sixty miners went to work in No. 5 mine, all on account of a prediction made by some woman that on that day No. 5 would blow up. As absurd as it might appear, over 200 men refused to go into the mine on that day."¹⁰

Also, miners were very uneasy about women entering the mines; they perceived a connection between a woman's visit and any accident that followed soon thereafter."¹¹ One black miner, surveying the results of an explosion at

Wilburton in January, 1926 that took ninety-one lives, noted that "colored folks have a superstition connected with mine explosions.... When a negro miner dreams that one of his children is burned, he won't work in a mine on the day after the dream. One of the men who laid off yesterday morning had a dream like that and his life was saved." Another miner noted that the disaster had occurred on the thirteenth day of the month and the thirteenth day of the year."²

While miners and bereaved survivors struggled to come to grips with the harsh realities of fatal accidents, they had much the same problem with life in the coal towns. The amenities of the company town did little to offset the miners' strenuous work in a dangerous environment. Exploited below ground, miners found little respite in the grimy company towns.

After completing his shift, the miner trudged home to his company house. After a hot bath and a meal prepared from groceries bought at the company store, the exhausted miner soon fell asleep, only to awake all too soon for the next day's shift. Miners seldom saw the sun, beginning work before sun-up and leaving for home long after dark. Perhaps it was for the best. The sight of the company town did little to raise one's spirits.

The typical Oklahoma coal town was little more than an "appendage to the coal mine." It had distinctly "semi-feudal characteristics." The company owned all buildings

and houses, built on leased land from the Choctaws in the territorial period. It was not until after the watershed agreement of 1903, in which the union won recognition and many other gains, that the strength of the company town waned. Statehood pummeled the coal company town system further, but it did not die out until the 1920s. For nearly fifty years, the company town system provided ample fuel for the growth of industrial unionism among Oklahoma's coal miners."³

Coal company towns were dreadfully plain. All architecture centered around function; little, if any, effort was put into a "city beautiful" movement in these communities. Dying when the vein played out, these towns lacked a sense of permanence, instead exhibiting a sense of crude exploitation that betrayed their primary reason for being. Oklahoma's coal towns owed their existence to the mineral resource that lay beneath them."⁴

The mining companies typically built and rented nearly all housing in the early years of a coal community. Company houses were uniform in every manner. Usually painted a dull red, the standard company house had two to five rooms. Built with cheap local lumber, each house cost as little as \$50.00 to construct. Company houses rented for \$1.80 to \$2.00 per week. Operators deducted rent from wages and often withheld income for "damages" when the miner moved out of the house."⁵

Company houses illustrated the fleeting nature of the coal towns. Lacking solid foundations, most rested two to three feet above the ground upon piles of stone or brick. When a particular coal town's economic viability waned, operators often literally moved the town to a new location. This occurred at Savanna after the disaster there in 1887. Company housing was usually better in towns than in remote coal camps, and miners quickly turned to private housing when and where it became available.⁶ When company housing was scarce, miners often built their own two-room box houses.⁷ Also, the practice of two families sharing a four room house was common.⁸ In the most primitive coal mining communities, "most of the miners lived in tents."⁹

The row after row of identical houses in these isolated communities only reinforced the uniformity of the company towns. After a rain, the dirt streets quickly became nearly impassable. In the houses amenities were at a minimum. Coal towns seldom had sewage systems. Each residence had an outhouse behind it, and typically four houses shared a community water well. Often the water out of these wells was laden with minerals. One miner remarked that "the water is so hard that when you want a drink you have to break off a piece and then pulverize it with a sledge hammer before drinking it."¹⁰

Miners lived a frugal lifestyle - so frugal that some estimated \$50,000 in savings lay buried below one coal town.

Most single men lived in groups to cut costs.¹⁰¹ Families often took in boarders to help supplement their income. This often was crucial income, averaging nearly 20 percent of family income; for the Lithuanians it was an astounding 62 percent.¹⁰² Around the turn of the century, boarders paid \$18.00 monthly for room and board. This consisted of a bed and two hot meals a day plus a lunch to take to work. The exception was three hot meals on Sunday.¹⁰³

Boarders were much more common in the households of immigrant miners than in those of native-born Americans. In one survey of 476 households, eighty-three took in men, and of those, eighty-one were immigrant households. Overall, about 20 percent of immigrant homes had boarders. Lithuanian families had the highest percentage, some 55.6 percent. Among immigrant families the Welsh took in the fewest. Only one out of twenty-seven Welsh households had boarders. But the practice led to high congestion in these households. In some of the immigrant households, the average numbers of persons per sleeping room reached as high as 3.27, the average was 2.54.¹⁰⁴

Despite the starkness of the coal town, miners took pride in their community and engaged in lusty booster battles with nearby towns. Lehigh and Coalgate were constant rivals, as were the "twin cities" of Hartshorne and Haileyville. One resident of Savanna in 1884 listed among the town's attributes, "two drug stores, three finishing

stores and three grocie [sic] stores ... four bar shops, two black smith shops, [and] two fancy ladies houses." It is interesting to note that the local booster perceived "two fancy ladies houses" as an asset of the community. In 1904 the local paper in McCurtain announced that the community was the "best town on the Fort Smith and Western, between Guthrie and Fort Smith." When "a first class man" arrived, local leaders were "glad to see the San Bois Company's houses fill up with this class of family." But one miner noted that "the coal diggers were a rough lot, living poorly in company shacks."¹⁰⁵

Operators paid miners in both cash and scrip, but advances were available only in the latter. By issuing scrip, operators strengthened their control over the miners. Advances often led to the infamous "bob-tail" check on payday. A "bob-tail" check resulted when advances and deductions totaled more than earnings, leaving the miner with a paycheck amounting to \$0.00. One miner recalled that "a lot of people never saw any money at all." Scrip could be used in stores and banks not owned by the coal company, but at a discounted value. Operators sometimes replaced scrip with non-transferable coupons to counteract the use of discounted coupons, which were often used for gambling or drinking.¹⁰⁶

Mine owners forced patronage of the company store by often paying their employees in scrip. These stores charged

prices higher than at independent stores, sometimes as much as 20 percent. Operators fenced and guarded coal camps to fend off unwanted visitors. They ran off local farmers who attempted to sell their produce to miners. Not surprisingly, company stores were quite profitable for operators.¹⁰⁷

Merchants who competed with the company stores for the miners' patronage found the use of scrip a difficult obstacle to overcome. One competitor lamented that "it would be better for miners to economize a month and then with the money go to Elzey and Perry, where they get \$1.25 on the dollar, instead of trading on scrip worth 95 cents on the dollar." Merchants who dared to compete with the company stores advertised that "a dollar in cash, will buy more staples of Elzey and Perry than a dollar and a quarter any company store in town. Cash is the true test. Try it and see."¹⁰⁸

In the early years of the industry, most coal companies either operated their own stores or awarded "company store privileges" to "independent" stores in exchange for a percentage of the receipts. One independent operator, Dr. D. M. Hailey, received "company store" privileges as part of his payment when he sold out to the Gould interests. These businesses could offer credit, because the coal company deducted the money owed to the store operator from miners' wages. As a result, these stores were little more than

parts of the company town system controlled by the operators.¹⁰⁹

As early as the 1890s the company town system showed signs of weakening. Independently owned barber shops, clothing stores, drug stores, and warehouses began to dot the coal towns. One dry goods merchant in Hartshorne did business from a tent, displaying his wares on the sidewalk. In 1890 Hartshorne had only five businesses - a company store, two general stores, a meat market, and a drug store. White farmers brought in wagons of wild hogs that sold at five cents per pound.¹¹⁰ Miners bought buttermilk and butter from local ranches.¹¹¹ Also, a thriving Syrian merchant community of around 150 did business "through the mining camps" of the region.¹¹² By 1904 Hartshorne was a "booming little mining town" with a grocery store, the "Palace Meat Market," the "City Meat Market," a hardware store, cotton gin, and a lumberyard. Hartshorne also boasted of having a bank, newspaper, and a "big wooden opera house."¹¹³

After 1900 the erosion of the coal barons' total domination of their towns was well underway. It was not that the coal company's institutions disappeared - they did not. The change was that after 1900 the operators had to share the economic pie of the coal towns, whereas in the preceding years it had been their exclusive domain. After 1900 a multitude of small businesses developed in the coal

communities. A diverse business community developed as livery stables, confectioners, jewelers, clothing and furniture stores, and many other businesses began to dot the coal towns. All were competition for the company store that had operated as a department store, offering numerous general merchandise items for sale.¹¹⁴

The establishment of schools was another important activity in the coal towns. In the early 1870s there were no schools in the territory. Parents taught their children to read. The earliest non-Indian school was a subscription school established in McAlester in 1876. In 1881 the Presbyterians founded a mission that doubled as a school. In Hartshorne in the late-1890s the Choctaw, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad built a four-room schoolhouse for the children of its employees. Miners financed its operation, the cost being deducted from their wages. Married men paid one dollar per month and single men fifty cents per month into the education fund. Non-miners paid \$1.50 per month to send their children to the school. But by 1904 schools in Hartshorne no longer charged for tuition as the community switched to taxation to finance its school system.¹¹⁵

As the coal towns grew they attracted many immigrants. As a result many of the communities of southeastern Oklahoma have wide-ranging ethnic diversity. In 1900 26 percent of the workforce in the coal mines were immigrants. By 1911 more than 3,300 immigrants worked in Oklahoma's coal mines,

representing 55 percent of the workforce, leading one critic to note that the coal mines were "largely run by foreigners." All the major coal towns had substantial immigrant populations."¹⁴

Italians were numerous in the coal towns, comprising more than one-third of the immigrant population. In the coal mines Italians made up 42 percent of the workforce. By 1910 the Italian population of Oklahoma's coal mining communities numbered around ten thousand. Their presence strongly affected the culture in many of the communities."¹⁷ Among the most successful of the Italians was Joe Fassino, who moved to Krebs in 1891 and opened a store there that sold food his "countrymen wanted." Fassino also smuggled food into the local coal camps, where he sold Italian families such specialties as cheese, figs, and chestnuts. Later Fassino opened a macaroni factory in 1897. Other Italians entered the grocery store business until by 1905 there were "seven or eight" in the Krebs area."¹⁸ The experiences of Fassino and other Italians indicated upward mobility was at least a possibility for immigrants in the coal towns.

As a result of the influx of so many Italians, many of the coal towns developed "Little Italys." Krebs, with nearly 90 percent of the membership of the United Mine Workers local being Italian by 1909, became and remains a center of Italian culture in Oklahoma. By 1910 one-half of

the population of Krebs was Italian. As their numbers and wealth grew, the Italians showed signs of affluence. They operated several general merchandise stores in Krebs by 1905 and by 1911 had a controlling interest in a large mercantile store in Coalgate. Italians also rose in the white-collar ranks. In 1916 Dominic Antonelli was "manager of the Italian Department" of a bank in McAlester." Eventually Italians acquired more property than any other immigrant group in the coal communities.¹¹⁹ Poles, Croatians, Slovaks, and Slovenians also owned "considerable property" in the coal towns. At the other extreme, "only a very small percentage" of Mexicans in the coal towns owned property.¹²⁰

Americans' characterization of Italians-Americans often had an underlying, sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, racism. Americans charged that the Italians were slow to assimilate. They pointed out that the Italians congregated in their own neighborhoods while retaining their own language and customs. An Immigration Commission report contended that the Italians "drink enormously and are highly excitable." Another claimed that Italians were "too nervous and excitable" for work in dangerous areas of a mine. Others held slightly more progressive views. The opinion that "he is an Italian, but a good fellow just the same" was common.¹²¹

Numerous other nationalities came to work in Oklahoma's

coal mines. One of the largest immigrant groups were the miners from the British Isles. English, Welsh, Scottish, and Irish miners came to Indian Territory to ply their trade. They were among the most experienced miners in the Choctaw Nation. Lithuanians were one of the largest immigrant groups in the coal towns. There were Russian and Ukrainian communities that numbered in the hundreds at Hartshorne, Lehigh, and Coalgate. Poles drifted into the coal fields in 1876, and by 1911 an estimated eight hundred of them lived in region. There were small Belgian, Bulgarian, Dutch, French, Slovak, and Magyar communities as well. After 1890 a sizeable black and Mexican population developed in the coal towns.¹²² With immigrants drawn from nearly every country in Europe, McAlester, Krebs, Hartshorne, Lehigh, and Coalgate all developed large immigrant communities. In Krebs, half of the population at statehood was foreign-born.¹²³

Lasting vestiges of the ethnic diversity in the coal towns remain to this day. In Krebs, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, as well as the numerous Italian restaurants and grocery stores around the area, remains as an indelible symbol of the impact of the Italians on the region.¹²⁴ At Hartshorne stands the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Russian Orthodox Church. Built in 1917 by Carpatho-Russians who worked in the mines near Hartshorne, the bright red brick structure, complete with white spires topped by three blue

onion-domes, stands in vivid contrast to the less colorful churches of the community. The church was situated so the congregation faced the east in accordance with Orthodox tradition. The building, decorated with icons and stained glass, was a center of activity for those of the Orthodox faith in Hartshorne.¹⁸⁵

Religious activity was an important part of life in the coal towns. In the 1870s the coal communities were devoid of churches, as the company barons did not attend to the religious needs of their employees. During that decade circuit rider preachers provided opportunities for religious worship to the miners. They boarded with the local brethren and preached in the community's schoolhouse. Often there was only one hymn book. The preacher resorted to reading the hymns one line at a time and then the congregation would repeat it back - a practice known as "lining it." Congregations established permanent churches in the 1880s. By the 1890s both the Protestant and Catholic faiths were well-represented in the coal communities of the region.¹⁸⁶

Churches were centers of activity in the coal town, but other social organizations played important roles also. The fraternal societies of each nationality were important social institutions. Miners also joined the Woodman of the World Lodge and other fraternal orders, including the Masons, Knights of Columbus, Odd Fellows, and the Rebekahs.¹⁸⁷ Carpatho-Russians at Hartshorne joined the

Russian Orthodox Brotherhood, an organization that provided aid to disaster victims.¹²⁸ Besides providing aid and solace following accidents, these institutions organized social activities such as picnics, dances, and barbecues.

Holidays were major social events in the coal towns, providing a brief respite from the rigors of daily life. Every January 25 Scottish miners celebrated the birth of Robert Burns. Activities included recitals of the poet's work, and while recent arrivals from Scotland played bagpipe music, others performed Scottish folk-dances. On St. Patrick's Day all residents in the coal camps became Irish for a day. An important holiday for the Welsh miners was Saint David's Day. Fourth of July celebrations were a major affair. After a picnic, miners listened to a reading of the constitution followed by customary political speeches.¹²⁹

Miners engaged in various pursuits during their leisure time. Customarily quitting work at noon on Saturday, miners and their families enjoyed band concerts, circuses, dances, bicycling, and going to the local opera house. Every coal town fielded a baseball team. McCurtain claimed to have "the best baseball team in the Choctaw Nation." Miners also enjoyed hunting and fishing. Often the entire family would gather together and fry fresh turkey in the woods.¹³⁰

Horse-racing and the betting that accompanied it were other favorite pastimes of the miners. At Lehigh a "saw-backed mare" was famous for being "transformed into a streak

of lightning" that separated many a stranger from his money. One individual trained his horse to fake a limp that miraculously disappeared on the track. One miner recalled years later that the contestants used "trickery of all sorts" to gain an advantage over their opponents.¹²¹

While at leisure, miners consumed their favorite beverage, "choc" beer. Adopted from the Choctaw Indians, "choc" beer was a concoction of ingredients that included barley, hops, tobacco, fishberries, and a small amount of alcohol. Local Indians also used fishberries as a paralyzing agent to disable fish. Considering this, one can only speculate on its effect in the drink. Another recipe called for boiling malt, oats, corn, and hops in water. Then the brewer added yeast and sugar. After allowing the mixture to ferment, it "afforded a drink that had a wallop comparable to the kick of a mule."¹²²

Miners considered "choc" essential for good health. They claimed that local water supplies were questionable and that "choc" counteracted the effects of the "deadly malaria mosquito." Many argued that "choc" was a tonic, not a beverage, and local doctors agreed. Also, miners complained that the water tasted "gyppy" and that converting it into "choc" was the only way to make it palatable. With all the men working in the mines, women dominated the manufacture and distribution of "choc" beer. Production was considerable as the South McAlester Capital reported in 1895

that "Choctaw beer is again as plentiful ... as strip pit water." Irked by this illicit liquor trade, the Indian agent noted in 1894 that women were "troublesome" in their production of "choc" beer.¹³³

If a miner preferred "store-bought" whiskey to home-made "choc" beer, it was available also. While Indian Territory was technically dry, in reality it was far from that. Due to the remoteness of the region, mail order grocery shopping was common. Often the order included a gallon of whiskey, carefully packaged to appear as groceries and strategically placed in the center of the crate to afford protection from the prying eyes of the United States Marshals. Bootleg whiskey peddlers appearing out of the night and announcing their arrival by firing two pistol shots in rapid succession also frequented Indian Territory. But bootleg whiskey was expensive, two dollars a pint.¹³⁴ Proto-speakeasys also dotted the Choctaw Nation. The South McAlester Capital reported in 1894 that "the beer dives on the West side of the track are becoming a nuisance to the residents to such an extent that should be abated.... If the half that is told of them is true, they should be wiped out of existence."¹³⁵ The MK&T Railroad shipped in whiskey marked as "freight" for its employees in the territory and instructed their station agents to resist inspection by the Indian police.¹³⁶

Miners actively participated in politics. Even before

statehood the miners wielded considerable political clout. Hanraty, leader of U.M.W. District 21, helped form the Twin Territories Federation of Labor and was its first president. After statehood Hanraty became the state's first mine inspector; he also served as mayor of both McAlester and Coalgate. During his political career Hanraty often incurred the wrath of conservatives in the state. They labeled him a socialist and an anarchist when he came out in favor of women's suffrage. Hanraty denied he was "anything else but a Democrat.... To call me an anarchist or a socialist - I don't know whether it is a discredit or an honor.... I am a man who advocates human rights - human rights and human liberty." Conservatives argued that Hanraty led a union that was a "mob" that deprived "American Citizens of the Constitutional Right which the United States guarantees to every man."¹²⁷

The political loyalties of Oklahoma's miners split between two groups. Many were traditional unionists, and their politics reflected their moderation; these mainstream unionists tended to vote Democratic. But many miners leaned more to the left politically than the Democratic Party. Support for the Socialist Party was strong in mining towns such as Krebs, where only a "tiny middle-class" existed. In 1906 Appeal to Reason, a socialist paper published in Girard, Kansas, proclaimed that "the coal mining region of the Indian Territory is aflame with socialism." Socialist

candidate Eugene Debs garnered 40 percent of the presidential vote in Krebs in 1912, and nearly as high a percentage in many other Oklahoma coal communities, indicating considerable support for socialism among the miners at that time.¹²⁸

In the period from 1906 to 1914, socialist miners captured the leadership of the United Mine Workers districts in the Southwest, including District 21, which included Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas. In congressional districts with mining communities, socialist candidates regularly garnered a large share of the popular vote.¹²⁹

Oscar Ameringer referred to the state's coal miners as "instinctive radicals, genuine American proletarians" and as a "fighting bunch." Miners of this persuasion contended that everything was "shot to hell because of capitalism." Many miners considered socialism a viable alternative that "was a respectable democratic ideology compatible with American and Christian values," according to one authority.¹³⁰

While the Socialist Party was important in many miners' lives, the central institution for most was the union. Through the strike of 1894 the Knights of Labor represented the miners. After the failure of that year's strike, the Knights collapsed in Indian Territory. The United Mine Workers penetrated the region in 1898, and from 1903 until the mid-1920s it exercised undisputed leadership among

Oklahoma's coal miners.¹⁴¹

Miners turned to the union when they believed they had been treated unjustly by the operators. Union officials, armed with signed contracts, traveled extensively, settling disputes between miners and operators. The union's locals were the "most powerful working-class institution in the region." But discipline was rigid in the union's locals. In 1923 members of the Krebs local voted to discharge "Brother Alfonse Petrone" for "hiring a scab painter." Also, any member caught "assepting [sic] a salaried [sic] or comission [sic] for acting as an enforcement officer shall be expelled from the organization."¹⁴²

Miners and their families spent much of their time participating in union-sponsored activities such as barbecues, picnics, and dances. In organizing such events the union helped foster cordial relations among the many ethnic groups in the coal towns.¹⁴³ This resulted in these towns being amazingly devoid of racial animosity.

The frequent disasters and strikes pulled the various ethnic groups together under the umbrella of the union. The disaster at Krebs in 1892 and the "great strike" of 1899-1903 are examples.¹⁴⁴ As the numbers of accidents grew, so did unionism among the miners. Many miners held that only by binding together could they compel the operators to accept practices that improved safety. That goal became a driving force behind the growth of unionism among Oklahoma's

coal miners. They also saw unionization as increasing their ability to lobby for strict government regulations on safety in the mines. But unionization meant much more than the miners banding together so that the operators would heed their collective call for improving safety. Unionized, the miners could demand payment for "dead work." Miners also saw unionism as a way to combat the common practice of short-changing the miner at the scales. A checkweighman, selected and paid by the miners, became a non-negotiable demand of the miners. Above ground, the union confronted the outrages of the company town. Abolition of scrip and the company store were planks in the union platform.

Only in unions could the miners offset the tremendous power of the coal barons. Individually they were helpless; collectively, they could confront the operators. The coal communities were the battleground for that struggle.

Endnotes

¹ John W. Morris, ed., Geography of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977), 16.

² John W. Morris, ed., Drill Bits, Picks, and Shovels: A History of Mineral Resources in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982), 87-89; I.C. Gunning, When Coal Was King: Coal Mining in the Choctaw Nation (Eastern Oklahoma Historical Society, 1975), 66-68.

³ Priscilla Long, Where The Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 26; Frederick L. Ryan, The Rehabilitation Of Oklahoma's Coal Mining Communities (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 29; Ronald D. Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 177.

⁴ Long, Where the Sun Never Shines, 37; "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory" in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900. Miscellaneous Reports, Part I. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), cited hereafter as Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, 619.

⁵ Ryan, Rehabilitation, 29-30.

⁶ Ibid.; Clyde Hamm, ed., Labor History of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: A.M. Van Horn, 1939), 5; James Whiteside, "Coal Mining, Safety, and Regulation in New Mexico, 1882-1933," New Mexico Historical Review 64 (April 1989), 164.

⁷ Gene Aldrich, "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952, 181, 184.

⁸ State of Oklahoma. Third Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1910], 119.

⁹ Ryan, Rehabilitation, 29; Long, Where The Sun Never Shines, 37.

¹⁰ State of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1909], 11.

¹¹ Long, Where The Sun Never Shines, 29.

¹²Ibid., 45.

¹³United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines. Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines [1914] (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 43.

¹⁴Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 196.

¹⁵United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines. Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines [1914] (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1914), 43.

¹⁶Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 182.

¹⁷Ibid., 183.

¹⁸Philip A. Kalisch, "Ordeal of the Oklahoma Miners: Coal Mine Disasters in the Sooner State, 1886-1945," Chronicles of Oklahoma 48 (Autumn 1970), 334.

¹⁹Manuscript of an article on McAlester Mining Field, Mining Folder, Box Eight, Fred S. Barde Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

²⁰Kingfisher Free Press, 14 January 1892.

²¹Kenny Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 24-25.

²²Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 185.

²³Ibid., 186-187.

²⁴Ibid., 188, 192.

²⁵Ibid., 191.

²⁶The South McAlester Capital, 27 March 1902.

²⁷Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 193.

²⁸Long, Where The Sun Never Shines, 29.

²⁹Oklahoma School of Mines and Metallurgy, Bulletin 2, "Mine Ventilation," 1926, 14, Samuel Boydston Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; James Whiteside, Regulating Danger: The Struggle for Mine Safety in the Rocky Mountain Coal Industry (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 42.

³⁰Whiteside, Regulating Danger, 42; Long, Where The Sun Never Shines, 29; "Elementary Mining Engineering," 14.

³¹"Elementary Mining Engineering," 14-15; Elwood S. Moore, Coal (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1940), 303.

³²Whiteside, "Coal Mining," 167.

³³State of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1909], 13.

³⁴Author's interview with Bill Ryan, retired coal miner, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, June 1989.

³⁵State of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1909], 36; State of Oklahoma. Third Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1910], 111.

³⁶Indian-Pioneer Papers, 58: 496, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

³⁷Stanley Clark, "Immigrants to the Choctaw Coal Industry," The Chronicles of Oklahoma 33 (Winter 1955-1956), 451.

³⁸Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, [1897], 564, 600; Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, [1898], 740.

³⁹Author's interview with Bill Ryan, June 1989.

⁴⁰Indian-Pioneer Papers, 26: 222.

⁴¹H.E. Coll, "Economy as Related to Mine Accidents," (n.p., n.d.) Folder J, Peter Hanraty Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴²State of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Mine Inspector of Mines [1909], 35, 52-53.

⁴³Ibid., 53; Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, [1903], 732.

⁴⁴Kalisch, "Oklahoma Coal Miners," 335.

⁴⁵Haskell County News, 22 March 1912.

⁴⁶The Oklahoma Miner, (Krebs) 2 May 1912.

⁴⁷The McAlester Democrat, 21 March 1912.

⁴⁸Dallas Morning News, 23 March 1912.

⁴⁹Haskell County News, 22 March 1912; Dallas Morning News, 21, 22 March 1912.

⁵⁰Haskell County News, 22 March 1912; Dallas Morning News, 23 March 1912.

⁵¹Donovan Hofsommer, ed., Railroads in Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977), 34.

⁵²George Carney, Unpublished notes for presentation at Oklahoma State University on the history of the United Mine Workers in Oklahoma titled "Down in the Shaft," 1978.

⁵³Kalisch, "Oklahoma Coal Miners," 337.

⁵⁴United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines, First Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines [1911] (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 49.

⁵⁵United States Geological Survey, Mineral Resources of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1929), 750.

⁵⁶Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines, Miner's Circular 3, Coal Dust Explosions, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, n.d.), Folder J, Mine Safety, Peter Hanraty Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵⁷The Hartshorne Sun, 28 November 1904.

⁵⁸Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, [1904], 715.

⁵⁹State Inspector of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1909], 44.

⁶⁰State of Oklahoma. Third Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1910], 96-97.

⁶¹Ibid., 139.

⁶²Milby and Dow Coal and Mining Company records, Box Four, Edwin Ludlow Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁶³H. Wayne Morgan and Anne Hodges, Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 151; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 70: 65.

⁶⁴Clark, "Immigrants," 450-451.

⁶⁵Mine Inspector for Indian Territory [1904], 531.

⁶⁶State of Oklahoma. Third Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1910], 139.

⁶⁷Kenny L. Brown, "Peaceful Progress: The Italians of Krebs," Chronicles of Oklahoma 53 (Fall 1975), 343-345; Morgan and Hodges, Oklahoma, 152.

⁶⁸Constitution of the United Mine Workers District #21. Folder J, Peter Hanraty Collection.

⁶⁹State of Oklahoma. Fifth Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1912], 7.

⁷⁰George E. Ladd to Fred S. Barde, October 25, 1912, Mining Folder, Box Eight, Fred S. Barde Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁷¹United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines, Fourteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines [1924] (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 10.

⁷²Gunning, When Coal Was King, 69.

⁷³Ibid., 44.

⁷⁴Interview with Bill Ryan, June 1989.

⁷⁵Mine Inspector for Indian Territory, [1900], 626.

⁷⁶Indian-Pioneer Papers, 105: 427; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 35.

⁷⁷Fred S. Clinton, "The First Hospital and Training School for Nurses in the Indian Territory, Now Oklahoma," Chronicles of Oklahoma 25 (Autumn 1947), 219.

⁷⁸Francis Key Brooke, The Missionary District of Oklahoma and Indian Territory (Philadelphia: Avil Printing Company, n.d.); Clinton, "The First Hospital," 221.

⁷⁹The South McAlester Capital, 17 September 1896.

⁸⁰Ibid., 7 December 1899.

⁸¹Ellen Sue Blakey, Rustics, Roughnecks and Financiers: Oklahoma, 1907-1919. (Tulsa: Western National Bank, 1983), 25.

⁸²Pittsburg Enterprise, 31 March 1910.

⁸³Ladd to Barde, October 25, 1912, Barde Collection.

⁶⁴United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines, Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines [1913] (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 49.

⁶⁵Coll, "Economy as Related to Mine Accidents"

⁶⁶State of Oklahoma. Second Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1909], 14.

⁶⁷Interview with Bill Bryan, June 1989.

⁶⁸The McAlester Guardian, 16 January 1930.

⁶⁹Ibid., 23 January 1930; McAlester Democrat, 23 July 1931.

⁷⁰The South McAlester Capital, 25 December 1902.

⁷¹Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 179.

⁷²Clyde E. Woolridge, Wilburton: I.T. and OK: 1890-1970. (n.p., n.d.), 112.

⁷³Ryan, Rehabilitation, 35-37.

⁷⁴Indian-Pioneer Papers 70: 62; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 33; Jennings J. Rhyne, Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma (Guthrie: Co-Operative Publishing Company, 1929), 110.

⁷⁵U.S. Congress, Senate, Immigration Commission, Reports of the Immigration Commission, VII: Immigrants in Industries, Part I: Bituminous Coal Mining, Part IV: "The Bituminous Coal Mining Industry of the Southwest," Sen. Doc. 633, Serial Set 5667-5668, 61st Congress, 2nd Session, 1911, 64-64; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 212.

⁷⁶"Bituminous Coal Mining," 64-65; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 182.

⁷⁷Indian-Pioneer Papers, 48: 503.

⁷⁸Ibid., 105: 426.

⁷⁹Ibid., 99: 165.

⁸⁰Ibid., 26: 218-219, 27: 361; "Bituminous Coal Mining," 64-65, 72; The Coalgate Nonpareil, 18 May 1894.

⁸¹Morgan and Hodges, Oklahoma, 152.

⁸²"Bituminous Coal Mining," 55.

¹⁰³ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 81: 496.

¹⁰⁴ "Bituminous Coal Mining," 77-83.

¹⁰⁵ John Thompson, Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma, 1889-1923, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 61; E.F. Hollibaugh, The "Dusky Diamond" Fields: Tributary to Hartshorne, Haileyville, Gowen, Dow and Craig (Hartshorne: The Hartshorne Critic Print, 1904), 3; S.M. Garvin to Jefferson Gardner, February 1, 1884, Minerals, Choctaw Tribal Records, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; McCurtain American, 27 May 1904; San Bois News 13 October 1904; Don Lohbeck, Patrick Hurley: An American (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956), 26.

¹⁰⁶ Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 215-216; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 81: 497.

¹⁰⁷ Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 215; Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 36; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 5; Milby and Dow Coal and Mining Company records, Ludlow Collection.

¹⁰⁸ Coalgate Nonpareil, 4 January 1895.

¹⁰⁹ Ryan, Rehabilitation, 35-36; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 106: 6.

¹¹⁰ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 22: 58.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 81: 498.

¹¹² "Bituminous Coal Mining," 109.

¹¹³ Ryan, Rehabilitation, 37; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 27: 361-366, 70: 60.

¹¹⁴ The McMaster Publishing Company's Gazetteer and Business Directory of the Indian Territory (Buffalo, New York: The McMaster Publishing Company, 1901), 102-103, 143-144, 217-229.

¹¹⁵ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 27: 365, 70: 64, 81: 497.

¹¹⁶ Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Special Reports: Occupations, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), 274; "Bituminous Coal Mining," 16, 23; Rhyne, Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma, 110.

¹¹⁷ Douglas Hale, "European Immigrants in Oklahoma: A Survey," Chronicles of Oklahoma 53 (Summer 1975), 197; "Bituminous Coal Mining," 16-17, 23.

¹¹⁸ Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 34-36.

¹¹⁹ Brown, "Peaceful Progress," 346; Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 34-35; Hale, "European Immigrants," 196; "Bituminous Coal Mining," 16.

¹²⁰ "Bituminous Coal Mining," 16, 72.

¹²¹ Ibid., 16; Rhyne, Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma, 110; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 89.

¹²² "Bituminous Coal Mining," 14-19, Richard M. Bernard, The Poles of Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 14-29; Michael M. Smith, The Mexicans in Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 42-47; Michael J. Hightower, "Cattle, Coal, and Indian Land," Chronicles of Oklahoma, 62 (Spring 1984), 10; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 70: 61.

¹²³ Stanley Clark, "Immigrants in the Choctaw Coal Industry," Chronicles of Oklahoma 33 (Winter 1955-1956), 440-455; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 84: 280-281.

¹²⁴ Author's tour of Pittsburg County, 1989.

¹²⁵ Michael J. Hightower, "The Road to Russian Hill," Chronicles of Oklahoma 63 (Fall 1985), 244-245; Author's tour of Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, 1989.

¹²⁶ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 106: 10.

¹²⁷ Betty Poe, ed., History of Coal County, Oklahoma, (Coalgate: George B. Hill, n.d.), 72.

¹²⁸ Hightower, "Russian Hill," 245-246.

¹²⁹ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 84: 281-282; 101: 185.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 99: 163-164, 101: 185, 105: 435; McCurtain American, 27 May 1904.

¹³¹ Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 202.

¹³² Angie Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 228; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 201-202; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 105: 430-431.

¹³³ Ibid.; South McAlester Capital, 25 April 1895.

¹³⁴ Indian-Pioneer Papers, 105: 431-432.

¹³⁵ South McAlester Capital, 12 July 1894.

¹³⁶ Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 189.

¹³⁷ Gunning, When Coal Was King, 43; Draft of Peter Hanraty Speech before the Oklahoma State Constitutional Convention, Folder E, Peter Hanraty Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; S.W. Murphy to President of Oklahoma State Constitutional Convention, (n.d.), Folder O, Hanraty Collection.

¹³⁸ James R. Green, Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1978), 177-178, 199, 246, 269; Thompson, Closing the Frontier, 129.

¹³⁹ Green, Grass-Roots Socialism, 177; Thompson, Closing the Frontier, 130.

¹⁴⁰ Oscar Ameringer, If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 407; Thompson, Closing the Frontier, 142, 156.

¹⁴¹ Carney, "Down in the Shaft," 16.

¹⁴² Green, Grass-Roots Socialism, 203; Indian-Pioneer Papers, 26: 226; February 2, 1923 and January 3, 1924 meeting minutes, Box 18, Records of United Mine Workers Local #2327 (Krebs), Special Collections, Oklahoma State University Library, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

¹⁴³ Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 19-29.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CHALLENGING THE COAL BARONS: THE STRIKE OF 1894

The first major confrontation between the coal operators and miners of Oklahoma occurred in the spring of 1894. Under the leadership of the Knights of Labor, the miners for the first time resisted the edicts of the operators. The result was a six-month stand-off in which the miners faced off against an alliance of the operators, their hired security forces, the Choctaw Nation leadership, the United States government, its army, and an overzealous Indian Agent who saw radical labor uprisings everywhere. Occurring in a year of labor unrest highlighted by the railway workers strike, Coxey's Army, and the Cripple Creek Massacre, this array of forces deployed against the miners was symptomatic of capital's and government's reaction to the labor unrest that swept across the nation that momentous year.

The catalyst for the strike of 1894 was a 25 percent wage reduction announced by the operators in early March. This wage cut reduced the average miner's income to less than two dollars a day. The operators argued that the wage cut was necessary, contending that they were losing markets

to coal from Alabama, Colorado, and New Mexico. They argued that the wage cut would allow them to recover their markets, thus providing the miners more work. An editorial published in the Coalgate Nonpareil and in other local papers argued that the wage reduction "will be made for the purpose of competing in prices with other coal companies and therefore may greatly increase the demand for coal from the mines, thus furnishing steadier employment for the miners."¹

Production and income statistics strongly refute the operators' contention that they were being squeezed out of the market. Figures for both total tonnage and income increased in the period from 1891 to 1893. During that time production increased 50 percent and gross earnings grew substantially.²

The announced wage cut was to take effect on April 1. In late March several mine superintendents met at Lehigh with a Knights of Labor committee representing the miners to discuss the wage cut. The meeting accomplished little more than delivery of an ultimatum. Members of the Knights local leadership reported the results of the conference to the miners in mass meetings held in all the coal camps. At these meetings the Knights counseled the miners to reject the wage cut. The miners accepted the advice and declared that they would not accept the wage reduction and would not work at the new rate when it took effect. The Muskogee Phoenix noted that "something is hinted of a strike about

the 1st."³

The strike that followed led to a nearly complete shut-down of the territory's mines. The Oklahoma Times Journal reported on April 6:

With the exception of the mines operated here [at McAlester] and at Alderson the strike which was to affect all mining interests throughout the territory on April 1, is an accomplished fact. The whistles at Krebs, Lehigh and Coalgate blew for work yesterday, but all shafts at each place are idle.⁴

The signs of a major confrontation were unmistakable. Taking the lead, the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company began to operate its mines at Alderson and Hartshorne under the new wage scale with black strikebreakers brought in from outside the territory.⁵ Taking this action prior to April 1, the move threatened to provoke violence in the coal camps. The Daily Oklahoman reported:

The miners of Lehigh, Krebs, and Coalgate struck today. Unless a settlement is speedily reached much suffering will result. If an attempt is made to ship in new men, as the operators declare it is their intention, there will be bloodshed, it is feared."⁶

Tensions continued to rise during April. While the Osage Coal and Mining Company offered five cents more per ton than the Choctaw Company, its main competitor, the firm's miners declared that they "can not make a living at those wages, and will not give in." But at the same time a local paper noted that the miners "are getting desperate." The Muskogee Phoenix reported:

The agitators threaten to employ drastic measures

to compel the miners to side with them. The citizens generally express a willingness to repel any attempt at invasion [of the mines]. Much apprehension exists amongst the business men, as following the recent general financial depression a strike now will break up many of them. This vicinity, however, seems to be safely outside the maelstrom of dissension.⁷

Late in the month the strikers attempted to shut down the Choctaw mines, and as a result the white miners at Alderson joined the walk-out. Anticipating this action the Choctaw Coal Company brought in an additional three hundred black strikebreakers from Thurber, Texas. The Coalgate Nonpareil noted that "these Negroes are on the way from Texas and the 500 miners who went on strike some weeks ago have decided that the Negroes will not go to work and trouble is expected when they arrive."⁸

When Edwin Ludlow, superintendent of the Choctaw mines, prepared to operate that company's mines "without a white miner," the Oklahoma Times Journal noted that the miners promised, "the Darkies shall never enter the mines alive." Still, the paper expected Ludlow's importation of black scabs to "settle the strike with them, as the Negroes will not strike, and the white men say they cannot live at the wages. Trouble is expected when they arrive.... Every white miner swears vengeance upon the blacks."⁹

At that point the atmosphere in the coal towns reached a nearly incendiary condition. Both sides in the dispute steeled themselves for a major confrontation. The slightest provocation on either side was likely to lead to

disturbances. This occurred when the Williamson Brothers Company resumed mining operations at its strip pit at Lehigh. The men who worked there had agreed earlier to stop work, but when they reneged and returned to the mines, the strikers mobilized and marched on the Williamson Brothers' pit.

What followed combined a labor demonstration with a colorful parade. After a meeting in Coalgate attended by more than one thousand miners and their families, the crowd decided to march to the pit. At the procession's head were two flag bearers, followed by 50 women and 125 men armed with Winchester rifles and shotguns. The Coalgate brass band provided musical accompaniment, while bringing up the rear of the procession were hundreds of strikers armed with clubs. The procession marched four abreast and stretched out for more than a mile and a half.¹⁰

Marching "to the time of a live, quick step," the crowd proceeded to the Williamson Brothers pit. When they arrived, the marshals and company officials quickly retreated to the high bank on the opposite side of the pit from the demonstrators, while the strikebreakers fled. But no violence occurred except that a few of the women demonstrators tossed chunks of coal at the strikebreakers as they left.¹¹

This event precipitated a strong response by the operators and the governments of both the Choctaw Nation and

the United States. An unusual legal situation existed in Indian Territory, and it created a problem for labor unions that they faced nowhere else. Miners were considered guests of the Choctaw Nation, their situation akin to working in a foreign country. When a miner entered the Choctaw Nation it was by "permit." The exact cost of the permit is unclear. Frederick Ryan states in The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities that the fee amounted to twenty-five dollars annually. He notes that the miner's employer paid the fee and then deducted twenty-five cents monthly to recoup part of that cost. Clyde Hamm contends in Labor History of Oklahoma that the fee was a dollar a month. Choctaw Nation financial records indicate operators paid a twenty cent per month "permit tax" per employee. Angie Debo was probably closest to the truth when she stated in Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic that permit "laws were not uniformly enforced." The Choctaw Nation complained that many miners were without permit even before the strike began.¹²

The leadership of the Choctaw Nation knew only that the strike was costing the tribe revenue from coal royalties and permit fees. There is no doubt that the strike adversely affected the Choctaw Nation's treasury, for by 1890 coal royalties amounted to more than \$50,000 annually. Debo notes that the "Choctaws were greatly exasperated by the loss of tribal revenues" due to the strike. Coal royalties

financed Choctaw schools. But the loss of coal royalties does not fully explain the Nation's empty coffers. The Choctaw Nation's leadership spent at least \$28,000 supressing violence associated with tribal elections during 1892-1893. Corruption within the tribe's school system only compounded an already serious situation.¹³

The Choctaw Nation's leadership based its view of the strike strictly on its impact on the tribes's treasury. Based on this factor alone the tribe's leadership sided with the mining companies and lobbied the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to have the miners evicted. On strict legalistic grounds, there was nothing unacceptable about this procedure. The Choctaw leadership was within its rights to demand that unpermitted "intruders" be evicted and removed to the "nearest adjacent state." Bound by its treaty obligations, the United States government was responsible for the removal of the miners. This threatened the success of any strike in Indian Territory. The tribes wanted their coal royalties and were not hesitant to help crush a strike that threatened those revenues. Thus, the Choctaw Nation leadership was a willing ally of the operators.¹⁴

Regulation of United States citizens on the territory of the Choctaw Nation was a joint-affair between the tribe and the federal government. The procedure for eviction of "intruders" was for Choctaw sheriffs to make sworn statements declaring the non-citizen's failure to obtain a

permit. Then they sent the names of the "intruders" to the Principal Chief, who reported them to the Indian Agent with a request for their removal. The Agent would expel the "intruders" with Indian police or federal troops, depending on what the situation warranted. The tribe paid for the cost of the "removal."⁵

The position of Indian Agent was one of immense power in the affairs of the Choctaw Nation. The Indian Agent flexed much of his power through the Indian police. Established in 1878 and comprised of citizens of the tribe but under the Agent's control, the Indian police were a powerful force within the tribe's territory. They dealt primarily with United States citizens. Their main responsibilities included arresting fugitives, controlling the illegal liquor trade, and removing "intruders."⁶

On May 11 the Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, Wilson N. Jones, wrote to the Indian Agent, Dew M. Wisdom, urging prompt removal of the strikers. Wilson included a list of two hundred of the strikers; the process of eviction had begun. Jones stated that the miners had been given permits to work and because "they have quit work they are not there under permit and consequently are intruders." Jones held that by preventing "others from working," the strikers were "setting a demoralizing example."⁷

Agent Wisdom was in total sympathy with the operators and the Choctaw Nation's leadership. He promptly asked the

United States Secretary of the Interior, Hoke Smith, to send troops to eject the strikers. Wisdom argued that he needed federal troops for the evictions, remarking:

There are 2,000 miners who have struck, and they are exceedingly boisterous and threatening. My police force, supported by a squad of marshals, is inadequate to meet the crisis. I regard the presence of the military as absolutely essential. Prompt action alone will prevent trouble."⁹

Secretary Smith sent Wisdom's request on to the War Department. At first the War Department was disinclined to send troops to the Choctaw Nation to break up the strike. The Secretary of War's view was that the situation did not warrant troops. Wisdom helped persuade the War Department to alter its view by painting the situation as drastic. Wisdom's view was that "trouble is near at hand." By late May Wisdom's position prevailed, and soon thereafter federal troops were descending upon the Choctaw Nation from all directions.¹⁰

Judging from the size of the forces sent into the strike zone in 1894, one must conclude that the government anticipated trouble. The War Department responded to Agent Wisdom's shrill cries for troops by dispatching several companies of infantry from Ft. Leavenworth. Under the command of Major Joseph T. Haskell, these forces arrived at South McAlester on a special train on May 31st. Companies G of the 12th Infantry and H of the 13th Infantry Divisions were sent to Hartshorne. Troops from Company A of the 19th Infantry settled in at Alderson, while another company moved

into Krebs. More infantry and cavalry from Fort Reno guarded the coal mines and strikebreaker camps around Lehigh.⁸⁰

The arrival of troops quickly divided the coal communities into rival factions. Supporters of the decision to send in the military expressed relief that the federal government had sent troops "to suppress the mine trouble and restore to the owners the property now held by the strikers." But they did not expect the strikers to cave in meekly to the presence of troops. When Troop K of the 3rd Cavalry arrived by rail from Fort Reno, they steeled themselves for action as "much trouble is expected as the miners say they will not be put out of the country as intruders."⁸¹

The citizens and business community of Krebs protested to Agent Wisdom about the soldiers, arguing that threats of mob violence were "entirely incorrect." With miners being the majority of their customers, the business community supported the miners during the strike. They contended that the miners were respectable members of the community who had been "laboring in these dangerous mines for several years" and were "fortunate as to escape with their lives." The miners had acquired "little houses and garden spots," and ejection "would be a great hardship upon them and their families."⁸²

The strikers resented the use of government troops to

guard the coal mines. They resented even more the use of an anomaly in the law to justify and legitimize deportation. One miner, Dan McLaughlin, writing from Atoka, assessed the situation in this manner:

Had not intended to take a hand in this trouble and would not if things had not gone the way they had in the nation. But the U.S. Government took a hand in this trouble, and now have troops in the nation at Lehigh, Coalgate, Krebs, Alderson and Hartshorne, for the purpose of ejecting the men from the territory.

McLaughlin's view was that a successful strike was next to impossible because:

As soon as [the] miners strike ... [they] accordingly become intruders. Under ordinary circumstances this quirk in the law is not taken advantage of, but in ... case of a strike the companies take advantage of it and call in the power of our Uncle Sam to remove the strikers and their families and all their moveable property out of the territory. This is a very effective way of putting an end to a strike, is it not? But it savors to [sic] much of despotism.... Fully 1000 men and their families etc, probably 4000 persons will be removed without mercy.... The troops are here with orders to eject strikers and may begin at any movement.... The force of the U.S. Government has been procured (sic) through fraud to assist in making blacklegs and tramps. It must be stopped.²³

Federal troops found little evidence of trouble when they arrived in the Choctaw Nation. The scene they found made them wonder why they were sent there. When Captain F. Michler of the 5th Cavalry wrote to Major General N. A. Miles, he commented that when he arrived in the Choctaw Nation, he found "a large number of negro miners working." When Michler contacted Chief Jones to find out where the

reported trouble was, he said the Chief replied "All quiet. Do not need any soldiers."⁸⁴

Michler found the source of the reports of trouble when he went to McAlester and interviewed officials of the Choctaw Railroad and Mining Company. They argued that "the presence of troops was necessary and urgent," according to Michler. The National Agent of the Choctaw Nation, Dr. Wright, also at the meeting, glossed over Chief Jones's remarks by stating that the Chief did not understand English and misunderstood Michler's inquires and that he was positive the Chief wanted the miners ejected.⁸⁵

Michler anticipated trouble with the strikers. He reported that the miners at Lehigh and Coalgate "have armed themselves an [sic] assumed a very much more threatening attitude." Michler noted that many of the immigrant miners had fled the coal camps into the surrounding countryside where they existed on the vegetables from their gardens. But Michler expected the evictions to break the strike quickly, saying: "Prompt removal of the few leaders who are well known will settle the difficulty."⁸⁶ The Muskogee Phoenix reported that "the striking miners in the Choctaw Territory have caused considerable apprehension during the past week.... So threatening that Agent Wisdom asked that troops be sent there to keep the peace."⁸⁷

While federal troops were supposed to "keep the peace," they were "preparing for war at Lehigh." Cavalry and

infantry poured into Lehigh. The Daily Oklahoman reported "Great confusion reigns in the coal mining camps of Lehigh and Coal Gate. Men, women and children are making for the timber and some of the men are drilling and say they will fight Uncle Sam's men."²⁸

As both sides were "preparing for war," the miners had difficulty in obtaining sufficient provisions for their forces. Coalgate miners organized a relief association for needy miners and received aid "from all the [non-coal company] stores in the city." Most aid was in the form of groceries or meat. One store contributed five hundred pounds of flour, another gave three hundred pounds. Others promised "10 or 12 beefs" to assist the strikers. Some twenty to thirty families "have been relieved" in Coalgate, according to the local paper.²⁹

While the miners struggled to meet their needs, the operators found that the arrival of federal troops relieved them of considerable financial burden. The Coalgate Nonpareil noted the connection when it reported:

The Choctaw Coal and Railway Co. has secured the United States soldiers who will reach here tomorrow [sic]. This now assures them protection, and also throws the expense of guarding private property upon the Government. Heretofore the mine owners have paid about 200 marshals to guard the negroes at work, and also [to] protect their property, too. Trouble is expected daily at the Osage Coal and Mining Company's mines at Krebs and [at] this place [Coalgate], as the men are nearly starved out.³⁰

Rapidly events were spiralling out of control in

Indian Territory. The Nonpareil noted that the situation was rapidly reaching an "alarming aspect." The initial delay in sending troops had caused the strikers to gain in "assurance daily." Buttressed with "reports of the success of such movements elsewhere," they prepared to march to "Coalgate, Lehigh, and Krebs" and "move upon the Choctaw mines and force a cessation of work."³¹

Many who supported the operators' position argued that many among the striking immigrant miners were dedicated to a violent, syndicalist labor conspiracy. The Nonpareil reported:

The foreign element among the strikers are anarchistic in their utterances, and have made two attempts to wreck bridges of the Choctaw Coal and Railway Co., but were driven away the first time. The second time their dynamite was discovered and removed from under a bridge before it could be exploded.³²

Indeed, the Choctaw Company was fearful of the strike spreading to its railroad workers. When a Kansas newspaper ran a story to that effect, the South McAlester Capital was quick to refute it, claiming it was only unfounded rumor that "the Choctaw division trainmen would strike in sympathy with the miners of the territory. The whole affair originated at South McAlester and was sent from there to the press. The Choctaw men it is understood, will not strike."³³

Often the actions of the federal troops exacerbated an already dangerous situation. When the Cherokee Coal Company

in Atoka requested troops be sent there "to restore the property now held by strikers to its owners," a contingent of sixty men armed with rifles, including two Gatlings and one six-pounder arrived to "suppress trouble." A Captain Hunter "expressed himself very freely" to the miners "that he was going to suppress trouble."³⁴

Due to the previously lax permit policy, many non-miners in the Choctaw Nation were fearful of ejection from the territory. With troops on hand to eject those without permits, many individuals were apprehensive because "a good many" were without permits. The result was that the news of possible ejections "caused considerable excitement." Those without permits were advised to get one, for without a permit they were "in danger of being summarily expelled."³⁵

The striking miners complained often that the operators fooled the federal government into sending troops. At a protest meeting at Coalgate, they argued that the operators tricked the government into sending troops under the "pretense that the miners of Coalgate and Lehigh threatened to raid its mines at Alderson and Hartshorne, and intimidate the miners now at work there." They adamantly argued that "in no sense" could they "be construed to be intruders." The miners feared "5,000 to 8,000" being "summarily ejected from the territory regardless of the justice of our opposition to a most heartless and disastrous reduction in our wages." They demanded that the federal government

investigate before "destroying our liberty and compelling us to sacrifice our property."³⁶

The closest the miners got to a government investigation was an outdoor meeting held at Lehigh in early June. Originally the meeting was going to be held in the Labor Hall at Coalgate, but the crowd's size forced a move outdoors.³⁷ A federal officer told those in attendance that the army troops were in the territory to protect property and eject those without permits. He warned the crowd that

I find you all idle. Idle men are the devil's messengers. This state of affairs cannot exist. We are here by the request of the Choctaw government ... to maintain law and order. We are here to protect you as well as anybody else. Everybody here is entitled to our protection. The mining mills here will be started up, and those who wish to work will be furnished with work, and those who refuse to go to work we will put out of the territory and not only you men, but your families and belongings.... Anybody molesting any worker on his way either to or from work, or during the night, will be guilty of [a] misdemeanor, and punished accordingly.... First man that utters any threats or intimidation, is a marked man.³⁸

Most miners concluded that the main force behind the efforts to crush the strike was Edwin Ludlow of the Choctaw Company. Their view was that Ludlow was manipulating both the Choctaw and federal governments through a quirk in the law. By persuading Wisdom to call in federal troops, Ludlow and the other operators found they could "saddle the expence [sic] of breaking the strike onto the government by having the miners removed as intruders." The operators'

strategy was to use the threat of eviction to coerce the strikers into accepting the wage cut. If they did not accept the cut, then evictions would break the strike once and for all.³⁹ The strikers held that because of the "diverse overt acts committed by one Ludlow, and parties in his pay and employ, the lives and persons of the complaining employees are in jeopardy and we demand for them the protection to which every citizen of the United States is entitled ... no matter where sojourning."⁴⁰

Finally in June events began to develop that eventually led to evictions. First was a thwarted raid on the Elzey & Perry Company's powderhouse near Coalgate. Deputies caught five men in the act of breaking into the powderhouse. After firing forty to fifty shots, "mainly to intimidate them," authorities said later, two men were taken into custody.⁴¹ Following this incident the process of eviction began in the coal towns.

Before a miner was ejected he received a "fair hearing." Each coal company provided names of the men they wanted removed, then turned over the names to Indian Agent Wisdom. He held hearings that can be described only as the classic "kangaroo court." His power was absolute; there was no court of appeal. When he arrived in a coal town, the local papers reported that Wisdom was there "to look after the intruder question. Monday evening of the 25th was the limit fixed for the miners to go to work, as after that time

the Indian Agent has control."⁴²

At the hearings Wisdom would ask a series of questions related to the strike. Most centered around whether that individual supported the strike, had engaged in violence, or had a permit. No decision was rendered at that time. It was not "[un]til the day for ejection comes and the soldiers and marshals are marching them into box cars," as one miner described it, that miners found out Wisdom's unappealable verdict.⁴³

Most of the striking miners saw Wisdom as little more than a pawn of the operators. The Mayor of Hartshorne declared that Wisdom "seems to be acting in this matter wholly under the dictations of the mining company and without regard for justice."⁴⁴ In a letter to the Secretary of the Interior asking that Wisdom be removed from office, two miners declared him "a tool in the hands of the coal companies of the Indian Territory." Wisdom's "fair hearings" were little more than a "farce" to the miners. They held that his removal policy was the result of a "request of a corporation," and that it was "unjust and Unamerican," in addition to being "cruel and inhuman."⁴⁵

The process of evicting the miners was brutally efficient. Federal troops went out into the countryside in raiding parties, commanded by a sergeant and guided by Indian police who pointed out the "intruders." The federal troops seized the "intruder" and delivered him and his

family to the Choctaw Coal and Railway line. There the strikers and their families were put into box cars and shipped across the state line to Jenson, Arkansas where they "disembarked."**

By the end of June federal troops had deported more than eighty-five strikers from Alderson and Hartshorne. Agent Wisdom reported to the Secretary of Interior that "I have the honor to state" that the deportations were "accomplished with all reasonable dispatch consistent under the circumstances." Wisdom contended that "not a single accident occurred and I am happy to say nobody was hurt." But in a phrase that hinted of the repugnancy of the mission at hand, Wisdom expressed hope that "my conduct in the performance of this disagreeable duty may meet your approval."**

If the ejections were "disagreeable duty" for Wisdom and the federal troops, they were slightly more than that for the miners and their families. The Daily Oklahoman reported that the miners' descriptions of their evictions were similar to tales "which sometimes come from Siberia. Many of the men were thrown bodily from their homes, their wives and children beaten and bruised, and their furniture and personal effects destroyed." After being dragged from their homes, "they were loaded into box cars like cattle and shipped out of the Territory." The paper concluded that "the stories told of brutality by the men from the

Hartshorne district are revolting to the extreme."⁴⁸

An infamous incident in the June evictions did much to harden the strikers in their resistance and resentment toward the operators and the federal troops. The incident occurred when troops were evicting a family of four near Alderson. During the process the troops attacked a miner's pregnant wife. According to a Hartshorne merchant and other sources, she "was struck over the head with a Winchester and severely maltreated by the soldiers." After being "carted" over "rough roads, the "enceinte women" gave "premature birth to a dead child. She is in critical condition and may die." But this did not slow the miner's deportation. He was "not permitted to return," despite the fact his wife lay dying."

Condemnation of the evictions was widespread. The harshness of the policy shocked many Choctaws, despite their losing revenue due to the strike. One Choctaw who witnessed the Hartshorne ejections referred to the events as the most shameful exercise in injustice the country had ever witnessed. Other Choctaws denounced it. The postmaster of Hartshorne "condemned the act bitterly" and said in that city "indignation is so unanimous and intense there is sure to be just cause for it." The evictions led to "wide spread alarm ... among the farmers that their permits and contracts would be ignored."⁴⁹

The evictions even caused an international outcry.

Diplomats from Great Britain, Italy, France, and Belgium lodged protests over the treatment of their citizens in Indian Territory. The Secretary of State denied that the strike was the result of a wage cut. When the British ambassador met with Indian Bureau officials, he was told that the evictions were legal under the treaty between the Choctaws and the federal government.⁵¹

After this first wave of ejections, Chief Jones wavered in his decision to have the miners deported. Jones sent a request to Wisdom asking that miners who pledged to abide by Choctaw laws be exempted from eviction. This action threatened to put Wisdom's eviction machine into neutral. In a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs he expressed "surprise," noting that "this request ... will embarrass me very much in the discharge of my duties." Wisdom predicted that without deportations there would be "further demonstrations against law and order by the turbulent element of miners." He was afraid that without Choctaw acquiescence, "it would seem that further steps by this Agency" to break the strike "are forestalled."⁵² Secretary of Interior Smith requested that Wisdom clarify the "wishes of the Choctaw authorities."⁵³ In other words, get the Chief back on the ejection bandwagon.

This led to a conference in early July. Attending were Chief Jones, Agent Wisdom, and Choctaw Company officials. The Chief expressed the sentiment that he had been "imposed

upon" by the operators and the federal government. As for the disputed letter requesting that deportations be halted, Jones claimed that "he did not ask for the removal of troops and the stoppage of evictions." He admitted that he had signed a letter, but only because the contents of the request had been misrepresented. He had meant that only miners who had turned to farming and who had legitimate permits not be evicted. But Chief Jones left no doubt as to his view toward the strikers. He told Wisdom:

You continue putting out these strikers as intruders, paying special attention to such men as have by persuasion and threats prevented any assumption of work, as I am reliably informed that it is only the influence of a few hot-headed agitators and anarchists that keep the bulk of the miners from returning to their accustomed labors.⁵⁴

There was some truth to the Chief's charge. Early in July two striking miners at Coalgate were accused of disturbing the peace. The charges stemmed from an incident at Breedlove's strip pit. The warrants alleged that the two had intimidated miners there by "threatening to do bodily violence to those who wanted to work."⁵⁵ Deputy marshals never served the warrants as the two miners in question "lit out and got away before Marshall Parker could gather them in."⁵⁶

Tensions rose as the operators continued to attempt to reopen their mines with strikebreakers imported from all across the country. They brought in blacks to work as strikebreakers from Alabama, Arkansas, Kansas, Texas, and

Louisiana. When the Osage Coal Company attempted to reopen its mines at Krebs, which had been idle for three months, the result was "almost a riot," according to the South McAlester Capital."

References to events at Krebs on July 9, 1894 fall into two categories. Although some referred to the events as "almost a riot," others called it no more than "a mild demonstration." A "crowd of 600 men and 50 or 70 women" marched to the Osage Coal Company's No. 11 Shaft Mine, but found no one working there. The crowd, swelling by the moment, proceeded to an adjacent strip pit, where they persuaded the forty strikebreakers to cease working "as it was detrimental to their interest." They complied and "were hooted and jeered and called scabs and other offensive names" as they left the pit. One striker remarked that "the soldiers have had their day, and now we will have ours." The demonstration might have ended without violence except that an accountant who was "acting as pit boss assaulted an Italian and drew a revolver on the crowd, but [he] was promptly disarmed." After roughing up Bob Evans, the accountant-turned-pit boss, some among the crowd expressed a desire to "drown him." Luckily for all, the crowd quickly lost interest in the idea. The incident ended without further violence. The crowd moved on to Osage No. 12, but found it idle."

After more strikers joined the procession, the crowd

then marched "to the music of fife and drum" into Alderson. There they compelled the strikebreakers to quit at Patterson's strip pit and then at Hughes' pit. The latter agreed to stop mining operations "until the strike was settled." The confrontation ended peacefully; Hughes even "brought out refreshments for the ladies."⁵⁹

The crowd, content with a job well done, proceeded back to Krebs "led by a band of music." Buoyed by their success, they continued on into McAlester "under the Stars and Stripes, headed by a band." They visited several strip pits there and upon request, all the strikebreakers "came out at once." The mine superintendent agreed to halt operations until "everything was settled." As everyone left amicably, one observer stated that "a more peaceful lot of people have not been together in Krebs in a long time. There was no fighting or trouble of any kind."⁶⁰

While some saw the Krebs demonstrators as a "peaceful lot," Indian Agent Wisdom did not. The events of July 9th gave him the excuse he was looking for to resume deportations. The South McAlester Capital expressed this fear in an editorial about the demonstration. The paper declared that "the miners at Krebs had our distinctive sympathy of our people until Monday.... This action is exceedingly unfortunate and will result in the return of the troops and perhaps of wholesale evictions."⁶¹

Miners rebutted this editorial with a wave of letters

to the Capital. One miner retorted that "sympathy without relief tastes like mustard without beef." The miner went on to contend that "any sympathy we ever get, or expect to get, in your town, we have to pay for in dollars and cents. Your sympathy only extends to Ludlow and his accomplices."⁴²

Following the Krebs demonstrations, Ludlow's "mine guards" turned to violence to intimidate the strikers. In one incident a guard identified as "Tony Catizone" shot into the house of one miner "and came [with]in either three or four feet of killing him while he and his family were quietly reposing midnight slumbers."⁴³

Not surprisingly, Indian Agent Wisdom joined in the crackdown in the wake of the Krebs demonstrations. Wisdom considered the events of July 9th as having "inaugurated a reign of terror in that particular camp." He saw that the tactics of the miners were effective in persuading the strikebreakers to join the walk-out, and argued that the only way to combat the striking miners was to deport them. Wisdom considered evictions "an imperative necessity" and argued that "there was no other remedy for the disease."⁴⁴

Wisdom responded to the Krebs demonstration with eviction hearings and a wave of deportations. On July 17 he held hearings at South McAlester. Twenty-five "ring leaders of the Krebs miners" had to "show cause why they should not be called intruders." The miners refused to answer any of the inquisitor's charges. They based their

strategy upon a possible compromise with the operators, which had been hinted at since early July. While the operators might have been willing to compromise, Wisdom was not. The miners had thrown down the gauntlet in April, and he was not about to walk away from the challenge. The day following the hearing, Wisdom declared forty-four Krebs miners to be intruders and continually added new names to the list throughout the remainder of July.⁴⁵

Following Wisdom's deportation edicts, an attorney representing the miners attempted to have an injunction imposed upon the agent that would have blocked the deportations. District Judge Stewart refused the application. Evictions began in the predawn hours of the next morning.⁴⁶

In those early hours of July 19th, Company D of the 10th Infantry spread out through Krebs. The 10th Infantry had been guarding the mines of the Osage Coal and Mining Company, but now it was turning its energies to rounding up and deporting the striking miners in the Krebs vicinity. When they tried to do so the miners "ran and scattered so that only fourteen were caught. These were sent to Arkansas by the Choctaw train." Local citizens reported that "Krebs was in a stir all night, and the report here this morning is that no one there slept last night. The cavalry went over to Krebs this morning before 5 o'clock. They were back by ten." The South McAlester Capital reported that the

soldiers had been "delivering injunctions from Judge Stewart to the miners " and that "about 300 were delivered."67

Agent Wisdom was happy with the results of the predawn raids and subsequent deportations. He notified his superiors in Washington, D.C. that

the removal was accomplished with no friction whatever, although the foreign element at Krebs had boasted of their ability and determination to not only defy the orders of this Agency, but even to fire upon the United States Troops, when the time for action came, they were either passive, or fled precipitately to the bush and adjacent woods."68

Wisdom contended that he evicted only "chronic agitators" and then only because "their violence closed down valuable mining property." He was satisfied that the deportations had broken the "great strike" and that "the lawless element has been overthrown at every point of the conflict."69 To prevent further demonstrations the operators "obtained a writ of injunction against the striking miners" prohibiting further demonstrations. Judge Stewart stated in his remarks that any evicted miner who returned would be "presented to the grand jury and proceeded against as criminals."70

Broken by the evictions, the miners conceded and cancelled the strike on July 24th. They accepted a 20 percent reduction in the wage scale, not the original 25 percent cut. The operators, always the magnanimous victors, reciprocated with a 10 percent reduction in housing rent that helped ameliorate the impact of the wage cut. The

miners petitioned to allow those evicted to return under the new wage scale, but the operators declined.⁷¹

By early August "white winged peace" reigned in the coal fields. The mines were producing, royalties were once again flowing into the Choctaw Nation's coffers, and Agent Wisdom was happy with a job well done. The South McAlester Capital reported that "the soldiers have folded their tents and stole away as silently away as cavalry and government wagons can." Although the federal troops left, a strong contingent of marshals and Indian police remained to ensure tranquility. One commentator in Coalgate remarked that "the town is fairly supplied with deputy marshals."⁷²

There is little doubt of the deleterious effects of the strike of 1894 upon all involved in the event. The miners were the obvious losers. They lost six months' income in addition to having the operators dictate a lower wage scale. Over 350 miners and their families experienced the trauma of eviction. In the rush to sell their goods before being evicted, many received little more than one-fourth their value. Hanraty lamented years later that the strike of 1894 had been "a total failure."⁷³

The operators suffered as well from the strike, for the mines brought in little revenue during its duration. The operators' attempts to operate the mines with black strikebreakers imported from all across the nation had been a failure. A few strip pits produced some coal during the

strike, but the shaft mines remained idle. Also, much to the operators' chagrin, many of the strikebreakers changed sides in the conflict and joined the union.⁷⁴

There were others who suffered in the strike of 1894. The Choctaw Nation saw its treasury emptied during the strike because royalties stopped. Local merchants saw business virtually dry up, as the majority of their clientele were miners.⁷⁵

Perhaps the biggest losers in the strike of 1894 were the Knights of Labor. Their power and prestige declined rapidly in Indian Territory following the event. Of course, the failed strike contributed significantly to the Knights' demise locally, but the organization was disintegrating on the national level as well, largely the result of the national leadership's autocratic tendencies.⁷⁶

One can only speculate about the outcome of the strike of 1894 if the deportations had not occurred. The only question was who could hold out the longest, the operators or the miners, but the evictions make the question moot. The evictions put a de facto end to the strike. The operators used a quirk in the law to call in federal troops to deport the strikers, thus breaking the strike, while placing the cost of guarding the mines and evicting the strikers onto the federal government. The language of the federal treaties with the Choctaws and the tribe's permit law made a successful strike virtually impossible. The

provisions of these agreements and laws, by declaring anyone who struck an "intruder" and a candidate for eviction, made the chances of a successful strike slim at best. These agreements created a unique environment totally favoring the operators. The result was that the federal government became the iron fist of the operators. Years later Governor William Murray remarked that the eviction policy "amounted practically to military power indulged in for the purpose of preventing [the] laboring man from getting his just dues.""

The crux of any "legalistic" interpretation of the strike of 1894 centers around whether eviction and deportation was a legal and acceptable policy for the United States government to engage in. Under the existing treaty, there was no doubt that the federal government was obligated to eject non-Choctaw citizens the tribe's leadership wished deported. Gene Aldrich makes a strong case for the "legalist" interpretation of the strike. He declares that deportation was acceptable and those evicted "were treated with all the humanity circumstances would permit." Aldrich also contends that "the mandates of the government were executed by force, yet that force was tempered with mercy."⁷⁸ One must look hard to find any mercy in a policy of deportation enforced at bayonet point.

The strike of 1894 must be placed in the larger context of national events to understand better the actions and

policies of both the operators and the federal government during the Indian Nation strike. Labor strife beset the nation in 1894. The railways workers struck under the leadership of Eugene Debs, crippling the nation's rail network. Coxey's Army and the Cripple Creek Massacre fanned tensions further.

These upheavals all colored the political environment surrounding the Indian Territory strike. According to the Daily Oklahoman, anarchism, populism, Coxeyism, Debsism, and striking coal miners were only different versions of the same monster.⁷⁹ Also, while Indian Territory miners struck under the leadership of the Knights of Labor, 125,000 coal miners were on strike across the nation under the banner of the United Mine Workers.⁸⁰ The South McAlester Capital commented that "strikes are the order of the day, and with war starring us in the face, we ask, is there any panacea for the ills of our beloved America?"⁸¹ Reactionaries like Indian Agent Wisdom, who advocated a strong counter-strike, were convinced that a "reign of terror" had been inaugurated in the Choctaw Nation. From such a perspective, it easier to understand how the policy of deportation seemed the only "remedy for the disease."⁸²

Although the operators broke the strike of 1894, they only temporarily slowed the growth of industrial unionism among the miners in what was soon to become the state of Oklahoma. The miners' battles with the operators continued.

The strike of 1894 was only the first engagement in a continuing struggle. Although it was unsuccessful, the miners did serve notice that they no longer would accept without complaint the dictates of the operators. In late 1898 the miners, under the guidance of the United Mine Workers, again challenged the power of the coal operators, but with much more success than in 1894.

Endnotes

¹ Angie Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 2nd ed., (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 130; Angie Debo, The WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma, 2nd ed., (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 46; Clyde Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: A.M. Vanhorn, 1939), 6; Gene Aldrich, "History of the Oklahoma Coal Industry to 1907," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952), 73; Coalgate Nonpareil, 16 March 1894.

² C.W. Shannon, Coal in Oklahoma, The Oklahoma Geological Survey, Bulletin No. 4, (Norman: n.p., 1926), 28; George Carney, Unpublished notes for presentation at Oklahoma State University on the history of the United Mine Workers in Oklahoma entitled "Down in the Shaft," 1978.

³ Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 6; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 74-75; Muskogee Phoenix, 29 March 1894.

⁴ Oklahoma Times Journal, 6 April 1894.

⁵ "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory," in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1894. Miscellaneous Reports, Part I. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), cited hereafter as Mine Inspector of Indian Territory), 514; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 6; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 75.

⁶ Daily Oklahoman, 5 April 1894.

⁷ Oklahoma Times Journal, 21 April 1894; Muskogee Phoenix, 5 April 1894.

⁸ The Coalgate Nonpareil, 27 April 1894.

⁹ Oklahoma Times Journal, 21 April 1894.

¹⁰ Daily Oklahoman, 9 May 1894.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kenny L. Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 27; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 74; Hamm Labor History of Oklahoma, 7; Atoka Coal Mining Company to W. W. Wilson, Choctaw National Treasurer, September 25, 1895, Document 19412, Choctaw Permits Collection, Choctaw Records, Archives and

Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 143.

¹²Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 145-149.

¹⁴Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 7; Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, 27.

¹⁵Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 143.

¹⁶Ibid., 188-189.

¹⁷Daily Oklahoman, 20 May 1894; Coalgate Nonpareil, 1 June 1894.

¹⁸Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 7.

¹⁹Daily Oklahoman, 15 May 1894.

²⁰Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 7; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 81.

²¹Daily Oklahoman, 29 May 1894, 30 May 1894.

²²J.M. Stewart to Dew M. Wisdom, 1 June 1894, Document 23032, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²³Dan McLaughlin to Phil H. Penna, 2 June 1894, Reel #1, John Mitchell Collection, Catholic University Library Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁴F. Michler to N. A. Miles, 2 June 1894, Document 23031, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Muskogee Phoenix, 17 May 1894.

²⁸Daily Oklahoman, 9 June 1894.

²⁹Coalgate Nonpareil, 25 May 1894.

³⁰Ibid., 1 June 1894.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³South McAlester Capital, 28 June 1894.

³⁴Coalgate Nonpareil, 1 June 1894.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 1, 15 June 1894.

³⁷Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 83.

³⁸Coalgate Nonpareil, 8 June 1894.

³⁹J.B. Campbell and Sam McLaughlin to Hoke Smith, 27 July 1894, Document 30478, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁰Coalgate Nonpareil, 1 June 1894.

⁴¹Ibid., 5 June 1894.

⁴²Campbell and McLaughlin to Smith, 27 July 1894, Document 30478, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Coalgate Nonpareil 29 June 1894.

⁴³Campbell and McLaughlin to Smith, 27 July 1894, Document 30478, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁴Muskogee Phoenix, 28 June 1894.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 7-8; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 84.

⁴⁷Wisdom to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 19 June 1894, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁸Daily Oklahoman, 21 June 1894.

⁴⁹Ibid.; Muskogee Phoenix, 28 June 1894; Guthrie Daily Leader, 22 June 1894.

⁵⁰Muskogee Phoenix, 28 June 1894.

⁵¹Ibid., 19 July 1894.

⁵²Wisdom to Comm. of Indian Affairs, 29 June 1894, Document 24785, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵³Smith to Comm. of Indian Affairs, July 7, 1894, Document 25808, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁴South McAlester Capital, 12 July 1894.

⁵⁵Coalgate Nonpareil, 6 July 1894.

⁵⁶Ibid., 13 July 1894.

⁵⁷Ibid.; South McAlester Capital, 12 July 1894.

⁵⁸South McAlester Capital, 12 July 1894.

⁵⁹Ibid.; Coalgate Nonpareil, 13 July 1894.

⁶⁰South McAlester Capital, 12 July 1894.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., 19 July 1894.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Wisdom to the Comm. of Indian Affairs, 10 July 1894, Document 26077, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁵Wisdom to Comm. of Indian Affairs, 20 July 1894, Document 28164, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Alrich, "Coal Industry of Oklahoma," 88.

⁶⁶Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 88.

⁶⁷Coalgate Nonpareil, 27 July 1894; South McAlester Capital, 19 July 1894.

⁶⁸Wisdom to Comm. of Indian Affairs, 20 July 1894, Document 28164, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰South McAlester Capital, 19 July 1894.

⁷¹Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 11; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 89.

⁷²South McAlester Capital, 2 August 1894; Coalgate Nonpareil, 3 August 1894.

⁷³Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 27; Peter Hanraty, speech notes, Folder E-11, Peter Hanraty Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁷⁴Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 11; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 89-90; Carney, "Down in the Shaft," 10.

⁷⁵Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 89-90.

⁷⁶Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 11-12; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 89-90; Brown, Italians in Oklahoma, 28.

⁷⁷William Murray, Address before the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor Official Proceedings, 1929, 9.

⁷⁸Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 90.

⁷⁹Daily Oklahoman, 12 July 1894.

⁸⁰Ibid., 26 April 1894.

⁸¹South McAlester Capital, 19 July 1894.

⁸²Wisdom to Comm. of Indian Affairs, 10 July 1894, Letters Received, 1894, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER IV

THE EFFORT OF THEIR LIVES: THE SOUTHWEST STRIKE, 1899-1903

While the operators scored a knockdown in 1894, it was not a knockout. By late 1898 the miners were ready again to challenge the operators. This time it was under new leadership. The failure of the Knights of Labor in the strike of 1894 opened the door to Indian Territory for the United Mine Workers of America. Under U.M.W leadership, the miners launched a new effort in 1899 to gain not just better pay and working conditions, but an entirely new worker-management relationship based upon collective bargaining. Achieving this goal required the operators to recognize the union as the representative of the miners. This became the central issue of the "Southwest Strike" of 1899-1903.

Little had changed in Indian Territory's mining industry between 1894 and 1898. The operators still exercised absolute control over the wage scale, frequency of payment, hours, working conditions, housing, food, and mining supplies. Clyde Hamm notes in Labor History of Oklahoma that the strike of 1894 did nothing to ameliorate "the harshness of the company-town system." In fact the

operators "had learned to use this advantage against the miners to vitiate their bargaining power." Eviction and cut-off of food and other necessities were powerful weapons in the operators' arsenal. It made the miners' families hostages. If a miner struck, his family was subject to eviction and deprivation.'

Labor conditions in the territory's mines worsened from 1894 to 1898. There were brief work stoppages, but the operators sustained production by hiring non-union workers. Rising demand for coal led to price increases. Wages remained steady while the cost of living rose, and excessive production left miners idle much of the time. It was into such an environment that the United Mine Workers made their first appearance in Indian Territory in 1898.^e

In 1898 the United Mine Workers' national leadership sent James Boston into Indian Territory to organize the miners. He established the first local at Krebs. The drive to organize locals in every mining community accelerated after a series of wage reductions led to "unbearable" conditions. By late 1898 the United Mine Workers' locals in Indian Territory, Arkansas, and Texas had banded together to form District Twenty-One of the United Mine Workers of America.^g

In October 1898, the miners of District Twenty-One gathered at Fort Smith, Arkansas to hold their first convention. As first order of business, the miners elected

Albert Struble as district president. At the convention the miners passed a resolution urging Congress to abolish "script, and its consequent evil, company stores," and to legalize pay every two weeks. Congressman Little of Arkansas cheered the miners with his statement that he would introduce a bill that would "redress the evil which the miners claim is working a hardship on them. This will be of great importance to the Indian Territory, and will cut a considerable figure in the finances of many company stores that have had almost a monopoly of the miner's trade."⁴ The miners also demanded higher wages and that the operators recognize the union as their sole bargaining representative.⁵

Upon returning to Indian Territory after the convention, the miners began to press the operators for concessions. They demanded that the coal they mined be weighed in the pit car, instead of after being loaded into railroad cars. This would benefit the miners for up to that time only lump coal was loaded into railroad cars, meaning that the miner received no pay for all the "slack" he mined. The operators claimed that "slack," coal powderized in the mining process, was virtually worthless and, therefore, they did not pay for it. This "worthless" product still managed to earn the operators a tidy profit. Slack was perfect for conversion to coke, a material crucial to the production of steel. All the operators accepted the miners' demand except

those at Coalgate and Lehigh, the slack there being unsuitable for coke production. The miners considered this a token concession; their main goal was recognition of the union and they were prepared to strike to achieve it.⁶

In January 1899, the miners and operators of District 21 met at Pittsburg, Kansas to negotiate the next year's contract. While the operators contended they were just recovering from the effects of an economic downturn in 1897, the miners demanded a wage increase and the eight hour day. While their representatives talked, several union locals took action. On the eleventh of February the miners at Alderson laid down their tools and walked out; the next day three hundred miners struck the Choctaw mines at Hartshorne.⁷

The strike at Hartshorne was not called to pressure those negotiating at Pittsburg. The miners struck to protest Edwin Ludlow's firing of sixty men because of their membership in the U.M.W. The miners "allege that Supt. Ludlow discharged member of the order because they were members and for no other reason." The strikers presented no other demands but the reinstatement of the sixty, claiming "they were satisfied with the scale."⁸

Ludlow summarily rejected the miners' grievances. He claimed he had good reason for discharging the men, arguing that they were fomenting discord among his employees. Ludlow agreed to take back the sixty, but "not as members of

this organization." Refusing to compromise, Ludlow laid out the grounds for negotiations. He stated his opposition to a pit committee - wage increases and recognition of the union. If these terms were not accepted, he would "shut the mines down." The superintendent of the Choctaw Mines reiterated that he "would in no ways [sic] recognize the United Mine Workers association."⁹ The McAlester News-Capital reported that Ludlow expected to replace the strikers "with Negroes and that he has sent to Birmingham, Alabama for them." Marshall Grady declared his intention to protect both mine property and men who "work peaceably."¹⁰

The Capital argued that the union's objective was to have a universal wage scale for all the nation's miners. The Capital's main complaint was that the miners wanted an agreement on rules governing the employment of miners. The Capital editorialized that if this was achieved, it would "to a great extent take away the management of the mines [from the operators] and place it in the hands of the miners."¹¹

James Boston contended the purpose of the U.M.W. was to bring the miners and operators "into closer relations and to prevent strikes." The management of the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad considered the organization nothing less than labor agitators and refused to meet with any representatives of the organization. Nevertheless, Henry Wood, general manager of the C.O. & G., met with Boston and

Albert Struble, district president, on February 13, 1899. At the meeting Wood declared that "we think the strike was absolutely without any justification whatever, and the men who have been discharged [at Hartshorne] will not be reinstated." Wood refused to meet the union representatives again, although he stated his willingness to meet with his own employees.¹²

The strike spread to Wilburton after the negotiations failed. The town remained peaceful as the miners there joined the walk out. The Capital noted that there was "no display of hostility on the part of the miners" and remarked that "there is no rioting or ill feeling expected nor anticipated."¹³

In a last ditch effort to forestall a complete breakdown of the negotiations, the miners of District 21 met February 17th at Fort Smith and invited the operators to join them. Ludlow, a hard-liner among the operators, refused to attend, declaring that he would have nothing to do with the miners' union. Despite the absence of the operators, the miners issued their proposals at the Fort Smith convention. They demanded that coal be weighed before screening, a small wage increase, two weeks' pay, payment for "dead work," check-off dues, and no discrimination against members of the United Mine Workers.¹⁴ The Oklahoma State Capital reported that if the operators did not accept these terms a general strike in the district would begin

March 1.¹⁵

A letter to the editor of the South McAlester Capital in late February clearly delineated the position of the miners. The letter was titled, "a plea of the United Mine Workers of America," from a "miner." Its author argued that the U.M.W. wanted peace, not industrial strife, and it would be achieved only when the union and operators worked together. According to the author, the miners were entitled to the eight hour day and higher wages because their "extremely dangerous occupation" required "laboriously heavy tasks" in "dark, damp, unsanitary surroundings." The "miner" also cited the "isolated, unfavorable, inconvenient situation, miners are nearly always compelled to reside in" as justification for a wage increase.¹⁶

For his part, union organizer Boston continued to argue for the demands of the miners and to press for the reinstatement of the miners Ludlow "fired out" at Hartshorne. Boston contended that "the discharging went on every day, every morning rather, until I think there was in the neighborhood of sixty men discharged at Hartshorne and at a meeting of the miners they decided to stop until the men were re-instated." Boston lamented that "Mr. Ludlow refused to do business with us, or talk with us." He argued that the U.M.W. had to defend itself from the "injustice of Mr. Ludlow in discharging these men" and that the policy was "un-American."¹⁷

True to their word, the miners began a "wholesale walking out" on March 1. The next day four hundred men at Cherryvale joined the strike, followed by an equal number at Coalgate and Lehigh after a mass meeting held by the miners of those communities. Nearly a thousand miners met at Krebs to discuss the situation, but the meeting adjourned amid arguments. The strike continued to spread until over two thousand miners were on strike. The strikers pledged "the effort of their lives" because if they failed "then will be lost all hope of their even being able to unionize any of the mines" and that collective bargaining was the only way they could "be sure of receiving recognition of their grievance." The Capital reported that "the miners will not give up."¹⁸ But neither would the operators.

Almost immediately after the strike started, the operators began to import black strikebreakers to keep the mines producing. In early March the Capital noted that about forty black miners arrived at Hartshorne. Estimates of the numbers of strikebreakers working in the mines varied from thirty to one hundred, but they produced little coal due to the small size of the work force and their inexperience. The Wilburton mines' output was one-third normal, only a trickle at Haileyville, and none at all at Lehigh and Coalgate. Miners at Hartshorne claimed the strikebreakers were poorly-trained and the result was that eighteen "rooms fell in, ... caused by [the] new miners not

knowing how to do the work."¹⁹

While using strikebreakers to keep production going, the operators turned to the federal government to rid themselves of James Boston. Henry Wood, general manager of the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad Company, wrote United States Inspector J. George Wright of the Interior Department requesting that Boston be ejected from the territory. He argued that most of the miners were opposed to the strike and that "there is no real difficulty between the miners and the operators." Wood claimed that "the trouble has been caused by James Boston," and that the Boston was leading the miners in a strike "to force recognition by the operators in their dealings with their men, and to enforce such scale of wages and conditions of mining as they thought best." According to Wood, the strike was costing the miners, operators, and the Choctaw Nation financially. He urged that "this man James Boston and his aiders and abettors be excluded from the Territory as disturbers of the peace and as men whose actions are inimical to the well-being of all parties interested." Wood requested prompt implementation "as every day of this continued agitation is a menace to order and security of property and a great injury to all interests involved."²⁰

Wright turned Wood's request over to Colonel Dew Wisdom, Indian Agent. Wisdom ordered Captain J. W. Ellis of the United States Indian Police to notify Boston either to

secure a permit or face expulsion. The Indian Agent told Ellis that Boston was "playing the role of an agitator and inducing men to strike," the result being "a menace to the repose of society."¹²¹

Boston quickly launched a counteroffensive against the eviction order. His argument was that he was only traveling through Indian Territory and did not require a permit. Through his attorneys Boston asked for fifteen days to present his case. One of Boston's attorneys informed Wisdom that "you have had only one side presented to you" and once he had heard both sides of the story he would "not feel like issuing this order to eject him from the Territory."¹²² Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, also came to the defense of Boston. He wrote the Secretary of the Interior to argue that Boston be allowed to remain in the territory on the grounds that Agent Wisdom had "over-stepped his authority." Gompers stated there was nothing illegal about working against "low wages, long hours, and slave-like conditions of labor" and that neither "Mr. Wisdom nor Mr. Wright has been commissioned by society as its savior."¹²³

The Choctaw Nation's attitude toward Boston was similar to that of the operators. Principal Chief Green wrote to Wisdom to complain that Boston was "inciting dissatisfaction among the miners of this Nation." He pointed out that the strike was "interfering with the coal royalties of the

Choctaw Nation," and requested Wisdom to "take such steps as you deem necessary to the protection of the Nation in this matter." Green closed his letter with the comment that Boston "follows no occupation other than that of creating trouble, and I ask that he be removed from the limits of this nation." Special Investigator J. W. Zevely reported to the Secretary of the Interior that the "Choctaw authorities are anxious for immediate action" on Boston's removal.²⁴

The miners protested the order that Boston leave Indian Territory. They declared that Boston was not "the promoter of the present strike or any disturbances," but rather he was there to "defend their rights as miners." They deplored Wisdom's actions, claiming they violated Boston's "privileges [sic] granted him by the constitution of the United States, namely that of freedom of speech." Miners at Lehigh complained that Wisdom's actions "cannot be too strongly condemned as arbitrary in the worst sense and as an abuse of the authority vested" in his office.²⁵ The union local at Coalgate pleaded with Wisdom not to "rashly enforce your order upon the mere recommendation of the Choctaw Coal and Mining Company's Officials."²⁶

Miners also complained to Wisdom about physical intimidation by the mining company's security guards. The miners demanded that Agent Wisdom "take measures to prohibit Deputy Marshals and the Choctaw company armed guards from kicking and throwing people's furniture out of houses

without authority from court, and threatening to kill people without provocation."²⁷ Boston charged that the authorities had saturated the coal towns with Indian Police and U.S. Deputy Marshals, some drunk, all attempting to provoke strikers into violence. He alleged that the authorities had struck miners, shot into their houses, and in general, had threatened the strikers while rousting them out of bed during midnight raids.²⁸

Not surprisingly the miners blamed the operators for the unrest that beset Indian Territory. At Hartshorne, where the strike began, the miners declared they were engaging only in "legal and legitimate" activities. They scoffed at the operators' contention "that miners cannot strike without destroying human life and property." The Hartshorne miners proclaimed that the myth had been "put to rest as the history of this strike as far as it has gone, there has not been a single offence [sic] against the laws." The miners concluded that abstaining from provocative illegal actions was "absolutely essential" if the strike were to succeed. Calling themselves "peaceable and [law] abiding citizens," they contended "the strike was caused by the C.O. and Gulf Coal Co. discharging 60 members of the organization without cause and Mr. James Boston was not the cause of this stopping of Mines in the Choctaw Nation." The miners told Agent Wisdom that "when this strike is investigated, you will find that the Company was the

aggressor and the said Mr. Boston has been notified to vacate the Territory without just cause, and we demand the just right and privilages [sic] as other corporations and organizations in the Territory to have a man looking after our interest."²⁹

A series of clashes at Lehigh prompted the operators of the mines there to request that the federal government put a halt to the disturbances. This request was the result of one hundred strikers at Lehigh surrounding a company house where five men resided who had crossed the picket lines. The strikers gave the five a twenty-four hour notice to leave town. In another incident, seventy-five strikers intercepted a dozen men who were on the way to work in the mines and ordered them to turn back.³⁰ Wisdom suggested that the operators seek relief through the courts, based upon their lease agreements with the Choctaw Nation. He noted that there were "both a civil and a criminal remedy for interferences and disturbances" and this action would provide "a speedy and effective remedy."³¹

Most operators blamed the U.M.W.'s organizers as "outsiders" whose actions "breed dissention (sic) and threaten violence." Ira D. Oglesby, attorney for the Atoka Coal and Mining Company and the Osage Coal and Mining Company, asked Agent Wisdom for assistance in keeping "co-operation in suppressing and preventing violence towards our employees." Oglesby held that if the government assisted in

"keeping from our several camps these outsiders, it will do much towards quieting the present disturbances."³²

Not all the operators took such a hard line in the struggle. In early March a rumor swept the coal fields that the superintendent of the Lehigh mines "had signed the scale. This has been flatly contradicted and there you are." Still, the Perry Brothers, one of the smaller operators, reached an agreement on a wage scale with U.M.W. Local No. 557 at Coalgate, an action heartily praised by the local.³³

The miners planned a mass meeting at Krebs to discuss their options. Hearing of the proposed meeting, Agent Wisdom instructed Captain J. W. Ellis of the Indian Police to attend, stipulating that "if Boston makes an incendiary speech, report to me for final action."³⁴ After attending the meeting Ellis reported back that Boston did not ask the miners "to strike but to stick to the Union until they got what they wanted." Ellis noted that Boston told those at the meeting that if "all the men at Krebs had gone to work they would have been scabs, as the majority in the district were out on a strike." Ellis also denied the charge that "the police were drunk and abusing everybody that belonged to the miner's union" and steadfastly maintained that "all of this is a lie." Finally Ellis noted that Chief McCurtain had informed him that Boston would not be issued a permit under any circumstances and "he should be put out of the

territory." ³⁵

The mass meeting at Krebs buoyed the spirits of the men on strike. The sheer numbers at the meeting (hundreds attended) was proof to the miners that the strike was far from settled. This led organizer Boston to declare at the meeting that "we will fight it to the finish." One miner bragged that "the only coal which is now being hoisted is mined by scab labor and is called scab coal." But the miner went on to lament that "it seems as if the people of South Town [McAlester] were on the monopoly side of the question, instead of being on the poor miner's side." He stressed that "we are only fighting for liberty, and liberty we must have." ³⁶

From the outset of the strike the operators ignored the strike and used non-union workers to maintain production. The striking miners often were effective in persuading these workers to change sides in the dispute. In Hartshorne, the center of the strike, "several miners who were en route for Hartshorne have been stopped by miners, the situation explained to them and that they refused to go to work." ³⁷

The operators almost immediately sought a restraining order to bring a halt to the strikers' efforts to resist the importation of strikebreakers. In mid-March the Atoka Coal and Mining Company "asked for an injunction against the striking coal miners at Coalgate." The company's attorneys requested that the strikers "be restrained from interfering

or in any way molesting other miners who were desirous of working in the Atoka Coal and Mining Company's mines."²⁸ On the next day Judge W. H. H. Clayton of the Central District of Indian Territory at Atoka issued the injunction the operators had requested. The injunction ordered the strikers not to interfere with the operation of the company's mines and in particular forbade the striking miners from "interfering or molesting other miners who want to work with federal protection." The injunction also warned the strikers not to destroy mine property and banned them from "holding riotous public meetings." If the operators hoped the injunction would provoke a reaction from the miners, they did not get the response they desired. When asked to comment on the injunction, Boston argued that the injunction "is a benefit to the miners and not an injury." He noted that the injunction asked that the miners obey the law and this was something the miners had already pledged to do.²⁹ A few days later the courts issued a second injunction, this one against the striking employees of the Kali-Inla Coal Company at Alderson. This action resulted from a mass meeting at Alderson at which Boston offered to pay the transportation cost of any strikebreaker desiring to leave the territory. While reporting on the injunction granted against the Alderson miners, the Daily Oklahoman noted at the same time that "the Kali-Inla Company received another consignment of new miners today, which will

be put to work tomorrow."*

The initial results of the strike were mixed. The larger operators, the Osage Coal and Mining Company and the Choctaw Coal and Mining Company, continued to work "full blast" with non-union labor. Other companies continued to operate, but at reduced output.*

By early April both sides settled in for a long struggle. The operators, fortified with injunctions and strikebreakers, believed they could outlast the striking miners. The miners took a more defensive posture. Hobbled by the injunctions and the threat of eviction, they focused on the strategy of a limited strike while continuing efforts to organize the non-union mines in the territory. At the same time the union organized relief efforts in the communities where strikes continued.

On April 3 Boston traveled to St. Louis to confer with John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers. They agreed that "more aggressive measures must be taken to make the strike a success." Accordingly, they decided to extend the strike to Kansas and Missouri and to send organizers into those states. Boston also persuaded Mitchell to order miners in Illinois and Alabama to quit shipping coal to Indian Territory and Arkansas. These deliveries allowed the territory's operators to fill their orders. Boston also appealed to the national leadership for financial assistance, arguing that this was necessary "to continue the

strike to a successful end." Boston commented that "we are in this strike to win.... The operators may fill to the top some of their mines with scabs. It will avail them nothing. This strike will not be called off by the United Mine Workers until it is a success."⁴²

Chief Green McCurtain had no intention of allowing the strike to be "a success." In April he demanded that Boston be removed from the Choctaw Nation. The Department of the Interior asked for further information before committing to the dismissal of Boston. In May Special Inspector J.W. Zevely transmitted another request from Chief McCurtain to remove Boston and others who "appear to be either strikers, or persons in sympathy therewith." This request was "accompanied by affidavits and complaints relative to the situation." Zevely also enclosed financial records illustrating that the tribe's coal royalties had "been almost entirely cut off by the actions of these miners." He recommended "that some action be taken by the Department in this matter, and believe that the removal of the principal leaders and agitators would prove very effective."⁴³

The result was that the tribe declared the presence of sixty-four strikers to be "detrimental" to the welfare of the Indians. The South McAlester Capital reported that "Captain Stanley and W. L. Richards, representing the Choctaw Nation, have filed with Secretary Hitchcock a petition praying for interference of the Interior Department

in the Choctaw miner's strike." But the Commissioner of Indian Affairs requested further investigation before taking action on the request to evict the sixty-four. Responding to this request, Secretary of the Interior E. A. Hitchcock ordered Special Inspector J. W. Zevely to investigate the strike and report back.⁴⁴

The operators, lacking confidence in the government's will to intervene in an aggressive manner, continued with their own plans to break the strike. A key part of the operators' strategy was to evict the striking miners and their families from company housing. Miners countered this tactic by trading houses. The operators responded by seeking and receiving an injunction "restraining Cherryvale miners from swapping house to defeat writs of possession issued against them." Earlier the courts had given the miners ten days to vacate company houses owned by the Kansas and Texas Coal Company. This action was the result of thirty-five unlawful entry suits the operators filed against the striking miners. But before the ten days had expired, the miners engaged in a "general swapping around of houses" and then argued they had complied with the court order to vacate the particular company house they lived in. Judge Clayton's injunction ordered a stop to the house swapping and declared that after an additional ten days, the miners "would be ejected by force" if they did not leave the company houses on their own accord.⁴⁵

The operators' plan was to fill their company houses and mines with non-union workers. The South McAlester Capital reported in late May that William F. Kelley, agent for the Missouri and Kansas Coal Company, was in Leavenworth "trying to secure negro miners" to work as strikebreakers in Indian Territory. He promised protection and sixty cents a ton. Kelly declared he hoped "to fill the territory mines with negroes as soon as possible." The railroad official said that the negroes "worked as steady as whites and caused no trouble by organizing strikes." After discounting the effectiveness of the strike, Kelly claimed reports of that sort "were exaggerated and that they were only a few men out."** The President of the Kansas and Texas Coal Company posted notices that stated: "All miners who do not return to work today will be forever barred from working in the mines of the company and must at once vacate the company property."** Officers of the Missouri Pacific Railroad and the Western Coal and Mining Company posted similar notices at their mines, declaring they would "bring miners from elsewhere if necessary." Strikers gathered at one mine, anticipating that "negroes would be brought in during the night."**

In late May officials of the Kansas and Texas Coal Company threatened to bring in black strikebreakers to operate the company's mines. The miner's union sought an injunction to halt such activity. Ruling from Pittsburg,

Kansas, Judge A. H. Skidmore (or Skedmore), ruled in the union's favor when he granted an injunction against the company. It forbade the company from importing "convict laborers, undesirable citizens, or people with malignant or contagious diseases."⁴⁹

The operators' decision to operate their mines with non-union labor quickly led to violence in the coal towns. In early June, a strikebreaker identified as J. D. New entered McDuff's pool room at Howe, Indian Territory. Once inside he found "several miners in the room." One called New a "scab." He drew a pistol and shot dead the miner making the charge. Bystanders subdued New "after striking him several blows" and turned him over to the authorities.⁵⁰

Later in the month three striking miners robbed a Pittsburg and Gulf Railroad train near McAlester. The "Pee-Gee" bandits were captured soon thereafter. Deputies stated that all three "have all been miners and went out since the strike was ordered."⁵¹ Jailers two months later authorities caught the three with "penknives of the Barlow variety," which had been fashioned into saws. Presumably the men planned "to saw out of jail," but "at any rate they are now minus their means of escape."⁵²

In July the operators began importing strikebreakers in large numbers. Four railroad cars carrying black strikebreakers from Virginia arrived on the Missouri,

Kansas, and Texas Railroad. Guarded by United States Marshall Grady and sixteen deputies, they detrained at Limestone to prevent trouble at the Coalgate train station and then were escorted into Coalgate. The South McAlester Capital reported that the "sixteen deputy marshals will be left at Coalgate a few days until matters begin to run smoothly. The importation was a genuine surprise to the miners and people of Coalgate."⁵³

The strikebreakers found themselves less than welcome in the coal towns. At Lehigh the Atoka Coal and Mining Company built fifty four-room dwellings and a large boarding house to shelter their imported black strikebreakers. Armed guards, deputized as United States Marshals, protected the "bull-pen." This continued until it was considered safe for them to move into standard company houses.⁵⁴ By early July fifty-two additional colored miners were working at Lehigh.⁵⁵

Not all the strikebreakers were happy about such work conditions. The Krebs Eagle reported:

The imported Negroes are having a whole lot of fun with their bosses. One of them floored a strip-pit foreman the other day, then smote him with a shovel while he was down. Another chased a foreman up a ladder at No. 6 shaft and it is said no straw-boss ever flew heavenward faster than did that one. Another unlimbered a rapid-fire razor and went after a company official who objected to the negro leaving camp. But he might as well have chased a hole in the wind.⁵⁶

As the operators brought in non-union workers they evicted the strikers from company houses. The union raised

tent cities to house the strikers and their families. Supply depots were established at Wilburton and at other locations to distribute food to needy strikers. But funds were limited, and often families received as little as one dollar weekly.⁵⁷ Others in the coal communities rallied to support the miner's cause. Dozens of stores displayed "Union Store" placards in their windows; the strikers boycotted stores that did not.⁵⁸

Living conditions became difficult for the strikers. Evicted from company housing and living in tents, possessions sold for debt, hundreds of miners subsisted on little more than turnips. Edwin Ludlow, leader of the operators, declared that he would "make a dollar look as big as a wagon wheel."⁵⁹ While the strikers lived in tents and ate turnips, operators like D. M. Hailey lived a pampered life. A McAlester paper declared that the "Hailey mansion has not a superior in the city. It is large and elegantly furnished, rooms are spacious and decorated with pansies and roses," a measure of civilization the strikers' tents lacked.⁶⁰

While the strike continued, Special Inspector Zevely began his investigation into the affair. He held hearings at the "commercial club rooms" at McAlester for a week in mid-July and then traveled to Atoka to hear additional testimony there. The Krebs Eagle noted that at stake was the fate of the "sixty-four persons ... [who] by their

agitation were prolonging the strike."⁴¹

Both sides in the strike realized the importance of the Atoka hearings. The outcome of the strike depended upon the results of the hearings. Accordingly, the hearings "attracted large crowds."⁴² Among the first witnesses were leading officials of several of the largest coal companies in the territory. "Most of the mine operators of the territory" were present.⁴³ The Krebs Eagle noted that the operators were "naturally giving aid where possible to the prosecution." The paper went on comment:

The operators are in the novel position of endeavoring to prove that the strike has materially affected the output of the mines, or in other words has been a success, while the miners must either show that the strike has not amounted to anything, or else that the charges against them have some foundation.⁴⁴

The central question of the Atoka hearings was to determine if the strikers had violated Choctaw laws. Once again the tenuous status of miners in the territory was apparent. The Eagle reiterated:

People must bear in mind that the situation here is entirely different from that in any state. Anywhere else it would be perfectly legal for strikers to quit work and talk all they pleased provided they did not bodily interfere with work. Not so here. This is the Indians' country. The law provides that parties whom the Indians decide objectionable to them may be removed. The investigation is to decide if the strikers are objectionable.⁴⁵

After the operators testified, it was the miners' turn to give their side of the dispute. They stated that they were not using force to prevent non-union men from working.

They also contended that the strike could be settled promptly if the operators would meet with the executive committee of the United Mine Workers, "but not individually" as the operators demanded. The miners also testified that a "committee had been appointed to get permits for the striking miners, but the Choctaw authorities refused to issue them."⁶⁶ This was interesting, as many of the strikers held municipal positions in the towns where they lived. Among those who testified were Dan Shea and Peter Hanraty, both elected mayors of their communities.⁶⁷

With testimony completed, Special Agent Zevely reviewed the material and forwarded it on to the Secretary of the Interior. Zevely did not make any judgments at the hearings. "The final decision" on evictions would be at the cabinet level, although many in the coal towns were unsure how Secretary Hitchcock would "pass upon it." Over 650 pages of testimony was given at the Atoka hearings, and as a result, most expected that "it will be probably be 30 days before the result of the investigation is known."⁶⁸

During the hearings the Choctaw tribe continued to press for the United States government to intervene actively in the strike. Governor McCurtain reiterated his desire "to have the objectionable parties removed."⁶⁹ The tribe also sent a memorial to Congress that called for expulsion of the miners and appropriated 350 dollars to fund expulsions.⁷⁰

It was during the Atoka hearings that John Mitchell,

President of the United Mine Workers, began to take an active role in assisting the striking miners in District 21, of which Indian Territory mines were part. He notified the union's locals across the nation of conditions in Indian Territory and requested that they lobby Secretary Hitchcock. The result was a flood of letters to the Secretary, not just from U.M.W. members, but from many labor organizations across the nation.⁷¹ Mitchell himself offered to testify in "opposition to the ejection of miner from the Indian Territory." Mitchell told Hitchcock that what happened to the sixty-four men facing expulsion was

of the greatest importance not only to the mine workers of the Indian Territory, but to the trades union movement everywhere, and I assure you, all we ask or expect is that the Governemnt shall act with entire impartiality between the employer and the employee.⁷²

Surprisingly Hitchcock granted Mitchell's request for additional arguments on the expulsions.⁷³ After months of soul-searching, Hitchcock refused to sanction expulsion of the sixty-four. He partially based his decision on reports of the Indian Commissioner, J. George Wright, and recommended that the activities of the strikers only "be closely watched."⁷⁴

At the end of July the miners offered a proposal to the operators to settle the strike. The demands were wage of sixty cents per ton for "run of mine" coal, (that is, non-screened coal). This was to correct the operators' policy of not paying miners for "slack." The miners also asked for

payment every two weeks, an arbitration committee, an eight-hour day, a check weighmen, and check-off dues. The president of Local No. 641 at Krebs had the contract published, to prove "we are not demanding anything unreasonable."⁷⁵

The operators ignored the union's proposal, and they continued as if the union did not exist. They maintained production with the use of imported non-union men. Operators brought in black strikebreakers from Iowa, Kansas, and West Virginia. The Coalgate Courier noted that "the Negroes from West Virginia are very quiet and attend strictly to their own business." August marked the first use of non-black strikebreakers as "seventy-nine white miners from West Virginia arrived" at Lehigh and another eighty at Hartshorne to work in the coal mines. The Courier went on to note that "just at the present the Indian Territory is the checker-board, the railroad presidents are the checker-players, and the game is interesting."⁷⁶ The South McAlester Capital reported that "the mines are being rapidly filled up and will be running just as if no strike had taken place, in a few weeks."⁷⁷ By August, despite the strike, production was exceeding that of a year earlier.⁷⁸ As they brought in non-union men, the operators continued to evict strikers from company housing. In August the Southwestern Coal and Improvement Company

served notice on all the striking miners who occupy company houses to vacate them within five

days. Many of the miners have moved and other will move in the next few days. In many cases the strikers are selling their household goods and will seek employment elsewhere."

Not all the miners gave up so easily though. In late-August the Krebs Eagle noted that "some of our boys got into a little difficulty Tuesday.... It is to be hoped [it] will have no serious results, but which may have." The Eagle reported that a group of strikers were "having a little fun tossing rocks around but taking care to hurt no one." A disturbance began when

two [non-union] foreign miners came along. The boys say the two men became scared at seeing the crowd and the stones, and noticing this the crowd chaffed them a good deal. The two men turned to run away when a stone, thrown by a striker, said to have been thrown at one of their own crowd - without any attention of hitting anyone - hit one of the [non-union] miners. The man is laid up at present, but we do not know how seriously he may be injured. It is to be hoped there was no malice on the part of the strikers and that the rock was not intended for the miners, but anyway three of the strikers were arrested."⁹⁰

The close cooperation between the authorities and the operators was made clear in the reaction to this incident. When the case came to trial, the judge issued a continuance "to allow Attorney Oglesby, of Fort Smith, attorney for the Osage Coal Company, to appear to assist in the prosecution." While this affair continued to develop, the Eagle lamented that "some trouble was reported between Italian and Negro miners at No. 5 one day last week. We do not know the extent of the trouble nor the accuracy of the report."⁹¹

While the operators contended that the strike was

inconsequential, Chief McCurtain of the Choctaws did not. McCurtain acknowledged that many of the strikers had left Indian Territory, but in a letter to Ludlow he claimed that "at each mine a small guard of men were left who are in the employ and are paid by an organization know as the United Mine Workers of America." McCurtain complained that these men "dissuade imported men from entering the mines." McCurtain notified Ludlow that he was ordering the sheriffs of Gaines and Tobucksy counties "to call upon you for the purpose of having the agitators pointed out to them." The Chief declared that the sheriffs would then demand to see a permit, "and if they have no permits or are not following any legitimate avocations, steps will be taken to cause their removal." McCurtain argued that the tribe and the operators had to stand united. He claimed only then "we can succeed in having the mines fully operated."⁸²

The union's district leadership then responded with a series of mass meetings to keep support for the strike going. At Coalgate the "speakers were met at the depot with a band and a procession was formed and marched to the hall. The strikers carried a banner bearing the inscription that they were good for seven months more." In a Coalgate meeting the secretary of the district, John P. Reese, "assured the striking miners they were sure to win if they held out against the operators a few months longer, as the mines could not be operated without them." Reese pledged

financial support for the miners and promised the strike would continue "until it was won."⁸³

At Krebs there was a festive open air meeting of union miners. About two hundred strikers gathered in front of the post office to hear several members of the district leadership speak. According to the Krebs Eagle, the speakers "seemed to have made a good impression."⁸⁴ Reese remarked in a letter to John Mitchell that the mass meetings gave "the strikers new hope." He also noted that a mass meeting in Krebs was "something new for that place."⁸⁵

At these mass meetings union organizers implored the strikebreakers to join the union's cause. Reese notified Mitchell that "at Alderson we influenced one hundred black scabs to quit the day after we spoke there." In a meeting at Hartshorne the district leadership not only "had the pleasure of speaking to Ludlow and all his bosses, induced a few of is scabs to quit.... At all the other camps the boys repeat that the meeting done good."⁸⁶

Reese advised Mitchell that "this strike can be made more effective down here if we can hold more meetings." He also asked that an articulate spokesman for the union be sent as "not one of the boys here is a public speaker." He expressed the hope that in a few weeks the strike could be expanded to several "mines that are running unmolested" with "hundreds of scabs at work."⁸⁷ What was important, according to Reese, was for the union men to redouble their

efforts. Reese noted that "our men never crusaded in this district yet at all, hence you see much might be done. We can crusade in the territory.... I believe the operators are now making their last fight."¹⁸⁸ A local paper noted that Reese "was very sanguine of the ultimate success of the strike."¹⁸⁹

As for his meeting with Ludlow, Reese came away with the attitude that a negotiated settlement was possible. He noted that Ludlow even "gave me a cigar." He went on to comment that "I feel he is beginning to recognize us."¹⁹⁰

While Reese may have believed that Ludlow "is beginning to recognize us," reality was the opposite. Soon after the meeting with Reese, Ludlow "without consulting the strikers, or any committees," increased the wage scale at the Choctaw mines. The wage increase was evidence that Ludlow was having difficulty finding enough workers to operate the company's mines. While the wage increase indicated the strike was having an effect, the Coalgate Courier reprinted an editorial that originated in the Hartshorne Sun, headquarters for Ludlow's Choctaw Company mines. The author of the article contended that Ludlow, "without dictation from the strikers," made the advance "to men who work. He pays no attention to idlers who gather on the streets and demand an advance in wages." The paper advised that "if you want to make an honest living in this country, go to work. There is no premium on idleness."¹⁹¹

Both sides in the struggle seem to pause in September to assess the results of the strike. The Courier noted:

the strike situation remains about the same as it has for the past few months. The operators are filling up the mines with non-union men.... The union miners seem to be firm and say they are able to keep up the strike until next spring.... Neither side will yield and it looks as though the mines will continue to be operated with non-union men. The miners do not ask for an increase in wages and never have, and the operators have not recognized the union and that is what prolongs the strike. The United Mine Workers of America demand that their organization be recognized and this the operators refuse to do."²

As the strike dragged on, the operators continued to press the Choctaws and the Secretary of the Interior to intervene aggressively. The South McAlester Capital noted that when the two sides were unable to reach an accommodation, "the operators endeavored to prevail upon the authorities of the Territory to cause the striking miners to be expelled. Steps looking to this end were taken last spring, but without effect." The Capital warned that the "mine operators have petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to remove the strikers from the Territory shows they refuse to return to work or should they continue to use any effort to induce the men now at work in the mines to quit."³

Concerned about the continuing agitation in the mining communities, Secretary Hitchcock complained in a letter to John Mitchell that labor organizers had come to the territory from Iowa and Arkansas to persuade non-union

miners to quit work. He contended that at the union's mass meetings, "gathered together by means of a brass band," organizers urged the non-union miners to quit and join the strike. Hitchcock threatened that "if the troubles are not soon settled an effort will be made to expel the striking miners from the Territory." Mitchell retorted that only persuasion was being used and that if the non-union miners quit, it was of their own accord. He also argued that "all citizens" had "the right to peaceful assemblage [sic]" and that the union was against "any overt act or violation of the law."⁴

Not surprisingly, the strike divided the coal communities into rival camps. Those who supported the operators argued the strike only hurt the coal towns. The Coalgate Courier argued that the town had "made substantial improvements during the past few months, notwithstanding the fact she has been greatly handicapped by a strike in the mines." The paper suggested if the town "would unload a few old drones, pullbacks, and kickers who would prefer to see the town stand still than to improve, the conditions would be for the better."⁵

Advice like that tended to turn crowds into mobs. After the Courier ran an article critical of the union, a supporter of the strike confronted its author on a street in Coalgate. According to the Courier, the strike supporter, Jack Gay, was "looking for trouble" when he proceeded to

heap profanity upon the paper's reporter and the crowd that had gathered to witness the confrontation. The crowd turned on Gay and he was "treated to a good thrashing." Despite being challenged, the Courier reporter refused "to enter the pugilistic arena." Police made several arrests in connection with the incident."⁶

In November Chief McCurtain criticized the federal government for not ejecting the strikers, contending that those in Washington preferred "not to antagonize the miner's union." The South McAlester Capital chided McCurtain by reminding him that the mine's allies, the operators, had "shipped into the territory a foreign element of low character and caste, and negroes which are an abomination rather than a benefit."⁷

By the fall the solid walls of solidarity exhibited by both sides began to show signs of cracking. Several small operators declared they would abide by the strikers' demands and would operate their mines "with union labor." But when a rumor surfaced claiming that the Kansas and Texas Company had agreed to sign the union scale, it was declared to be "like most similar rumors, utterly without foundation."⁸ In November three hundred miners met at the Hartshorne opera house and voted to sever their ties to the United Mine Workers. They denounced the organization and agreed "to continue work and not allow the so-called-agitators to interfere."⁹

As the strike dragged on, union representatives focused their attention on the territory's unorganized mines. Peter Hanraty played a key part in organizing the miners in those locations. He launched a drive to organize locals in the district as rapidly as possible after his election as president of district twenty-one in 1899. The strike spread in this manner from one coal community to the next.¹⁰⁰

Hanraty devised a multi-faceted strike strategy. The first objective was to organize locals. The Oklahoma Federationist declared that he "started out almost single handed and tramped from coal camp to coal camp, preaching the gospel of organization, dinning into the miners' ears that they could never right their wrongs unless they banded together in the United Mine Workers of America."¹⁰¹ Once locals were established, organizers began appealing to the strikebreakers to change sides and join the union. Many did, and Hanraty sent the former strikebreakers home to organize new locals.¹⁰² He also implemented "guarrila [sic] warfare against the larg [sic] operators that refused to sign" union contracts by entering into union contracts with the smaller operators, thus pitting one operator against another. It was classic divide-and-conquer strategy.¹⁰³

As the strike wore on, isolated incidents of violence occurred. In January 1900, a union miner and a strikebreaker shot it out on the main street in Hartshorne.

The incident began when the union miner was tipped that a group of black strikebreakers were planning an attack on him. The striker then secured a Winchester for his own defense. He found one of his pursuers in the center of town; the strikebreaker opened fire first, but missed. At that point "both men advanced on each other, shooting as rapidly as possible and continued to advance until they were within a few feet of each other when the Negro [strikebreaker] fell dead."¹⁰⁴

In another strike-related incident, a mine operator's milk cow was attacked and mutilated. The Coalgate Courier reported that "some fiend in the shape of a man had caught the cow and cut her tongue out." The operator offered a hundred dollar reward for information leading to the capture of the perpetrator of "the fiendish act."¹⁰⁵

As the year 1900 began, another "fiend" appeared in the coal towns, a smallpox epidemic. Beginning six months earlier at Hartshorne, the epidemic quickly spread to Atoka and other mining towns in the Choctaw Nation. Most of the cases affected the imported black strikebreakers. The Indian Commissioner, J. George Wright, acknowledged this in a letter to Secretary of the Interior E. A. Hitchcock. Wright notified the Secretary that the "epidemic was introduced into the Choctaw Nation to a large extent by the miners."¹⁰⁶ But only after the epidemic had swept through the coal towns were government officials so honest.

Despite several deaths, authorities quickly denied July reports of smallpox in Hartshorne. Marshall Grady claimed that "every facility for investigation had been offered by Superintendent Ludlow," and together they found "no case of smallpox exists." Trying to quiet fears, Marshall Grady declared that one black family did have chicken pox, but even then they were "not among the imported miners as has been reported." Despite this weak attempt at a cover-up, the authorities quarantined the strikebreakers "in response to a request of a meeting of citizens held yesterday morning." Edwin Ludlow pledged to furnish provisions and doctors for those afflicted with the "chicken pox." The Coalgate Courier declared the rumor of smallpox among the blacks strikebreakers at Hartshorne to be false, noting that "the physicians now pronounce it chicken pox."¹⁰⁷

The South McAlester Capital tried to quash rumors with the comment that the epidemic was "confined to the Negroes entirely."¹⁰⁸ But after the disease spread to Krebs, the Eagle advocated that "people should take some steps to prevent [this] disease from coming among us."¹⁰⁹ As a result, "several Krebs parties" sought "a petition asking the Indian Agent to investigate the reported prevalence of smallpox at Hartshorne, Alderson, and other places."¹¹⁰ The citizens of Alderson declared that their city had no smallpox, but rather an outbreak of "a fungoid disease."¹¹¹ Coalgate declared that there was "no smallpox here!

Coalgate has never had a case." But just ten miles to the south Atoka was under quarantine, its schools and churches closed.¹¹²

Only after the epidemic had run unchecked for months did the authorities quit denying the outbreak and start taking aggressive measures to combat the spread of the disease. In October Chief McCurtain ordered the Choctaw Nation's medical board to take charge of protecting the tribe's citizens. Indian Agent Schoenfelt took similar action in regards to United States citizens residing within the borders of the Choctaw Nation.¹¹³

Officials took these measures as a belated reaction to a serious smallpox outbreak. By October the epidemic had spread to most of the coal towns in the territory. One of the towns hit the hardest was Atoka, where infected miners were "corralled" at one of many detention camps established. Surprisingly, the mortality rate was relatively low, about 2.5 percent of those infected. The Coalgate Courier noted that those who survived were "cured, washed, dressed up and turned loose to again mingle with the outer world. While they are not so handsome as they were, they have the consolation of knowing they will never have to be vaccinated."¹¹⁴

By late in the year the authorities were actively combating the smallpox epidemic. The Choctaw Board of Health, with the cooperation of the Indian Agent, took

complete charge of the quarantine camps. At one camp thirty guards quarantined "an entire mining settlement with a population of several thousand Negroes." Medical personnel treated over eight hundred cases at the twenty-nine detention centers. The Choctaw tribe spent heavily for tents, food, physicians, nurses, and guards. In January 1900 Secretary Hitchcock recommended an appropriation of fifty thousand dollars "to stamp out small pox in the Indian Territory," but Congress rejected the bill. Congress did not appropriate funds until after the epidemic was under control.¹⁵ Still, some federal officials did take the initiative. The postmaster general ordered the mail be "fumigated" at McAlester, Krebs, Hartshorne, Atoka, and other coal mining communities.¹⁶

The smallpox epidemic certainly disrupted life in the coal towns. It forced a closing of the courts, resulting in the jails being "filled to overflowing with prisoners." The authorities also banned public meetings, but they did not enforce the order uniformly. Blacks in McAlester who attended a Republican club meeting later found their names on a removal list given to Indian Inspector Wright. But with the ban on public meetings still in force the Woodmen of the World Society gave a ball and supper at the McAlester city hall. A local paper called the festivities "a swell affair."¹⁷

Despite the disruptions caused by the epidemic and the

ongoing strike, the citizenry still managed to maintain a spirit of boosterism and a sense of humor. The Coalgate Courier noted that Lehigh was "bounded on the south by a praiare [sic] fire, on the north by a coal mine, on the east by smallpox and on the west by more smallpox. People should look sharp."¹¹⁸ At McAlester the Capital declared it took "more than a strike and a small pox scare to keep South McAlester from expanding."¹¹⁹ By the spring of 1900 the smallpox epidemic was under control, the last detention camp being closed in May.¹²⁰ Attention in the coal towns turned back to the strike.

The year 1900 was indicative of what the next few years would bring in the "Southwest Strike." At times even the keen observer would have had difficulty knowing there was a strike on. The mines continued to operate. The Capital noted in January that "all the mines in this section report steadily increasing outputs of coal, numerous shafts are being sunk, and additional tracks and spurs laid. The output for 1900 promises to far eclipse that of last year."¹²¹

Conditions were not as promising for the striking miners. Without income for months, many were "reduced almost to the verge of starvation." The National Executive Board of the United Mine Workers requested that the union's locals levy an assessment of twenty-five cents per month for each member to raise funds for the six thousand on strike in

Indian Territory and Arkansas. The national executive board notified the membership:

Every honorable effort has been made [towards] settlement of this strike; but we regret to say that the operators have treated with scorn and derision every proposal or overture made by us. In addition to this they have invoked the assistance of the Federal authorities, and are now engaged in an attempt to have nearly all the leading members of our organization forcibly expelled from the Indian Territory.¹⁸²

Later in the year the national leadership gave ten thousand dollars to District Twenty-One for strike relief.¹⁸³ But as the operators continued to bring in strikebreakers from all across the nation and even Mexico, the likelihood of a quick victory was nonexistent.¹⁸⁴ Success, if it came at all, would be the result of a lengthy, protracted battle of attrition and willpower.

At mid-year for a moment there seemed a possibility of settlement. Albert Struble, a member of the district twenty-one's leadership, issued a call to the membership "asking the men now at work to send delegates." Struble issued an invitation to the operators as well, but they declined, stating that "no representative would be sent to the conference and that they had all the coal diggers they could use."¹⁸⁵ But a harbinger of the evolving position of the operators appeared when all but the "Big Four," the Central Coal and Coke Company, the Western Coal and Mining Company, the Osage Mining Company, and the Rock Island, broke ranks and met with the miners in joint session.

"Agreement [was] reached on most all of the debated questions of the scale."¹²⁶ The Coalgate Courier reported that the "coal strike may soon end" and that Boston was advising the miners to return to work. The paper went on to report that while "the strike has not been formorally [sic] declared off, but it is understood all arrangement will be perfected an the formal end of the strike soon announced."¹²⁷

These hopes for a settlement soon collapsed over the union recognition issue. While the Courier was reporting that the strike "is now about to end," it was clear the only agreement reached was on the wage scale. The Courier noted that "the coal companies do not recognize the union nor agree to employ union men nor agree to any of the other demands of the union."¹²⁸

A few days later all hope for settlement vanished. In a newspaper interview Boston stated he had been misquoted earlier when it was reported he had advised the striking miners to return to work. Boston stated that he would recommend the miners return to work if the operators agreed to pay the union wage scale, even though they had not recognized the union - but only if the "Big Four" agreed to the same scale. If they agreed to the union scale, Boston stated, "the strike would soon end and be called off."¹²⁹

Local papers blamed Boston for the failure of the negotiations. The Coalgate Courier declared:

Mr. James Boston is not proving to be a crowning success as a pacificator. His latest effort at bringing about a settlement of the strike ... only resulted in widening the breach.... By their action the operators clearly indicate that they will make no terms or enter into entangling alliances with the union whatever. The new breach is to be regretted.¹³⁰

The talks only muddled the situation further. Because of the compromises made in the partial agreements reached before the schism, both the operators and miners split into moderate and hard-line factions. At Coalgate the operators of the "Dead Horse" and "Tight Wad" mines reached agreement with seventy of their employees. Two weeks later the McDougal Coal Company and its employees "settle[d] their differences and the men have resumed work. Both parties made concessions."¹³¹ Thus by the willingness of some operators to pay the union scale and by some miners' willingness to forego union recognition, both sides experienced rifts in their ranks.

After the talks collapsed, the operators renewed their efforts to have union organizers ejected from Indian Territory. Henry Wood, general manager of the Choctaw mines, wrote to Secretary Hitchcock "to again call your attention [to] the actions of one James Boston and others connected with the United Mine Workers of America." Wood argued the union organizers were "engaged in agitation in the Indian Territory, endeavoring to stir the miners up to strikes, are holding public meetings at the different mines, making inflammatory speeches and doing everything that is

possible to strip up dissension between the operators and their men."¹³² Another official of the same firm asked the federal government to put an end to these "mischievous and direful influences ... exerted by such leaders as Boston and others, who go from camp to camp stirring up contention and strife."¹³³

The federal government's view was that intervention would only make martyrs out of the union organizers. Inspector J. George Wright wrote to the Secretary of the Interior recommending that as long as the situation remained peaceful, "no further action by the Department is necessary or advisable at this time." He argued that ejecting Boston "would tend to further agitate the matter and bring them into greater prominence among their sympathizers." As long as the union organizers picketed peacefully, Wright contended the best policy was "no action be taken at present looking to removal of these parties."¹³⁴

The "Big Four" continued to operate with imported strikebreakers, but there is evidence the operators found it difficult to obtain men willing to cross the picket line. When 320 miners were brought from Chattanooga, Tennessee to Hartshorne, the Coalgate Courier commented that "there is a great scarcity of miners in the Indian Territory. These men are to take the strikers places. The crowd was equally divided between whites and colored. There have been about 700 miners shipped into the Territory in the last month.

Not one half stay long enough to pay back their transportation."¹³⁵

While maneuvering behind the scenes to break the strike, the operators maintained the outward appearance that the strike had no effect. Peter Hanraty noted this in a circular to the district's miners in October 1900. Hanraty notified the membership that the strike for recognition was into its eighteenth month, with no end in sight. He informed the miners that the operators were scouring every coal camp across the nation in their search for labor, "stating that the trouble is all settled; which is false; and is only intended to deceive miners and get them here from their homes in the hope they will be compelled by the circumstances to help the operators out in their distress for workingmen."¹³⁶

John Mitchell noted with regret that "men are continually being brought into that District to take the places of the strikers." But in a hint of a secret deal being negotiated, Mitchell informed Boston that he had received assurances from the "powers that be," [Mitchell's quotes] that "a special effort will be made to bring the strike to a close." Mitchell ordered Boston to remain silent about certain "Republican officials" interceding with the "Big Four" railroad companies. Mitchell also promised a personal visit to the district "to render what assistance I could in bringing the strike to a close."¹³⁷

Mitchell's reference to "Republican officials" was to none other than Mark Hanna, Senator from Ohio, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, and political operative extraordinaire. The two often communicated through two intermediaries, Daniel J. Keefe, President of the International Longshoreman's Association, and Charles J. Devlin, president of the Mount Carmel Coal Company of Topeka, Kansas. On October 30, 1900, Mitchell asked Keefe if "the Captain," (Hanna) was "doing anything to end [the] Southwest strike? It is very important it be closed soon, as other side is preparing to flood mining regions with circulars on the eve [of the] election. Fire answer."¹³⁸ Keefe replied he was to meet with Hanna soon.¹³⁹

In the following weeks there was a steady flow of correspondence among Mitchell, Hanna, and their intermediaries, concerning the Southwest Strike.¹⁴⁰ These back-door negotiations might have yielded results had it not been for the efforts of the "Big Four" companies. High-ranking officials of these companies wrote to Hanna to inform him that they had "no difficulties" with their employees and that Hanna's intercession was not necessary.¹⁴¹ Faced with this obstacle, Mitchell thanked Hanna for his assistance "in trying to effect a settlement."¹⁴²

At this point Mitchell was nearly ready to concede defeat. In a letter to W. B. Wilson, national secretary-

treasurer of the union, Mitchell lamented that "it is evident that nothing further can be done to bring about a settlement of this strike." He even prepared to transfer the union's organizers in the district to new assignments.¹⁴³

On the second anniversary of the strike, the strains of the conflict were creating divisions within the union. With few prospects for a settlement, the district began to fall apart under the pressure. The district split into two factions over the issue of whether or not to hold a district convention. The national organizers, sent by the union's executive committee, advocated forgoing a convention for fiscal reasons, contending that the expenses of a convention would have to be drawn from the strike funds sent by the national board. Although this was "a proper view you must admit," according to John Mordue, national organizer, "this argument did not satisfy a few chronic kickers." On the opposite side were those who favored a convention, led by Hanraty, the district's president. Mordue considered the arguments made by Hanraty and the district's leadership to be "the vaporings of a set of office seekers."¹⁴⁴

The dispute was so serious that "the existence of District was tottering in the balance." The rift expanded into a general questioning of Hanraty's leadership of the district. The national organizers pushed for the district's leadership to resign, save the treasurer, "and throw the

district into the national officers hands." Despite the opposition of the national organizers, the convention was held. What followed had all the hallmarks of a classic convention-floor donnybrook.¹⁴⁵

According to Mordue, what happened "is known by few - will be realized by fewer yet." Hanraty took the offensive, charging that the national organizers were bent on undermining his authority and leadership. Mordue responded that this was true, but his response to Hanraty's leadership was due to "natural causes," alluding to Hanraty's poor leadership. Members of locals, one after another, rose to ask Hanraty, "why he had never had any policy." They quizzed him on controversial agreements made with independent operators. They asked Hanraty why he had "drummed the local L.U.'s for men to fill these mines." When mentioning this particular point to John Mitchell, Mordue noted, "few men care to be licensed as scabs." After this initial verbal skirmishing, "both factions sparred cautiously," then full-scale "hostilities commenced" on the first of August.¹⁴⁶

Hanraty adopted a defensive posture during the proceedings. After the membership repeatedly asked him to elaborate on an official report on the agreements, he refused, snarling "I will not." Hanraty's comment that "I came without trimmings" only further exasperated the membership already maddened by the district president's

stonewalling."¹⁴⁷

As the convention droned on, "the strain grew worse towards evening." Hanraty finally resorted to strong-arm tactics and closed-door deals to bring the membership back under control. The national organizers, labeled as troublemakers, became scapegoats in the dispute. But national organizer Mordue considered Hanraty the source of all the trouble, his tactics motivated by "plainly personal ambition prompting a detestable means of unjust and unmanly persecution."¹⁴⁸

Despite the union's inner turmoil, the strike continued. In the same letter that Mordue relates the events of the district convention battle to Mitchell, he noted that the strike was having an effect. He informed Mitchell that "indications for a settlement with some of the Big Four are more favorable than they have ever been since the inauguration of this strike."¹⁴⁹

Mordue drew this assessment from the success the union was having in negotiating agreements with independent operators. As part of Hanraty's divide-and-conquer strategy, agreements with independents put pressure on the "Big Four" to reach an accord with the union. One organizer who worked in the Lehigh district noted: "We hope to have enough men organized at Lehigh to secure a settlement with that coal co. We have made better progress this week than any previous week."¹⁵⁰

By the end of 1901 organizers were establishing locals where they had previously never existed. Several operators accepted the miners' demand for a check weighman at each mine. The check weighmen were "the first elected in 3 years," according to one organizer.¹⁵¹

Early in the spring of 1902 Mitchell began to maneuver to reopen channels of communication with the "Big Four" operators. Mitchell first approached Charles J. Devlin, president of the Mount Carmel Coal Company of Topeka, Kansas. Devlin responded favorably, but advised Mitchell not to press for a wage increase, arguing "it will only make trouble all along, which you and I want to avoid as far as possible.... I don't want to be an extremist on either side."¹⁵²

There was some doubt whether Mitchell's selection of Devlin as an intermediary was the most appropriate. Mitchell himself raised this issue with Devlin after the presidents of U. M. W. Districts 14, 21, and 25 notified him that the officers of the "Big four ... are not disposed to hold a joint conference of the operators and of the miners of the states west of the Mississippi River, because of some ill feeling between you and them." Mitchell went on to tell Devlin that "I understand, of course, that they are somewhat prejudiced against you because you paid the union scale and recognized our organization at the time of the strike." Still, Mitchell believed Devlin was the right man for the

job and asked Devlin to intercede, but only if it was possible "without loss of prestige or dignity."⁵³

Devlin's response to Mitchell's request illuminates the view of the independent operators toward the "Big Four." Relishing his mission, he told Mitchell that "the Big Four interests will never forgive me for helping you beat them in the strike." But Devlin did not expect his efforts to produce results. He commented that he had "very little faith that they will do anything and even if they agree to it, I have no faith that they would carry it out. They are a big crowd of big politicians." Devlin also advised Mitchell to raise publicly the issue of a general conference with the "Big Four." This was necessary so that "responsibility for failure - if we do fail - will rest upon the "Big Four" operators, who are evidently trying to make it appear that you are standing in the way." Devlin declared he was "writing you thus frankly, knowing that you will always regard letters such as this as being entirely confidential."⁵⁴

Devlin's efforts in 1902 never produced results. After the operators met at Kansas City in June, Devlin informed Mitchell that they adjourned, "having submitted their last years scale as their ultimatum." Mitchell was already having serious doubts on the prospects for a successful conclusion to the strike. The union's president admitted earlier in the month in a letter to Hanraty that he viewed

the strike as hopeless. Mitchell told Hanraty that he was cutting assistance to District 21, because "there is no possible hope of forcing the operators of Arkansas and the Indian Territory to accede to the demands of our Union by a continuation of the present strike."⁵⁵

Rather than give up the strike, Hanraty altered his strategy. He met with the district's executive board and issued a directive that authorized any miner who could no longer financially hold out to return "to work for the companies that are working under agreements with the organization." This was a concession to the operators who paid the union scale, despite their refusal to concede the union's central demand, recognition. Hanraty argued that officially ending the strike "would fill this District full of men and prevent any concessions that we may be able to secure through the scarcity of men." Despite this seemingly devastating setback, the mood at the district's convention in 1902 was a sense that victory was near at hand.⁵⁶

Only a few days later the mood of the convention was proven correct. The operators, minus the "Big Four," presented to the union a list of seven conditions they demanded in exchange for a meeting with the union. Hanraty succinctly replied that "the contract will be fulfilled to the letter."⁵⁷

The result was a joint conference between the miners and operators of district twenty-one. Both sides accepted

an agreement that called for an eight-hour work day, semi-monthly payment of wages, and a slight wage increase after a ten-day session held in August at St. Louis. All the operators, except the "Big Four," recognized the union as the miners' bargaining agent.¹⁵⁸

The agreement reached at St. Louis did not bring peace and prosperity to Indian Territory mines. The strike against the "Big Four" continued. This maintained the labor shortage in the region as many miners were reluctant to enter the territory. This forced the operators, even those who had signed the union scale, to run their mines at partial capacity. With the price of coal rising, the operators were missing an opportunity for profitable sales. As a result, the partial settlement reached at St. Louis did little to provide a comprehensive basis for a stable business environment in the territory's coal industry.¹⁵⁹

This was the situation as the coal operators of Indian Territory met at McAlester in September 1902. The South McAlester Capital reported that their purpose was to discuss the "consolidation of the larger coal interests in Indian Territory. The consummation of the deal is not far off." The paper cryptically noted that "it may be the Rock Island [Railroad] who will secure the plums, present indications point that way."¹⁶⁰

With the strike continuing in some communities, concluding in others, the situation was thoroughly confused

by the fall of 1902. Occasionally even the district leadership was unsure of the status of the strike in a particular community. When the miners at Ola walked out, the district secretary-treasurer declared that the strike

is not a general one in the mines of that portion of the Indian Territory. If there had been a general strike I would have known of it. I have not been notified of any walk out at Ola, but a local union, where there is no contract can, and frequently does, suspend work pending the negotiations for and the acceptance of a contract. I suppose that is the case at Ola.¹⁶¹

The district leadership worked on both the local and national level to bring pressure upon the hold-out operators. Union organizers continued to hold meetings in the coal camps as the strike continued. In November the executive boards of Districts 14, 21, and 25 met in "secret conference" with John Mitchell's representatives. The South McAlester Capital reported that their object was "to formulate plans by which they can make joint demands" on the "Big Four" for "recognition of the Union. These are the only companies in the West that have not signed a union contract."¹⁶²

The unresolved situation continued to produce sporadic violence. In late November unknown persons dynamited a company house at Carbon. The three black strikebreakers who resided there, a father and his two sons, were unhurt but "terribly shaken up." The authorities at Bache arrested a black striker in connection with the incident.¹⁶³

While the troops on both sides continued to skirmish

along the battlefield, each side's generals were groping to find the path to a negotiated settlement. All the miners walked out of the mine and refused to work at mine No. 1 at Hartshorne in February after a dispute with company officials over the selection of a checkweighman.¹⁶⁴ This action was symbolic of the growing sense of confidence in the miners. Months of organizing were paying dividends for the union. Two weeks later the miners presented an ultimatum to the operators. The South McAlester Capital reported that more than three thousand recently organized union men planned to walk out of twelve companies' mines if the operators refused to meet their terms. The Capital noted that "sufficient force has been gathered to warrant the union to made [sic] its first demand and the step is a most forcible one." Both sides agreed to meet a few days later at South McAlester.¹⁶⁵

Before the big face-to-face meeting, both sides gathered to confer. The Capital reported that "one of the [labor] leaders stated that the prospect for a settlement was considered good." But the unidentified union official implied that if no agreement was reached within a few days, "the miners would be ordered out." The operators met at the directors room of the American National Bank. While many of the striking miners were subsisting on turnips, the operators enjoyed a feast that included blue point oysters on the half-shell, frog legs, beef tenderloin, shrimp,

turkey, olives, ice cream, and other delectables.¹⁶⁶

The talks that ensued did not produce immediate results. One obstacle was that the operators were less organized than the miners. While the miners spoke with a single voice, the operators had yet to consolidate their position into a single set of demands. After the February meeting at McAlester, another meeting of the leading "coal magnates of Indian Territory" convened in April. What the operators discussed is unknown, but a few weeks later they met again at South McAlester and organized the Indian Territory Coal Operators Association. Among the seventeen operators there to witness the event were D. M. Hailey and T. W. Clelland, two of the largest independent operators in the territory. The Daily Oklahoman reported that "the combine is for the mutual protection of all operators" and that it would permit them to "regulate the price of coal and the method of operating," in addition to buying supplies in bulk.¹⁶⁷

While the operators met to map out their strategy, the striking miners continued to demonstrate for their cause. The miners of Coalgate, Lehigh, Phillips, and Midway held a "big parade" at Lehigh in April. The South McAlester Capital reported that "the procession was a very long one and was headed by a cornet band. There must have been four or five hundred in the procession."¹⁶⁸

The main reason why the miners were pressing so hard

for a settlement at that time was that they were unsure how much longer they could hold out. Elizabeth C. Morris, John Mitchell's personal secretary, commented that "after a very long and expensive strike in the Southwest (Arkansas, Indian Territory, Kansas, and Missouri), the organization is building up, but internal conditions are such that the local men there are unable to cope with them." But in a hint of a major breakthrough, Morris mentioned an upcoming convention that was going to be "one of vital importance."⁶⁹ In June the Missouri and Kansas operators, less the "Big Four," met with John Mitchell at Kansas City. They adjourned after agreeing to meet again in July at Pittsburg, Kansas and to issue an invitation to the Arkansas and Indian Territory operators to join them. Mitchell expressed his belief that the "Big Four" would attend the upcoming convention at Pittsburg, Kansas.⁷⁰

That city played host to four conventions being held at once in July 1903. Operators and union officials meet face-to-face at a joint-convention. At their meeting, seventy-one operators gathered together, including the "Big Four." The miners met in district and interstate conventions. More than a thousand delegates, who represented fifty thousand miners from Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Texas, and the Indian Territory, met at the interstate convention. In charge of it all was John Mitchell, elected committeemen-at-large and chairman of the subcommittee on wages at the

joint-convention.¹⁷¹ The evening before the convention began, Mitchell wrote that "the joint-convention starts tomorrow; how long it will last time can tell. We have a wild delegation from District 21, some delegates of the same character from 14 and 25. However I am hoping for the best."¹⁷²

The joint-convention nearly ended up being a love-fest. The big step for the operators was agreeing to meet. Once that happened, the negotiations proceeded smoothly. The South McAlester Capital reported that "the convention is harmonious and good feeling prevails. The miners are especially enthusiastic over the decision of the old non-union Big Four companies to recognize the union and participate in the conference."¹⁷³ After a sub-committee "appointed jointly by the miners and operators at their conference" the Daily Oklahoman commented that "it is now believed than an agreement will be reached rapidly."¹⁷⁴

The operators acceded to all the union's demands. Within a week the union and the operators reached a settlement that called for a seven cent per ton increase in wages, the eight-hour day, pay every two weeks, payment for deadwork, check-off dues, and, most importantly, "complete recognition of the union." The operators also agreed to the establishment of pit-committees to resolve disputes, to equal opportunity for work, and not to deduct a physician's fee from a miner's wages without prior approval. The South

McAlester Capital declared that "the miners trouble's are over."¹⁷⁵

As the joint-convention drew to a close, John Mitchell was happy with the results. He wrote to John P. Reese, one of the original leaders of the strike, that the convention had been "a long hard fight; not only with the operators but also with our own delegates.... All the companies in the three States and the territory are represented, including the 'big four,' and I regard it as a great victory for our organization." Mitchell later commented in a letter to Charles Devlin, president of the Mount Carmel Coal Company, that he was "quite satisfied with the outcome of the Pittsburg Convention and I sincerely hope that everything will run along smoothly and that neither operators nor miners will have cause to regret the action taken there."¹⁷⁶

Mitchell's hope that both sides would accept the agreements quickly became reality. Within a few weeks the membership of both sides' bargaining organizations ratified the agreements reached at Pittsburg. The Labor Day that followed soon thereafter became a celebration of the victory. "At Krebs the largest celebration held in this vicinity for years was successfully carried out." Down the center of town marched a "parade ... composed of the various unions from the towns in the mining belt as far east as Buck. Each division was uniformed differently and all wore

bright badges" and "the number of marchers was 2,500." Nearly everyone in the parade carried a picture of the hero of the day, John Mitchell.¹⁷⁷

The 1903 agreement was a watershed in industrial relations in the Southwest. The settlement reached at Pittsburg ushered in a nearly twenty-year period of relative tranquility in the coal communities of the region. For the following twenty years the United Mine Workers were the dominant force among and sole representative of the area's miners. While the settlement was everything the miners dreamed for, the operators did not lose in the strike. In reality, there was no loser in the strike. The miners received recognition, and the operators benefited by having orderly contractual relations with their work force for the next twenty years.

The operators also found that the settlement provided them with a stable labor force and business-like relations with the union. The acceptance of a uniform wage scale helped the operators by limiting their cut-throat competition, thus creating a business environment more conducive to profits. With the strike over, the operators could fill their mines with men and produce at full capacity. With prices high and the market brisk, the settlement was as beneficial for the operators as it was for the miners. In short, the agreement of 1903 brought order, equity, and prosperity to the coal fields of Oklahoma. The

tragedy was that it took so long for an agreement to be reached.

What drove the operators to the bargaining table and to accept recognition of the union are the central questions of the Southwest Strike. Years of unrest, bombings, demonstrations, and other agitation did not bring them to the negotiating table; neither did Mark Hanna, nor the independent operator, Charles Devlin. What more likely brought the operators to swallow their opposition to dealing with the union was a basic human emotion, greed. The strike was costing the operators' revenue. It was more profitable to recognize the union and operate at full capacity than it was to operate at a diminished capacity with strikebreakers and the other high costs associated with breaking the strike. Simply put, it was more cost effective to negotiate than fight. It was the bottom line that led the operators to overcome their own reluctance to entering into agreements with the union. With the agreement ratified, both sides prepared to enter the Golden Age of coal mining in Oklahoma.

Endnotes

¹ Clyde Hamm, ed., Labor History of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: A.M. Van Horn, 1939), 13.

² Ibid.; Frederick L. Ryan. The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma's Coal Mining Communities (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 45; Gene Aldrich, "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952, 93; "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory" in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1898. Miscellaneous Reports, Part I (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 48. Cited hereafter as "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory."

³ Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 93; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 46; Peter Hanraty, Speech Notes, Folder E-11, Peter Hanraty Collection, Archives and Manuscripts, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴ South McAlester Capital, 20 October 1898.

⁵ Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 13-14.

⁶ Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 94.

⁷ John Barnhill, "Triumph of Will: The Coal Strike of 1899-1903," Chronicles of Oklahoma 61 (Spring 1983), 84.

⁸ Ibid.; South McAlester Capital, 16 February 1899.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ South McAlester Capital, 16 February 1899.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² South McAlester Capital, 16, 23 February 1899; "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory," [1899], 57.

¹³ South McAlester Capital, 16 February 1899.

¹⁴ Ibid.; "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory," [1899], 58; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 97.

¹⁵ Oklahoma State Capital, 26 February 1899.

¹⁶ South McAlester Capital, 23 February 1899.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Oklahoma State Capital, 1 March 1899; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 14; South McAlester Capital, 2 March 1899.

¹⁹South McAlester Capital, 9 March 1899.

²⁰Henry Wood to J. Geo. Wright, 5 March 1899, File 670-1899, Special File on 1899 Strike, Box 15, Letters Received, 1899, Records of Secretary of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Cited hereafter as "Special File on 1899 Strike."

²¹D. M. Wisdom to J. W. Ellis, 7 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

²²Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 99; J. G. Harley to D. M. Wisdom, 11 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

²³Samuel Gompers to the Secretary of the Interior, 20 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

²⁴Green McCurtain to D. M. Wisdom, 20 March 1899, Ibid.

²⁵Geo. Carmichael to D. M. Wisdom, 11 March 1899; Charles Brown to D. M. Wisdom, 11 March 1899; Lehigh Citizens' Petition to D.M. Wisdom, 13 March 1899, Ibid.

²⁶Ben Reese to D. M. Wisdom, 14 March 1899, Ibid.

²⁷Charles Brown to D. M. Wisdom, 11 March 1899, Ibid.

²⁸South McAlester Capital, 16 March 1899.

²⁹A. W. Jenkins to D. M. Wisdom, 15 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

³⁰S. Guerrier to D. M. Wisdom, 10 March 1899, Ibid.

³¹D. M. Wisdom to S. Guerrier, 11 March 1899, Ibid.

³²Ira D. Oglesby to D. M. Wisdom, 11 March 1899, Ibid.

³³South McAlester Capital, 9 March 1899.

³⁴D. M. Wisdom to J. W. Ellis, 11 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

³⁵J. W. Ellis to D. M. Wisdom, 12 March 1899, Ibid.

²⁶South McAlester Capital, 16 March 1899.

²⁷Ibid., 2 March 1899.

²⁸Ibid., 16 March 1899.

²⁹Ibid., 23 March 1899; Daily Oklahoman, 19 March 1899.

³⁰Henry Wood to D. M. Wisdom, 21 March 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike; Daily Oklahoman, 23 March 1899.

³¹Daily Oklahoman, 19 March 1899; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 101.

³²South McAlester Capital, 13 April 1899.

³³Secretary of the Interior to J. W. Zevely, 26 April 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike; J. W. Zevely to Secretary of the Interior, 11 May 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 100.

³⁴South McAlester Capital, 1 June 1899; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 102.

³⁵South McAlester Capital, 11 May 1899.

³⁶Ibid., 25 May 1899.

³⁷Ibid., 8 June 1899.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 14; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 87-88.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹South McAlester Capital, 22 June 1899.

⁴²Ibid., 17 August 1899.

⁴³Ibid., 6 July 1899.

⁴⁴Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 15.

⁴⁵The Krebs Eagle, 7 July 1899.

⁴⁶Ibid., 21 July 1899.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Hanraty biography pamphlet, (circa 1907), Folder M, Box AMD 33-10, Peter Hanraty Collection.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰South McAlester Capital, 8 June 1899.

⁶¹The Krebs Eagle, 14 July 1899.

⁶²The Coalgate Courier, 20 July 1899.

⁶³South McAlester Capital, 20 July 1899.

⁶⁴The Krebs Eagle, 21 July 1899.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶The Coalgate Courier, 20 July 1899.

⁶⁷Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 105.

⁶⁸South McAlester Capital, 27 July 1899; The Coalgate Courier, 20 July 1899; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 105.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 107.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²John Mitchell to E. A. Hitchcock, 1 August 1899, Special File on 1899 Strike.

⁷³John Mitchell to E. A. Hitchcock, 5 August 1899, Ibid.

⁷⁴J. Geo Wright to E. A. Hitchcock, 12 September 1900, Ibid.

⁷⁵The Krebs Eagle, 28 July 1899.

⁷⁶Coalgate Courier, 3, 17 August 1899.

⁷⁷South McAlester Capital, 10 August 1899.

⁷⁸Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 107.

⁷⁹Coalgate Courier, 10 August 1899.

⁸⁰Krebs Eagle, 25 August 1899.

⁸¹Ibid., 1 September 1899.

⁸²Coalgate Courier, 31 August 1899.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴South McAlester Capital, 7 September 1899; Krebs Eagle, 1 September 1899.

⁸⁵John P. Reese to John Mitchell, 2 September 1899, Reel #1, John Mitchell Collection, Catholic University of America Library, Washington, D.C.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Krebs Eagle, 1 September 1899.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Coalgate Courier, 7 September 1899.

⁹²Ibid., 14 September 1899.

⁹³South McAlester Capital, 21 September 1899.

⁹⁴Ibid.; Coalgate Courier, 21 September 1899; Krebs Eagle, 22 September 1899.

⁹⁵Coalgate Courier, 28 September 1899.

⁹⁶Ibid., 5 October 1899.

⁹⁷South McAlester Capital, 9 November 1899.

⁹⁸Krebs Eagle, 6 October 1899, 3 November 1899.

⁹⁹South McAlester Capital, 23 November 1899; Coalgate Courier, 30 November 1899.

¹⁰⁰Ryan, Rehabilitation of Oklahoma's Coal Mining Communities, 46.

¹⁰¹Oklahoma Federationist (Oklahoma City), September 1932, Peter Hanraty Collection.

¹⁰²Proceedings, Fourth Annual Convention of District 21, U.M.W.A., 1902, "Report of the President," Peter Hanraty Collection.

¹⁰³William G. Snodgrass, "A History of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor to 1918," Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1960, 12.

¹⁰⁴South McAlester Capital, 18 January 1900; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 88.

¹⁰⁵Coalgate Courier, 28 December 1899.

¹⁰⁶J. Geo. Wright to Secretary of Interior, 11 September 1901, Dawes Commission, Letter press books, Vol. 116, Roll DC27, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁷The Coalgate Courier, 27 July 1899.

¹⁰⁸South McAlester Capital, 20 July 1899.

¹⁰⁹Krebs Eagle, 4 August 1899.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 11 August 1899.

¹¹¹Ibid., 25 August 1899.

¹¹²Coalgate Courier, 19 October 1899.

¹¹³Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 2nd ed., (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 234.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 235; Coalgate Courier, 9 November 1899.

¹¹⁵Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 235; South McAlester Capital, 11 January 1900; Coalgate Courier, 11 January 1900.

¹¹⁶Coalgate Courier, 30 November 1899.

¹¹⁷South McAlester Capital, 18 January 1900.

¹¹⁸Coalgate Courier, 17 January 1900.

¹¹⁹South McAlester Capital, 18 January 1900.

¹²⁰Debo, Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 235.

¹²¹South McAlester Capital, 25 January 1900.

¹²²United Mine Workers Circular, February 16, 1900, Reel #1, Mitchell Collection.

¹²³ Financial Report of National Secretary-Treasurer of the United Mine Workers of America, July, 1900, Reel #2, Mitchell Collection.

¹²⁴ Tho. R. Ryan to U.S. Indian Inspector for Indian Territory, 15 August 1900, Foreman Transcripts, Choctaw Division, Vol. II: 393-394, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹²⁵ Coalgate Courier, 17 May 1900.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 7 June 1900.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 21 June 1900.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Coalgate Courier, 28 June 1900; Frederick L. Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," Southwestern Social Sciences Quarterly 2 (September, 1933), 136-137.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Coalgate Courier, 28 June 1900; The Krebs Cyclone, 14 July 1900.

¹³² Henry Wood to E. A. Hitchcock, 16 July 1900, Special File on 1899 Strike.

¹³³ R. M. McDowell to Thos. Ryan, 27 July 1900, Ibid.

¹³⁴ J. Geo. Wright to Secretary of Interior, 12 September 1900, Foreman Transcripts, Choctaw Division, II, 421-424.

¹³⁵ Coalgate Courier, 4 October 1900.

¹³⁶ U.M.W.A. Circular, 6 October 1900, Reel #2, Mitchell Collection.

¹³⁷ John Mitchell to James Boston, 16 October 1900, Reel #2, Ibid.

¹³⁸ John Mitchell to Daniel J. Keefe, 30 October 1900, Reel #2, Ibid. Jim Hughes, cataloger of the Mitchell Collection, confirmed in August 1991 conversation with author that "the Captain" was Mark Hanna.

¹³⁹ Daniel J. Keefe to John Mitchell, 30 October 1900, Reel #2, Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ John Mitchell to M. A. Hanna, 12 November 1900; M. A. Hanna to John Mitchell, 12 November 1900, Reel #2, Ibid.

¹⁴¹ M. A. Hanna to John Mitchell, 27 November 1900; M. A. Hanna to John Mitchell, 5 December 1900; M. A. Hanna to John Mitchell, 13 December, 1900, Reel #2, Ibid.

¹⁴² John Mitchell to M. A. Hanna, 11 December 1900, Reel #2, Ibid.

¹⁴³ John Mitchell to W. B. Wilson, 11 December 1900, Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ John Mordue to John Mitchell, 6 August 1901, Reel #3, Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Milton Reid to John Mitchell, 21 September 1901, Reel #3, Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Milton Reid to John Mitchell, 7 December 1901, Reel #3, Ibid.

¹⁵² Charles J. Devlin to John Mitchell, 19 February 1902, Reel #4, Ibid.

¹⁵³ John Mitchell to Charles J. Devlin, 1 March 1902, Reel #4, Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Charles J. Devlin to John Mitchell, 3 March 1902, 5 March 1902, Reel #4, Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ John Mitchell to Peter Hanraty, 2 June 1902, AMD 33-13, Folder M, Peter Hanraty Collection.

¹⁵⁶ Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention of District No. 21, U.M.W.A., Ft. Smith, Arkansas, 2 June 1902, Hanraty Collection; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 110; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 90.

¹⁵⁷ Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 91; Proceedings, 1902.

¹⁵⁸Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," 135; South McAlester Capital, 28 August 1902; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 91.

¹⁵⁹South McAlester Capital, 4 September 1902.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 25 September 1902.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 9 October 1902.

¹⁶²Ibid., 13 November 1902.

¹⁶³Ibid., 27 November 1902.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 5 February 1903.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 19 February 1903.

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 9 April 1903, 14 May 1903; Daily Oklahoman, 16 May 1903; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 91.

¹⁶⁸The South McAlester Capital, 9 April 1903.

¹⁶⁹E. C. Morris to the Rev. J. F. Berry, 13 May 1903, Reel #6, Mitchell Collection.

¹⁷⁰Ryan, "Development of Coal Operators Associations," 135; Daily Oklahoman, 27 June 1903.

¹⁷¹The South McAlester Capital, 16 July 1903; Barnhill, "Triumph of Will," 92.

¹⁷²John Mitchell to John P. Reese, 12 July 1903, Reel #6, Mitchell Collection.

¹⁷³The South McAlester Capital, 16 July 1903.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., 22 July 1903.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 28 July 1903; South McAlester Capital, 1 September 1903; Ryan, Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Communities, 47; Aldrich, "Coal Industry in Oklahoma," 111.

¹⁷⁶John Mitchell to John P. Reese, 26 July 1903; John Mitchell to Charles J. Devlin, 30 July, 1903, Reel #6, Mitchell Collection.

¹⁷⁷South McAlester Capital, 27 August 1903, 10 September 1903.

CHAPTER V

THE UNEASY TRUCE: 1903-1918

The accords signed by the operators and the union in 1903 ushered in an era of unparalleled prosperity for the Oklahoma coal industry. Both the operators and the miners saw their income rise; relations between labor and management were cordial, but cool. Beginning in 1904, biennial joint-conferences became routine and institutionalized. While both sides remained adversaries, the agreement of 1903 marked the beginning of a new relationship. An atmosphere of detente had replaced the hostility of the previous twenty years. Direct confrontation remained limited to a period of intense sparring that accompanied contract talks. While the union and the operators remained wary of each other, both realized that to-the-death battles benefited neither.

Riding high after 1903, the United Mine Workers became the undisputed representative and leader of Oklahoma's miners for the following twenty years. These were prosperous times for both the miners and the operators. The McAlester Wasp noted that "a friendly feeling exists between employer and employee." At the joint-conferences, which

became "an established institution," according to one authority, the operators regularly granted wage increases. The operators, enjoying the profits derived from increasing output from mines "working on full time," conceded wage increases so not to disturb a situation beneficial to themselves.¹

Not surprisingly, U.M.W. membership grew steadily. By 1904 more than thirteen thousand Indian Territory miners belonged to the union. District #21 membership peaked in 1912 at over sixteen thousand members. By that time members of Oklahoma's forty-five U.M.W. locals earned nearly three dollars for an eight-hour day and worked a little over nine and one-half months annually. Income by 1910 averaged around four hundred dollars annually, but inflation consumed much of these increases and as a result wages were "sufficient only for a very moderate living," as one source noted.²

With their new-found power, the United Mine Workers were quick to turn to the strike when the operators balked at the union's demands. But the union did not always strike during contract negotiations, nor did they always press for wage increases. In 1904 the union accepted a 5 percent reduction in wages without striking, but during most contract negotiations over the years preceding World War One, while union leaders negotiated, the membership struck to apply pressure for a quick settlement. Walkouts

accompanied contract negotiations in 1906, 1908, 1910, 1912, and in 1916. The miners were not reluctant to strike if they believed it was warranted.³

The first major strike to test the new relationship between the union and the operators occurred in 1906. On February 1 the operators and miners of the Southwest district, Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and Indian Territory, met at the Masonic Hall in Indianapolis, Indiana. After a week of negotiations, the Krebs Banner expressed fear that "the situation looks a little striky [sic]," noting the "operators and united mine workers preparing for a battle royal." Declaring itself to be "neither a coal operator nor a United Mine Worker" organ, the Banner advocated that with "good sense and calm," it was possible to "find a way out of the difficulty." But the paper warned that without an agreement, the union would call a national strike on April 1.⁴

As the negotiations got nowhere, the operators revealed their next move. One operator, speaking on the condition of anonymity, told a Banner reporter attending the Indianapolis convention that if the miners struck, "the first move by the operators will be to close down for ninety days and make no attempt to work the mines." The operators "calculated that ninety days of idleness would exhaust the national treasury of the United Mine Workers and the strike [would] be won by the operators." By mid-March the Banner reported that "the

operators say the strike is inevitable.... The miners themselves ... have very little to say about it."⁵

Despite last-minute pleas for compromise, the strike began on April 1 as scheduled. The Banner reported that "since then not a mine in this vicinity has turned a wheel." Several days earlier the Banner had called for both sides to compromise, arguing that the U.M.W. should not impose its demands, but neither should the operators display "arrogance and shut down the mines" to freeze the nation into supporting the position taken by the operators. The Banner's plea for failed. The Indian Territory Coal Operators Association met at South McAlester on April 3 and adjourned after refusing to sign the 1903 scale.*

When the strike commenced the miners began preparations for an extended walkout. The Banner noted that "many of the Krebs miners own their own homes and most of them are employing their time making a garden." The situation remained calm, as there was "no disorder or expressions of ill will" among the striking miners. The strikers seemed prepared for a lengthy confrontation, as the Banner noted that "most of the miners have money ... there will be little if any suffering." The Banner contended that the miners had little reason for "excitement or panicy [sic] feeling," as "it is generally believed that all the operators in this district will soon sign the scale and resume work."

The strikers at Krebs showed few signs of a "panicy

feeling" when they "celebrated the eight-hour day anniversary." According to the Banner, "a big crowd was out.... The procession formed up town and marched down Main Street and out to the [fair] grounds, several hundred marched in the procession, and United States flags were much in evidence in the marching column. The Krebs Italian band furnished music for the occasion and the boys played well.... The day passed off pleasantly."⁸

The failure to reach a prompt settlement in the dispute led to a growing sense of apprehension among the businessmen in the communities affected by the strike. They feared that an expected short walkout was degenerating into a lengthy strike. A protracted shut-down would result in economic hardship in the coal towns. Near the end of April the Banner noted that "the difference that began so mildly between the operators and the mine workers a month ago is growing more pronounced and is hardening into real strike conditions."⁹

Only a few days later the situation improved considerably. By May 4 the Banner predicted that "it is a cinch that mine work will be resumed within thirty or sixty days." The Banner noted that "mine workers cannot live on wind." The paper's editor declared that with the coal supply as well as the U.M.W. treasury nearly exhausted, both sides would be forced to reach a settlement.¹⁰

This prediction rapidly became true. On May 10th the

national convention of the U.M.W. adjourned after authorizing district officers to sign agreements with operators willing to pay the 1903 scale. This amounted to a call for a 3 cent per ton increase in the Southwest district. By the end of the month the miners and operators concluded an agreement at Kansas City that called for "a slight advance" in wages. The agreement included provisions that established a permanent board of arbitration. It was hoped that this action was "a long step in the direction of settling mine troubles without strikes." Both sides also agreed to keep the mines operating with "no tie-up" for two years. But while the operators were forced to grant a wage increase, they did win on other important issues. The 1906 agreement gave the operators an important concession - the right to fine miners fifty cents daily for each day's work stoppage whenever "wildcat," or unauthorized local strikes broke out. This prevented these spontaneous local strikes from escalating into district-wide walk outs."

Both sides expressed satisfaction with the agreement. The Banner reported that all were "shoutin happy" and "in fine spirits over the strike settlement" that called for the miners to return to work by June 1. Within weeks the mines of the district were "working full time."¹⁸ According to the Banner, demand for coal was "growing every day. Jobs at Krebs were plentiful as the paper noted that "1000 miners can find employment and in thirty days there will be room

for five hundred more."³

The relations between the union and the operators continued along a regular course over the period leading to World War One. As the time for contract renewals approached, both sides raised their rhetoric level as well as their demands. The approach left both sides maneuvering room and the option of compromise. Still, shut-downs, either by strike or lock-out, marred every contract renewal. The short duration of each strike indicated that neither side categorically rejected compromise. No strike lasted more than a few months. All of these developments reflected the general nature of relations between the union and the operators - detente and a precarious peace - but always a new crisis to overcome. The lock-out of 1908 was just one of those crises.

In early March, 1908, Arkansas and Oklahoma operators closed their mines. The Haileyville New State declared that the shut-down was a scheme to prevent a strike the miners planned for April 1 if the operators did not grant a 10 percent wage increase. The New State noted that the operators wanted to prevent a "strike if possible, but their method is an unusual one. They have decided to close the mines down before the miners make their demand." The operators believed this action "will take the edge off the desire of the miners to strike." Just as importantly, it would also leave the miners "short of money." The operators

calculated that their preemptive action would render the union incapable of sustaining a lengthy strike. As for the wage increase, the operators vowed they would "never consent to sign a new contract," contending they had "gone the limit already." The lock-out affected five thousand miners in the district.¹⁴

When the existing contract expired on April 1 the operators declared that what followed was a "suspension; no strike." The lock-out was to continue, "pending an agreement on a new contract," according to the New State. The paper argued that "during the temporary suspension the operators will have an opportunity to make improvements, and the miners a chance to make [a] garden, go fishing and rest."¹⁵

After a month the union withdrew its demand for a wage increase. With this obstacle removed, both sides quickly came to an agreement. In early May the miners of District #21 met at Kansas City to ratify the contract reached with the Southwestern Interstate Coal Operators Association. While awaiting ratification, thirty-five thousand striking miners in Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas returned to work. By the end of the month the strike had dwindled to a one-line news story. On May 29, 1908 the New State reported: "The strike is now off."¹⁶

Within weeks all was peaceful in the coal fields of Oklahoma. The New State noted that "the mine whistles are

blowing and calling for all available men." Everyone in Haileyville and the other coal towns celebrated "the ending of the coal miners strike." But the operators celebrated as well. The New State remarked that both the Hailey-Ola and Rock Island coal companies, the two leading firms in that district, were "making money."¹⁷

While the operators "making money," so were the miners. Not only were their wages higher, but they were being paid in cash; for many it was the first time ever. When the Osage Coal and Mining Company dispersed a seventy-five thousand dollar payroll in early January, it was in cash. This was the "first payment entirely of cash since the money flurry set in several months ago." The New State stated that it was "understood that cash payments will be regular from this time on." When one miner received his pay envelope he looked inside, smiled and remarked to his fellow miners, "its money this time, boys."¹⁸ Other operators quickly followed suit. The Hailey-Ola Coal Company notified its employees in 1909 that "no scrip will be issued after May 1, 1909, and all outstanding scrip must be redeemed on or before May 24th, 1909. Govern yourselves accordingly."¹⁹

While the typical miner's standard of living rose steadily during the 1903-1918 period, the dangers he faced daily in the mines remained. Oklahoma's new state constitution contained many provisions aimed at improving

safety in the work-place, but their effect was limited. Peter Hanraty, "the most powerful labor leader in the territories," represented the miners as vice-president at the constitutional convention. Hanraty's presence at the convention was so overpowering that it led his opponents to complain to W. J. Murray, president of the convention. One critic, S. W. Murphy, lambasted Murray, telling him that "we did not expect you to be doped by such men as Hanraty." He asked Murray "how much more of the Constitution are you going to let Hanraty make?" Quite a bit, it seemed, as the convention delegates created the office of state mine inspector, with Hanraty named as the first individual to hold the office.²⁰

Hanraty's rise to state mine inspector did little to reduce accidents in Oklahoma's mines, however. Fatalities increased during the period between statehood and World War One. Politicians passed many laws, but the penalties associated with mining laws were inadequate to force compliance. Operators had little financial incentive to abide by state mining regulations. Fatal mining accidents continued to increase, despite claims of politicians that they would "enact laws as strong as the Holy Writ for the safety and protection of the boys at the mine." Hanraty complained in 1908 that due to the procrastination of the state legislature in enacting mine safety laws, it was an exercise in futility to tell "the operators to observe

regulations and rules necessary for safety. They know they do not have to now."²¹

Whatever the cause, accidents continued, despite the efforts of the union and the state government. In August 1908, twenty-nine miners died at Hailey-Ola No. 1 after a fire broke out in the mine. The fire began when a miner's open-flame lamp ignited two kegs of "black jack oil." Only two of the twenty-nine killed had life insurance. For three of those killed, it was their first day in the mine. In addition to the men who died, "seventeen valuable trained mine mules were suffocated."²²

No number of laws could prevent some accidents. One such mishap occurred in September 1908 when lightning struck the powderhouse of the Samples' mine, two miles west of McAlester. The lightning set-off a huge explosion. The only fatality was a man who lived three-quarters of a mile away from the mine. He died when a huge rock projectile, probably a portion of the powderhouse, smashed through his house, "completely severing his head from his body."²³ Accidents underground also continued unabated. In one accident, Ben Price, a miner at the Bolen-Darnell's Mine No. 4 at Craig, was "blown to pieces" in an explosion in January, 1909. "Gas" overcame several others when they tried to rescue Price.²⁴

Hanraty recognized the inability of the state to improve safety in the mines. He suggested in a letter to

John Mitchell in 1909 that the:

miners and their officials should take up the question of the protection of life and property in their meetings and in their joint conferences with the operators. While I have not much hope of the miners and operators agreeing on the question of safety, where the financial interest of either party is effected, and if they cannot agree, then the Inspectors should be empowered by law to make rules and enforce them, that will protect life and property regardless of the wishes or opinions of the miners or operators.²⁵

Mitchell responded by stating that he agreed with Hanraty. He added that "so long as it is cheaper to kill and maim workmen than to provide for their safety, employers will not, except in rare cases, make the investments necessary for the adequate protection of the working people."²⁶ From Mitchell's comments one can infer he did not expect the operators to change their views toward mine safety on their own.

Hanraty continued to press the operators to reform their way of doing business. He chastised them for replacing skilled miners with inexperienced men,

the vast majority of whom, never saw a coal mine. It is not enough that they pay accident insurance or make provisions for the bereaved families. Suffering and bereavement have no money equivalent. Prevention is better than compensation or charity.... More than 90% of [accidents] could be avoided if the [mining] laws were not violated.²⁷

The primary reason why the operators were reluctant to make the investments required by the mining laws was, of course, the costs involved. The large railroad associated

operators faced not only competition from other states, but from smaller operators in Oklahoma. The smaller independent operators complained that the larger companies dominated the regional market through sales associations that were little more than thinly-disguised pools. The smaller companies went on to complain that despite their numerical superiority within the Southwestern Coal Operators Association, their views did not receive the consideration due them. This internecine conflict disrupted the association's efforts to present a solid front to the union. To remedy this problem the association launched a drive in 1910 to bring all the operators into the organization. As this effort proceeded the miners announced they would seek a wage increase of ten cents per ton in the upcoming contract negotiations.²⁸

As the miners sought a wage increase, a new factor was being introduced into relations between the operators and the union. The oil industry was beginning to have an impact on the coal business. A member of the operators' association made this point in a letter to John Mitchell in March, 1910. W.D. Ryan notified Mitchell that there was going to be "a disagreement out here in short order." He informed Mitchell that the operators were willing to renew the present wage scale, but the union's demand of a ten cent per ton increase was unacceptable. He stated that a wage increase was impossible as "without any doubt the oil and gas [industry] has put the coal business on queer street

down here, and that competition will be rather severe for a few years to come." It was clear that the oil industry had become a major threat to Oklahoma's coal industry.²⁹

With this in mind the operators entered the negotiations in 1910 adamantly opposed to any increase in the wage scale. Their demands refused, the miners struck on April 1. After several months of watching their mines sit idle, the operators attempted to resume operations with the old scale. In late June the Krebs Advertiser noted that a "feeling of unrest and tenseness in the atmosphere" when the Rock Island Coal Company offered "work to the miners at the old scale. It is not believed that any miners will report for work and many of the men are looking for other employment."³⁰

As the strike entered its fourth month, prospects for a settlement seemed non-existent. The McAlester Wasp lamented that "there seems to be no prospect of work being resumed in the coal mines."³¹ At Kansas City negotiations between the union and the operators dragged along.³² The deadlock broke after Thomas L. Lewis, the U.M.W.'s new international president, left the negotiations to attend a meeting of the union's leadership at Indianapolis.³³ Whether the two events were linked together is difficult to prove, but the prompt settlement so soon after Lewis' departure raises the possibility. By the end of the month an agreement was reached that called for the three cent raise that the miners

demanded. It seemed as though the strike was over, but a week later the miners of District #21 rejected the agreement, wanting better terms. The membership was divided over their next step. Some favored breaking off negotiations, others stressed the need for arbitration. The McAlester News-Capital reported that it was to be expected that the operators would "seek to open the mines on the open shop policy."³⁴

This was high-stakes poker for both sides. On August 1 the McAlester News-Capital announced that the "ultimata scrap" might "conclude tonight." It was expected that the operators were going to make a final offer as an ultimatum. The following day the News-Capital noted that the miners had rejected the operators' last offer and that all efforts at compromise had failed. The miners declared that they would "picket the mines at once." The News-Capital reported that "trouble of the gravest nature is feared by both sides."³⁵

After the negotiations collapsed, the time came to place blame for the failed talks. The inability to reach a settlement exposed a serious rift in the union. The traditional unionists were facing a serious challenge from the socialist faction, headed by Alex Howat, president of the Kansas district. Always a renegade, Howat carried as many battle-scars from encounters with other union leaders as he did from engagements with the operators. The Howatites sabotaged the agreement. They favored a joint-

convention rather than having two men reach an agreement behind closed doors.³⁶

The split also affected District #21. The district had a high percentage of socialist-oriented miners. Fred W. Holt, district secretary and socialist, argued that this was "a fight to keep our people from being forced back into slavery." He contended that the open shop was "the sole object and aim of the Southwestern Coal Operators' Association." Opposing Holt was the district's president, P. R. Stewart, who was firmly in the camp of the union's president, T. L. Lewis.³⁷

During this upheaval, delegates of the U.M.W. met for a national convention at Indianapolis in mid-August. The convention amounted to a showdown between the two rival factions of the union. Miners of the Southwest district who wanted to continue the strike "were not largely represented at the national convention." In fact, they were virtually shut out of the convention by the national leadership. Alex Howat, their leader, declared that "our strike is still on." The McAlester News-Capital reported that the Illinois delegation, which was at the convention but also opposed the agreement reached at Kansas City, "held [a] meeting of their own and reiterated their declaration of war, to continue until they win their fight and their big strike." The Illinois delegation argued that if it was victorious in its district, "the Southwestern district also would win their

strike." The News-Capital also noted that the "Illinois men declare that the operators of the Southwest could not stand a continuance of their strike if Illinois were working."³⁸

While the U.M.W. convention continued to degenerate into something similar to a streetfight, the operators responded to Fred Holt's claim that the operators were bent on trying "to force the men back into slavery." James A. Elliot, president of the operators' association, categorically denied Holt's charge that the operators' primary goal was to break the union. "This we absolutely deny," Elliot forcefully responded when queried on the topic by a newspaper reporter.³⁹ But few were interested in Elliot's comments at that moment. The attention of all was focused on the "chaos" at the U.M.W. convention at Indianapolis.⁴⁰

The Indianapolis convention pitted the union's president, Lewis, against Kansas and Illinois district presidents, Howat and Walker.⁴¹ After multiple verbal broadsides were exchanged, the renegades had won the day. Lewis was humiliated when the convention delegates voted to declare that "all strikes are endorsed." Before the meeting adjourned, a special committee recommended that a one dollar assessment per member be levied on "all members now working" to support the continuation of the strike. Not surprisingly, Howat endorsed and Walker seconded the committee's recommendation.⁴²

While the convention endorsed a continuation of "all strikes," within days there were rumors of a settlement in the Southwest district. The operators notified the presidents of the three districts composing the southwest district that they would accept the miners' demand for a three cent per ton wage increase. The operators made the offer with one stipulation, that the miners return to work immediately and ratify the agreement before negotiations were suspended. The News-Capital declared the offer a "concession on part of the operators." The operators also concurred that the agreement be referred to the Southwest district convention preparing to convene at Pittsburg, Kansas.⁴³

As the time for the district convention neared, the News-Capital predicted a "stormy time at Pittsburg." The paper noted that at the same time a delegation of eighteen prepared to travel to Kansas City to continue talks with the operators. The delegation was clearly anti-Howat as thirteen of the group repudiated him and his faction, but their primary purpose was "to end the coal strike troubles in the Southwestern district." The delegation announced that it was prepared to accept the operators' latest terms. At first, President Lewis was expected to attend the talks with the operators at Kansas City, but he declined at the last moment, claiming to be "busy all day" and wanting to finish up several matters before Labor Day.⁴⁴

As the "stormy session" at Kansas City continued, national president T. L. Lewis flashed his hatred of Howat. Lewis continued to refuse to assist in the negotiations, his decision based on "hostility toward Alexander Howat, President of the Kansas district." The News-Capital reported that Lewis was still smarting from the humiliation resulting from Howat's victory at the convention.³

Without Lewis as a counterweight to Howat, the negotiations in Kansas City were "still hung up" after a week of talks. The main sticking points were the penalization and arbitration clauses. Still, the News-Capital noted that the union and the operators were "both confident" the talks would be successful.⁴

This promise of a possible settlement proved true within days. Both sides accepted the appointment of W. L. A. Johnson, state labor commissioner of Kansas, as "official arbitrator in case of future disputes." The ratification vote was set for September 10. Last-minute delays led the News-Capital to declare that "the seventh son of a seventh daughter who has been sending out predictions as of the hour of settlement of difficulties between the mines and operators of the Southwest has fooled us again." Still, the paper expressed hope that the two sides might "sign this afternoon." Both sides finally reached a formal agreement on September 10. The ratification vote was delayed a few days, but a unanimous vote was expected as "the miners seem

to have all that they wanted."⁷

The final ratification was tantalizingly slow. On September 17 the New-Capital reported that the vote was "progressing slowly," according to "the seventh son who has been casting the horoscope for the mine troubles in the Southwest."⁸ Finally, on September 19 the News-Capital received a telegram from James Elliott and P. R. Stewart stating that the union's membership had ratified the contract and that the mines would resume work the following day. The paper reported that "the long suspense is ended and everybody is happy."⁹

The Hartshorne Sun captured the prevailing sentiment concerning the outcome of the contract talks when it reported, "Strike ends, Victory for the Miners." This assessment can be attributed to the fact the miners demanded and received a wage increase. But the Haskell County News provided a more balanced assessment. The paper noted that the operators had won a significant concession when the union accepted the penalty clause that protected the operators from arbitrary strikes.¹⁰

The strike of 1910 was illustrative of the union-operator relations during the 1903-1918 period. While the rhetoric at the negotiations was often acidic, neither side questioned the other's good faith during the talks. The Haskell County News went so far as to claim that the negotiations were "marked by utmost good will." The

Pittsburg Enterprise expressed the same sentiment when it declared that "an era of good feelings and good business" had begun. Within weeks thirty thousand miners return to work in the Southwest District.⁵¹

The clause in the 1910 agreement that prohibited wildcat strikes was not very effective. One wildcat strike broke out even before the miners returned to work after the 1910 strike. As their leaders signed the new contract, the miners at Dow announced they would not return to work. They had earlier demanded that operators at Dow "get rid" of those who had worked in the mines doing extension work during the strike. The operators refused this demand, and "as a result none of the men went back to there this morning."⁵² While this was an inconsequential walk-out, others were of a more serious and protracted nature.

One of the largest wildcat strikes occurred in the San Bois Company No. 1 and No. 2 mines at McCurtain in June 1911. More than three hundred coal miners struck over a dispute with the operators on the issue of payment for "deadwork." The Haskell County News reported:

We are unable to learn the particulars, but the miners claim the company will not pay them for the rock they must remove in digging coal. The trouble caused a strike here last fall but work was resumed upon promise of the company to pay for this rock, and it seems they have not stuck to their agreement. The strike is not likely to last long enough to be serious.⁵³

After two weeks it appeared the strike was over. The Haskell County News proclaimed on June 23 that there was

"great rejoicing" as "the strike is ended." While the settlement details were unknown to the public, the Haskell County News noted that "it is satisfactory to the miners and that is all we care."⁵⁴ But only a week later Fred Holt, secretary of District #21, announced that "the strike at the San Bois mines was on again." Holt charged that "the superintendent backed down" on the agreement to pay for deadwork. He noted that the "mine operators commissioner and President Stewart decided the dispute against the company two months ago, but the superintendent refuses to abide by it." Holt claimed the union was "forced to call the men out."⁵⁵

With the issue of non-payment for deadwork rekindled, it appeared the strike had the possibility of being a lengthy one. Although the 1903 agreement covered this issue, the operators continued to balk at payment for this type of work, arguing that the tonnage rate took into consideration the time needed for deadwork. The Haskell County News pointed out that "the trouble is the old one; the company refuses to pay for dead work, and the miners feel that they should. It is sincerely hoped that the miners and the operators will speedily reach an agreement." After a strike lasting six weeks, the two sides came to an agreement that permitted a resumption of work. The operators agreed to pay for removal of slate when it was two or more inches in thickness. Later an arbitrator ruled that

the walk-out did not violate the penalty clause of the 1910 agreement and overturned an earlier ruling that fined the miners for the strike. The Haskell County News declared that "this is a signal victory of Labor over Capital."⁵⁶

Only two months later State Mine Inspector Ed Boyle condemned and ordered closed the San Bois's No. 2 mine, one of the mines struck in the dispute. The Haskell County News noted that "this is the mine in which so many men have lost their lives."⁵⁷ After a few weeks of repairs the mine reopened. The accident that occurred on March 12, 1912 made all the previous disasters there pale in comparison.

The explosion at San Bois No. 2 killed seventy-three men and left McCurtain shocked and bereaved. According to the Haskell County News, "nearly all the dead were married, had families." Fifty-five of those killed were buried together at the local cemetery; one hundred and fifty men dug the graves. The paper went on to lament that "the whole city is in mourning." Wandering the streets of the city were "mothers with babies in their arms," their "wild eyed and tear washed faces look helplessly at you." The paper noted that it was a scene that "make's one's heart bleed with pity." Rumors spread that one widow died in her bereavement and that another had "gone insane." The Haskell County News declared that these "reports are groundless." But no one could deny the blast created two hundred and fifty widows and orphans. One family lost five members in

the tragedy.⁵⁹

The disaster at San Bois No. 2 in 1912 was the seventh explosion causing fatalities there in the nine years the mine had been open.⁵⁹ Many of those who died in the blast had participated in the strike there only a few months earlier. The accident was more proof than anyone needed that state safety regulations had accomplished little. It was in this somber environment that the strike of 1912 occurred.

The strike of 1912 began with the miners demanding a ten cent per ton wage increase. Many believed that if there was to be a strike, it was going to be limited to the district. The Haskell County News noted that there was "no likelihood of the strike being nation-wide" and that it was not expected to "be of long duration."⁶⁰ The union's district leadership was not so certain; it amassed \$120,000 in a "defense fund," anticipating a strike on April 1.⁶¹ As that date neared, the operators declared that they were "not disposed to grant the advance" that the union demanded. It was feared that if the operators did not grant the increase, the "miners may not take their picks and lanterns and descend into the dark holes where they pound out a living."⁶² After a strike lasting two months, the Southwestern Coal Operators Association granted the demands of thirty-five thousand miners in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. The miners even decided to return to

work before ratifying the agreement."⁴³ The Coal County Democrat noted that "work will not be suspended.... The men have decidedly the best of it, will have an advance in wages, and most of their demands were conceded. We congratulate [sic] the men on the peaceful and advantageous settlement."⁴⁴

For several years the coal fields of Oklahoma remained calm. This lull was broken in 1915 when two hundred miners struck at the San Bois mines at McCurtain, scene of the 1912 wildcat strike. Instead of a dispute over payment of deadwork, this time the "cause of the walkout" was blamed on "the rejection of the coal operators of the proposed contract of the United Mine Workers for a basis of working conditions and scale of wages in the San Bois mines," according to the Keota Record. The paper also reported that President Jordan of the Blue Ridge Coal Company, which controlled the San Bois mines, intended to operate the mines on an "open shop basis." In reality the mines had never reopened after the March 1912 disaster. The effort to operate the mines on "open shop basis" never took effect.⁴⁵

The only other work stoppage during the 1903-1918 period was in 1916. A strike lasting more than three months occurred while the contract talks dragged on. The onset of World War One created unprecedented demand for Oklahoma coal, and all the mines of the district worked full time. Wages rose with the price of coal, but so did the cost of

living. Federal wage and price controls during the war insured the operators high profits and the miners good wages. By the end of the war the wage scale had reached more than five dollars a day. Operators enjoyed high production and prices, and Oklahoma coal production peaked at over four million tons in 1920. But not all was well in the Oklahoma coal industry.“

Throughout the period from 1903 to 1918 the socialists and the "pure unionists" struggled to control District #21. Alex Howat and Fred Holt led the socialist faction, while "pure unionists" such as John Wilkinson, Andrew McGarry, and William Dalrymple tended to take their lead from the union's national leadership. The socialist faction was a minority, but a vocal one. They enjoyed visits from such nationally-known socialists as Eugene V. Debs and Mary "Mother" Jones. Socialist-oriented miners remained a powerful movement within the district until as late as the mid-1920s.“

The operators, often a target of the Howat and Holt faction, ridded themselves of the two in 1914 when an independent operator, Franklin Bache, accused President R. H. Keith of the Central Coal and Coke Company and president of the operators' association, of funnelling bribe money to Howat and Holt. Although the accusation never was proved conclusively, Howat and Holt were forced to resign their positions in the union. Howat still was able to remain a thorn in the side of the union's leadership as well as the

operators. After World War One, Howat became involved in disputes with John L. Lewis, the national president, and John Wilkinson, president of District #21. Jailed frequently for his strike-associated activities, Howat was an outcast within the union, but loved by his district's membership.“

The "pure unionists" also had their share of scandal. John Wilkinson, president of the district in the 1910s and early 1920s, likewise was accused of accepting bribes. Checks surfaced showing that Wilkinson had accepted checks from Colonel Samuel M. Rutherford, a political opponent of Oklahoma's Governor Robert L. Williams. Photocopies of the damning checks found their way into Williams' hands in 1918 as he was involved in the process of being appointed to a federal judgeship, an appointment Wilkinson publically opposed. Williams questioned Wilkinson's ability "to make the fight solely in the interests of labor," under such circumstances.“

The district leadership had other problems as well. In 1914 several of the smaller independent operators decided to break ranks and attempted to run their mines on an open shop basis. The result was months of violence at Prairie Creek, Arkansas, only four miles from the Oklahoma border. During these clashes union miners shot dead two mine guards, several mines were dynamited, and others intentionally allowed to flood. Franklin Bache, an independent operator

with mines in Arkansas and Oklahoma whose mines and guards were attacked, accused district president P. R. Stewart of ordering the purchasing of firearms with union funds. Later Stewart was arrested and jailed briefly for contempt.⁷⁰

Across the border in Oklahoma the business community at Adamson offered to provide arms to the miners in Arkansas, while union miners in Oklahoma professed their readiness "to join with the Arkansas Unions in their fight."⁷¹

While no further large-scale violence occurred during Bache's attempt to operate his mines in Arkansas under open shop conditions, his aborted effort to break the union was proof of a rising discontent among the independent operators. The large railroad-connected mining companies were generally satisfied with business conditions, because their mines turned a profit while providing a dependable fuel source for their railroad locomotives. As a result those who complained the loudest about the union were the independent operators. Without the benefits the larger companies derived from economies of scale, the independent operators claimed their cost of production "equals or exceeds the gross revenue." Franklin Bache claimed this was due to "forced payment for ... deadwork which was considered as being paid for in the mining rate per ton of coal."⁷² He argued that "another year of union operation would put us entirely out."⁷³ Other operators declared that they had "about reached the limit" and that they were ready to do

battle with the union in order to secure the open shop."⁷⁴

Briefly in 1914 it appeared as if the open-shop drive would spread to Oklahoma. Franklin Bache noted that the cost of production was also up in Oklahoma and it would be beneficial for state operators to see the open shop in the state's mines.⁷⁵ An attorney for Bache suggested reopening the closed-down mines at McCurtain on a non-union basis. He also recommended filing suit against the union, arguing that the union "is a combine in restraint of trade under the Sherman Law."⁷⁶ Bache agreed, stating that the operators could make a profit only under non-union conditions. He contended that if "business continues on a union basis, there is in my judgement no prospect whatever of getting the cost [of production] reduced, and every prospect of having it continuously increased."⁷⁷

Bache enjoyed partial success in his efforts to break the union. He sought and won a treasury-breaking \$750,000 judgment related to the Prairie Creek violence in the landmark case of Coronado Coal Company v. United Mines Workers. In its ruling in 1922, the Supreme Court ruled that the district was liable for the actions of individual members of the union. The case dragged on in the courts for a decade, but the judgment was financially devastating for the district.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the open shop movement fizzled in Oklahoma in 1914. The other operators refused to join the open shop crusade, arguing that "the difficulties

of establishing open shop mining property in Oklahoma and Texas" were "greater than we care to undertake at the present time."⁷⁹ Bache complained that the union's inordinate influence in Washington was to blame and that the union had convinced the federal government that "there is only one person, namely myself, in this part of the world that isn't in love with the union."⁸⁰

Bache was one of many independent operators who became involved in the Oklahoma coal industry during the 1903-1918 period. By 1910 the region sported dozens of small independent operators, their increased numbers attributable to a number of reasons. A surplus of miners, low labor costs (\$2.40 a day), easily accessible coal outcrops spread over a large area, and a local market untouched by the large operators all contributed to the scores of independent operators.⁸¹

The independent operators often were locals with spare cash to invest. Storekeepers, lawyers, mining company officials, even frugal miners, all could save and raise enough money to lease and develop small undeveloped tracts of land sandwiched in-between the large railroad mines. At these sites they had access to railroads, highways, electricity, and water.⁸²

The large operators initially ignored the small independents. Only after the independents were well-entrenched did the large operators recognized the threat the

independents represented. If the independents went non-union they could eventually become real competition to the larger operators. Outside of the market their own railroads represented, the larger operators were vulnerable to the independents. By the mid-1910s the large operators had grown suspicious of the independents, believing they had reached deals with the union to allow them to reduce their wages below the contract rate, thus putting the large operators at a competitive disadvantage.⁹³

Another threat to the operators during the 1903-1918 era was the development of "co-operative mines." Co-operative mines were ones in which a small group of miners agreed to operate the mine together. They combined their money and labor while sharing the profits. These mines became especially prevalent after 1910. A five-mile long outcropping between Krebs and Adamson had seventy small mines upon unleased lands.⁹⁴ While miners at all the co-operative mines shared responsibilities and profits, some took the collective philosophy a step further.

One location where this occurred was the mining colony at Milton, Oklahoma. At Milton the entire community functioned according to socialist guidelines. Located in Leflore County, "a band of industrial workers" gathered in 1913 to "establish a communism in which all working members of the colony may find employment at a living wage." The colony, about one hundred total, consisted of houses,

stores, a church, school, sawmill, and its mining lands, all operated on a collective basis. Most of the members of the colony worked in its mines, which produced a peak of nearly eight hundred tons monthly. Many of the estimated forty thousand active socialist voters in Oklahoma at that time visited Milton to tour the colony.⁸⁵

The large operators' animosity toward the co-operative mines was at least as great as their distaste for the independent operators. They contended that the union, on principle at least, favored the co-operative mines. The large operators suggested that the union worked with the co-operative miners in order to keep them in the organization.⁸⁶

Having found a niche to survive in, the small mines, both independents and co-operatives, multiplied in the 1903-1918 period. The cooperatives operated around the fringes of the market, and only locally. The independents, who operated on a mid-scale level, were more of a threat to the large operators, but still only in a limited way. In some ways they benefited the large operators, who found they could purchase coal from the independents for less than it cost them to produce from their own mines.⁸⁷

The 1918 District #21 convention centered around the union's position toward the independent and the co-operative mines. Topics raised at the convention included the relative advantages of the larger operators and measures the

government could take to prevent the proliferation of the often illegal "wagon mines." Often individuals simply sneaked at night onto the holdings of the larger companies, pilfering wagon-loads of coal from outcroppings, then sold it locally. Enforcement of union contracts at the smaller mines also was discussed at the convention, but no major decisions were made on the issue of the smaller operators. Increasing prices allowed both the large and small operators to make profits on their coal mining investments."

Oklahoma's coal industry came out of World War One in full-gear. Production and wages were at all-time levels. It seemed as if the golden era would never end, but it would. Within a year the union and the operators would be locked in battle during another bitter strike. The government-fixed high wages and prices of the war came to an end in 1919, leading to a major confrontation that fall. The upheavals related to the post-war economy were difficult on the state's coal industry, but even more threatening was the impact of oil and gas production on the coal industry of Oklahoma. Many railroads began to switch to less expensive oil. Other industries also turned from coal to oil, as did millions of home-owners just wanting to heat their homes for less. Oil and gas production ended up being a far greater threat to the large operators than the independents and the co-operative mines, but from 1903 to 1918, it was only good times in Oklahoma's coal towns.

Endnotes

¹ George Carney, Unpublished notes for presentation at Oklahoma State University on the history of the United Mine Workers in Oklahoma titled "Down in the Shaft," 16; Arthur E. Suffern, The Coal Miners' Struggle For Industrial Status, (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 73-76; South McAlester Wasp, 26 November 1904, 10 December 1904.

² F. Ray Marshall, Labor in the South, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 75; State of Oklahoma. Annual Report of the Department of Labor, [1909-1910], 359; I.C. Gunning, When Coal Was King: Coal Mining in the Choctaw Nation (n.p., Eastern Oklahoma Historical Society, 1975), 64.

³ Clyde Hamm, ed., Labor History of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939), 16; Kenny L. Brown, The Italians In Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 29.

⁴ Krebs Banner, 8 February 1906.

⁵ Ibid., 23 February 1906, 16 March 1906.

⁶ Ibid., 6 April 1906, 30 March 1906; South M'Alester Republican, 12 April 1906.

⁷ Krebs Banner, 6 April 1906.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 27 April 1906.

¹⁰ Ibid., 4 May 1906.

¹¹ The Kinta Enterprise, 10 May 1906; Krebs Banner, 1 June 1906; South M'Alester Republican; 24 May 1906; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 16.

¹² Krebs Banner, 15 June 1906, 29 June 1906.

¹³ Ibid., 13 July 1906.

¹⁴ The New State, 13 March 1908.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3 April 1908.

¹⁶ The Hartshorne Sun, 7 May 1908; The New State, 29 May 1908.

¹⁷The New State, 19 June 1908, 26 June 1908.

¹⁸Ibid., 24 January 1908.

¹⁹Ibid., 30 April 1909.

²⁰Blue Clark, "Delegates to the Constitutional Convention," Chronicles of Oklahoma 49 (Winter 1970-1971), 414; S.W. Murphy to W.J. Murray, n.d., Folder O-5, Hanraty Collection.

²¹Krebs Banner, 7 June 1907; The New State, 28 February 1908.

²²The New State, 28 August 1908.

²³Ibid., 18 September 1908.

²⁴Ibid., 29 January 1909.

²⁵Peter Hanraty to John Mitchell, 25 June 1909, Reel #16, John Mitchell Collection, Catholic University of America Library, Washington, D.C.

²⁶Mitchell to Hanraty, 28 June 1909, Mitchell Collection.

²⁷Hanraty Circular to the Coal Operators of Oklahoma, [circa 1909], Reel #17, Mitchell Collection.

²⁸Frederick L. Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly 2 (September, 1933), 139; Oklahoma Miner, 17 July 1913.

²⁹W.D. Ryan to John Mitchell, 2 March 1910, Reel #19, Mitchell Collection.

³⁰The Krebs Advertiser, 23 June 1910; The McAlester News-Capital, 18 July 1910.

³¹The McAlester Wasp, 16 July 1910.

³²McAlester News-Capital, 8 July 1910.

³³Ibid., 15 July 1910.

³⁴Hartshorne Sun, 28 July 1910, 4 August 1910; McAlester News-Capital, 30 July 1910.

³⁵McAlester News-Capital, 2 August 1910.

³⁶Ibid., 4 August 1910.

³⁷Ibid., 11 August 1910.

³⁸Ibid., 12 August 1910.

³⁹Ibid., 13 August 1910.

⁴⁰Ibid., 17 August 1910.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 22 August 1910; newspaper clipping, 20 August 1910, Folder Eight, Mining, Fred S. Barde Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁴³McAlester News-Capital, 25 August 1910.

⁴⁴Ibid., 29 August 1910, 30 August 1910, 2 September 1910.

⁴⁵Ibid., 3 September 1910.

⁴⁶Ibid., 7 September 1910.

⁴⁷Ibid., 8, 9, 10, 12 September 1910; Hartshorne Sun, 15 September 1910.

⁴⁸McAlester News-Capital, 17 September 1910.

⁴⁹Ibid., 19 September 1910.

⁵⁰Hartshorne Sun, 22 September 1910; Haskell County News, 23 September 1910.

⁵¹Haskell County News, 23 September 1910; Pittsburg Enterprise, 29 September 1910.

⁵²McAlester News-Capital, 20, 23 September 1910.

⁵³Haskell County News, 9 June 1911.

⁵⁴Ibid., 23 June 1911.

⁵⁵Ibid., 30 June 1911.

⁵⁶Ibid., 30 June 1911, 22 September 1911, 6 October 1911.

⁵⁷Ibid., 29 September 1911.

⁵⁸Ibid., 22, 29 March 1912.

⁵⁹The Oklahoma Miner, 9 May 1912.

⁶⁰Haskell County News, 2 February 1912.

⁶¹Ibid., 29 March 1912.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., 12 April 1912, 3 May 1912.

⁶⁴The Coal County Democrat, 30 May 1912.

⁶⁵The Keota Record, 4 March 1915.

⁶⁶Ryan, "Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," 136; Ryan, Frederick, Rehabilitation of Oklahoma's Coal Mining Communities, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 61; Harlow's Weekly, 27 September 1924; Mineral Resources, [1921] Part II, 612; General Commercial Engineering Department, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, Economic Survey of Oklahoma, (St. Louis: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1929), 185-186.

⁶⁷Ryan, Rehabilitation, 67; Krebs Banner, 20 July 1906; Mary Jones to Terence V. Powderly, 9 May 1906, Folder 1, Box 2, Mary Harris Jones Collection, Catholic University of America Library, Washington, D.C.; Haskell County News, 21 June 1912, 9 August 1912.

⁶⁸Ryan, Rehabilitation, 54; "Coal Operators' Association in the Southwest," 140-141; Franklin Bache to C.E. Ingersoll, 28 April 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Kali-Inla Coal Company Records, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁶⁹Robert L. Williams to Robert L. Owen, 23 September 1918, Federal Judiciary Folder, Box 7, Robert L. Williams Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁷⁰Bache to Woodrow Wilson, 9 October 1914, Folder F-2, Box 61, Kali-Inla Records, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁷¹C.H. Finley to Jas. B. McDonough, 29 May 1914, Folder F-4, Box 61, Kali-Inla Company Records.

⁷²Superintendent of Bache-Denman Coal Company to Bache, 23 March 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷³Bache to C. E. Ingersoll, 28 April 1914, Folder F-4, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷⁴J. G. Puterbaugh to Bache, 27 March 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷⁵Bache to Carl Scholz, 4 June 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷⁶Alton C. Dustin to Bache, 9 April 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷⁷Bache to A.C. Dustin, 15 April 1914, Folder F-5, Box 60, Ibid.

⁷⁸Bache to Jas B. McDonough, 29 August 1914, Folder F-3, Box 61, Ibid.; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 60-62; Roger Biles, A New Deal for the American People, (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 155.

⁷⁹C. M. Weld to Bache, Folder F-5, Box 60, Kali-Inla Company Records.

⁸⁰Bache to Fremont Stokes, 30 November 1914, Folder F-4, Box 60, Ibid.

⁸¹Ryan, Rehabilitation, 54-57.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid., 56.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Manuscript for newspaper article dated August 9, 1914, Milton Folder, Box 8, Barde Collection.

⁸⁶Ryan, Rehabilitation, 59.

⁸⁷Ibid., 52-53.

⁸⁸Ibid., 57.

CHAPTER VI

A CHANGE IN THE WIND: THE STRIKES OF 1919 AND 1922

The first brisk winds that signaled the onset of winter in 1919 ushered in more than a changing of a season. The mood of the nation was changing also. A contagion was sweeping the country, one that caused a collective paranoia known today as the Red Scare. Lenin was in the Kremlin, and a fear was sweeping the United States that his disciples were about to rise up and seize the nation violently in the name of the proletariat. This led to a spasm of reaction by the authorities. From the White House to the local sheriff, government launched a massive assault on all perceived radicals. Caught in this broad-brush approach were the coal miners. Their demands for higher wages to offset the greatly increased cost of living were lumped together with the more shrill cries of the Industrial Workers of the World, a chief target of the government crack-down. It was in this atmosphere that the coal miners of Oklahoma joined in a nation-wide strike in the fall of 1919.

There were several differences between the strike of 1919 and those prior to the war. First, by the war's end the coal operators of Oklahoma had withdrawn from the

Southwest Coal Operators Association. The main reasons for their secession were disagreements over the cost of production and the "five-day" clause, which guaranteed a miner five days pay once he was put on the work list, whether he worked a full five days or not. Oklahoma's operators argued that the higher costs of production in the state made the "five-day" clause an economic death blow. After the 1916, conference Oklahoma's coal operators withdrew from the Southwestern Coal Operators Association and formed one of their own.¹ This action made reaching agreements with the operators more difficult. Now the union had to reach several agreements, rather than one. Also, each association's goal of using its separate contract to gain an advantage over the other only made negotiations more troublesome.

The other major difference in the strike of 1919 and those that preceded it was that this was the first time wages and prices in the coal industry were under government control. The contract signed in 1917 fixed wages "until the expiration of the war." With the war over, the miners in the fall of 1919 presented the operators with a list of demands. When two thousand delegates gathered at Cleveland, Ohio in September, they asked for a six-hour day, a five-day week, and a pay increase of 25 to 40 percent.² What happened at Cleveland was important, as the contract signed there was for the central competitive coal field, the basis

for all other contracts across the nation. While he did not take an active role, J. B. Wilson of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association was in attendance to keep that organization abreast of events.³

From the beginning the strategy of the operators was clear. They argued that the strike was in violation of the existing contract that forbade strikes until the conclusion of the war. The operators contended that the miners should continue to work under the existing contract "until the peace treaty is actually signed."⁴

The miners contended that the war had been over for nearly a year and it was time to move into the post-war era. When President Wilson vetoed an extension of a war-time prohibition bill, the miners argued that this action supported their contention that the "war emergency" was over and that they were no longer bound by contracts "for continuation of the war."⁵ John Wilkinson, president of District #21, remarked in early October that unless the operators of the district accepted the demands put forth at the Cleveland convention, over ten thousand miners in Oklahoma and nationally over four hundred thousand were prepared to strike. Threatened with an injunction by the federal government, John L. Lewis, the larger-than-life leader of the union, refused to blink an eye in this high-stakes game of brinksmanship. Lewis issued a national strike order on October 15 that called upon all the union's

miners to lay down their tools on November 1.⁶

Both the federal and state governments actively sought to prevent the strike. United States Secretary of Labor William Wilson appealed for both sides to continue to negotiate, but refused to arbitrate. John L. Lewis, after conferring with Wilson, stated simply that "the strike order stands."⁷

Governor J. B. A. Robertson of Oklahoma also wanted to prevent a strike. He scheduled a conference at McAlester and invited both sides to attend. District president Wilkinson wired Robertson to express his plans to attend, but noted he could "only state our position."⁸ J. L. Britton, district vice-president, stated he did not see how the governor's conference could have any "immediate effect," considering that 90 percent of the district's membership favored the national officers' order to strike. William Dalrymple, U. M. W. board member, contended that if the governor's goal was to separate the district from a national strike, then the meeting would be "a joke."⁹

Dalrymple was right when he predicted that the governor's plan was to ask the state's miners to stay on the job regardless of the national strike situation. Robertson openly admitted that he intended to put such a proposition to the miners at the meeting at McAlester, despite Dalrymple's contention that there was no chance that Oklahoma's miners would "stay out" of the strike. While

Robertson hoped for "good results from the meeting," the opposite occurred.¹⁰

The governor's conference at McAlester ended in complete failure. Dorsett Carter, president of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association, while arguing that the proposed strike was "entirely without justification," contended that the operators were willing to make a new agreement "if possible" and that they were "ready to go [to] any lengths to avert the strike."¹¹ The governor declared that "the people of the state would not suffer," but the governor's plea that the miners stay on the job failed. They argued that they were bound to the decisions made by the union's international officers. District vice-president Britton stated that the district would "not secede" and that "whatever comes we will stick by the international."¹²

The meeting adjourned with a stormy exchange between Governor Robertson and Britton. After Britton criticized Robertson for declaring his intention to keep mines open regardless of the consequences, the governor stated that if the miners wanted a confrontation, he was prepared to give it to them. Robertson pledged "to use every ounce of power I can muster to keep the mines operating."¹³

The following day Robertson launched an assault against the union. Brazenly declaring, "we'll see who's running this old U. S. A.," Robertson stated that he considered the imminent strike to be "nothing short of a lawless

conspiracy" and that the strike amounted to a showdown between the "sovereign people of Oklahoma" and the United Mine Workers. The governor then warned the miners that if they struck, he would bring criminal charges against all strikers and that he would ask the federal government to deport aliens who joined the strike. Robertson followed up on the threat to deport all alien miners who struck. He wired Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, asking for their deportation and contending that their action "renders them and their presence undesirable in every way." Finally, Robertson also promised to keep the mines operating, "if labor can be found to run them," and implored the citizenry to save fuel."

The federal government quickly joined many state governments in their efforts to counter the strike. President Wilson declared the strike to be "not only unjustifiable but unlawful." Attorney General Palmer threatened prosecution under the Lever Act of those who struck, despite the fuel administration having been dissolved nine months earlier. The Wilson administration appointed Oklahoman Judge C. B. Ames, Assistant Attorney General, "to direct legal forces of government in pending strike." Ames advocated tying up the union's fifteen million dollar strike benefit fund, arguing that it was the most effective method of crippling the union. The Daily Oklahoman reported the government's view of the strike when

it noted that the "president's cabinet has decided to permit no more strikes" and that any strike would be treated as an act "against the government and will be suppressed accordingly."¹⁵

Back in Oklahoma, Governor Robertson began "the largest intra-state military operation in the history of the state." From the outset Robertson realized this was going to be "a nasty piece of business." After meeting with the governor, Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett, head of the Oklahoma National Guard, announced the activation of several regiments. Barrett also revealed that the troops would move into the strike zone "some time tonight." Over two thousand guardsmen, nearly the entire Oklahoma National Guard, poured into McAlester, Henryetta, and Coalgate during the night. When dawn broke the next morning the citizens of these communities found themselves under virtual military occupation. Robertson also asked Attorney General Palmer for federal troops, arguing that he was willing to use the "State Guard but am short of funds."¹⁶

Governor Robertson's actions found praise in many parts of Oklahoma. Receiving special kudos was Robertson's announced intention to have deported all alien miners who struck. A citizen in Ardmore, whose sentiments represented the view of many, wrote the governor that "you hit the bullseye when you said let us deport these aliens."¹⁷ A businessman in Ardmore declared that if the alien miners did

not like "our Uncle Sam," they could "go back to their own beloved country."¹⁸ A psychology professor at Central State College praised the governor for "doing the right thing. I glory in your spunk."¹⁹ A banker from Earlsboro contended that "real red blooded Americans" were not involved in the strike, it was "a lot of foreigners who have received their inspiration from men like Tom Watson, Eugene Debs, Jack [Bill?] Haywood, Tom Goar [Gore?] and others." The banker suggested that if it was necessary "to fight it out with this crowd of anarchists, the sooner the better."²⁰

This attitude of linking the U. M. W. with radicalism heavily influenced Governor Robertson. He and many others were convinced that the state was under assault by the I. W. W. and other radicals. This assumption was at the core of Robertson's decision to send troops into the coal towns. Robertson and many others believed the revolution had arrived in Oklahoma. A consulting engineer from Tulsa stated that if only more public officials would follow the lead shown by Governor Robertson, "the Anarchistic, Socialistic, I. W. W. and other tendencies destroying our American institutions would soon be a thing of the past."²¹ The Oklahoma City Commissioner for Public Property told the Governor that "it is high time to see who is running this Country of ours, the people or a little bunch of Bolshiviki. You are right and I sincerely trust you will accomplish your

purpose."²²

Robertson's announced purpose in calling out the troops was to provide protection for those keeping the mines operating. He notified the operators of his intentions and implored them to keep their mines producing.²³ While the operators of underground mines declined, strip mine operators were more amenable to the Governor's request. C. W. Dawley, who operated a strip pit near McAlester, told the Governor that with "necessary protection," he was willing to "operate if possible."²⁴

The larger operators were more interested in protection than in maintaining production. Harry N. Taylor, vice-president of the Central Coal and Coke Company, wrote Governor Robertson to warn him that the company's properties were in "danger from riot, incendiarism and other forms of violence." Taylor went on to "respectfully demand" protection of the company's property, but at the same time threatened to hold the governor responsible "for all damage which may result" from the strike.²⁵

Despite a last minute injunction issued at Indianapolis, the nation-wide strike began on schedule. Over eight thousand miners "quietly walked out of 150 mines at quitting time" in Oklahoma on October 31. District President Wilkinson was in McAlester, but remained "mum as Proverbial Clam," citing the injunction issued in Indianapolis. Standing in front of the Busby Hotel when the

first battalion of national guard troops arrived, Wilkinson smiled and stated that they would not be needed. He went on to affirm that "not a miner will raise his hand in violence in this crisis." Wilkinson's words appeared true, as the McAlester News-Capital reported that "all is serene in Mining Districts" after the "first day of military rule."⁶⁴

But within hours of the strike beginning, however, armed confrontations began. John R. Cavanagh, an operator at Chelsea, notified the Governor that he was "having trouble now at our mines." Strikers had threatened and chased two of the company's officers. Although the assailants were apprehended quickly, Cavanagh expressed hope for "further protection of our mines and houses which are threatened with destruction." General Barrett warned the striking miners that further occurrences would not be tolerated. He stated that "I am not going to run rough shod over the miners in Oklahoma, but I am going to be in full control of the situation at all times." He threatened "military control over the entire mining district" if any other demonstrations or disturbances occurred.⁶⁷

Not all arriving troops met hostility. At Henryetta the striking miners extended a "cordial welcome to the troops." The miners there stated that they expected to "get along nicely with them" and they would do everything possible to "promote a friendly feeling between them and us." The miners' first step toward this goal was to

challenge the guards to a baseball game. The game at Henryetta pitted a "crack team" fielded by the Pleasant Valley Mine versus a "picked team of soldier boys." The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance reported that "everybody is in good humor" - that is, except for Captain Sharpe of Company K. He came "under stern displeasure of a Col. McPherrren after the coal diggers beat the "soldier boys." In one of the few humorous moments in the strike. the Free-Lance reported that Sharpe had been granted permission to play on one condition, that the soldiers win. The Free-Lance humorously speculated a court-martial was in the offing for Sharpe, reporting that "we wait the outcome of this situation with interest."²⁸

The reaction of the Henryetta miners was an exception. Not surprisingly, most miners "fiercely resented" the Governor's decision to send in the troops. The Daily Oklahoman reported "high tension ... in the air" at McAlester. The paper noted that the radical element among the miners was busy "stirring up sentiment against the action of the government and president." The paper stressed that it was a "matter of speculation" how long the "ignorant ones" in the rank and file could stand up to "the stress of radical statements and bolsheviki" agitation.²⁹

Just how strong the "bolsheviki" element was among Oklahoma's miners is debatable. The Daily Oklahoman reported that at Henryetta the "guards awe reds," but at

Coalgate and Wilburton, "little radical sentiment" was observed. District president Wilkinson pledged to drum out what few I. W. W. and "Bolsheviks" there were out of the union. Wilkinson informed the press that he had a man in the coal fields who spoke seven languages and who was identifying I. W. W. men. Once identified, Wilkinson promised that "all will be suspended from the union." At the same time he declared that sending troops to the region was "an unnecessary expense to the state."³⁰

The press generally supported the Governor's decision to send troops into the strike zone. Harlow's Weekly noted that only the Tulsa Democrat disagreed with the decision, arguing that because the strike had been peaceful, there was no need for the two thousand troops the Governor sent into the region.³¹ The Poteau Weekly News was among the most strident supporters of the Governor's policy. Robert L. Kidd, the paper's publisher, noted that the strike was a "fight of the survival of the fittest." He warned that "if unionism imperils this government it's time for unionism to die." He went on to rebuke strikers for calling the guard troops "scab herders." Kidd suggested the strikers would get their comeuppance, "altho it would be criminal to waste ammunition on such carrion while ducks are flying."³²

Soon after the strike began, the governor announced his plans to keep the mines operating. Robertson stated that he planned to use convict and "volunteer" labor to man the

mines. He hoped that as many as eight thousand would volunteer to work in the mines. He argued that "green men" could be trained quickly.³³

At this point Governor Robertson came into a confrontation with State Mine Inspector Ed Boyle. The Inspector stated that he would prohibit the introduction of inexperienced men into the mines. He promised that all the powers of his office would be used "to keep green men out of the mines." Boyle included guard troops in his definition of "green men." He declared that any troops ordered into the mines would have to prove their expertise. Boyle maintained that safety was his primary concern in this decision.³⁴

Boyle's action outraged Governor Robertson and General Barrett. Declaring that he considered Boyle a "mild degree of anarchist," Barrett stated that he was prepared to ignore the Inspector's order that inexperienced men be barred from the mines. Barrett argued that Boyle had no right to interfere in the crisis and that his statements were "calculated to encourage anarchy." He promised that "the mines are going to be operated just as soon as we can get men, regardless of what any man many say or do, count on that."³⁵

State officials and the operators were not going to let one individual block their effort to break the strike and the union. J. G. Puterbaugh, a leading operator in

Oklahoma, dreamed of eliminating "some outrageous mining laws on the books put there by the miner's union." He even went as far as to state that the office of state mine inspector was "a product of the union." He felt little threat from Boyle though. Puterbaugh noted in a letter to the vice-president of the National Coal Association that Boyle had "overlooked the fact that when martial law is declared ... every other law is set aside." The Governor, General Barrett, and the Pittsburg County Attorney concurred in this opinion. Barrett stated a "lack of statutory law" prevented Boyle from "interfering in the state's procedure of operating state mines." While Robertson had not yet officially declared martial law, he had effectively eliminated Boyle's mandate from the state constitution to maintain safety in the mines.³⁶

Despite his boasting to keep the mines operating, the Governor did not immediately put his plans into action. Robertson intended to issue a call for volunteers on November 5, but he delayed that action after a conference with Dorsett Carter, president of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association. Robertson did order mines on state penitentiary property be kept operating with convict labor. Just in case this move provoked trouble with the strikers, a machine gun company "was ordered in from the regimental headquarters at Hartshorne."³⁷

The Governor must have expected trouble at the

penitentiary mines in McAlester to move troops away from Hartshorne, for that community was considered to be a hotbed of radicalism and an expected source of trouble if any developed. Robertson's operatives in the field reported there were scores of radicals there, all "bent on creating trouble." According to Robertson's agents, "various I. W. W. groups" met several nights a week in the hills south of Hartshorne. Hundreds attended these meetings, and investigators reported that they had "the names of 168 of this group." The Daily Oklahoman noted that most of the so-called radicals were Slavs and Italians, along with a few "renegade Americans as leaders." J. C. Britton, the union's district vice-president, denied reports of secret meetings, but Britton was a traditional unionist and an opponent of the radicals.³⁸ The radicals boasted that the Guard would be powerless if the dispute escalated to violence. These miners held that there were too few troops in the region to be effective. Besides, most expected many of the Guard to desert to the union side if violence broke out. Some National Guard officers feared just such an occurrence. Lt. J. H. Carey, an intelligence officer, notified his superiors that many of his men were in sympathy with the strikers. He warned that the strikers believed "that fifty percent of the National Guard will help them if trouble starts."³⁹

While labor organizations across the state came out in support of the strike, the miners also drew support from

farmers, businessmen, and many others in the coal belt. When Guard troops bivouacked at the state school of mines at Wilburton, students there sent a resolution to the Governor requesting that he move the soldiers elsewhere or they would institute a student strike. The President of the school made a similar request, but without an accompanying threat. He told the Governor that friction between the students and soldiers made classes impossible, contending that the "sight of the Kakai [sic] clad boys with their guns and ammunition detracted from the student's attention." The President of the school stated that it was impossible for the students and soldiers "to live under the same roof." The wife of one guardsman requested that the Governor discharge her husband. She argued that her husband had served faithfully, but "now as the war is over," he should be discharged.⁴⁰

Convicts also protested against the Governor's policies. After Robertson announced his intention to use convict labor to keep the mines going, the foreman of a convict road-gang wrote him that "my prisoners are in sympathy with the cola [sic] strikers and dont [sic] want to work in the mines." The work-gang foremen assured the Governor that he had "enough pistol toters to force them in."⁴¹

Miners were under no such restrictions. They actively worked to support the strike. The first incident of this sort occurred when two Mexican miners attempted to persuade

several other miners at Pittsburg to quit work at the McAlester-Edwards mine, the only non-union mine in the state. The two were arrested, held briefly in the state penitentiary, then released after they promised General Barrett they would "be careful in talking."²

The belief that the strike was part of a radical uprising continued to create an atmosphere of near hysteria in the coal towns. The second week of the strike several newspapers reported the discovery of a "large cache" of dynamite on the outskirts of Dewar. The Daily Oklahoman reported that enough dynamite was found "to blow up every mine in the Henryetta district." The "large cache" turned out to be a single stick, used by "nutting parties" to knock pecans down from trees. The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance chided the Muskogee Phoenix for reporting that "enough dynamite to blow up all of Dewar" had been found.³

The fears of violence were not without justification, however. In one incident a barbed wire barricade was stretched across a highway between Henryetta and Okmulgee. National Guard officers surmised that strikers had intended to wreck military cars delivering supplies to the troops in the field, but instead a miner coming from Henryetta had hit it, badly injuring him in the process.⁴

While the strike continued in Oklahoma, there was considerable legal maneuvering at the national level. A federal judge issued an injunction against the union's

national leadership. The union filed a counter-suit that asked to have the first order lifted. A spokesman for the union argued that the government had no case, because President Wilson already had dissolved the Fuel Administration and without it the government's claim that the strike "was a conspiracy under the Lever Act to reduce the output of coal" was baseless.⁴⁵ The federal government increased pressure on the union when Judge A. B. Anderson issued an order that demanded the U. M. W. leadership withdraw the strike order.⁴⁶ Under duress, the union's general committee decided to obey Judge Anderson's order. National president John L. Lewis proclaimed that "we will comply with the mandate of the court. We do it under protest. We are Americans. We cannot fight our government. That is all."⁴⁷

Many believed at that point that the strike was over.⁴⁸ Governor Robertson surely did, for he ordered the recall of troops from the strike zone.⁴⁹ Miners in Oklahoma expressed resentment over the court's order to call off the strike. Many felt "sullen" that the union's national leadership had buckled under to government pressure.⁵⁰ Their mood soon changed, though. The order ended up being a ploy as locals, probably in a pre-planned maneuver, refused to abide by it, pointing out that the order was not on official U. M. W. stationery, that it lacked an international union seal, and that the names of

the officers signing the order were printed, not signed.⁵¹

Both Governor Robertson and General Barrett felt tricked by the fake recall order. Angered by the affair, Robertson stated that the ploy had been "only a cheap trick, a course bit of camouflage." Robertson then went on to declare that the miners were "in insurrection" and that their actions had led to anarchy prevailing in the state. The Governor claimed that the miners had instituted "a virtual blockade" of the coal fields. General Barrett called the recall order nothing but "trickery" and a "conspiracy."⁵²

This upheaval brought coal production to a virtual standstill. All union mines were idle, and the men at the only strip pit in the state still working joined the strike on November 15. Only the two mines on the grounds of the state penitentiary were producing coal.⁵³

With coal production virtually nil, the Governor called a conference of state officials and the operators to formulate their next step. The Governor and General Barrett advocated that the operators reopen their mines on an open shop basis. Barrett pushed for a full-scale lockout and to "fight the battle to victory at once."⁵⁴ Governor Robertson warned the miners that if they did not return to work, the state "will act with a determination that will get results."⁵⁵

While Governor Robertson and General Barrett were ready

to do battle to the death with the miners, the operators held no such opinion. They almost immediately rejected Robertson's request that they operate on an open-shop basis.⁵⁴

Most of the operators, especially the larger firms, favored a settlement rather than a fight to the bitter end. High prices, high profits, and a nation crying out for coal offset a reluctance to grant a wage increase. In fact, most operators were ready to grant an increase - how much was the question. Throughout late November the Federal Fuel Administrator brought the heads of both sides together for negotiations. The union reduced its demand for a 60 percent increase to a 40 percent increase. The operators countered that a 20 percent increase was the "utmost that could be given." The operators' claim was brought under wide-spread criticism when William McAdoo, former Secretary of the Treasury, stated that the operators had made "shocking and indefensible profits" during the war while the miners' wages were frozen. While the gap between their positions narrowed substantially, no agreement was reached. Secretary of Labor Wilson proposed a 31 percent increase. John L. Lewis accepted this proposal on behalf of the striking miners, but the operators balked at the proposal. Fuel Administrator Garfield then replaced Wilson's proposal with a offer of 20-25 percent increase. The operators accepted this, but the miners rejected it. After a month, a settlement seemed

nowhere in sight.⁵⁷

Although both sides were haggling over a 25 or a 30 percent increase, neither was willing to blink in what was becoming a test of wills. Almost on cue, a severe winter storm swept across the United State. As the coal shortage reached critical levels, both the federal and state governments began to take aggressive steps toward the goal of satisfying a freezing nation's pleas for fuel.⁵⁸

Governor Robertson expressed joy when the talks collapsed in Washington in late-December. He claimed that the miners were not seeking justice, but that "the whole matter is a hold-up." Robertson then promised to reopen the mines using convict and volunteer labor. To prepare public opinion for the declaration of martial law, Robertson announced the establishment of a commission to investigate the strike. While the commission's purpose was only to collect testimony and not to render a judgment, the result was quite different. The commission hearings became a forum for the operators to declare their willingness to work with the government and the public to insure a resumption of the coal supply.⁵⁹

After the hearings Robertson announced his intention to use volunteer labor to operate the state's mines. Overseeing the project was J. A. Whitehurst, president of the state board of agriculture and the chairman of the state council of defense. Whitehurst proposed that each county

furnish workers and that a county's ration of coal was to be based upon its contribution of volunteer labor. Wages were based upon the final government offer made at the Washington talks, a 14 percent increase. Under threat of being put into receivership, the operators agreed to work with the Governor, but only if troops were brought back in to protect the mines. Robertson, already having to authorize deficit spending "due to high costs associate with deploying National Guard troops in the strike zone," then requested federal troops. If troops were unavailable, Robertson wanted either the federal government or the operators to assume the cost of sending troops back into the coal towns.⁴⁰

While Governor Robertson was asking the federal troops to maintain order in Oklahoma, he was the chief source of anarchy in the state. Early in the strike Robertson had suggested to the coal-starved towns of the state that they "take coal wherever you find it." Federal officials, alarmed at such rhetoric, demanded that Robertson retract the advice. As a result of Robertson's suggestion, citizens in several communities in western Oklahoma hijacked railroad trains as they passed through their towns. At Tipton, a crowd of fifty men piled railroad ties on the track, stopped a passing M. K. & T. train, seized seven or eight tons of coal, and left the train stranded. National fuel administrator Garfield admonished Robertson for his role in

this vigilante activity. A regional administrator at St. Louis demanded that the "holding up of trains ... must be discontinued immediately." Two weeks passed before Robertson officially rescinded his "self-preservation" order.⁴¹

With the situation desperate, volunteer miners turned out in throngs. "Volunteers by the hundreds" descended on several strip pits in Pittsburg County. Several hundred students from Oklahoma A & M University volunteered, as did students at other state colleges. The pastor of the Maywood Christian Church of Oklahoma City declared that he was prepared to "lay down the Bible and take up the shovel." Governor Robertson even volunteered. In a brief visit to a strip pit near McAlester, he donned rubber boots, mined a little coal, met the workmen, and "had a good time generally." The McAlester News-Capital argued that the volunteers were only doing their patriotic duty and were "in no manner strike breakers." Volunteer labor produced three thousand tons of coal while the Oklahoma's mines were "in the hands of the state," but this provided less than one-half of one day's supply of the state's daily demand, which was estimated at seven thousand tons daily. This token amount of coal was prohibitively expensive to produce as well. One source states that the volunteer-mined coal was produced "at a cost that placed it in a class with precious minerals."⁴²

To protect the volunteer miners, Governor Robertson declared martial law in several counties in early December. He argued it was necessary "to uproot sedition, prevent sabotage and criminal syndicalism and restore the mining section to its normal condition." At the same time he requested a thousand federal troops to assist in "guard and patrol duty in the mining districts of Oklahoma." Robertson withdrew his request when the commanding officer at Fort Sam Houston offered two all-black infantry companies from Columbus, New Mexico. Robertson argued that black troops would only lead to "unnecessary conflict and confusion." A few days later the commander at Fort Sam Houston did send four companies of "white cavalry."⁴³

To increase pressure on the miners, the Governor ordered the eviction of all strikers and their families from company houses at the Dawley strip pit near McAlester. He argued that "they cannot live there unless they will work." Robertson proclaimed that "this is an industrial war and they are the ones who declared it."⁴⁴

At the same time the National Guard established a military zone around the areas where volunteer miners were working. In reality this amounted only to the Dawley strip pit. According to the McAlester News-Capital, the guard planned it so "no one can leave and no one can enter in. Troops will be on hand to enforce this edict."⁴⁵ Robertson also ordered General Barrett to close "all pool halls, soft-

drink stands and other non-essential businesses ... during the military occupation." The Governor told Barrett to forbid "tumultuous meetings" and if such meetings occurred, "all such assemblages" were to be dispersed immediately and "those guilty arrested." Harlow's Weekly reported that "the iron hand of military law is being held over the mining districts and no activities of agitators or reds are permitted."⁶⁶

The Governor warned the public not to be too quick to criticize his "strong-arm" tactics in handling the strike. He argued that "we expect to meet some trouble and we are prepared to handle it summarily. We have come down here to mine coal and we are no going to let anything or anybody interfere with the accomplishment of that purpose."⁶⁷

Most newspapers in the state backed the Governor and his policy. The Daily Oklahoman argued that he was "thoroughly justified in declaring martial law," contending that the strike was "a showdown between Americanism and radicalism. And Americanism must win."⁶⁸ The McAlester News-Capital reminded its readership that in 1894 soldiers had "deported a whole mine strike," and that a proclamation of martial law had not even been necessary in that instance.⁶⁹ Harlow's Weekly contended that eminent domain and the coal strike were tied together. The paper's publisher argued that because the strikers had "no hesitancy of freezing the public into submission," the government had

not only the right, but the obligation to seize the coal mines and keep them operational.⁷⁰

The district president of the union, John Wilkinson, branded the governor's actions "a series of blunders." He argued that the governor "had erected a monument of colossal errors which would never be torn down in the minds of union miners." Wilkinson promised he would "go to jail" before attempting to coerce the miners "back in the mines against their wills."⁷¹ After tongue-lashing the governor, Wilkinson left for Indianapolis for a conference with Attorney General Palmer, Judge Ames, and leading union officials.⁷²

The conference in early December at Indianapolis brought an end to the strike of 1919. Attorney General Palmer brought with him a proposal from President Wilson. The settlement offer included an immediate 14 percent wage increase. More importantly, Wilson called for the appointment of a committee to investigate and readjust wages, taking into account the increasing cost of living. John L. Lewis accepted the government's proposal on behalf of the miners.⁷³ Judge Ames then wired Robertson and suggested the governor consider "the propriety of withdrawing troops." Attorney General Palmer asked the governor "to cooperate."⁷⁴ Not missing a broad hint, Robertson ordered the troops return to their barracks, but he did not act immediately. Robertson argued that the

miners had tried trickery earlier and he was not convinced of their honesty this time. Robertson noted that "we've been fooled before, and I intend to take no steps until the miners actually return to work."⁷⁵

Nor did the Governor like the terms of the settlement brokered by the White House. In a letter to a state congressman, Robertson lamented that he regretted the compromise reached at Indianapolis. He argued that "another week's work by the volunteers would have settled it good in this state. As I see it now, we will have to do the whole thing over again in the near future." Robertson told the publisher of The Interstate Farmer that the "federal government had made a very serious mistake in compromising this strike at the time and in the manner it did. We had the thing broken."⁷⁶

The Governor had equally harsh words for the operators. He complained that he received "little support from the Federal government or the operators." Robertson chastised the operators for being "unresponsive and seemed unwilling to help us. They didn't seem to realize that it was to their interest to break the back of such an octopus as this thing is."⁷⁷

Many in Oklahoma agreed with Robertson's assessment of the strike settlement. Freeman E. Miller, an attorney in Stillwater, wrote the Governor that "I have no patience with the terms of that [strike] settlement." Miller attributed

the settlement to "another instance of Wilson's weakness." He went on to rebuke the president severely for his interference, claiming that Wilson had surrendered to the miners, "whose agreements are only scraps of paper." Miller argued that Wilson "had not at all succeeded in making the world safe for democracy, but he has succeeded in making the United States mighty unsafe for Democrats."⁷⁸

While the Governor may have wanted to continue the fight to the finish, many in the state expressed relief that the strike was over. The Latimer County News-Democrat proclaimed that the "great coal strike is ended." Harlow's Weekly reported that "the greatest strike of Oklahoma's history was weathered without a single casualty" and that there had not been any "actual rioting."⁷⁹

Only in the waning hours of the strike did any major violence mar the union's promise to abide by the law. In the last days of the strike, there were two night attacks upon National Guard troops. At McCurtain guardsmen exchanged fifty shots with "miner sympathizers" near a mine "manned with volunteer labor." At the Hiawatha mine on the grounds of the state penitentiary at McAlester, unknown assailants crept up to and fired upon a guardsmen barracks in an hour-long skirmish. There were no casualties in either incident.⁸⁰

By mid-December normality returned to Oklahoma's coal fields. Nearly eight thousand miners resumed work,

receiving a temporary wage scale of \$5.50 a day. The Governor lifted martial law, but only after intense pressure from not only the miners, but from the federal government and the operators, who all saw the presence of troops as a destabilizing force. In early 1920 the Bituminous Coal Commission granted the miners a wage increase to \$7.50 a day. In June 1920, after a short walk-out, the operators agreed to a two-year contract at that scale.⁸¹

When contract renewal talks began in the spring of 1922, another national strike appeared unavoidable. Disputes over several issues had deadlocked the negotiations. The operators, arguing that they were under intense pressure from the oil industry, demanded that the miners accept a wage cut of 30 percent "or more" from the \$7.50 a day that the 1920 contract stipulated. The miners refused to move from their demand for a 20 percent increase. The operators also demanded elimination of check-off dues and the national wage scale, contending that economic conditions were different in every district. The operators demanded that separate contracts be reached in each district.⁸²

Facing the possibility of a lengthy strike, the operators kept their mines at "full-blast" in anticipation of the April 1 deadline. Railroads and industrial concerns stockpiled coal, hoping to prevent a recurrence of 1919. Economists predicted that the price of fuel oil would

skyrocket if the strike was not averted. John L. Lewis, the union's national president, declared in mid-March that the strike was "coming about automatically" if the operators refused to negotiate. He accused the operators of trying to reach agreements with the union's locals in a strategy of divide and conquer.**

The union did not need the operators' efforts to divide them; they were doing a fine job of it themselves. In February a rift between district twenty-one's president John Wilkinson and Alex Howat, renegade leader of the Kansas miners, was threatening to tear the district apart. Drawn into this controversy was the socialist paper, the Oklahoma Leader, published by Oscar Ameringer. District twenty-one owned \$10,000 worth of Leader stock, as did the Kansas miners in district fourteen. When Ameringer sided with Howat and the Kansas miners, Wilkinson and eight other plaintiffs filed suit and asked that a receiver be appointed for the Leader. Also thrown into the dispute was Governor Robertson. Howat accused Wilkinson of "playing politics" with the governor, referring to the collapse of the Okmulgee Bank of Commerce "in which \$15,000 of the district's funds were involved." Howat noted that Wilkinson's association with Robertson was so complete that he retained J. D. Lydick, "Governor Robertson's impeachment lawyer" to file the suit against the Oklahoma Leader.**

In many ways Wilkinson was merely carrying out the

orders of the union's national president, John L. Lewis. Howat was not only embroiled in controversy with Wilkinson, but he was also at odds with the traditional unionists at all levels of the organization. Ameringer argued in the papers of the Leader that Wilkinson was little more than "one of the errand boys of John Lewis, ... his Lord and Master."⁸⁵

While the union prepared to strike on April 1, the Howat-Wilkinson controversy continued to rip the union apart. Scoffing at Wilkinson's suggestion that he was dead politically, Howat took his case to the miners of the district. Speaking in many of Oklahoma's coal towns, Howat drew crowds that numbered in the thousands. He and Ameringer denounced Wilkinson and Lewis in Hartshorne, Henryetta, Wilburton, and other Oklahoma coal towns. Howat argued he was in the state to fight the "traitorous betrayal of the Oklahoma miners by John Wilkinson and his crowd." Many locals in Oklahoma passed resolutions favoring the restoration of district fourteen's autonomy, which was under direct control of the national leadership, and condemning district twenty-one's leadership for their verbal attacks on Howat and for the Leader receivership lawsuit.**

While the Leader dispute divided the union, the operators had their own disputes. Meeting at Kansas City, the Southwestern Coal Operators Association debated a proposal to return to the 1917 wage scale "as an ultimatum"

to the miners. This amounted to an offer that included "a scale of less than half that now being paid," according to the McAlester News-Capital. The operators of the Southwest district also declared that they planned to abolish the check-off system and that they were under no obligation to negotiate under the terms of the central competitive field scale, which had been the basis of agreements nation-wide for years.⁸⁷

In late-March there was a joint-meeting at Okmulgee of the members of the Southwestern Coal Operators Association (SWCOA) and the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association (OCO A). Their main purpose was to hammer out the details of a new contract with District #21. When asked about details of the contract, J. B. Wilson, a commissioner in the O. C. O. A., noted that "when this bunch get together, it is always for the purpose of decapitating someone and the people will find out soon enough what we intend to do."⁸⁸

Several last-minute attempts were made to avert the April 1 strike, but these efforts failed. Oklahoma's operators cloistered at McAlester, but kept their plans secret. They flashed a hint of their position when they argued that competition from non-union mines of Alabama, Colorado, and New Mexico, plus cheap Texas crude oil, required a lower wage scale. Just before the anticipated walk-out, the secretary of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association announced that it was prepared to fight to the

finish with the miners of the Oklahoma district."⁸⁷

On April 1, 1922 an estimated 665,000 union miners went on strike across the United States. Soon many non-union miners joined the walk-out. This was unexpected, as the Harding administration was betting on non-union coal to supply the nation's needs until a settlement was reached with the United Mine Workers. Governor Robertson, still smarting from his experience in the 1919 strike, declared a "hands-off" policy in regard to the strike. He reminded the state that he had warned three months earlier of the impending strike and that he assumed that "all have laid in a supply of fuel."⁹⁰

By April 1 the union had modified its demands, retracting its proposal for a wage increase and pressing for a renewal of the present contract, but with one important change. Union officials proposed a six-hour, five day week and a renewal of the \$7.50 scale. John Wilkinson argued that shorter hours would limit miners' exposure to the "poison air" in the mines to a point below what "his constitution will stand."⁹¹

The operators refused to renew the \$7.50 scale. Meeting at Kansas City in early April, the Southwestern Coal Operators Association agreed to return to the May 1917 wage scale of \$3.60 a day. Members of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association demanded that wages be cut not just to 1917 levels, but to a pre-war standard.⁹²

As the strike lengthened, district president Wilkinson's control over the union became more and more precarious. Wilkinson had raised the ire of many Oklahoma miners when he signed a contract with one mine owner to keep it operating in order to provide coal for the state's utility plants. When it was discovered that much of this coal was being shipped out of the state, the miners at the Blackstone mine protested, arguing that the agreement sapped morale and made them feel like traitors to their striking comrades. Only by threatening to take away the union cards and charter of the Blackstone miners if they refused to work did Wilkinson keep the rebellious miners under control."³

Worsening Wilkinson's grip on the district was his ongoing rivalry with Alexander Howat. The dispute nearly degenerated into violence between the two men and their supporters at a miner's meeting held at Coalgate on April 15. Wilkinson had called the Coalgate meeting to discuss the Leader receivership suit, but as soon as the meeting began Howat, the deposed leader of the Kansas miners, crashed the event, leading to a "near riot." ⁴

At this point Howat rose and demanded a chance to debate Wilkinson on the issues that divided them. The Leader suit may have brought their rivalry to a head, but their differences went much further. The two had been "sworn enemies" since Wilkinson opposed Howat at the international meeting that "threw him out of office." The

district's leadership refused to recognize Howat. Instead, Wilkinson launched a verbal attack on him, noting that Howat had not extended his "campaign of vindication" to Arkansas, because he had escaped from jail there fourteen years earlier after a woman had brought charges against him and that he was fearful of arrest if he returned."

Divisions at the meeting ran deep. Confronting William Dalrymple, a member of the international board and a John L. Lewis operative, Howat demanded to know what Dalrymple was doing at the Coalgate meeting. Dalrymple replied that "I'm a man, Alex. Something you never were." Other Howat supporters were refused the right to speak. While half the crowd cheered, Howat's supporters "booed, yelled coward, traitor and more profane things." Howat again challenged the district president to a debate, Wilkinson agreed, but demanded it be at a later date. Howat promised to be "on hand." As tempers flared, deputy sheriffs were called in to remove the radicals. This became unnecessary as Howat and his side-kick, Ameringer, called for all "friends of justice" to follow them to another floor in the same building where "the truth will be told." More than half of the crowd of five hundred in attendance walked out. The Leader claimed that eight hundred were there and that only one hundred remained after the Howat forces left. The Daily Oklahoman noted that many at the meeting were not miners, but townspeople who saw a storm brewing and wanted to be on

hand for the big battle. What they saw was preliminary sparring; the main attraction was set for May 15 in Muskogee.*

During the month leading up to the district convention, little progress was made toward settling the strike. The vice-president of the union's national leadership announced in late April that the miners would call off their strike and return to work, pending a new agreement, on the condition that Congress passed a resolution that called for the Bituminous Coal Commission's ruling of 1920 giving the miners the \$7.50 a day. The operators were willing to wait the union out. They saw no need for a settlement with a sluggish market and with no shortages expected for at least six weeks. Although the nation's bituminous coal output had been cut 75 percent by the strike, production from non-union mines had increased to 4,150,000 tons weekly, although the amount of anthracite coal "remained at practically zero."⁷

Six weeks into the strike, the miners of district twenty-one met in Muskogee. Superficially the main issue on the table was distribution of strike benefits. The union's constitution called for strike benefits to begin after a strike reached six weeks in duration. The problem was that with nearly 14,000 miners in the district, strike benefits added up \$260,000 monthly. Continuing the policy of distributing a weekly \$5 strike benefit to each union member would virtually wipe out the district's treasury in a week,

as it contained at that moment \$77,000 dollars, less the cost of the Muskogee convention. With many miners already in desperate straits, those who declared they were "in fine shape and can hold out indefinitely " voted that benefits be distributed only to those who required them rather than to the entire district membership."

Despite his wishes to be "on hand" for the convention, Howat was unable to attend. He was at that time residing in a jail cell in Girard, Kansas for violating an industrial court act. Standing in for Howat was President Farrington of the Illinois district. Wilkinson had hoped to ban Farrington, but the Howat forces on the first day of the convention showed their strength when they mustered enough votes to pass a resolution that invited Farrington, who had taken up Howat's fight since his incarceration. Farrington, another radical and opponent of J. L. Lewis, relished his mission. So did Ameringer, who was equally ready to assist Howat's effort from his jail cell to unseat Wilkinson."

Besides these big names, many in Oklahoma's locals were "active among the opposition forces."¹⁰⁰

When the president of the Illinois district arrived for the Muskogee convention, the Phoenix reported that Farrington was "here for scrap today." The Phoenix expected a major battle, as the morning session had been colored by "personalities of a more or less profane nature were hurled back and forth" between the two factions. Several times

during the session it appeared as if the convention "would break up in disorder."¹⁰¹

Farrington lived up to his billing as a firebrand. Before turning his attention to Wilkinson, Farrington launched a bitter attack on John L. Lewis. He claimed that Lewis had a vendetta against him since he had exposed how three of Lewis's henchmen had stole \$3000 from the local at Panama, Illinois." Farrington then stridently defended Howat, contending that he "was the victim of the biggest political conspiracy ever perpetrated." The Illinois president stated that even "granting for the sake of argument that Howat is guilty as hell," he asked why he should be kicked out of the union for fighting an industrial court act. Farrington's language was so colorful that Wilkinson warned, "easier on cussing or be kicked out," after a women's club, meeting in another room in the building, objected to the rhetoric. Farrington's only comment was that he would "use any kind of language I see fit." Wilkinson retorted: "Go ahead and get us thrown out of the building." While Farrington and Wilkinson sparred verbally, their supporters had to be pulled apart repeatedly. When Farrington arrived to the applause of the radicals, the demonstration nearly led to blows between followers of the two factions. Some had to be physically restrained, others were ejected from the meeting.¹⁰²

Supporters kept Howat abreast of events at the

convention. Commenting from his jail cell at Girard, Kansas, Howat noted that "Wilkinson will no doubt try and dictate to the delegates." He urged the miners to stand up to Wilkinson and his "dastardly and cowardly attempt to destroy the Oklahoma Leader."¹⁰³

Finally, in the fifth session Wilkinson rose to present his case to the convention. First, Wilkinson defended his own policies. He stated his reasons for allowing the Blackstone mine to produce coal for utilities and for allowing miners in Texas to sign an agreement that called for a reduced wage scale. Wilkinson contended that neither action violated the union's national strike order. Then Wilkinson turned his attention to the radicals. He lambasted Howat, Farrington, Ameringer, and several other socialist-oriented miners. Wilkinson lampooned Farrington's assertion that he had no hate for anyone by replying that "if what he said here, was an expression of love, then it must have been in the true caveman fashion." Wilkinson then accused a deceased socialist miner of being a "scab herder" during the 1910 strike. After the deceased miner's daughter rose to demand proof of such an ugly accusation, Wilkinson retracted the charge, which had been based on hearsay evidence.¹⁰⁴

Wilkinson saved his strongest rhetoric for Oscar Ameringer. He declared that Ameringer "says I've got a streak of yellow a yard wide, but he can't prove it;

physically or otherwise." Wilkinson then launched into a lengthy diatribe aimed at the socialist publisher.¹⁰⁵

Arguing that he was at the end of his patience, Wilkinson prepared to let the Howat forces present their case. Acknowledging the dispute had taken a nasty turn, Wilkinson stated he would let Ameringer take the floor and "go at it as dirty as he likes." Wilkinson maintained he was ready to do battle. Confident of victory, the district president claimed that "if they want to make it a moral issue [the Leader receivership suit] and go down in the mire they can go just as far as they like. We'll kick the lid off."¹⁰⁶

After supporters of both sides hurled insults and accusations at each other, it was Ameringer's turn to speak. He rose and in a thick German accent proceeded to accuse Wilkinson of a wide variety of crimes and injustices. Speaking for an hour and a half, Ameringer charged Wilkinson with graft, fraud, and theft of treasury funds. After a lengthy verbal attack on John L. Lewis, Ameringer indicted all the officers of the district, telling the crowd that "these men have stolen your money boys," pointing to the officers on the platform. To drive his point home that the district leadership were little more than armed thugs, Ameringer declared that he was unarmed and proceeded to take his coat off to prove it. While he spoke and with a smirk on his face, Ameringer turned his trouser pockets out and

slapped his backside to emphasis the point. Insulted, Wilkinson charged at Ameringer, declaring that "no German can pat the seat of his trousers at me and get away with it.... The Kaiser did that to the United States once." At that point the convention was a tinderbox, ready to deteriorate into a free-for-all fight. When a miner rose to make a motion for a twenty minute recess so the delegates could check their "firearms and surgical instruments" at the door, Wilkinson over-ruled the motion, declaring he was armed and did not care who knew it.¹⁰⁷ The district leadership presumably expected trouble, as "different members of the board were armed with guns, pistols and knives." Although Wilkinson contended that he was armed because of death threats he had received, the Leader posited that Ameringer was the one in physical danger and that the publisher spoke at the convention "under circumstances as unfavorable as would be. All week were rumors of threats to beat him up and a personal conflict seemed imminent."¹⁰⁸

As he drew his speech to a close, Ameringer warned that even if the district leadership won the receivership suit, the union would be the real loser. He pointed out that the district was a minority shareholder and that the majority shareholders, the Milwaukee Social Democratic Publishing Company, still supported him, "for they think I'm a pretty good sort of a fellow up there."¹⁰⁹

Wilkinson then rose for a final rebuttal. He denied

that he had ever been influenced by Governor Robertson in the depositing of district funds in the failed Bank of Commerce at Okmulgee. Wilkinson promised to resign if "one scintilla of evidence" could be found that proved the charge. Declaring that he wanted Ameringer "to go back to Germany," Wilkinson noted that he had lost a brother in the Great War and had "more respect for the German who killed my brother in France than I have for Oscar Ameringer."¹⁰

What followed gave credence to Ameringer's claim that the district leadership used strong-arm tactics to get their way. After the convention voted eighty to seventy-six against a resolution authorizing the continuance of the receivership suit, the acting chair, D. A. Frampton, international organizer from Missouri and a John L. Lewis man, overruled the motion in a blatantly partisan move.¹¹

While Wilkinson may have prevailed in the battle, he and his leadership were discredited among the socialist membership as a result of the Muskogee convention. Ameringer claimed Wilkinson's supporters had resorted to "racial and religious prejudices" in addition to abuse of office to prevail. Ameringer called Wilkinson a knave and a fool and said that if he were Wilkinson, he would "have pulled that six-shooter out of my hip pocket, pressed it between my lying teeth and soiled the ceiling with my foul brains."¹²

Delegates at the Muskogee convention almost forgot that

the union was involved in a national strike. Torn by the Wilkinson-Howat fight, the convention adjourned with no resolution of the strike benefit question, despite the district's treasury being "practically empty."¹¹³ The Muskogee Daily Phoenix declared the convention "a smashing success," pointing to the convention hall where there were twenty broken chairs, curtains tied in knots, and the floor covered in tobacco juice, cigarette, and cigar butts. This led the Phoenix to report that "the floors are evidence of the conventionites unfamiliarity with cuspidors."¹¹⁴ The Leader receivership suit controversy ended with a whimper, as a few days later a district judge denied Wilkinson's application for receivership.¹¹⁵

As the strike entered its third month, both sides edged toward a settlement. But the situation remained far from peaceful. At Herrin, Illinois, thousands of union miners attacked strikebreakers in an orgy of violence, dozens were killed. The Herrin Massacre shocked all, but coupled with the Coronado case ruling, it led many of Oklahoma's operators to contemplate re-opening on an open shop basis - especially after they heard that the Governor had ordered the state's military to prepare to move into the coal fields if the operators took such an action. Both the operators and state officials publicly denied making such plans.¹¹⁶

It was only as coal reserves dwindled and the strike dragged onto into the fourth month that the Harding

administration began to take an active role in bringing about a settlement. Calling both sides to Washington, Harding proposed a resumption of work on the basis of the scale that expired March 31, with arbitration to follow. After neither side seemed receptive, Harding turned from the carrot to the stick. He threatened the operators with seizure of their mines and warned the union that he would send in federal troops to get the mines operating."¹⁷

Not desirous of seeing their mines put under government control, the operators signalled their readiness to negotiate a settlement with the United Mine Workers. Nor were they prepared to re-open on an open shop basis. The president of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association declared that the state's operators were "loathe to break relationships that have existed for many years with the miners' organization and are still willing to meet in joint-conference and discuss our differences with a view of reaching an agreement."¹⁸

After a final round of sparring, both sides reached agreement. A settlement was concluded in mid-August in Cleveland that called for the miners to return to work under the contract that expired March 31 at \$7.50 a day. After a brief period of contemplating going ahead with open shop plans and a lower wage scale, the operators of Oklahoma gave up on the idea after district president Wilkinson threatened to pull fireman, pumpers, and other essential personnel out

of the mines if the operators attempted to use non-union labor."⁹

By late August more than seven thousand miners returned to work in Oklahoma's coal mines. Because the operators had been unable to force a reduction in the wage scale, the miners believed they had won "a signal victory in the settlement reached." But the strike was costly for the miners. Over \$200,000 was paid out of the district's treasury in strike benefits, leaving the district penniless and weakened for the next battle with the operators.¹²⁰

The strikes of 1919 and 1922 indicated a change in the union's relationship with the operators. Threatened by oil and gas competition, the operators had twice seriously contemplated abandoning their relationship with the union in favor of the open shop. Although they backed off both times, this was something unheard of since 1903. It signalled that the golden days of high profits and wages were drawing to a close. The prosperity that had reigned in Oklahoma's coal towns for nearly twenty years was under assault from competition from oil and gas. Both sides, having grown accustomed to prosperity, were unwilling to work together to continue the competitiveness of their industry. This was proven beyond a shadow of a doubt in 1924 when the contract came up for renewal.

Endnotes

¹ Frederick L. Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, 2 (September, 1933), 141.

² The McAlester News-Capital, 9 September 1919.

³ Ibid., 17 September 1919; Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," 134.

⁴ J. G. Puterbaugh to "The Trade," 4 October 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, J. B. A. Robertson Papers, State of Oklahoma Department of Libraries Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 28 October 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 28 October 1919.

⁶ Daily Oklahoman, 9 October 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 15 October 1919; David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Coal Miner's Unions, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939), 145.

⁷ The McAlester News-Capital, 27 October 1919.

⁸ John Wilkinson to J. B. A. Robertson, 25 October 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁹ The McAlester News-Capital, 27, 28 October 1919.

¹⁰ Ibid., 28 October 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 28 October 1919.

¹¹ Daily Oklahoman, 28 October 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 29 October 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 30 October 1919.

¹² Ibid., 29 October 1919.

¹³ Daily Oklahoman, 29 October 1919.

¹⁴ McAlester News-Capital, 30 October 1919; Robertson to Palmer, 30 October 1919, Folder 8, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Daily Oklahoman, 31 October 1919.

¹⁵ McDonald and Lynch, Coal and Unionism, 145; McAlester News-Capital, 30 October 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 31 October 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 28 October 1919.

¹⁶G. McIntyre, brief summary of Robertson and the strike of 1919, J. B. A. Robertson vertical file, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Robertson to Robert Wimbish, 3 November 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Daily Oklahoman, 31 October 1919, 1 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 1 November 1919; Robertson to Palmer, 30 October 1919, Folder 3, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

¹⁷J. S. Mullen to Robertson, 30 October 1919, Folder 3, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

¹⁸Samuel H. Butler to Robertson, 30 October 1919, Folder 3, Box 11, Ibid.

¹⁹Edmund D. Murdaugh to Robertson, 30 October 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, Ibid.

²⁰R. R. Hiudau to Robertson, 30 October 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, Ibid.

²¹R. K. Hughes and S. W. Mitchell to Robertson, 31 October 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, Ibid.

²²Joe H. Patterson to Robertson, 31 October 1919, Folder 8, Box 11, Ibid.

²³Robertson to C. W. Dawley, 31 October 1919, Folder 3, Box 11, Ibid.

²⁴Dawley to Robertson, 31 October 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

²⁵Harry N. Taylor to Robertson, 1 November 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

²⁶Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 31 October 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 5 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 3 November 1919.

²⁷McAlester News-Capital, 3 November 1919.

²⁸John R. Cavanagh to Robertson, 1 November 1919, Folder 3, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 3, 6 November 1919.

²⁹Daily Oklahoman, 1 November 1919.

³⁰Ibid.; Latimer County News-Democrat, 7 November 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 5 November 1919.

³¹Harlow's Weekly, 5 November 1919.

³²The Poteau Weekly News, 6 November 1919.

³³Daily Oklahoman, 2 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 4 November 1919.

³⁴Ed Boyle to Robertson, 3 November 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Daily Oklahoman, 1 November 1919.

³⁵McAlester News-Capital, 5 November 1919; Barrett Testimony At Strike Commission Hearings, November 1919, Folder 13, Box 30, Robertson Papers.

³⁶J. G. Puterbaugh to J. D. A. Morrow, 3 November 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, Robertson Papers; McAlester News-Capital, 6 November 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 7 November 1919.

³⁷McAlester News-Capital, 5 November 1919.

³⁸Daily Oklahoman, 5 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 5 November 1919; Lt. John H. Carey to C. O., 2nd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, 8 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Carey to Commander 2nd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, 9 November 1919, Folder 8, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

³⁹Carey to C. O., 2nd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, 5 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11; 8 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11; 9 November 1919, Folder 8, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁴⁰Harlow's Weekly, 12 November 1919; Oklahoma City Building Trades Department to Robertson, 8 November 1919, Folder 3, Box 11; A. D. Fossett and C. Madseu to Robertson, 8 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11; Carey to C. O., 2nd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, 8 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11; Student Committee, Oklahoma School of Mines to Robertson, 4 November 1919, Folder 4, Box 11; Mead S. Johnson to Robertson, 10 November 1919, Folder 9, Box 11; Pat C. Rogers to Robertson, 8 November 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁴¹S. J. Buckner to Robertson, 5 November 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁴²A. D. Fossett to Robertson, 6 November 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, Ibid.; McAlester News-Capital, 6, 7 November 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 12 November 1919.

⁴³Daily Oklahoman, 8, 9 November 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 9 November 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 12 November 1919.

⁴⁴Harlow's Weekly, 12 November 1919.

⁴⁵McAlester News-Capital, 6 November 1919.

⁴⁶Ibid., 8 November 1919.

⁴⁷Ibid., 11 November 1919.

⁴⁸Lt. J. H. Carey to C. O., 2nd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, 12 November 1919, Folder 4, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁴⁹Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 12 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 12, 13 November 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 13, 14 November 1919.

⁵⁰Daily Oklahoman, 10, 12 November 1919.

⁵¹McAlester News-Capital, 14, 17 November 1919; Latimer County News-Democrat, 14 November 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 14 November 1919.

⁵²Daily Oklahoman, 16 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 14 November 1919.

⁵³McAlester News-Capital, 17 November 1919.

⁵⁴Daily Oklahoman, 15, 16 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 17 November 1919.

⁵⁵Daily Oklahoman, 16 November 1919.

⁵⁶Ibid., 17 November 1919; Latimer County News-Democrat, 21 November 1919.

⁵⁷McAlester News-Capital, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 November 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 30 November 1919; Oklahoma Leader, 29 November 1919; Black Diamond 3 (17 July 1920), 48; Daily Oklahoman, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 November 1919.

⁵⁸McAlester News-Capital, 28 November 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 3 December 1919.

⁵⁹Daily Oklahoman, 18, 19, 20, 21, 28 November 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 18, 19, 21 November 1919.

⁶⁰Daily Oklahoman, 29, 30 November 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 3 December 1919; The Poteau News, 4 December 1919.

⁴¹Robertson to Mayor of Rocky, Oklahoma, 6 November 1919, Folder 2, Box 11; Robertson to Magnum Chamber of Commerce, 6 November 1919, Folder 2, Box 11; Robertson to Fred Varner, 13 November 1919, Folder 4, Box 11; Robertson to J. B. Simpson, 11 November 1919, Folder 4, Box 11; H. A. Garfield to Robertson, 19 November 1919, Folder 5, Box 11; B. F. Bush to Robertson, 1 December 1919, Folder 6, Box 11, Robertson Papers; McAlester News-Capital, 2 December 1919.

⁴²Harlow's Weekly, 10 December 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 2, 5, 8, 14 December 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 1, 4, 5 December 1919; Clyde Hamm, ed., Labor History of Oklahoma (Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939), 59.

⁴³Martial Law Proclamation, 4 December 1919, Folder 10, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Robertson vertical file, Oklahoma Historical Society; Daily Oklahoman, 4, 5 December 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 4, 5 December 1919; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 4, 5 December 1919; Jos. Dickman to Robertson, 4 December 1919, Folder 6, Box 11, Robertson Papers; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 58-59.

⁴⁴Daily Oklahoman, 6 December 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 6 December 1919.

⁴⁵McAlester News-Capital, 5, 8 December 1919.

⁴⁶Daily Oklahoman, 8 December 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 10 December 1919.

⁴⁷Daily Oklahoman, 8 December 1919.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹McAlester News-Capital, 6 December 1919.

⁵⁰Harlow's Weekly, 10, 24 December 1919.

⁵¹Daily Oklahoman, 6 December 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 8 December 1919.

⁵²McAlester News-Capital, 8 December 1919.

⁵³Daily Oklahoman, 7 December 1919; McAlester News-Capital, 8, 9 December 1919.

⁵⁴C. B. Ames to Robertson, 11 December 1919, Folder 7, Box 11, A. M. Palmer to Robertson, 11 December 1919, Folder 7, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁵⁵Daily Oklahoman, 11 December 1919.

⁷⁶Robertson to Hon. Richard Elam, 16 December 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, Robertson to M. C. Harper, 17 December 1919, Folder 6, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁷⁷McAlester News-Capital, 12 December 1919.

⁷⁸Freeman E. Miller to Robertson, 13 December 1919, Folder 7, Box 11, Robertson Papers.

⁷⁹Latimer County News-Democrat, 12 December 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 24 December 1919.

⁸⁰McAlester News-Capital, 10, 12 December 1919; Daily Oklahoman, 13 December 1919; Harlow's Weekly, 24 December 1919.

⁸¹Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 59; Frederick L. Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma's Coal Mining Communities, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 61; McAlester News-Capital, 12 December 1919.

⁸²McAlester News-Capital, 17 January 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 20 January 1922; Allan Kent Powell, The Next Time We Strike: Labor in Utah's Coal Fields, 1900-1933, (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1985), 121.

⁸³Latimer County News-Democrat, 3 February 1922; Daily Oklahoman, 15 March 1922.

⁸⁴Oklahoma Leader, 24, 27 February 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 6 March 1922.

⁸⁵Oklahoma Leader, 27 February 1922.

⁸⁶Muskogee Phoenix, 6, 9 March 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 6, 7, 8 March 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 10 March 1922.

⁸⁷McAlester News-Capital, 8, 9, 18 March 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 8 March 1922.

⁸⁸McAlester News-Capital, 20 March 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 24 March 1922.

⁸⁹McAlester News-Capital, 23, 24, 29 March 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 31 March 1922.

⁹⁰Daily Oklahoman, 26, 30 March, 2 April 1922; McAlester News-Capital, 30 March, 1, 13 April 1922, Latimer County News-Democrat, 31 March 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 1 April 1922.

- ⁹¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 26 March 1922.
- ⁹²Ibid., 4 April 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 28 April 1922.
- ⁹³Oklahoma Leader, 10 April 1922.
- ⁹⁴Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 15 April 1922; Daily Oklahoman, 15 April 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 15 April 1922.
- ⁹⁵Ibid.
- ⁹⁶Ibid.
- ⁹⁷Daily Oklahoman, 17 April 1922; McAlester News-Capital, 25 April 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 22 April, 1 May 1922.
- ⁹⁸Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 12, 16 May 1922.
- ⁹⁹Ibid., 12, 16, 19 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁰Oklahoma Leader, 16 May 1922.
- ¹⁰¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 17 May 1922.
- ¹⁰²Ibid., 18 May 1922; Daily Oklahoman, 18 May 1922.
- ¹⁰³Oklahoma Leader, 19 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁴Daily Oklahoman, 20 May 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 20 May 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 20 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁵Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 20 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁷Daily Oklahoman, 21 May 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 21 May 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 21 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁸Oklahoma Leader, 23 May 1922.
- ¹⁰⁹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 21 May 1922; Oklahoma Leader, 23 May 1922.
- ¹¹⁰Daily Oklahoman, 23 May 1922; Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 23 May 1922.
- ¹¹¹Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 24 May 1922.
- ¹¹²Oklahoma Leader, 24, 26 May 1922.

¹¹³ McAlester News-Capital, 22, 23, 24 May 1922.

¹¹⁴ Muskogee Daily Phoenix, 25 May 1922.

¹¹⁵ Oklahoma Leader, 1 June 1922.

¹¹⁶ Daily Oklahoman, 22, 23, 24 June 1922; McAlester News-Capital, 22, 23, 24 June 1922.

¹¹⁷ Daily Oklahoman, 2, 4, 5, 11, 16, 18, 19 July 1922; McAlester News-Capital, 8, 10, 11, 14, 18, 19 July 1922.

¹¹⁸ McAlester News-Capital, 20 July 1922.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 8, 10, 15, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28 August 1922; Daily Oklahoman, 16, 17, 19 August 1922; Latimer County News-Democrat, 21, 28 July, 18, 25, August 1922.

¹²⁰ McAlester News-Capital, 19, 22, 25, 28 August 1922.

CHAPTER VII

GOTTERDAMMERUNG: THE STRIKE OF 1924-1927

When the miners of Oklahoma came to the bargaining table in the spring of 1924, they asked for a three year extension of the existing contract. Little did they know that three years later their union would be destroyed, the open shop instituted, and life as they had known for nearly a quarter century was over. With the union smashed, the operators slashed wages in their frenzied efforts to compete with one another and the growing menace of oil and gas. But the union was not the only loser in this death struggle. The medium-sized mine operators, who led the open shop drive, were wiped-out, unable to compete with the larger railroad mines. The smaller independents survived around the edges of the market, but the coal towns themselves were perhaps the biggest losers. With few jobs and lower wages, the glory days of Oklahoma's coal towns were over. Empty and boarded-over businesses replaced bustling and crowded streets. Population fell dramatically as people drifted away in search of employment. The strike of 1924-1927 was truly a Gotterdammerung for all in the Oklahoma coal industry.¹

In January 1924 the leading operators of the Central Competitive Field met at Jacksonville, Florida. The contract reached at those talks became known as the Jacksonville Interstate Agreement of 1924. The agreement extended the existing wage scale for three years and became the basis for all other fields across the nation, including the Southwestern Interstate field.²

More than forty thousand miners struck in the Southwestern field on April 1. Within a month the Southwestern Coal Operators Association accepted the Jacksonville Agreement, but not every operator in Oklahoma belonged to the S.W.C.O.A. About one-third of the mines in Oklahoma were operated by members of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association. While it was independent of the Southwestern Coal Operators Association, traditionally the O.C.O.A. based its contract with the U.M.W. upon the S.W.C.O.A. contract. But many operators in the Oklahoma field complained that they could not compete with non-union mines and fuel oil if they continued to pay the \$7.50 scale. After a month-long strike, the S.W.C.O.A.-affiliated mines were back operating, but the strike continued at the O.C.O.A.-affiliated mines.³

Two weeks later the O.C.O.A. came to an agreement with the United Mine Workers. The settlement was identical to the S.W.C.O.A. contract and the Jacksonville Agreement.⁴ Except at Hartshorne, where an electric lighting dispute

kept the mines closed, all the mines of the state were back up and operating. By June the controversy at Hartshorne had been resolved, and the miners there had returned to work.⁵

It seemed as if tranquility had returned to the coal fields of Oklahoma. A contract had been signed that extended the existing wage for three years. But within weeks this veneer of tranquility was shattered, for not all the O.C.O.A. operators accepted the Jacksonville Agreement. A faction led by D. C. McAlpine, Franklin Bache, F. B. Drew, and James McConnell broke with the majority on the wage scale. These operators argued that they were uncompetitive paying the Jacksonville scale, and therefore they had no choice but to run their mines on an open shop basis.⁶

On July 18, 1924, three to four hundred union miners stormed the Kali-Inla mine at Cambria. Sheriff Austin Parks of Latimer County, who had been expecting trouble, was on the scene, but so outnumbered that he was helpless. The crowd, comprised of union miners from Hartshorne, Henryetta, and several other nearby towns, but also from as far as Texas, quickly disarmed the mine guards and forced seven non-union miners who had been working under the 1917 scale to leave the mine. The non-union miners were lined up and told to raise their right hand and swear never to work again under open shop conditions. The Daily Oklahoman noted that the demonstration was "orderly throughout the trouble,

although there were a few guns." After searching the surrounding company houses for arms and ammunition, the union miners left without incident. Later the union miners declared that the visit to the Cambria mine was not an attack, but a "demonstration against the 1917 scale." This was seen by all as the first attempt of the union to prevent the open shop movement from taking hold in Oklahoma's mines.⁷

In the days that followed the Cambria raid, paranoia and fear ran wild in the Hartshorne-Wilburton district. Rumors swirled through the region as confrontations at the open shop mines of the Wilburton region continued. Latimer County was a test for the operators. If successful there, they planned to expand into the McAlester and Henryetta districts, strongholds of the union. But Hartshorne, in far eastern Pittsburg County and a center of union sentiment, was only twelve miles away from Wilburton, where most of the non-union mines were located. This proximity threatened to mushroom into civil war between the two communities.⁸

The day following the Cambria raid the miners expanded their anti-shop campaign. Sheriff Parks of Wilburton announced that the Degnan-McConnell mines at Wilburton were the next target for mob action from "an invading force from the community of Hartshorne." The Daily Oklahoman reported that "a runner said to have been from Hartshorne conveyed the threat to the Degnan and McConnell miners." The sheriff

placed guards at the threatened mine and proclaimed that state troops would be called in if needed. Meanwhile, more than one hundred non-union miners at the Degnan-McConnell mine worked under armed guards, as did those at the Cambria mine.⁹

While Cambria remained "peaceful" on the surface, there was great excitement and fear in the area. Some of the miners who had been driven off at the Kali-Inla mine stated that they had been threatened with death if they continued to work "under existing conditions." Another raiding party sent word to Wilburton that they were preparing to march on the Hailey-Ola Company's mines at nearby Lutie. After the citizenry of Lutie declared they would offer armed resistance if attacked, the raid was aborted. But Wilburton continued to believe it was a community under attack.¹⁰

After the union miners of Pittsburg County threatened to eject all non-union miners from the district and to "make it hot" for the Wilburton merchants, the citizens of that community prepared for an attack. Hundreds of armed citizens patrolled the streets. As the citizens of Wilburton steeled themselves for the impending attack, reports of "scores" of miners massing in the hills west of the city only worsened fears there. Motorists reported that miners in twenty-five autos had blocked the road to Wilburton. Pickets at the barricade declared they were going to "get Wilburton." Throughout the night the tense

stand-off continued. It seemed as if hostilities were imminent. The Daily Oklahoman reported that there was "grim foreboding of what may or may not happen to the coal industry of the McAlester valley." At Hartshorne, the whistle blew at the Rock Island Mine Number Twelve, calling the miners to work, but they "preferred to join the demonstration against the Kali Inla Coal Company." While this was happening the county authorities met with representatives of the governor in a midnight meeting. The sheriff, the county attorney, and twenty-five concerned citizens demanded the governor send in state troops to protect Wilburton.¹¹

The midnight meeting at Wilburton had great significance in the outcome of the strike. In attendance at the meeting was the Governor's representative, General B. H. Markham of the National Guard. At the meeting General Markham heard the testimony of James Patterson, superintendent at the Cambria mine. Patterson predicted another Herrin Massacre if the mine was reopened without adequate protection. After the meeting H. C. Finley, treasurer of the Kali-Inla mine at Cambria, officially requested that the governor provide troops to protect the company's property at Wilburton. General Markham quickly agreed, but held back on asking the Governor to declare martial law.¹²

The operators proceeded to expand the open shop

movement as the authorities began to round up and arrest those who participated in the Cambria raid. The operators announced they planned to open more than a half-dozen more mines on an open shop basis, paying the 1917 scale of \$5 a day. The operators contended that they could not remain competitive paying the 1924 scale of \$7.50 a day, while the union miners argued that they could not survive on the 1917 scale. The Daily Oklahoman acknowledged the differences of opinion, but declared that "a riot is not the answer."¹³

The authorities rounded up the leaders of the Cambria raid within a week. They were charge with rioting, robbery, and unlawful trespassing. One of those arrested in connection with the raid openly admitted that he had been there and that he had carried an American flag during the proceedings, "considering it an honor." The miner, when asked what he would have done if someone had insulted the flag while in his presence, quickly replied that he would have been obligated to "stomp his face." Eventually the authorities arrested thirty-eight miners in connection with the Cambria raid.¹⁴

The union miners continued to fight against the open shop movement in the Wilburton district, despite the arrests that followed the Cambria raid. Three masked men appeared at the entrance to the Great Western Mine Number Seven and warned the operator to close down by that evening. The raid was a daring one, as the mine was only one-half mile from

the Latimer County Court House.¹⁵ At the same time another group of miners attempted to raid a National Guard armory on the Pittsburg County fairgrounds near McAlester. There guardsmen drove off the raiders "under a fusillade of shots." While these raids were occurring, a rumor spread that the miners had cut the telephone lines to Wilburton.¹⁶

Once again Wilburton was plunged into fear and apprehension. The Daily Oklahoman reported that the citizens of Wilburton were "apprehensive and nervous" and that they were "armed against an expected invasion from across the county line." In Hartshorne the citizenry remained "firmly behind the miners in their support of the closed shop."¹⁷ The Hartshorne Sun contended that the mine trouble was "greatly exaggerated." The Sheriff of Pittsburg County denied that he had warned his counterpart in Latimer County that an invasion was imminent and stated that he had only heard rumors of an attack and had counseled against it. Hardware store owners in Hartshorne denied a run on their gun stocks.¹⁸

Wilburton began to calm down only after a contingent of National Guard troops arrived from Muskogee. To supplement these troops a citizen guard was formed. Wilburton declared itself "fully prepared to cope with any crisis," as rumors of "impending invasions" continued. The Latimer County News-Democrat argued that Wilburton became partisan on the wage issue only because it was threatened. As a result,

"three hundred or more men have been sleeping on their arms [firearms]."¹⁹

The union's district leadership declared that the miners were not to blame for the trouble in the Wilburton area. District President Andrew McGarry stated that "the whole troubluous [sic] situation was brought on by the premeditated plans of the operators to incite an uprising and bring on state military investigation and protection," so that non-union labor could be introduced into the area under military protection.²⁰

While he poured troops into Wilburton, Acting Governor Tom Anglin called the miners and the operators to a conference at Oklahoma City. The conference resulted in little more than an opportunity for the operators to send in more troops as a "reign of terror" prevailed in Latimer County. District President McGarry reiterated his position that the operators' efforts to run their mines on an open shop basis was to blame for the trouble. The Acting Governor did little more than condemn the disorder in Latimer County.²¹

Anglin's conference did nothing to stop the violence in the county. While thirty-seven miners were being arraigned in a crowded courtroom in Wilburton for their participation in the Cambria raid, there was a more serious attack upon non-union miners. Five of them were fired upon from ambush at the Bull Hill mine near Red Oak, eighteen miles east of

Wilburton. The miners had just completed the day shift and were crossing a creek near the open shop mine when "they were met with a fustillade of bullets which mowed them down." After more than twenty shots rang out, all five lay injured, one seriously, after he was hit in the face, chest, and abdomen by "two charges of buckshot." The Bull Hill mine employed fifty men and had been operating on a non-union basis for several weeks. Only a week earlier a non-union miner was fishing near the spot of the ambush, when an unknown assailant fired upon him, wounding him in the neck.²²

Throughout August and September sporadic incidents continued. Mine guards at the Great Western Coal and Mining Company's properties drove off union pickets who had come to put forth a "strenuous effort" to persuade the non-union miners there to quit working. In one incident mine guards at Lutie ordered union miners off mine property, but only after one miner invited a guardsmen out to the highway "for a licking." The McAlester News-Capital predicted a clash between the two sides "at any date." National guardsmen also protected the open shop mines, "their automatic rifles trained on the approaches." Operations resumed at the Kali-Inla mine at Cambria "under a heavy guard of state troops and state police." At least three machine-gun nests protected the mine, including one at its entrance. Several times guard troops exchanged fire with union miners, but no

injuries resulted.²³

For the first six months of the strike, the operators of Latimer County attempted to run their mines on an open shop basis. In early October the operators of Pittsburg County invited miners there to return to work on an open shop basis and the 1917 scale. The operators contended that the 1917 scale beat idleness. It did not take long for the miners to offer their response.²⁴

The miners of Pittsburg Country replied with dynamite, which demolished the padlocked gate to Rock Island's Number. An hour later a Rock Island railroad bridge and a wagon bridge leading to the mine were put to the torch. Rock Island management had announced earlier that they were planning to switch to the 1917 scale. Sheriff Anderson, aided by four deputies and bloodhounds, searched for the bombers, but to no avail as they fled by auto. In nearby Hartshorne, nerves were on edge after hearing the "two thuds of the explosions."²⁵ A smaller independent mine also was "dynamited and badly damaged."²⁶

The dynamiting spree was largely a last, futile gesture by the union miners. Only days later Rock Island management reopened its Number Twelve mine, paying the 1917 scale. Thirty-five private guards provided security at the mine. More than a hundred union miners who worked at Number Twelve held a meeting to discuss their next move. The sentiment of the meeting was against returning to work under the 1917

scale and conditions "virtually the same as open shop." But with an empty treasury and the mines under military protection, the miners conceded and signed an agreement that slashed their wages by one-third. Thus, the last union stronghold in the state had been broken. Many miners had feared that if the 1917 scale prevailed at their stronghold, Number Twelve, then soon the whole district would follow. This held true, for within a few months many of the mines in the state reopened on an open shop basis, paying the 1917 scale.²⁷

Not all the union miners in Pittsburg County conceded so easily, though. In November, two miners were arrested and charged with criminal syndicalism after they accosted a miner working under the 1917 scale at the Rock Island mines. The men had threatened to dynamite the non-union miner's house if he continued to work at the lower pay scale. One of the two had been arrested previously in connection with the Cambria raid. Judge Harve L. Melton set bond for the two at \$5000 each. The authorities dropped the charges before the case came to trial, but the incident led to "government operatives" keeping "a close tab" on "suspected radicals in the McAlester and Hartshorne districts."²⁸ Also in late November, five of the thirty-eight arrested in connection with the Cambria raid pled guilty to riot charges and served forty-five days of a sixty-day sentence. The authorities dropped the charges against the other thirty-

three two months later.²⁹

As the open shop took hold across the coal fields of Oklahoma, the union's district officers turned against each other in a struggle for power. The main source of much of this turmoil was an election dispute between the incumbent president, Andrew McGarry, and William Dalrymple, who was challenging for the office. Dalrymple had garnered the most votes during the district election, but McGarry stole the election by disfranchising thirty-five locals that supported Dalrymple on the grounds that they had held an unauthorized rump convention at McAlester in January.³⁰

After it became clear that the president had attempted to manipulate his re-election, the district membership protested and rose up to drive McGarry and "his band of political saltadors" from the organization they "disgraced." But the damage the internecine conflict had wrought on the district was indisputable. Conditions were becoming very difficult for union stalwarts. Seven months into the strike, many were dependent on strike relief funds that had dwindled to virtually nothing. At the same time the district had to abandon its attempt to provide "cooperative insurance" for its members, due to the lack of financial resources. District #21 had been the only U. M. W. district in the nation to provide such a pension system. Worst of all, while all this was going on, the open shop movement, which began in Latimer County, had spread to Pittsburg

County and was beginning to take hold in the Henryetta district in Okmulgee County.³¹

The union miners made a last desperate attempt to hold off the open shop in the Henryetta district. Miners feared that if they accepted the 1917 scale, the non-union mines would "go them one better" and pay the 1914 scale, and so on until wages would be reduced to starvation levels. Union miners argued that "the old cut-throat tactics are being resorted to in order that some may gain a temporary advantage." Union men contended that the operators had repudiated the Jacksonville Agreement, comparing their action to 1914 when the Germans called their neutrality treaty with Belgium a "scrap of paper."³²

When the operators of the B & A Mine at Schulter declared they would resume operations in April, nearly everyone in Henryetta expected trouble. This was the first attempt to operate a mine in the Henryetta field on an open shop basis. The result was a series of clashes between union miners and mine guards. After the violence escalated, Governor Martin Trapp sent in guard troops into the Henryetta district in early June.³³

While both miners and non-miners protested the presence of troops, there were no serious outbreaks of violence related to their arrival. More than 1500 Henryetta citizens signed a petition asking Governor Trapp to remove the troops. After Henryetta had been calm for nearly a month,

Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett traveled there to see for himself if the troops could be withdrawn.³⁴

Instead of a calm Henryetta, Barrett saw a series of protest demonstrations that grew in size and intensity at every turn. The miners claimed their gatherings were "prayer meetings," and not demonstrations or picketing. After one such "prayer meeting" at one open shop mine, the protesters' caravan drove on to Henryetta. The long line of cars passed along Main Street, each car "decked with flags and bunting, and the thing looked more like a Fourth of July celebration than a labor demonstration," according to the Henryetta Daily Free-Lance.³⁵

Further demonstrations continued into August. Then came a turning point in the showdown. Sheriff John Russell of Okmulgee County issued a proclamation that banned parades, demonstrations, and "so-called religious meetings." The Free-Lance noted that the result was "a situation little short of martial law." At the same time, Governor Trapp sent a "full battalion" of troops from Ft. Sill to augment the troops already in Henryetta.³⁶

Sheriff Russell's proclamation quickly led to a test of wills. After a protest at the Whitehead Mine, Sheriff's deputies arrested two miners for violating the proclamation. Several days later a judge at Okmulgee denied the two a habeas corpus writ, but did release them on bond. The issuance of the proclamation became a political scandal when

the two miners' attorney, C. E. B. Cutler, charged that the proclamation was part of a larger conspiracy, involving Governor Trapp. Cutler contended that the Sheriff's proclamation was the result of a secret meeting with the Governor. The American Civil Liberties Union also joined in the fight against the proclamation, as did Clarence Darrow, who sent a telegram in which he expressed support for the miners' actions. But every new report of a prayer meeting "sent bands of national guardsmen roving over the district" on many a "wild goose chase."²⁷

Arrests continued under the sheriff's proclamation, despite the continuing efforts to have the edict overturned. After several "open air prayer meetings," miners were arrested and charged with such infractions as "disturbing religious worship" and "violating an order prohibiting public prayer meetings."²⁸

Those involved in the prayer meetings contended these gatherings were of a strictly religious nature. Mrs. Frances Coulter, "one of the leaders" of the Henryetta prayer meetings, declared that "Presbyterians, Baptists, Catholics, and Methodists are participants in the prayer meetings." Mrs. Coulter went on to point out that the guardsmen were "hard-boiled" types, citing "one instance where guardsmen slapped one miner when he stopped his car to let his wife in."²⁹

Finally, the union's lawsuit against the proclamation

was heard in the state court of criminal appeals. Miners charged with violations of the proclamation contended that the meeting at the Whitehead Mine, after which they had been arrested, had been "a religious service consisting of the singing of songs, offering prayer to the almighty for his divine protection and guidance in the wage struggle." In their petition the miners also argued that there had been an "unholy conspiracy" among the operators, Governor Trapp, Sheriff Russell, and A. N. Boatman, County Attorney for Okmulgee County. The union's lawsuit alleged that these individuals had gathered together at the Governor's office on August 6 to formulate the proclamation issued by Sheriff Russell.⁴⁰

The state court of criminal appeals agreed with the miners. Judge Thomas Doyle ordered the immediate release of the four defendants in the case before the court. The judge declared that "there is not an element of the crime of unlawful assembly charged in the information under which these men are held." Judge Doyle ruled that the proclamation and the subsequent arrests by the national guard were "a misuse of military authority to arrest men for holding religious meetings or peaceful picketing." The judge went on to "direct several caustic thrusts" at the Governor and his advisors for sending troops to Henryetta. Judge Doyle referred to Sheriff Russell as a "self-appointed law-maker" who had annoited himself with a "tinsel crown as

the lord of Okmulgee County."¹

Governor Trapp denied having any role in the formulation of the proclamation prohibiting prayer meetings. He pointed a finger at General Barrett. The Governor's spokesman, C. E. McPherran, a general in the national guard, stated that no one at the August 6 meeting could recall who suggested the proclamation and that it was drawn up in General Barrett's office after the meeting, suggesting that the Governor had no role in its preparation."²

The miners praised the criminal court of appeals and Judge Doyle for the ruling upholding "valid prayer meetings of union miners." Celebrating their victory, the union miners held parades at several open shop mines. When the miners marched to the B & A Mine, where the protests first started, they marched there under an American flag. The meeting began with a robust rendition of the national anthem, following by a prayer to the almighty that "there be no violence nor will there be any violence on the part of the union miners."³

Neither side seemed interested in compromise. The operators were determined to implement the open shop. The miners refused to move away from the 1924 scale, despite admitting that they realized it was nearly impossible for the operators to compete with oil and gas if they continued to pay the higher scale. The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance noted that both sides were "dug in" and that "neither side

will concede." As their industry collapsed around them, both sides were too preoccupied with the fight to contemplate compromise."

With the operators and the union locked in battle, Governor Trapp called both sides to Oklahoma City for a conference. He offered to recall all the guardsmen from the Henryetta district on the condition that the union promised there would be no violence while they picketed. International representative David Fowler promised that the union did not want any "pistol pete" actions by its membership and that they planned peaceful picketing only."

Despite this promising beginning, the conference resulted in no agreement or settlement. In reality it worsened the situation. The union representatives walked out of the conference after Governor Trapp refused to offer any concrete propositions to settle the dispute. Contending he did not want a "repetition of Herrin in Oklahoma," the Governor stated that he believed the true purpose of the miners' prayer meetings was to intimidate non-union miners. He argued that "if this can be done, you can take a Bible under your arm and a flag in your hand and rob a bank."

The operators quickly transformed the Governor's conference into a plea that the troops remain to guard their mines. J. J. Puterbaugh, president of the McAlester Fuel Company, argued that if the troops were withdrawn there would be "loss of life and property." Several non-union

miners testified that they faced daily intimidation. One miner claimed that without the presence of troops, he "might get bumped off." Colonel Ewell Head of the National Guard testified that several strikers had bragged that if the troops left, they would tie the non-union miners to their cars and "drag the strikebreakers behind their cars to Okmulgee."⁷

As mass meetings continued, Governor Trapp stated he had not decided his next course of action. While the Governor planned his next step, Captain B. G. Patton, in charge of the guard troops at Henryetta, notified Trapp that the mood of the union miners was "worst it has ever been" after the collapse of the Governor's conference. At the same time four hundred non-union miners at Henryetta sent a petition to the Governor. In the petition the non-union miners declared that "the union men will get us as soon as the troops are withdrawn." The next day Governor Trapp announced the troops would stay in Henryetta indefinitely.⁸

The union responded to the failed conference by declaring a strike for September 1, 1925 against all non-union mines in the state. This was "little more than a gesture," as the operators already were manning their mines with non-union labor only. More than ten thousand miners and their families attended a barbecue at Hartshorne the day before the announced strike began. The event was described

as peaceful, the crowd "good humored." Even the miners working under the 1917 scale joined in the festivities, fraternizing "with those who refused work under it." A government operative at the event reported back to Governor Trapp that the meeting was "more of a holiday, enjoying the picnic, the crowd was peaceful."⁴⁹

The strike declared on September 1, 1925 was ineffective. The district was without funds, and the operators were recruiting large numbers of strikebreakers to man their mines. Sporadic violence continued, and several mines were dynamited near Hartshorne, but with troops guarding them, the open shop mines continued to operate with non-union labor.⁵⁰ After one confrontation resulted in injuries in October, Federal Judge R. L. Williams issued an injunction that prohibited the striking miners from picketing against the use of non-union labor at the open shop mines.⁵¹

The operators recruited non-union miners from the surrounding countryside. Initially they had brought in six hundred Mexicans, but many of them later joined the union. The operators then turned to local farmers as a labor source. The decision of the operators to employ men unfamiliar with mining quickly had devastating results.⁵²

On January 12, 1926 a gas and dust explosion at the Degnan-McConnell's Mine Number Twenty-One at Wilburton killed ninety-one men. Would-be rescuers attempted to enter

the mine, but they were forced to retreat by noxious gases. Hysterical relatives gathered at the mine entrance "in a frenzy of anguish." The two thousand who had gathered at the mine entrance "surged against the ropes, but were held back by national guardsmen." An empty building across the street from the mine was converted into a temporary morgue. Wilburton's single undertaker was unable to cope with the disaster himself, and additional undertakers were brought in. They "worked at top speed to prepare the bodies for burial." Forty convicts were sent to Wilburton to dig the graves, and extra coffins had to be trucked in from Fort Smith. State Mine Inspector Ed Boyle declared in his official report on the disaster that inadequate ventilation and "green men" had caused the explosion. He stated that the non-union miners had detected gas, but "were afraid to protest." Boyle argued that union miners would have refused to enter the mine until state officials had declared it safe."

The Wilburton disaster did not alter the strategy of the operators to continue on an open shop basis. Whenever miners protested, they were arrested for violating Federal Judge Williams' injunctions issued at Okmulgee in October, 1925. Judge Williams later rescinded the injunction and charged the operators with misrepresentation, but the damage the injunction had inflicted upon the union was irreparable. The federal injunction was the coup de grace for the

district.⁵⁴

For all practical purposes District Twenty-One ceased to exist by 1927. The Jacksonville Agreement expired in April of that year. Attempts to reach an agreement in the Central Competitive Field failed, ending a thirty-year era and beginning a six-year period of chaos in the labor relations of the bituminous coal industry. In Oklahoma the open shop operators had won complete victory. Skilled miners were reduced to working side by side with inexperienced "Hoosiers," the name given to the white farmers the operators brought in to the mines during the strike. As the union miners had predicted, wages continued to slide downward, first to \$5.00, then to \$3.60, eventually reaching a low of \$2.00 a day during the nadir of the depression.⁵⁵

The union was not the only casualty of the 1924-1927 strike. The coal towns themselves showed the scars of the battle. As the state's coal industry faded away, so did the coal towns. Every indicator illustrates the decline. Production, payroll, and population all fell, but the banks illustrate the collapse best. After 1923, all but four of the sixty-five banks in the McAlester district failed, many during 1926 and 1927, when the miners were broken not only as a union, but financially. These towns were utterly dependent on the coal industry; when it collapsed, so did the towns. Many of the coal towns simply disappeared,

while others dwindled to a pitiful version of their former selves.⁵⁶

Whether this Wagnerian tragedy had to occur is debatable. The fact that the industry recovered and even prospered during World War Two is evidence to the contrary. The coal industry could have and has survived competition from oil and gas. Even as early as 1925 the "Katy" railroad converted its locomotives from fuel oil back to coal burning, citing the mounting cost of the former. Also, the growing demand for electricity by the state's municipalities could have provided new customers for the coal industry, had it survived in its former glory. Instead, Oklahoma imported coal to supply this need.⁵⁷

Looking back on their defeat, many members of District #21 blamed the national leadership for their demise. Many in the district argued that when the national leadership refused to move away from a national pay scale, it was devastating for the Oklahoma coal industry. Many of Oklahoma's miners accepted that the costs of production varied from region from region and that the pay scale should reflect that. But at the same time, the district's leadership was in such disarray that they were unable to unite long enough to stand up against the national leadership. The Secretary-Treasurer of District #21 noted after the strike that the Illinois district had accepted a wage cut and thus survived the crisis. The district officer

contended that "we should have accepted a similar reduction in Oklahoma. If we had, we could have save our district."⁵⁸

By 1928 the United Mine Workers had virtually disappeared from Oklahoma. The operators had no relations whatsoever with the union. With no counterpart, the operators' associations faded away as individual members withdrew from these organizations whose sole purpose was to bring the operators together for contract talks with the miner's union.⁵⁹

For several years the spirit of unionism would lay dormant in Oklahoma's coal industry. But like the mythical phoenix, unionism and the state's miners rose from the ashes of defeat in 1927 to be reborn in 1931. While the torch of unionism had flickered in the winds of the open shop campaign, it had not gone out.

Endnotes

¹ Frederick L. Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 63; Clyde Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939), 61-62; Patrick J. Blessing, The British and Irish in Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 68; Charles R. Perry, Collective Bargaining and the Decline of the United Mine Workers, (Philadelphia: Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 179; Jennings J. Rhyne, Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma, (Guthrie: Co-Operative Publishing Company, 1929), 110; Kenny L. Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 67-68.

² Frederick L. Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," Southwestern Social Science Quarterly, 2 (September, 1933), 142; McAlester News-Capital, 19 February 1924; The Commercial and Financial Chronicle, 5 April 1924.

³ Ryan, "Coal Operators Associations," 142; McAlester News-Capital, 10 March, 2 April, 5, 7 May 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 14 March, 4 April, 9 May 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 10 May 1924.

⁴ McAlester News-Capital, 15 May 1924.

⁵ Ibid., 13, 28 June 1924; The Hartshorne Sun, 3, 10 July 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 2 July 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 5 July 1924.

⁶ Ryan, "Coal Operators' Associations," 141-142; Victor E. Harlow, Oklahoma History, 4th ed., (Oklahoma City: Harlow Publishing Company, 1961), 462.

⁷ Harlow, Oklahoma History, 462; McAlester News-Capital, 18, 21 July 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 19 July 1924; The Hartshorne Sun, 24 July 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 25 July 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 26 July 1924.

⁸ McAlester News-Capital, 19 July 1924.

⁹ Ibid., Daily Oklahoman, 19 July 1924.

¹⁰ McAlester News-Capital, 19 July 1924.

¹¹ Daily Oklahoman, 20 July 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 21 July 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 26 July 1924.

¹⁵McAlester News-Capital, 21 July 1924.

¹⁶Daily Oklahoman, 20 July 1924.

¹⁷Ibid., 23 July 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 22, 23 July 1924; Hartshorne Sun, 14 August 1924.

¹⁸McAlester News-Capital, 23 July 1924.

¹⁹Ibid., 23, 24 July 1924.

²⁰Daily Oklahoman, 24 July 1924.

²¹Hartshorne Sun, 24 July 1924.

²²Latimer County News-Democrat, 25 July 1924.

²³McAlester News-Capital, 24 July 1924.

²⁴Daily Oklahoman, 24 July 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 25, 29 July 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 1 August 1924.

²⁵McAlester News-Capital, 12 August 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 13, 15 August 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 15 August 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 16 August 1924.

²⁶McAlester News-Capital, 20, 29 August, 2 September 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 5, 12 September 1924.

²⁷McAlester News-Capital, 27 September 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 3 October 1924.

²⁸Hartshorne Sun, 9, 23 October 1924; Latimer County News-Democrat, 10 October 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 7 October 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 8 October 1924.

²⁹Daily Oklahoman, 9 October 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 9 November 1924.

³⁰Hartshorne Sun, 19, 20 October 1924, 8, 22 January 1925; Latimer County News-Democrat, 21 November 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 19 November, 1 December 1924, 8 January 1925; McAlester News-Capital, 19 November 1924; Harlow's Weekly, 27 September, 29 November 1924.

³¹Hartshorne Sun, 20, 27 November, 11 December 1924; Latimer News-Democrat, 21, 28 November 1924; McAlester News-Capital, 22, 24 November 1924; Daily Oklahoman, 22 November 1924.

²⁹Hartshorne Sun, 29 January 1925; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 9 February 1925.

³⁰Hartshorne Sun, 25 December 1924; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 68.

³¹McAlester News-Capital, 13, 30, 31 January, 6, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, 28 March 1925; Hartshorne Sun, 22 January, 26 February 1925; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 30 January, 9, 13, 17 February, 23 March 1925.

³²Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 29 March 1925.

³³Ibid., 23, 29 March, 22, 28 April, 11 June 1925; McAlester News-Capital, 22, 24 April 1925; Harlow, Oklahoma History, 463; LeRoy H. Fischer (ed.), Turbulent Politics: Oklahoma's Governors, 1907-1929, (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1981), 165.

³⁴Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 16 June, 7 July 1925.

³⁵Ibid., 19 July 1925; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 61.

³⁶Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 24, 27 July, 7 August 1925; Daily Oklahoman, 7 August 1925.

³⁷Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 August 1925; Daily Oklahoman, 9, 11, 14 August 1925.

³⁸Daily Oklahoman, 11 August 1925; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 16 August 1925.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 16 August 1925.

⁴¹Ibid., 19 August 1925.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 20 August 1925.

⁴⁴Ibid., 21 August 1925.

⁴⁵Ibid., 24 August 1925; Harlow, Oklahoma History, 463.

⁴⁶Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 24 August 1925.

⁴⁷Ibid., 24, 26 August 1925.

⁴⁸Ibid., 25, 26 August 1925.

⁴Ibid., 28, 31 August 1925; J. Jones to Martin Trapp, 31 August 1925, Folder 2, Box 5, Martin Trapp Papers, Oklahoma State Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

⁵Ryan, "Coal Operators' Associations," 143; Harlow, Oklahoma History, 463; Kenny Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, 68.

⁶McAlester News-Capital, 29 January 1926; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 29 January 1926.

⁷Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 61; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 70; Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, 68.

⁸McAlester News-Capital, 13, 14, 15 January, 1, 4 February 1926.

⁹Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 60-61; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 29 January 1926; McAlester News-Capital, 29 January 1926; James R. Scales and Danny Goble, Oklahoma Politics: A History, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 130.

¹⁰Hartshorne Sun, 6 January 1927; Perry, Collective Bargaining and the Decline of the United Mine Workers, 179; Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, 68; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 61-62; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 66.

¹¹Ryan, Rehabilitation, 67; Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, 67; Ryne, Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma, 110.

¹²Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 21 June 1925.

¹³Ryan, Rehabilitation, 68.

¹⁴Ryan, "Coal Operators' Associations," 143.

CHAPTER VIII

FROM THE ASHES OF DEFEAT: THE STRIKES OF 1931 AND 1932

The years from 1927 to 1931 were dark years for union miners in Oklahoma. Every mine in the state operated on an open shop basis. Wages had dipped to \$2.00 a day. At the same time safety had become a secondary concern of the operators as they struggled to survive in the worst economic conditions ever seen. The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance reported in its 1931 New Years' edition that "1930 will be known as year piper was paid." Accidents continued to mount, topped by the Little Bolen Disaster in 1929 in which a gas explosion killed sixty-one men. Since 1892 more than four hundred men had died in the state's coal mines. Oklahoma's mines had become so dangerous that by 1930 "better informed miners were afraid to work in them," according to one source. These desperate working conditions led the miners to reorganize and prepare once again to confront the operators.'

After four years of open shop supremacy in Oklahoma, the United Mine Workers sent in David Fowler to reorganize the state's miners. He began his work in Henryetta early in 1931. In meetings held across the Henryetta district,

Fowler implored the miners to reorganize their locals. By late October Fowler had enrolled fifteen hundred miners in the Henryetta field, many of them former-members of the union who had worked under open shop conditions after the union collapsed in 1927. The first test of strength for the reconstituted locals was when they declared that unless their demands were met, they would strike on the first of November.²

The union presented a list of grievances to the operators. Among their demands was a return to the \$5.00 scale. The catalyst for the strike had been the operators slashing the pay scale that had led to \$3.60. The miners demanded that the "task system" be abolished and favored payment on a tonnage basis, which rewarded hard work. Finally, they demanded reinstatement of the check weighman and that the operators meet with the union's grievance committee. When the operators refused to even meet with the union's representatives, fifteen hundred miners voted unanimously to strike in the Henryetta field.³

The operators shut down their mines rather than attempt to break the strike. They closed fifteen mines in the Henryetta district. Among these were five co-operative mines that "closed in sympathy" with the strike. While the operators gathered at Okmulgee to confer and formulate strategy, State Labor Commissioner W. A. Murphy sent his assistant, James Hughes, to observe and make recommendations

on the dispute. Murphy expressed concern that it would be difficult "to iron out the difficulties," because the miners were under the control of the union's national leadership at Indianapolis.⁴

Almost immediately cracks began to appear in the operators' wall of solidarity. On just the second day of the strike, one of the smaller operators announced his willingness to sign a contract with the union that paid miners the 1917 scale of \$5.00 a day. Rumors of ongoing "conversations" between the operators and the union continued to ripple across Henryetta.⁵

The union showed its strength by calling a meeting in downtown Henryetta. After the police roped off the center of town, the meeting of more than one thousand miners took place in the middle of the street. The "scores" who attended the meeting heard speeches from the president of the Henryetta local, former district president Andrew McGarry, and national organizer David Fowler, a former member of the Pennsylvania state legislature. Fowler urged the miners to "stick to their guns" until the operators agreed to meet with the miners' committee. Fowler stated that if the operators refused, the miners would have to "force their hand," although he did not mention specifics. A few days later a second operator signed a contract with the union.⁶

From the union's standpoint the strike was proceeding

nicely. Several operators had already signed with the union, and others were contemplating it. At this crucial point Governor "Alfalfa" Bill Murray decided to take an active hand in the dispute. Murray announced that he thought the miners should immediately return to work "at the best wage scale they can get," insinuating that the miners should accept the \$3.60 pay scale. After Murray announced that he was going to "undertake to get the miners and operators together," Fowler responded that "we believe the miners have the operators whipped" and that "if Governor Murray will only quit encouraging the operators to reduce the wage, they will abandon their efforts."

Governor Murray had a two-track approach to the strike. While Murray proposed that the Board of Arbitration mediate the dispute, he denied Fowler's claim that his primary purpose in sending armed agents from the Oklahoma State Bureau of Criminal Investigation into the strike zone was to force the miners to return to work at the reduced scale. Fowler had earlier contended that Murray's statements and actions indicated he planned to force the miners back to work "at starvation wages." O. P. Ray, assistant superintendent of the O.S.B.I., denied that the bureau's agents in the strike zone were "excessively armed," noting that they carried only one pistol each. Ray contended that the state's operatives were "not there to force anybody to work, but to prevent any law violations."⁸

While the arbitration conference continued in Henryetta, the rift between Governor Murray and union organizer Fowler was the talk of the streets. The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance reported that "despite the more or less lurid stories being bruited [sic] about ... nothing ugly has happened." In fact, any hostility that existed seemed to be limited to that between Governor Murray and Fowler. The McAlester News-Capital noted that at the Governor's conference, there were "indications of a friendly spirit." While the strike began over the operators cutting wages, the main issue at the conference was union recognition. The operators remained adamantly opposed to this, stating only that they would allow the union miners to return to work without prejudice, but at the reduced scale of \$3.60 a day. A day later the operators offered to return to the 1917 scale of \$5.00 a day, but balked at recognition.⁹

The Governor's conference collapsed in failure over the recognition issue. Governor Murray then ordered Adjutant General Markham to be ready "in case of an emergency." The Henryetta Daily Free-Lance predicted that the operators would soon reopen, without a contract, and that Governor Murray would supply protection. In the lull before the storm, the Free-Lance reported, "everything is serene."¹⁰

Union organizer Fowler took his case to the miners of the state after the Governor's conference collapsed. Speaking at McAlester, Fowler preached for a revival of

unionism. He argued that the wage cuts the miners had been forced to endure had destroyed purchasing power in the mining communities of Oklahoma and that they must combat any further reduction in wages. Fowler argued that with their wage cuts, the operators had "killed the goose that laid the golden egg."¹¹

Fowler then turned his comments to the subject of Governor Murray. Demanding that the Governor stay out of the strike, Fowler criticized Murray for sending an armed investigating committee, noting that the arbitration board was the only one in history "on which Pistol Petes are allowed to sit." Fowler reiterated that Murray was bent on forcing the miners to accept "starvation wages." To prove his point, Fowler stated that he had a letter that Governor Murray had sent to William Jones, superintendent of the Rock Island mines at Hartshorne suggesting the miners might accept a 40-50 percent wage cut if confronted with a shut-down. Pointing out that the Governor had accused him of stealing the letter, Fowler proceeded to note gleefully that he would "rather be the thief than the author."¹²

After both sides rejected each other's final proposals, the operators announced that they would reopen their mines, despite the failure to reach an agreement with the union. The operators stated they would give preference to former workers. Fowler predicted that no more than fifty of Henryetta's miners would return to work. The union's worst

fear was that there would be trouble when the mines reopened, giving Governor Murray the pretext he needed to send in troops. When operatives of the state bureau of criminal identification arrived in Henryetta "to preserve order and prevent lawbreaking," the union quickly promised no disorder of any kind.¹³

Henryetta waited anxiously "for the show-down" when the operators reopened their mines with skeleton crews. Private guards and state operatives patrolled the streets, while six hundred miners marched "bareheaded" down Main Street under "the Stars and Stripes" to protest the reopening of the mines. The crowd was vocal, but there was "no disorder of any kind." When the paraders passed near two hospitals, "not a sound was heard as the lines marched past."¹⁴

The operators at this point considered the dispute over. While there were pickets at the mines, they had been peaceful. The central contention of the operators was that they had successfully rebuffed the union's demand for recognition, the negotiations were complete, and it was time to resume production. The operators notified state labor commissioner W. A. Murphy that they no longer desired state mediation of the dispute. Murphy had proposed earlier that the State Board of Arbitration and Conciliation be convened to "consider the walkout."¹⁵

Murphy was not so ready to consider the matter at an end. He and his assistant traveled to Henryetta to "look

into the situation." Murphy declared that he would take any action possible "to bring about a peaceful settlement of the strike."⁶

While the catalyst for the strike had been a wage cut, the central issue was recognition of the union. Part of that recognition would be the reinstatement of check-weighmen, selected and paid by the miners. The operators had eliminated the position after they broke the union during 1924 and 1925. The check-weighmen's role was to prevent short-changing of the miners by jointly overseeing weighing along with the "weigh boss." The miners considered their demand for a check-weighmen to be non-negotiable.⁷

The miners also demanded abolition of the "task" system. Under this procedure a miner had to mine eighteen thousand pounds of coal daily to earn his day wage. Time-consuming activities such as "brushing," the clearing away of rock and slate, as well as timbering, the installation of roof supports, were not paid for. The operators maintained that they took such "dead-work" into consideration when they set the day wage for "task" positions. The miners argued that the "task" system amounted to "slave-driving." With the operators refusing to negotiate on these issues, the negotiations remained deadlocked.⁸

Only a few days after the operators reopened with skeleton crews, dynamite blasts shook the community of Dewar. Both miners whose homes were bombed worked as

members of a skeleton crew at the Pittsburg-Midway mine near Dewar. The blasts not only "greatly damaged" the two houses, but the "resultant shock was considerable" for the miners and their families. Eventually seven suspects were arrested in connection with the midnight bombings. In another incident a member of a skeleton crew "was struck on the head and wounded." Repeated incidents such as these made the Governor unresponsive to a petition circulated around Henryetta that called for him to remove his "special officers" from the district."

Both the operators and the miners had raised the stakes. The operators had reopened without a contract, while some within the ranks of the miners turned to dynamite to press their argument. In the middle was State Labor Commissioner Murphy. He declared that the state arbitration board would hold hearings and make recommendations, "whether anybody abides by our decision or not."²⁰

On the following day the miners at Henryetta held a mass meeting, at which five hundred union miners voted unanimously to return to work and abide by whatever ruling the arbitration board handed down. On all accounts it appeared that after a six-week strike, the union had yielded to the operators' terms. The miners returned to work at the lower \$3.60 scale, and even more importantly, they had abandoned their demand for recognition of the union. While they lost this particular battle, the strike proved the

union was capable of regrouping to fight again. Alone the miners still lacked the strength to bring the operators to terms. To do this would require the assistance of the state arbitration board.²¹

The arbitration hearings got off to a rocky start. Labor Commissioner Murphy noted that "unless we do so it would probably cause another walkout." Murphy was referring to the operators' decision to keep the men they had reopened with. As a result, many strikers found their positions filled when they attempted to return to work. This blatant discrimination by the operators against union members created considerable tension as the arbitration hearings began.²²

First to testify was David Fowler. He gave a detailed account of how the miners had reorganized in the past few months. Fowler "supplied a rather graphic picture of the past six weeks' trouble" to a packed auditorium, according to the Henryetta Daily Free-Lance.²³

Then it was the operators' turn to tell their side of the story. All but one testified that he had operated at a loss in recent months. J.C. Reid, who marketed the Henryetta district's coal, testified that the operators of the district had to slash wages to remain competitive with the McAlester district where wage cuts had already occurred.²⁴

After the operators testified, the miners offered a

stinging rebuttal. They charged the operators with discrimination against union members. Also, the miners charged the operators with short-weighting as much as four hundred and fifty pounds per car-load. Charles Bailey, Assistant Mining Inspector, testified that the miners were exaggerating, that the operators only short-weighted the miner an average of one hundred and fifty pounds per car. The operators blamed it all on faulty equipment, which had been repaired.²⁵

As Labor Commissioner Murphy declared the hearings closed, he reminded the participants that he had no authority to rule on the union recognition issue. Murphy pressed both sides to settle that issue themselves. The miners declared that they would abide by the board's ruling, whatever it might be. The operators remained mute as to their next action.²⁶

In late December the arbitration board released its findings. The board began by criticizing the operators for discriminating against those who participated in the strike. The board noted that if there was trouble in the future, "it will very likely be from that cause." The board then found in the union's favor on two points. The members of the board advocated abolishing the "task" system and reinstating the check weighmen, both central demands of the miners. On the wage issue the board ruled in favor of the reduced \$3.60 scale, but recommended no further wage

cuts for the remainder of the coal season.²⁷

As it promised, the union immediately accepted the arbitration board's findings. The operators were more secretive in their initial reaction. There was no general agreement, in fact; the Henryetta Daily Free-Lance reported that each operator "will act individually in dealing with the report. No group action was taken by the operators." But in fact, many of the operators already were implementing the board's recommendations.²⁸

The mediated resolution to the strike was indicative of improving relations between the union and the operators. Just sitting down at the same table was an achievement in itself. From a perspective that you must crawl before you can walk, the settlement was a step toward resumption of contractual relations.²⁹

Emboldened by its relative success in the Henryetta field, the union expanded into the eastern coal fields of Oklahoma in the following months. Twenty locals had been established in the McAlester-Hartshorne district by November 1932. Others locals regrouped at other locations such as Wilburton and Shady Point. But as the locals reorganized, sporadic violence threatened to derail the process that had been so successful in the Henryetta district.³⁰

When the miners of the McAlester district struck for union recognition, they immediately embarked on a campaign of picketing the mines of operators who refused to sign a

contract with the union. The result was that dozens were arrested for picketing. In one incident, the authorities arrested eleven strikers for obstructing highways. So many were being arrested that feeding the "large numbering thrown into the county jail" was becoming a problem, according to the McAlester Democrat.³¹

The authorities showed no sign of relenting as Judge Hal Johnson of Shawnee issued a permanent injunction against District #21 that prohibited mass picketing. Johnson's ruling limited pickets to "three men at any one point." The ruling made permanent a temporary injunction Johnson issued in August.³²

Always a supporter of law and order, Governor Murray then took measures to insure that the miners abided by the court's rulings. Murray appointed James Springer of Stillwater to prosecute violations of the injunction. Springer was to assist Pittsburg County Attorney Frank L. Watson, according to Governor Murray. A group of miners met afterwards with Murray to protest the appointment.³³

The next day more than three hundred miners gathered at Krebs to discuss Judge Johnson's injunction. Those at the meeting declared that the injunction was "an effort to take away from labor its only weapon of striking back," according to an American Federation of Labor representative who spoke at the meeting. But little else came of the meeting.³⁴

Within a week the mood of the Krebs miners had changed

dramatically. The operators of the Osage mine at Krebs relented and signed a contract with the union. After the parade of cars, "bebannered and beflagged," drove triumphantly through town, led by the Krebs Italian band, three to four thousand gathered at the Krebs fairgrounds to celebrate the occasion.³⁵

While the dispute ended peacefully at Krebs, it did not at many other locations. Dynamite attacks continued on the homes of non-union miners. A miner who worked at the Messina mine southeast of McAlester awoke to the sound of a dynamite blast a few days after he was warned not to continue working at the mine. After a state operative was beaten severely, the authorities arrested four men in connection with the incident. The state operative had accepted a position as foreman at a non-union mine. O. P. Ray, the man in charge of state operatives in the strike zone, hinted that he would ask Governor Murray to send state troops into the mine area. The union also continued to picket non-union mines, despite the district court injunction forbidding such activity.³⁶

The miners tested the authorities' willingness to enforce the injunction in early October. After hundreds picketed the Little Bolen mine in North McAlester, O. P. Ray ordered the arrest of over one hundred miners. Ray indicated that the arrests were the "beginning of an intensive clean-up campaign against strikers who persist in

illegal picketing of mines and intimidating workers."³⁷

The arrested crowd then marched to the state penitentiary. The county jail already was filled to capacity, as "scores of arrests had been made prior to the wholesale haul" at the Little Bolen mine. Many of the picketers had refused bail, leaving the jails full. With no vacancies at the county jail, the authorities decided to put the Little Bolen picketers in the state's maximum security prison, which was located a half-mile from the mine. The miners, "with an American flag waving at the head of the column ... marched into the front door of the state penitentiary." En route to the penitentiary the miners sang songs, and other "outbursts of merriment marking the parade." After guards screened out women and the under-aged, a search of the miners went smoothly with only a couple pocket knives found. Throughout the process the miners seemed to enjoy it all. One guard noted that there was no "surliness on the part of the arrested men." Next, the miners were treated to a meal of ham, eggs, potatoes, bread, and coffee. After being on strike for months, one miner remarked that "its the most I've had to eat in 60 days." This was the attitude of many of the miners. After they were released the next day, many of the strikers stated that they were pleased with the experience, noting that it was their "first square meal" in months.³⁸

The miners declared they would return to "the picket

line in full force." Fearing trouble, C. A. Burns, head of the state bureau of investigation, left Oklahoma City for McAlester, equipped with machine guns, tear gas, and spare ammunition. The Daily Oklahoman reported that the authorities "indicated they would enforce the edict against picketing, even if the machine guns and bombs were necessary." While the state brought in extra firepower, the miners were "augmented by sympathizers" from across the state's coal belt.³⁹

To show their strength, the miners held a picnic on the grounds of the Haileyville ballpark. More than three thousand attended. The first speaker the crowd heard was Judge E. P. Hill of McAlester. Hill criticized the arrests at the Little Bolen mine and noted that the charges had been filed by James M. Springer, Governor Murray's special prosecutor, and not by the local authorities. Judge Hill said that he sympathized with the miners, as long as they remained peaceful. After A.F.L. and U.M.W. spokesmen addressed the gathering, Constable Grady Anderson rose and "spoke a few words" to the crowd. Large segments of the local community, including the political leadership, were squarely in the miners' corner.⁴⁰

Throughout October a tense stand-off continued in the McAlester district. Both sides sustained symbolic casualties in the on-going conflict. One by one, the operators broke ranks and signed contracts with the union.

Each time this occurred, it bolstered the spirits of the union miners. But at the same time state operatives continued to arrest dozens of union miners as they continued to picket the remaining non-union mines.⁴¹

In one incident, twenty-six miners at Pittsburg were arrested after they attacked two non-union miners as they passed by the Labor Hall, while en route from the mines to their homes. One of the non-union miners lost four teeth in the incident before the mine superintendent arrived and put a stop to the disturbance. O. P. Ray of the state bureau of investigation took the offenders to McAlester for arraignment.⁴²

In another incident, twenty-five union miners were arrested for picketing a non-union mine near Haileyville. They faced charges for camping on land adjacent to the Messina mine. According to Tom Bost, president of the union local, the miners had leased the land and were in the process of establishing a community camp. Others miners were more honest, indicating that they had pitched their tents on the field "so they might picket more forcefully."⁴³

By this time the courts and jails of Pittsburg County were clogged with miners. The Little Bolen case, the Pittsburg fights, the Messina arrests, and a multitude of smaller incidents had created such a backlog in the county's court system that it had virtually dragged to a halt. In an

effort to bring about a settlement, Governor Murray traveled to the strike zone. Many in the communities affected by the strike feared that Murray would declare martial law if the unrest continued."

After meeting with a miners' committee in McAlester, Governor Murray spoke to a large crowd at Haileyville. Murray prefaced his comments by declaring to the miners that "you may not like what I am going to say but I don't give a damn if you do or not." The Governor told the miners that they were "mostly right, but partly wrong." Murray urged them to refrain from violence, noting that they had a right to organize and picket, but "that doesn't mean standing at the roadside and shooting at somebody. It doesn't mean hitting somebody in the head when he starts to the grocery store."

Murray told the crowd at Haileyville that he was neither for the strikers nor the operators, but that he was "standing on the public policy side." He reminded the union miners that his duty was to uphold the law and that "we are not going to have anarchy in this state." Murray claimed that if the law was not enforced, then it would be "every man, woman, and child for himself." He continued to chastise the union miners, telling them that "you can't cure economic trouble by revolution. If your attempt to cure economic trouble by revolution, it only makes the trouble worse." Murray advised that the best cure for society's

ills was "the ballot" and concluded by advising the miners to "go on with your union. But you must get it in your head that you can't commit violence.""⁴⁶

The Governor's pleas to stop the violence had little effect. The local papers reported the casualties like tallies on a scoreboard. Fist fights, bombings, and shootings occurred nearly every day. Meanwhile, the miners involved in the Little Bolen arrests were "turned loose." Judge A. C. Sewell of McAlester ruled that there was insufficient evidence to warrant a trial."⁴⁷

The union took its case to the public while the violence raged across the coal fields of eastern Oklahoma. The miners had complained that the public had heard only the operators' and the state government's versions of the strike, and not their side. Responding to this criticism, the Daily Oklahoman published a series of articles presenting the miners' version of the events that had transpired since the strike began. The miners argued that their primary reason in calling the strike was "mine safety, not high pay." They contended that "union regulation over working conditions is [the] paramount issue." The union miners stated simply that their central demand was a "contractual right to share in arranging the working conditions surrounding their hazardous occupation."⁴⁸

Union miners noted that safety in the mines had deteriorated substantially since the onset of the open shop

campaign in 1924. To buttress their argument, they noted that during the fifteen years leading up to the open shop, from 1910 to 1924, 108 union miners died in accidents in Oklahoma's mines. But in the five years since the Jacksonville Agreement expired, 315 non-union mines had died in accidents, a rate nine times greater. The miners argued that the operators opposed the cost of maintaining mines at the standards set by law. They noted that the operators had let safety in the mines regress to the point that they were permitting the firing of shots while men were in the mines, a policy abandoned since the 1890s. Ignoring such fundamental safety practices led to accidents like the blast at the Little Bolen mine that killed sixty-one men. But the union miners did not blame only the operators. They noted that the state mine inspectors performed only a "perfunctory" role, their reports were little more than transcripts of the operators' own comments on conditions in their mines, rather than on the basis of rigorous personal investigations."

The miners cited other evidence of a regression back to the robber baron era of Oklahoma coal mining. They noted that operators commonly "rob the miners by stealing coal on crooked scales," or with "crooked" company weighmen. When the miners requested a check-weighman be appointed, the operators retaliated by having the request put in written form. Then they discharged all those who signed the

petition. Finally, the miners demanded an end to being paid in scrip, a practice reminiscent of an era many miners thought was gone forever.⁵⁰

It was not only the union miners who criticized the operators for insensitive treatment of their employees. The Red Cross complained that the operators at Pittsburg were blocking the distribution of Red Cross flour to union miners. The operators contended that it was true they had persuaded local Red Cross officials to deny flour to union men, arguing that the action was justifiable "on the grounds they were voluntarily idle." Only an order from the Red Cross national office at St. Louis restored the distribution of government flour to those who needed it, regardless of their stance in the strike.⁵¹

The situation seemed hopelessly deadlocked. The miners contended that their status was near serfdom and the union was their only hope. The operators retorted that unionizing the field would be disastrous. Fights, shootings, and bombings continued unabated. Fearing violence, both union and non-union miners began to travel about only in large numbers. This resulted in street confrontations quickly deteriorating into mob scenes. In addition, several operators' homes were dynamited. While the violence raged, the picketing of non-union mines continued.⁵²

The miners' tent city that adjoined the Craig Valley Coal Company's Messina mine near Haileyville rapidly was

becoming a semi-permanent community. In addition to their picketing duties, the miners erected a "dancing pavilion at the tent colony." The picketers held nightly dances and kept "up a loud noise" every night, according to the Daily Oklahoman.⁵³

As the dispute dragged on, the miners and the state government grew more displeased with the obstinate behavior of the operators. The union's chief organizer in the district, David Fowler, argued that the open shop operators were "doing more to foment communism and bolshevism in the United States than any other agency." W. A. Murphy, state labor commissioner, blamed the operators for the strike lasting more than one hundred days and advised them to sign an agreement with the union.⁵⁴ While the operators, miners, and the state government sought a solution to the crisis, forces outside of the state were about to impose a settlement.

The Depression reached its nadir in the spring of 1933. Already seriously weakened by competition with the oil and gas industries, the Depression dealt a nearly fatal blow to Oklahoma's coal industry. One by one, the large railroad subsidiary mines closed. The Rock Island mines at Hartshorne, the biggest in the state, closed down. When operating at full capacity, the Rock Island mines employed more than a thousand miners. The miners at Hartshorne sent a resolution to newly-inaugurated President Roosevelt

requesting that he instruct the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to provide funding so that the Rock Island Railroad could keep the mines open. The plan never got off the ground when the firm's officers, noting the low price of fuel oil at that time, announced that even with government help, it was unlikely the mines would be reopened. J. J. Puterbaugh, receiver for five bankrupt mining firms, noted that all were unprofitable due to economic and labor troubles and recommended liquidation of the properties. At the few mines that remained open, miners worked an average of only ninety-three days annually during 1932 and 1933.⁵⁵

These were the most difficult times ever experienced in the coal towns of Oklahoma. With many miners destitute and homeless, town leaders organized rabbit hunts to provide food for the needy. Local hunters shot thousands of rabbits to feed the county, while cold storage firms warehoused the meat until it was distributed. In April 1933 Cambria was left without electricity after the McApine mines there were closed. Judge Harve Melton ordered the mines reopened.⁵⁶

By the fall of 1933 conditions in the coal towns of Oklahoma were desperate. United States Congressman Wilburn Cartwright of McAlester proposed giving the unemployed miners of Pittsburg County small tracts of land, ranging from two to ten acres. Cartwright argued that this action would allow the people "who live in the abandon mining section of the county" an opportunity to live as subsistence

farmers. As a result of Congressman Cartwright's efforts, a government agent was dispatched to McAlester to study the feasibility of the federal government purchasing subsistence homesteads for the unemployed miners, but little came of the project.⁵⁷

Despite the slow progress of the New Deal's programs in the coal towns of Oklahoma, its impact eventually was monumental. The principal domestic measure of the "First New Deal" was the National Industrial Recovery Act. In June 1933 Congress passed Title I of the NIRA, which suspended antitrust laws, permitting implementation of industrial codes that regulated production, prices, wages, and trade practices. To ensure that these efforts to jump-start the economy did not trample upon the rights of labor, safeguards were included to protect workers. The result was Title I's famous Section 7(a), which guaranteed labor's right to organize and bargain collectively.⁵⁸

Superficially it appeared as if the legislation had effectively brought an end to the open shop movement in Oklahoma. Many operators already had conceded and signed with the union before passage of the NIRA. It seemed likely at this point that the remaining hold-outs would have their mines unionized by government edict. There was no doubt that Section 7(a) was of benefit to labor, but only if it was enforceable.⁵⁹

The United Mine Workers perceived Section 7(a) as their

salvation. In fact, the union had led an intense lobbying campaign to insure its inclusion in the legislation. John L. Lewis considered Section 7(a) tantamount to a second emancipation proclamation. Under this assumption the union experienced a nation-wide revival in 1933. Having dwindled to sixty thousand members in 1932, more than three hundred thousand were added to the membership rolls only a few months later. But already business was digging in its heels in opposition to the legislation, and the Supreme Court had not ruled on its constitutionality.⁶⁰

From the onset business was opposed to Section 7(a). Many feared "collective bludgeoning." Some corporations flatly prohibited their employees from organizing. Others created company unions, hoping to prevent the establishment of independent unions. Over four hundred company unions came into existence between 1933 and 1935. Through such tactics business fought Section 7(a) to the end. If - enforced, it would be a major blow to their anti-union activities. In fact, the business community's resistance to Section 7(a) was a driving force toward passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935.⁶¹

The purpose of the National Labor Board was to settle disputes arising under the NIRA. Established in August 1933, President Roosevelt named Robert F. Wagner as its first chairman. In February 1934 the Board was authorized to hold elections so that employees could choose their

bargaining representatives. In 1935 the entire system was changed with the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, commonly known as the Wagner Act. The legislation created the National Labor Relations Board, but unfortunately for labor, the change did little to help its cause as business remained adamantly opposed to collective bargaining.⁶²

It is questionable if Roosevelt ever intended to guarantee labor's right to organize and bargain collectively. Without an all-out lobbying campaign by the United Mine Workers, Section 7(a) might never have been part of the NIRA. More likely, it was a bone tossed in the direction of organized labor in order to muzzle dissent sure to arise from other New Deal measures that were decidedly in capital's favor. But passage of the Wagner Act did reaffirm the principle of Section 7(a), while at the same time making permanent the three-man National Labor Relations Board.⁶³

Slowly the legal questions surrounding the New Deal's impact upon organized labor filtered through the nation's court system. In late 1934 a Federal court ruled Section 7(a) unconstitutional in the Weirton Steel case. Then in May 1935, the Supreme Court ruled the National Recovery Act unconstitutional in the landmark Schechter case. Political pundits chortled that the NRA's Blue Eagle had been plucked, as the case dealt with the poultry industry. But in a major victory for the New Deal and for organized labor, the

Supreme Court ruled in National Labor Relations Board v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Company (1937) that the Wagner Act was constitutional. Whether Roosevelt intended it or not, the New Deal's reforms granted unions "the stamp of legitimacy."⁶⁴

Union coal miners in Oklahoma did not feel overly beholden to the federal government. Many believed they were in the process of achieving their goal of union recognition before the NIRA and Title I's Section 7(a). Nor did they give blanket endorsement to NIRA policies. In September 1933 union coal miners in Oklahoma protested the \$3.75 day wage established by the federal government's coal code. But the NRA code probably helped both the union and the operators. Under the NRA the local coal industry recovered somewhat; nearly seven hundred men were working in the mines around Hartshorne. The Hartshorne Sun reported that "all mines are union and operating under the NRA code." A District Twenty-One official argued that the nation's coal industry had entered a new era in which strikes were to be a thing of the past. John L. Britton stated that the union would turn to the strike as an option only if an employer failed to meet a payroll.⁶⁵

Britton was a little ahead of the curve when he stated that strikes were a thing of the past. Wages for Oklahoma's miner rose to \$4.60 by April 1934. When NRA Administrator Hugh S. Johnson ordered the scale be adjusted downward,

first to \$4.35, then later to \$4.00, it led to a temporary shutdown of nearly all the shaft mines in District Twenty-One.⁶⁶

By the end of the decade, management-labor relations in the Oklahoma coal industry had come full-circle back to 1903. Faced with the Supreme Court declaring the Wagner Act constitutional, the operators still clinging to the open shop could no longer refuse to bargain with the miner's union. On May 19, 1938, District Twenty-One officials signed a union-shop agreement with the operators of the district. Thirty-five years after their first agreement in Oklahoma, the union and the operators were once again contractual partners.⁶⁷

Endnotes

¹ Frederick L. Ryan. The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), 70-76; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 1 January 1931; McAlester Guardian, 19 December 1929; Hartshorne Sun, 19 December 1929.

² Clyde Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, (Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939), 80; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 28 August 1931, 19, 20, 30 October 1931.

³ Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 80; Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 30 October, 2 November 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 2 November 1931.

⁴ McAlester News-Capital, 2 November 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 4 November 1931.

⁵ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 3, 4 November 1931; The Henryetta News, 6 November 1931.

⁶ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 6, 13 November 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 7 November 1931.

⁷ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 24, 25 November 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 25 November 1931.

⁸ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 2, 3 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 4 December 1931.

⁹ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 4, 6 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 4, 6 December 1931.

¹⁰ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 7 December 1931.

¹¹ Ibid., 7 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 7 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 7 December 1931.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 8, 9 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 9 December 1931; Henryetta News, 11 December 1931.

¹⁴ Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 10, 11 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 12 December 1931.

¹⁵Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 13 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 13 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 13 December 1931.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Daily Oklahoman, 14 December 1931.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 14 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 15 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 15 December 1931.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 15 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 15 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 15 December 1931.

²²Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 16 December 1931; Daily Oklahoman, 16 December 1931.

²³Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 16 December 1931.

²⁴Ibid., 17 December 1931.

²⁵Ibid., 18 December 1931.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 23 December 1931; McAlester News-Capital, 23 December 1931; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 81.

²⁸Henryetta Daily Free-Lance, 24 December 1931.

²⁹Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 81-82.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹McAlester Democrat, 8 September 1932.

³²Ibid., 15 September 1932.

³³Ibid., 22 September 1932.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 29 September 1932.

³⁶Hartshorne Sun, 29 September, 6 October 1932; Daily Oklahoman, 3 October.

³⁷McAlester Democrat, 6 October 1932; Daily Oklahoman, 6 October 1932; Hartshorne Sun, 6 October 1932.

³⁸Ibid.; Daily Oklahoman, 7 October 1932.

³⁹McAlester Democrat, 6 October 1932; Daily Oklahoman, 7 October 1932.

⁴⁰McAlester Democrat, 13 October 1932; Daily Oklahoman, 9 October 1932.

⁴¹Daily Oklahoman, 11 October 1932; Hartshorne Sun, 13 October 1932; McAlester Democrat, 13 October 1932.

⁴²Hartshorne Sun, 13 October 1932; McAlester Democrat, 13 October 1932.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Daily Oklahoman, 14 October 1932; Hartshorne Sun, 20 October 1932.

⁴⁶Hartshorne Sun, 20 October 1932; Daily Oklahoman, 15 October 1932.

⁴⁷Hartshorne Sun, 3, 10 November 1932; McAlester Democrat, 27 October 1932.

⁴⁸Daily Oklahoman, 17 October 1932.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., 29 October 1932.

⁵²Ibid., 18, 25, 29, 30 October, 29 December 1932; McAlester Democrat, 1, 29 December 1932; Hartshorne Sun, 29 December 1932.

⁵³Daily Oklahoman, 25 October, 5 November 1932.

⁵⁴Ibid., 20 November 1932; McAlester Democrat, 24 November 1932.

⁵⁵McAlester Democrat, 9 February 1933; Hartshorne Sun, 6 April 1933; Ryan, Rehabilitation, 63; Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 82; State of Oklahoma. Twenty-Fifth Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines [1932], 31.

⁵⁶Hartshorne Sun, 13, 20 April 1933.

⁵⁷McAlester Democrat, 21 September, 2 November 1933.

⁵⁸David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Coal Miners' Union, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939), 194; Roger Biles, A New Deal for the American People, (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 44; Henry Pelling, American Labor, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 156-157; Joseph G. Raybeck, A History of American Labor, sixth printing, (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 327; Irving Bernstein, Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970), 786; Charles R. Perry, Collective Bargaining and the Decline of the United Mine Workers, (Philadelphia: Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1984), 179.

⁵⁹Pelling, American Labor, 160.

⁶⁰Ibid.; Raybeck, A History of American Labor, 328; Bernstein, Turbulent Years, 89; Biles, A New Deal for the American People, 157-158.

⁶¹Raybeck, A History of American Labor, 329; David Brody, "Labor and the Great Depression: The Interpretative Prospects," Labor History 13 (Spring 1972), 235.

⁶²Pelling, American Labor, 161; Biles, A New Deal for the American People, 159; Raybeck, A History of American Labor, 342.

⁶³Pelling, American Labor, 161; Biles, A New Deal for the American People, 157.

⁶⁴Pelling, American Labor, 161; Biles, A New Deal for the American People, 160-161, 171; Raybeck, A History of American Labor, 331-345.

⁶⁵The Hartshorne Sun, 21 September, 30 November 1933.

⁶⁶McAlester Democrat, 26 April, 7 June 1934.

⁶⁷Hamm, Labor History of Oklahoma, 82.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

Within Oklahoma's coal industry the tide of unionism ebbed and flowed much like an ocean's tide. There were high water marks such as 1903 and the twenty years that followed. During this period wages rose steadily from \$2.56 a day in 1903 to \$7.50 a day in 1924.' At the same time the union's demand for check-weighmen eliminated the operators' common practice of short-changing miners at the weigh-scale. While improving the standard of living for its membership, the union forced elimination of dangerous mining practices that emphasized profit over safety, such as "shooting off the solid."

The union pushed for other advances in mine safety. These included improved ventilation, rock dusting, and safer explosives. All reduced the likelihood of deadly gas and coal dust explosions. Another improvement resulted from the operators granting the union's demand that they be paid for "deadwork." Non-payment for crucial safety measures such as timbering had led to countless accidents. Also, the union's demand for abolition of the infamous "task system" that emphasized wages based upon a tonnage rate was a major safety advance. No longer would miners be forced to

overlook safety concerns in order to meet a tonnage quota.

Better training also improved safety in Oklahoma's coal mines. The Red Cross and the state's Bureau of Mines trained miners in the latest safety practices. The School of Mines at Wilburton also contributed to improving safety. Although mining remained a dangerous occupation, these measures helped reduce accidents in the mines.

Also slayed by the union sword was the company town system and its two central components, the company house and store. As a result of the union's victory over the company town system, miners bought their own homes, instead of the company house being the only housing option. At the same time, a multitude of businesses developed in the coal towns as the company store faded away, the result of another important victory over the operators by the union.

But there were times when the tide of unionism in the Oklahoma coal industry flowed in the operators' favor. The evictions of 1894 and the open shop campaign of 1924-27 are the most vivid examples. Both times the operators dealt severe blows to the union movement among Oklahoma's miners. But neither was a lethal blow. Also, it can be argued that without active government intervention in both these confrontations, the outcome might have been different. Without government-supplied injunctions and troops, the operators were a less powerful opponent. When the federal and state governments stayed neutral, the union often won

its demands at the bargaining table. The strike of 1899-1903 is perhaps the best example, as all subsequent victories ensued from the recognition battle won in 1903.

In many ways the union's fortunes paralleled that of Oklahoma's coal industry. Union membership grew along with the industry in the 1880s and 1890s. From 1900 to 1920 the union prospered along with the industry in general. At the same time, the union's demise in the 1920s coincided with the plight of the state's coal industry. This decades-long symbiotic relationship undermines the operators' contention that union wages were the reason for the industry's decline. A more realistic assessment of the industry's decline, and subsequently the union's, was the evolution of the nation's industrial infrastructure from a coal-based system to a petroleum-based system. This evolution was hastened in Oklahoma by the state's relatively thin coal seams. Once the easily accessible seams played out, it became difficult for the state's coal industry to compete with the oil industry and with coal from states like Wyoming, where coal lay in fifty-foot seams - (In Oklahoma, coal seams were typically four feet thick). Oklahoma's coal industry would have declined in the 1920s whether it had been unionized or not. But from the miners' perspective, the union was essential.

The union transformed the lives of Oklahoma's miners. Until their victory in 1903, the miners were the low rung in

a semi-feudalistic society. Under the protection of the union, miners became the political and social leaders of their communities. Much of social life in the coal towns centered around union-sponsored activities. Going to the weekly union meetings was as routine as going to church on Sunday. In fact, the union and the church were the two primary social institutions for the coal miners. They drew their inner strength and ability to persevere against long odds from both. After every tragic mine disaster, it was the union and the church that provided both spiritual and material comfort. From their religious faith the miners drew spiritual solace, but they turned to the union for day-to-day protection from the coal barons.

The coal fields of Oklahoma were a perfect breeding ground for the growth of industrial unionism. Exploited both above and below ground, the miners saw the union as their only hope. Together they could combat not only low pay, but the dangerous working conditions in the mines. In unions, the miners had broken the company town system and the vise-grip the operators had on the coal towns. Coupled with government regulation, safety slowly improved in the mines, although there were setbacks such as during the 1925-1931 period.

Changes related to unionization of Oklahoma's coal miners included more than higher wages, better working conditions, and the demise of the company town system.

There were substantive social and political changes in the coal towns that are attributable to the miners organizing. Under the union the miners became influential in their communities. They went from the low-rung of a semi-feudal society to being community leaders in a few short years. Many served in elected office, filling offices at both the local and state levels. One miner, Pat Hurley, went on to serve in President Roosevelt's cabinet.² Peter Hanraty was influential in state politics for decades. He served as mayor of two coal towns, played an important role in the framing of the state constitution, and was the Oklahoma's first mining inspector.³

The union also helped foster amiable race relations in the coal towns of Oklahoma. While the operators often pitted differing ethnic groups against one another in the mines, especially during strikes, the union did much to bring the many races together. In fact, the operators efforts to forestall ethnic cliques by mixing the differing nationalities together had an opposite effect than intended. Instead of dividing the miners, it brought them together. All races groups were brought together in the union against a common foe, the operators. During the many strikes, miners of many races and nationalities stood together in solidarity. Whether a miner was union or not was much more important than his nationality. One Italian miner noted that upon his arrival in Oklahoma, the first question asked

of him was whether he intended to join the union or "scab."* Even with their extremely heterogenous ethnic populations, the coal towns were amazingly devoid of racial animosity.

The transition of the coal towns from semi-feudal fiefdoms of the coal barons to democratic communities was part of a national trend. While this change was in no small part due to the efforts of the miners and their union, it also was part of the progressive movement that swept across the nation from the turn of the century until World War One diverted the public's attention. Within this favorable political environment the efforts of the miners were made easier. The miners found political allies on the local, state, and national levels. In fact, the plight of Oklahoma's coal miners paralleled closely the national political scene. When conservative Republicans were in the White House in the 1890s, and again in the 1920s, the miners faced off against not only the operators, but presidential administrations that often sided with the business community. From 1903 to 1922 the union prospered. Not coincidentally, this was when the progressive period was at its zenith. While the demise of the union in the 1920s was attributable to competition with oil and gas, and not to a return to conservative Republican rule, it certainly did not help the union's cause. When the Great Depression occurred the nation turned to the Democrats for relief. Roosevelt's

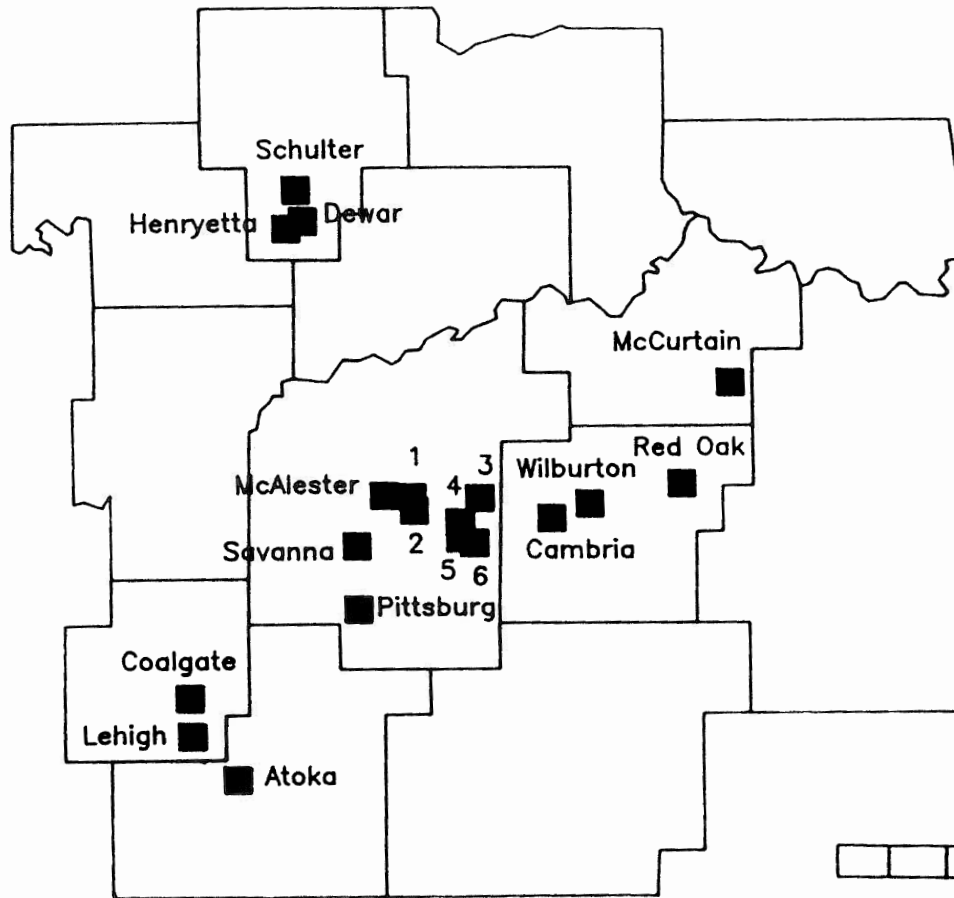
New Deal signaled a return to a more favorable political environment for unionism. The result was a resurgence of the United Mine Workers on a nation-wide scale. Without a doubt, national political trends had significant influence in Oklahoma's coal towns, despite their geographic isolation.

Oklahoma's miners often were more successful in their union activity than their counterparts in other states. Oklahoma's miners won recognition of their union long before those in West Virginia. Also, the struggle in Oklahoma was far less violent than in other states. Oklahoma never experienced a massacre such as those at Cripple Creek, Ludlow, and at Herrin, names that are synonymous today with bloodshed. Violence did accompany every miner's strike in Oklahoma, but on a far milder scale than in many other states. (See Figure 4.) Neither side found it necessary to resort to extreme measures.

During the golden years of Oklahoma's coal industry, from 1903 to 1922, both the operators and the miners enjoyed the good times. For nearly twenty years both sides enjoyed the benefits of detente. When the industry declined during the 1920s, neither side was willing to compromise so that the industry could survive. The result was nearly fatal for both. While the state's coal industry did recover during World War II, it failed to attain its former status. Those glory days were gone forever. Still, the union survived -

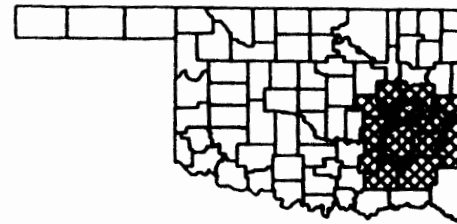
as did the miners' demands for a say in their own pay and working conditions. While Oklahoma's coal industry faded away, the spirit of unionism lived on.

Figure 4. Mine Strike-Related Violence (1870-1935)



- 1=Krebs
- 2=Alderson
- 3=Bache
- 4=Dow
- 5=Haileyville
- 6=Hartshorne

0 65 Miles



Endnotes

¹ David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Coal Miners' Union, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939), 238.

² Don Lohbeck, Patrick Hurley: An American, (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956), 247.

³ Patrick Blessing, The British and Irish in Oklahoma, (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 18-20.

⁴ Kenny Brown, The Italians in Oklahoma, (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 19.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Government Documents

- Bryans, William S. Historical Narrative for State Historic Preservation Office project cataloging coal mining related properties of Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, 1989.
- Choctaw Tribal Records, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Dawes Commission, Letter Press Books, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Department of the Interior. Indian Territory Division, Letters Received, 1894-1903, National Archives, Washington, DC.
- "Mine Inspector for Indian Territory," in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior. Miscellaneous Reports. Part I. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1894-1906.
- Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, Official Proceedings, 1929-1931.
- Shannon, C. W. Coal in Oklahoma. Bulletin No. 4 Norman: Oklahoma Geological Survey, 1926.
- State of Oklahoma. Bureau of Mines. Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines. 1908-1935.
- _____. Department of Labor. Annual Report. 1908-1913.
- _____. School of Mines and Metallurgy, Bulletin 2, "Mine Ventilation," 1926.
- Taff, J. A. "The Southwestern Coal Field," United States Geological Survey 22nd Annual Report, 1900-1901: Part III-i. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.

1902.

- _____. "Progress of Coal Work in Indian Territory." United States Geological Survey Bulletin 260. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1905.
- Taff, J. A., and George I. Adams. "Geology of the Eastern Choctaw Coal Field, Indian Territory." United States Geological Survey 21st Annual Report, 1899-1900. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901.
- Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900. Special Reports: Occupations. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Office, 1901.
- United States Congress. Senate. Immigration Commission. Reports of the Immigration Commission, Vol. VII: Immigrants in Industries, Part I: Bituminous Coal Mining, Part IV: "The Bituminous Coal Mining Industry of the Southwest." Senate Doc. 633, Serial Set 5667-5668, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., 1911.
- _____. Senate. Senate Document #390. Coal Lands in Oklahoma. 61st Cong., 2nd sess., Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910.
- United States Department of the Interior. Bureau of Mines. Annual Report of the Bureau of Mines. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911-1927.
- _____. Bureau of Mines. Annual Report of the United States Coal Commission. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911-1927.
- United States Geological Survey. Mineral Resources of the United States. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1882-1931.

Manuscripts

- Fred S. Barde Collection, Archives and Manuscript Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Samuel Boydston Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
- Peter Hanraty Collection, Archives and Manuscript Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

- Indian-Pioneer Papers, Archives and Manuscript Division,
Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Mary Harris Jones Collection, Manuscript Division, Catholic
University of America Library, Washington, DC.
- Kali-Inla Coal Company Records, Western History Collection,
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
- Edwin Ludlow Collection, Archives and Manuscript Division,
Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- John Mitchell Collection, Manuscript Division, Catholic
University of America Library, Washington, DC.
- J. B. A. Robertson Collection, State of Oklahoma Department
of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Martin Trapp Collection, State of Oklahoma Department of
Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
- Robert L. Williams Collection, Archives and Manuscripts
Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma.

Union Records

- Records of United Mine Workers Local #2327. Krebs,
Oklahoma. Oklahoma State University Library, Special
Collections, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Newspapers and Trade Journals

- Black Diamond. New York, New York. 1920.
- Choctaw Gazette. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1903.
- Coal County Democrat. Coalgate, Oklahoma. 1912.
- Coalgate Courier. Coalgate, Oklahoma. 1899-1922.
- Coalgate Nonpareil. Coalgate, Oklahoma. 1894-1895.
- Daily Oklahoman. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1894-1935.
- Dallas Morning News. Dallas, Texas. 1912.
- Guthrie Daily Leader. Guthrie, Oklahoma. 1894.

Harlow's Weekly. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1919-1924.

Haskell County News. McCurtain, Oklahoma. 1910-1912.

Hartshorne Sun. Hartshorne, Oklahoma. 1904-1933.

Henryetta Daily Free-Lance. Henryetta, Oklahoma. 1919-1931.

Keota Record. Keota, Oklahoma. 1915.

Kingfisher Free Press. Kingfisher, Oklahoma. 1892.

Kinta Enterprise. Kinta, Oklahoma. 1906.

Krebs Advertiser. Krebs, Oklahoma. 1910.

Krebs Banner. Krebs, Oklahoma. 1906.

Krebs Eagle. Krebs, Oklahoma. 1899.

Latimer County News-Democrat. Wilburton, Oklahoma. 1919-1924.

McAlester Democrat. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1912-1934.

McAlester Guardian. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1929-1930.

McAlester News-Capital. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1910-1931.

McCurtain American. McCurtain, Oklahoma. 1904.

Muskogee Daily Phoenix. Muskogee, Oklahoma. 1894-1922.

Oklahoma Federationist. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1932.

Oklahoma Leader. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1922.

Oklahoma Miner. Krebs, Oklahoma. 1912-1914.

Oklahoma State Capital. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1899.

Oklahoma Times Journal. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. 1894.

Pittsburg Enterprise. Pittsburg, Oklahoma. 1910.

Poteau Weekly News. Poteau, Oklahoma. 1919.

San Bois News. McCurtain, Oklahoma. 1904-1905.

South McAlester Capital. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1894-1903.

South McAlester Republican. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1906.

South McAlester Wasp. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1904-1910.

Star-Vindicator. McAlester, Oklahoma. 1877.

The New State. Haileyville, Oklahoma. 1908-1909.

The McMaster Publishing Company's Gazetter and Business Directory of the Indian Territory. Buffalo, New York: McMaster Publishing Company, 1901.

Interviews

Hughes, Jim. Washington, DC. Interview, 12 August 1991.

Ryan, Bill. Krebs, Oklahoma. Interview, 10 June 1989.

Secondary Sources

Books

Ameringer, Oscar. If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983.

Archbald, Hugh. The Four Hour Day in Coal. New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1923.

Bernard, Richard M. The Poles in Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Bernstein, Irving. Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970.

Biles, Roger. A New Deal for the American People. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991.

Bimba, Anthony. The Molly Maguires. New York: International Publishers, 1932.

Blakey, Ellen Sue. Rustics, Roughnecks, and Financiers: Oklahoma, 1907-1919. Tulsa: Western National Bank,

1983.

- Blessing, Patrick J. The British and Irish in Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.
- Brody, David. Workers in Industrial America, Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Broehl, Wayne G. The Molly Maguires. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Brooke, Francis Key. The Missionary District of Oklahoma and Indian Territory. Philadelphia: Avil Printing Company, n.d.
- Brown, Kenny L. The Italians of Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.
- Burbank, Garin. When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976.
- Coleman, J. Walter. The Molly Maguire Riots: Industrial Conflict in the Pennsylvania Coal Region. Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936.
- Dale, Edward Everett, and James D. Morrison. Pioneer Judge: The Life of Robert Lee Williams. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1958.
- Daughters of the American Revolution, comp. Church Histories of Pittsburg County, Oklahoma. n.p., n.d.
- Debo, Angie. Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic, 2nd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961.
- _____. The WPA Guide to 1930s Oklahoma. 2nd ed. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986.
- Eller, Ronald D. Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1982.
- Fink, Leon. Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.
- Fischer, LeRoy H., ed. Oklahoma's Governors, 1907-1929: Turbulent Politics. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1981.

- Foner, Philip S. Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974.
- Garlock, Jonathan. The Knights of Labor Data Bank: User's Manual and Index to Local Assemblies. Ann Arbor: Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, 1973.
- General Commercial Engineering Department, Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. Economic Survey of Oklahoma. St. Louis: Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, 1929.
- Gittinger, Roy. The Formation of the State of Oklahoma, 1903-1906. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939.
- Goble, Danney. Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.
- Green, James R. Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1978.
- Gunning, I. C. When Coal Was King: Coal Mining in the Choctaw Nation. n.p.: Eastern Oklahoma Historical Society, 1975.
- Hamm, Clyde. A History of Labor Legislation in Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932.
- _____. Labor History of Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: A. M. Van Horn, 1939.
- Hofsommer, Donovan, ed. Railroads in Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977.
- Hollibaugh, E. F. The "Dusky Diamond" Fields: Tributary To Hartshorne, Haileyville, Gowen, Dow and Craig. Hartshorne, Oklahoma: Hartshorne Critic Print, 1904.
- Josephson, Matthew. The Robber Barons: The American Capitalists, 1861-1901. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1934.
- King, Pauline. Haskell County History. n.p., n.d.
- Klein, John J., Richard H. Leftwich, Richard W. Poole and Rudolph Trenton. The Oklahoma Economy. Stillwater: Oklahoma State University Publishing and Printing Department, 1963.

- Lohbeck, Don. Patrick Hurley: An American. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956.
- Long, Priscilla. Where The Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry. New York: Paragon House, 1989.
- Marshall, F. Ray. Labor in the South. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- McDonald, David J., and Edward A. Lynch. Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Miners' Union. Silver Spring, Maryland: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939.
- Montgomery, David. Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Moore, Elwood S. Coal. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1940.
- Morgan, H. Wayne, and Anne Hodges. Oklahoma: A Bicentennial History. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977.
- Morris, John W., ed. Geography of Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1977.
- _____, ed. Drill Bits, Picks, and Shovels: A History of Mineral Resources in Oklahoma. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982.
- Pelling, Henry. American Labor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Perry, Charles R. Collective Bargaining and the Decline of the United Mine Workers. Philadelphia: Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1984.
- Poe, Betty, ed. History of Coal County. Coalgate, Oklahoma: George B. Hill, n.d.
- Poole, P. W. Oklahoma Population Trends. Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1968.
- Powell, Allan Kent. The Next Time We Strike: Labor in Utah's Coal Fields, 1900-1933. Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1985.
- Raybeck, Joseph G. A History of American Labor. New York: Macmillan, 1959.

- Rhyne, Jennings, J. Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma. Guthrie: Co-Operative Publishing Company, 1929.
- Ryan, Frederick L. The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935.
- Scales, James R., and Danny Goble. Oklahoma Politics: A History. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982.
- Shirk, George H. Oklahoma Place Names. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965.
- Smith, Michael M. The Mexicans in Oklahoma. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.
- Suffern, Arthur E. The Coal Miners' Struggle For Industrial Status. New York: Macmillan Company, 1926.
- Thompson, John. Closing The Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma, 1889-1923. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986.
- Ware, Norman J. The Labor Movement in the United States, 1860-1895. New York: Vintage Books, 1929.
- Whiteside, James. Regulating Danger: The Struggle for Mine Safety in the Rocky Mountain Coal Industry. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990.
- Wieck, Edward A. The Miners' Association: A Record of the Origin of Coal Miners' Unions in the United States. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1940.
- Woolridge, Clyde E. Wilburton: I.T. and OK., 1890-1970. n.p., n.d.

Articles

- Albert, Carl. "Recollections of my Early Life." Chronicles of Oklahoma 52 (Spring 1974), 30-37.
- Bache, Franklin. "The Arkansas-Indian Territory Coal-Field." The Engineering and Mining Journal 76 (September 1903), 83-84.
- Barnhill, John. "Triumph of Will: The Coal Strike of 1899-1903." Chronicles of Oklahoma 61 (Spring 1983), 80-95.

- Brody, David. "Labor and the Great Depression: The Interpretive Prospects." Labor History 13 (Spring 1972), 231-244.
- Brown, Kenny L. "Peaceful Progress: The Italians of Krebs." Chronicles of Oklahoma 53 (Fall 1975), 332-352.
- Clark, Blue. "Delegates to the Constitutional Convention." Chronicles of Oklahoma (Winter 1970-1971), 411-422.
- Clark, Stanley. "Immigrants to the Choctaw Coal Industry." Chronicles of Oklahoma 33 (Winter 1955-1956), 440-455.
- Clinton, Fred S. "The First Hospital and Training School For Nurses in the Indian Territory, Now Oklahoma." Chronicles of Oklahoma 25 (Fall 1947), 218-227.
- Fite, Gilbert C. "Oklahoma's Reconstruction League: An Experiment in Farmer-Labor Politics." Journal of Southern History 13 (November 1947), 535-555.
- Gibson, A. M. "Life Story of Otto Koeltzow." Chronicles of Oklahoma 40 (Summer 1962), 100-149.
- Hale, Douglas. "European Immigrants in Oklahoma: A Survey," Chronicles of Oklahoma 53 (Summer 1975), 179-203.
- Hightower, Michael J. "Cattle, Coal, and Indian Land." Chronicles of Oklahoma 62 (Spring 1984), 5-25.
- _____. "The Road to Russian Hill: A Story of Immigration and Coal Mining." Chronicles of Oklahoma 63 (Fall 1985), 228-249.
- Holden, James Franklin. "The B. I. T.: The Story of an Adventure in Railroad Building." Chronicles of Oklahoma 11 (March 1933), 637-666.
- Kalisch, Philip A. "Ordeal of the Oklahoma Coal Miners: Coal Mine Disasters in the Sooner State, 1886-1945." Chronicles of Oklahoma 48 (Fall 1970), 331-340.
- Morrison, James D. "Problems in the Industrial Progress and Development of the Choctaw Nation, 1865 to 1907." Chronicles of Oklahoma 32 (Spring 1954), 70-88.
- Nesbitt, Paul. "J. J. McAlester." Chronicles of Oklahoma 11 (June 1933), 758-764.
- Ryan, Frederick L. "The Development of Coal Operators'

Associations in the Southwest." Southwestern Social Science Quarterly 14 (September 1933), 133-144.

Whiteside, James. "Coal Mining, Safety, and Regulation in New Mexico, 1882-1933." New Mexico Historical Review 64 (April 1989), 160-174.

Unpublished Materials

Aldrich, Gene. "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma to 1907." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952.

Carney, George. Unpublished notes for presentation at Oklahoma State University on the history of the United Mine Workers in Oklahoma titled "Down in the Shaft," 1978.

Knox, L. G. "Development of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma." M.S. Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1949.

Snodgrass, William G. "A History of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor to 1918." M.A. Thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1960.

VITA

Steven Lee Sewell

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM AND THE OKLAHOMA COAL
INDUSTRY, 1870-1935

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Independence, Kansas, April 20,
1957, the son of Donald and Myrtle Sewell; married
Sharon C. Sewell.

Education: Graduated from Charles Page High School,
Sand Springs, Oklahoma, in May 1975; received
Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Oklahoma
State University at Stillwater in July 1984;
received Master of Arts degree at Oklahoma
State University at Stillwater in December 1986;
completed requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree at Oklahoma State University in
July, 1992.

Professional Experience: Teaching Asstant, Department
of History, Oklahoma State University, August 1984
to December 1989; Instructor, Phillips
University, Enid, Oklahoma, January 1990 to
December 1990; Instructor, Redlands
Community College, El Reno, Oklahoma, January 1991
to July 1991; Instructor, Oscar Rose State
College, Midwest City, Oklahoma, October 1991 to
May 1992.

Fellowships: Raymond Estep Fellowship, April 1992;
Townsend Dissertation Fellowship, April 1992.

Professional Organizations: Organization of American
Historians.