Resources, Radicals, and Reactionaries: The First Red Scare in Oklahoma, 1919-1920

By

Michael Molina

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THESIS APPROVAL

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COMMITTEE APPROVALS:

Dr. Kenny Brown, Ph.D.
Committee Chairperson

Dr. Patricia Loughlin, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Dr. Douglas Hurt, Ph.D.
Committee Member

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, Oklahoma

NAME: Michael James Molina

TITLE OF THESIS: Resources, Radicals, and Reactionaries: The First Red Scare in Oklahoma, 1919-1920

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: Dr. Kenny Brown, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to identify and explore the major events of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma, and how the distinct resources contained in the state, namely coal and oil, defined its Red Scare experience. This work will also cover responses by the local government and populace to provide a broader understanding of this major event in Oklahoma history. After the First World War reactions against radicalism, labor movements, and social disturbances appeared in heightened form. These reactions manifested themselves as an outgrowth of paranoia and fear resulting in the detention, deportation, and arrest of thousands of individuals across the United States. From coast to coast, labor disputes, strikes, and anti-government sentiment were seen as tantamount to treason, prompting an overly harsh reaction by the public and government officials. Oklahoma remained no exception and meted out its own punitive reactions against suspected radicals. The coal and oil producing areas especially served as hubs of labor discontent and reaction and helped plunge the state deeper into the bowels of Red

Scare hysteria. After the state severely overreacted to labor disturbances in Oklahoma and the national government overplayed the threat of radicals across the country, the First Red Scare evaporated.

This study traces the course the first Red Scare took in Oklahoma, the response by the local government, and the response by the local populace and media during the critical years of 1919-1920. To that end, special attention is paid to the town of Drumright and the coal mining regions in the state, as these areas were situated near the nexus of resource production for their respective areas. Newspapers from the time are consulted, including the *Drumright Derrick*, the *McAlester News Capital*, *Durant Weekly News*, the *Daily Oklahoman*, *Tulsa World*, *Harlow's Weekly*, and others. Primary sources include the papers of Governor JBA Robertson located at the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, papers, clippings and vertical files from the Oklahoma History Center, congressional representative files from the Carl Albert Center at OU, US House and Senate hearings, published autobiographies, manuscripts, nation-wide papers including the *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Wall Street Journal*, and elsewhere.

Introduction

During the post-World War I era, the United States faced unprecedented challenges to its deep-rooted social and economic systems. Millions of Americans returned home after aiding in the defeat of Germany, only to find a lack of jobs, a dramatic increase in the cost of living with little increase in wages, a volatile streak of unionism that demanded improved working conditions, and changes to the social system with the coming of prohibition and women's right to vote. The period of the late teens and early 1920s represented an explosive period in history in which it seemed the very fabric of the nation was torn asunder by so-called radicals who wished to forge a new society based on egalitarian and socialist values. Disturbances soon arose, centered around the nation's key resources and industries. Control over the extraction of such resources, along with the benefits involved, preoccupied both labor and big business, resulting in fierce clashes that threatened to bring the economy of the United States to a standstill. The xenophobic tendencies of Americans, fostered by the vicious propaganda against the "Huns," carried over into the post-war era, when America required a new enemy on which to focus their fear. Immigrants, naturalized citizens, and labor unions received the brunt of this new paranoia. They became targets in numerous actions taken by federal and state governments aimed at weeding out radical elements in society.

US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer carried out raids in 1919 and early 1920, targeting communists, socialists, and elements of radical labor. Government agents would round up detainees, routinely deprive them of their rights, and prepare them for deportation. These moves were greeted with overwhelming popularity by the people of the US, who became caught up in an irrational fear and paranoia that later became known

as the First Red Scare (1919-1920). Declarations of martial law, calling out of national guard units, deportations, and paranoia-induced witch hunts became widespread across the country.

Oklahoma played a part in this event with a falsely alleged Bolshevist uprising in Drumright making headlines nationwide. The state routinely overreacted to events that in any other year would have been simple labor disputes. Since becoming a state, Oklahoma continually laid the foundations for the Red Scare mentality to thrive. The second chapter of this thesis explores this aspect, showing how the spread of poverty, control of resources, unfair labor practices from businesses, and labor unions played a part in shaping the state's First Red Scare experience. The third chapter also examines the final foundations laid as local authorities in eastern Oklahoma battled with outmatched labor unions for control over the state's resources. The forces of radical labor suffered a humiliating and severe defeat at the hands of officials, becoming crushed by the end of World War I. The state along with the rest of the nation would become swept up in hysteria as control of resources played a central role in inspiring fear during the First Red Scare. The Drumright strike stood as one of the two major pillars of the event, as discussed in the fourth chapter. While exact details of the event remain disputed, the strike showed how faulty reporting and an over-zealous government and populace gave in to fear and overreacted to the event. Far from a Bolshevik conspiracy, national guard troops marched on the town only to find peaceful residents, little damage, and no fatalities from the so-called revolution.

Chapter five explores the final pillar of Oklahoma's Red Scare reactionism during the nationwide mining strike in 1919. Resources once again played the main role in

attracting disturbances, as the populace reacted harshly to the presence of foreign miners. The press categorized the strike as a Bolshevist inspired conspiracy and the governor called out the national guard to protect the coal fields. A government report later revealed that foreign miners were the most well-behaved and had no ties to communism. The botched handling of the strike demonstrated Oklahoma's willingness to give in to the rampant and illogical paranoia flourishing across the country.

The state shared much in common with the rest of America. Some differences in Oklahoma existed, however, centered primarily around the state's unique resources that included the coal mining and oil production industries. These distinct resources attracted large numbers of union workers who fought for improved wages and other concessions from operators, bringing about the wrath of the state government in some of the most dramatic events in Oklahoma history. In essence, the resources contained in the state defined its Red Scare experience. This thesis seeks to explore the event with this geographic idea in mind, one that preceding historians have not touched upon. Furthermore, most Oklahoma historians focus primarily on the years 1907-1918, exploring either tenant farming or socialist and labor activity. Few dedicate the bulk of their research on the First Red Scare, a goal this work seeks to rectify by providing a more comprehensive study. Essentially, this work will demonstrate that the resource producing areas, such as Coal and Oil in Oklahoma, exacerbated the Red Scare fear against radicals, defining the state's experience. This thesis will also provide an unprecedented in-depth look at the event, with greater attention paid to events such as the Drumright riot that have long been overlooked by historians. To that end, this work's most important contribution to the existing literature remains the chapter on the strike in

Drumright in 1919, as no other work has delved as deep or as comprehensively into the event. Another major contribution involves the complete picture of the First Red Scare this work provides. To date, no historian has covered the events of the entire First Red Scare in Oklahoma, a problem this thesis aims to rectify. The following pages expand on the literature by providing an in-depth look at this often neglected topic. It demonstrates how resources defined the state's experience during this time, and shows how countless Oklahomans became swept up in the nationwide frenzy and paranoia of the First Red Scare.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Over the last 90 years, various historians explained and evaluated the First Red Scare with differing levels of interpretation. Coverage from the academic community on the national level remains plentiful, with evolving critiques and explanations for why the event occurred. Beginning with Robert K. Murray's pioneering work in the 1950s, to the expanding themes of Kim Nielson in the 2000s, the wealth of literature and commentary on the topic has provided researches with a veritable treasure trove of interpretations, each one building off previous works. The historiography of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma remains a far different story. Most historians tend to focus on the agrarian and socialist movements of the state, and provide little coverage of the First Red Scare during this time period. This work will rectify this imbalance, and provide a thorough addition to the scarce literature on the topic in the state. It will also introduce the geographic element of resources, and how it played a key role in defining Oklahoma's Red Scare experience.

One of the first and most notable historians on the subject remains Robert K. Murray and his influential work *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920*. First published in 1955, Murray wrote at a time when McCarthyism was in full swing and fear of communism highly unpopular to criticize. In the book, he said that the First Red Scare served as an example of how easily excessive hate and intolerance could spread within a democratic nation, when fear and suspicion supplanted reason.[1] Murray explained that his reason for writing the book was to offer a full-length analysis of the Red Scare, of which he concluded was caused by wartime intolerance, postwar industrial unrest, the lack of statesman-like leadership, and an ill-fated quest for false normalcy. He also gave credit to the population for a fearful mentality, who apprehensively dreaded the

spread of the "Red Scourge" across the world.[2] Essentially, Murray's interpretation of the Red Scare as an overreaction fueled by intolerance, unrest, and paranoia became the standard among historians.

In 1978, Robert Goldstein challenged this viewpoint in his work *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to the Present*. He claimed that past historians were incorrect in downplaying the radical labor threat, essentially painting the First Red Scare as an irrational manifestation of general fears and tensions in American society. He concluded that, by downplaying this radical threat, often to point out the valid excesses of the period, most historians obscured the fact that there was a large upsurge in radicalism both within and outside the labor movement in 1919. To prove this, Goldstein cited that radicals within the American labor movement as a whole were making strong gains and proposing challenges to the very structure of American capitalism. Seen from this viewpoint, the author argued that the First Red Scare reaction was a rational response on the part of government and business elites who perceived the status quo as being threatened. Thus, the effect of the paranoia was to destroy these developing forces of radicalism, and when the destruction was substantially achieved, the panic ended.[3] Throughout the section on 1919-1920, Goldstein introduces the hefty gains made by labor movements and the need for a conservative response. He claimed that a measure of fear of radicalism had become engrained in the American psyche, prompting them to demanded action. The Red Scare effectively put an end to threats from socialists, radical labor, and communism, and in comparison to the brutal and similar repression in Czarist Russia, the author concluded that unlike in Russia, American repression actually worked.[4]

By 2000 Regin Schmidt also challenged the early literature on the subject when he published *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919-1943*. In the book he explores the connection of the FBI to the First Red Scare, and claimed that the institution entrenched itself in a political role during this time period. He builds on Murray's work, whom he cites as claiming that the Red Scare "made" the FBI and put it on the road to becoming the famous organization that it is today.[5] Schmidt, however, challenged the early literature on the topic, saying that the existing explanation that the event was caused by an irrational, mass-based hysteria deserves questioning. He refuted Murray, who compared the event to McCarthyism and attributed it to a bottom up, grassroots support for the drastic actions taken. This "consensus" school of thought dominated American historical thinking during the 1950s and 60s, and assumed that events and polices were supported by a consensus of Americans.[6]

Schmidt denied this, and instead stated that powerful economic and conservative groups exploited the already existing social conflicts, as the First Red Scare gave them an opportunity to promote their anti-radical campaigns for their own benefit. The author agreed with Goldstein's brief treatment of the topic where he mentioned government and business elites used the event to crush their opposition. Schmidt stated that these elitist interest groups served as the primary causes of anticommunist policies, and had a real reason to want to see an end to organized labor's influence. To that end, they helped initiate a propaganda campaign to discredit unions as subversive, Bolshevist, and alien to American values. Furthermore, the government knew of this campaign, and even utilized private detective agencies as labor spies to exaggerate the revolutionary threat posed by radicalism to frighten employers. The press too engaged in such practices to keep its

readership from its war-time highs when it reported on sensationalist stories. Schmidt concluded that the First Red Scare was an integrated part of a reactionary political campaign, created by businesses and their conservative allies aimed at destroying the power of organized labor and halt the growing government regulation of the economy.[7] The author certainly presents an arguable case for this, though he ignores important evidence in dismissing the mass hysteria aspect. Countless letters to legislators and actions by individuals and groups proved that citizens approved of the measures and even encouraged more action on the part of the government. The public truly feared Bolshevism, and to discount such influence in creating policy appears to dismiss the voluminous amounts of evidence to the contrary.

Diverging viewpoints continued to emerge, and in 2000, Kim E. Nielson published *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*. In this work, Nielson argued that gender was a primary component of Red Scare antiradicalism. Antifeminists during 1919-1920 saw radicalism as entangled in a web of economic, gender, sexual, and racial chaos, and successfully imbued much of the Red Scare sentiment with this belief.[8] The author completely rebuffed the idea that gender played no relevant role in the First Red Scare as many historians argued, and that because of this the phenomenon deserves a closer look. She claimed that antifeminists embraced the fear, and their political fervor helped sustain antiradicalism throughout the 1920s. From this viewpoint, the Red Scare did not end in 1920, instead continuing throughout the decade as conservative women attacked the work of progressives. These antifeminists were driven by a fear of gender, sexual, and political disorder that compelled them to lead activist lives. Nielson maintained that these women used the anxieties surrounding

Bolshevism, expansion of the state, social welfare programs, and peace efforts, to foster a political culture hostile to progressive female activists.[9] She concluded that gender remained at the core of how the United States lives, discusses patriotism, proper citizenship, and the needs of the nation.[10] Her work represents a fresh wave of discussion on the topic, as new historians incorporate gender and other elements into the discussion. Far from being quiet and staying at home, countless women did take part in the national events during the First Red Scare, and this book provides a glimpse into one faction that the author stated had a sizable impact on the propagation of fear during the period.

By the 2000's, an increasing number of historians continued to incorporate different elements into Red Scare historiography. A more recent publication from 2003, *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism, 1919-1923*, by Todd Pfannestiel, postulates that as events unfolded, repression became more focused, with education a key target. As targets changed, methods of repression also shifted from raids and arrests to subtle legal and legislative proceedings. Finally, Pfannestiel claimed that the Red Scare did not end in January 1920, but advanced until 1923, when shifting perceptions on civil liberties brought the event to its conclusion.[11] The author's work contributes another aspect overlooked by many, by introducing how authorities specifically targeted education to weed out undesirables. He disagreed with Schmidt, opting to go along with Murray's and a host of other historian's explanation that the First Red Scare involved a genuine panic from the public as the number of social issues came to a head after the war.[12]

Scientific racism, immigration, and anarchist movements would next be touched upon in the ever expanding approaches to the First Red Scare when Kenyon Zimmer

produced his doctoral dissertation over the subject in 2010. Zimmer focused on the topic in the United States covering the years 1885-1940. In his chapter over the First Red Scare period, he portrayed the activities of various Jewish, Italian, Russian, and other anarchist groups, and concluded that congress, during and after World War I, was motivated by a combination of nativism, scientific racism, and antiradicalism which signaled the death knell of anarchist movements by limiting immigration of Southern and Eastern Europeans. This struck at the very heart of the domestic anarchist movement, migration and working-class mobility, which caused the eventual withering away of immigrant anarchism.[13] Zimmer added to the historical debate by including specifically immigrant populations and their contributions to radical movements of the period. He agreed with Goldstein in stating that the gains by radicals motivated the government to take a action, eliminating the group as a threat. Interpretations of the First Red Scare have evolved from Murray's first publication to include a multitude of angles and incorporate a number of disciplines.

As the national historiography evolved, so too did interpretations of Oklahoma during the First Red Scare. One of the first major historians to touch upon the paranoia and fear during the time period in Oklahoma remains Angie Debo. Publishing *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* in 1943, she mentioned the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and vigilante actions taken by the ultra-nationalist Knights of Liberty in 1917. She explained that the war "increased the city's tumultuous spirit," and one midnight a group of Knights took members of the IWW from police custody to the edge of town, whipped, tarred, and feathered them, and ordered them to leave town. While she did not provide a value judgment on the action, her excerpt provides a valuable

early glimpse into a key resource producing area of the state and the growing fear that characterized much of the First Red Scare.[14]

Arrell Gibson painted a broader, yet still small picture of the events when he wrote *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries* in 1965. In the over 300 page work, Gibson utilized a scant paragraph in reviewing the chaotic events during Governor Robertson's administration. He merely mentioned the strike in McAlester, blamed by business interests on IWW agitation, and how it forced the governor to call out the national guard to Henreyetta, Coalgate, and McAlester. He later mentioned the declaration of martial law, and ended by stating that labor protests spread to railroads, building trades, and manufacturing plants. A brief portion focused on naming restrictive laws passed during this time, including criminal syndicalism legislation, the forbidding of flag desecration, and banning the teaching of foreign languages.[15] While small in scope, this work laid the groundwork for interpretations on the First Red Scare, providing evidence of the event's impact on the state for a broad audience.

By the 1970s, scholars would take a keener interest in the subject, increasing the depth of their research about the early years of the state. To that end, most focused solely on the socialist movement, and while not delving too deeply into events of the First Red Scare, provided important details about the foundations of fear that carried over into 1919-1920. Publishing in 1976, Garin Burbank wrote *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924* in an effort to explain the unique aspects of Oklahoma Socialism. Burbank specifically cited in his book that he came from a Marxist background, learning from British social historians, and analyzed throughout the work the events in Oklahoma from that viewpoint.[16]

Burbank appeared dismissive throughout his book of the Socialist Party, and stated that socialism was merely a transitory moment in the lives of tenant farmers, representing a brief period in time when people in squalid conditions responded to a radical doctrine of hopes and dreams.[17] The author first described the social setting, laying out the desperate conditions of the people living in the state. Afterwards, he chronicled the development of the party through its rise and fall, and ends with a discussion on how the group failed in Oklahoma, and its impact. Among his conclusions were that the Socialists in Oklahoma were not true party adherents, as they vacillated between varying degrees of intensity.[18] In covering the events of the First Red Scare, he provided little information regarding specific events, such as actions at Drumright or McAlester. Instead, he devoted time to speaking of the decline the post-war era caused upon the Socialist Party, stating that the failed Green Corn Rebellion and Red scare caused former supporters to fear for their safety.[19] In the end, he stated that both repression and prosperity ended up killing the Socialist Party. [20] His work represented a major achievement in the exploration of the leftist party in the state, with countless scholars owing their own work to his original book.

One of the first to build off Burbank was James Green, who produced his seminal work on the subject in 1978, titled *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895-1943*. Green expanded the overview to include Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, and said that previous histories had focused primarily on the decline of Socialism in the US. His study, however, explains not only the disasters, but carries the story through to the 1930s and focuses not on its decline, but on its growth in the years prior to World War I. Specifically, he focused on the relationship between

populism and socialism, a relationship he saw as ignored in previous accounts.[21] He illustrated the spirit of the southwestern socialist movement, describing it as one of combined anger and optimism, motivated by feelings of both hate and hope. As he put it, the Socialists "were terribly angry with the 'parasites' who denied the 'producers' the full reward for their honest toil,' but they were also amazingly hopeful about the possibility of creating a new society in their own lifetimes.'"[22] Green defined the first Red Scare as occurring in the fall of 1917, with severe action taken against the IWW and other radical labor movements, eventually leading to the destruction of the Socialist party in eastern Oklahoma. [23] In a later section exclusively titled "Red Scare," the author spent four pages discussing the events of 1919 to early 1920. Briefly addressing the coal strike, he mentioned how the governor of Oklahoma declared martial law and acted decisively against all unions, especially those with radical members. He discussed the red flag ban, as well as the criminal syndicalism laws, aimed primarily at the IWW. Green did include in his book a mention of the telephone workers' strike in Drumright, explaining the details of Robertson sending in the national guard against "radical oil workers," who, as the author stated, had reportedly disarmed the sheriff and mayor and threatened them with lynching.[24] This inclusion of expanded information on Drumright, while brief, portrayed an early interpretation of the event that would stand unchallenged for several decades. Together with Burbank, Green's work would stand as the second of two pillars in the history of socialism in the state, though still the gap remained in discussing with great detail the First Red Scare in Oklahoma.

By the 1982, James Scales and Danney Goble published their influential work, *Oklahoma Politics: A History*. This book covered the political history of the state from

territory days through the 1970s, and provided a comprehensive look at the rise and fall of political factions, governors, and issues facing the state. The two dedicated their book to Angie Debo, whom they called Oklahoma's greatest historian, and who brought the two together on the project. The book spends several pages discussing the fear building during World War I leading into the First Red Scare, portraying instances such as the Green Corn Rebellion and Tulsa Outrage in disparaging tones, making note of the overreaction of vigilantes in dealing with the IWW. Governor Robertson's actions during the First Red Scare in 1919 comprise around a one-and-a-half pages, with the authors stating surprisingly little about the Drumright telephone operator's strike. The book simply stated that the governor detected the hand of the IWW in the strike, and so called out the National Guard to allay the fear of the townspeople.[25]

Scales earlier wrote of the strike in his 1949 PhD dissertation, providing arguably the first historical work on the subject. This would later form the basis for his partnership with Goble in writing *Oklahoma Politics*. The information in the thesis provided much the same information, stating that purported actions of the IWW provoked Robertson to act. Similarly, in his dissertation he showed important details of the strike, and offered a negative commentary on the governor stating that he showed "debatable judgment" in his handling of the situation.[26] In their later book, Scales and Goble maintained that Robertson used heavy-handed repressive legislation and military powers in an effort to steer the Democratic party away from radicalism. They devoted half a paragraph to the coal mining strike, and spend the next chapter discussing the political landscape of Oklahoma during the 1920s, presenting little else on the First Red Scare.[27] While brief, their inclusion of events during the Red Scare, as well as admitting that the governor

overreacted to events, provided a clear historical interpretation of the event. While going along with the mainstream national historiography dating back to Murray, that told of the event as a paranoid induced reaction, Scales ad Goble still provided an early history of the event in Oklahoma.

In 1986, John Thompson penned the next important work discussing radicalism in the state with *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma, 1889-1923*. In his work, the author argued that Oklahomans who loathed capitalism but lacked political awareness and more thoughtful radicals worked together to gain control of the political system before corporate powers could become entrenched. Similarly, he stated that the northern and western prairie outgrew its frontier status eclipsing the southern and eastern portions of the state developmentally. He concluded that in the south and east an especially violent, "almost primitive" radicalism grew beside a modest yet dignified Socialist ideology.[28] Thompson appeared to be the first historian to address major geographic themes in his publication, as he addresses the disparity between regions giving rise to different forms of radical activity. He maintained that Oklahomans' political ideologies came from a legacy of cultures and socioeconomic systems introduced to the wilderness and altered by the frontier, and that one needed to give nature credit. He maintained that the effects of formidable natural forces, especially the weather, had the power to dwarf the influence of established cultural and economic practices.

He eventually concluded that the frontier period of Oklahoma included a number of paradoxes, involving communalism and individualism, materialism and idealism, tolerance and bigotry, cosmopolitanism and provincialism, and humanitarianism and violence in both advancing and destroying political radicalism.[29] Thompson later

explained that the Green Corn Rebellion and political repression after the war illustrated a tragic phenomenon. Essentially, as the state matured, pressure to conform increased, and local leaders along with ambitious farmers and workers feared Oklahoma's radical reputation would hinder investment and prevent the state from "outgrowing its 'colonial status."[30] Thompson attempted to rebuff the dismissive attitudes towards Oklahoma socialism espoused by Burbank and Green. Rather than a simple "transitory moment," he claimed "the fact that the populists, the socialists and the neopopulists were crushed, dispersed, and, for the most part, forgotten should not, however, tarnish the memory of their brief battle."[31] Essentially, Thompson offered a far more positive outlook on the movement, and while spending but a little time on the early Red Scare, he outlined his argument on how the frontier and the geographic environment helped shape the leftist movements.

Thompson specifically set himself in open disagreement with Burbank and Green, dismissing their claims about the lack of authenticity among Oklahoma socialists. While covering little over the First Red Scare, the author cements himself as an opponent of the two major interpreters of Oklahoma socialism.

This growing trend of inclusion and reinterpretation continued with Steve Sewell, who in 1997 published arguably the most complete account of the coal mining strike in Oklahoma up to that time. His article, entitled "Painted Red: The Coal Strike of 1919," provided a comprehensive look on the overreaction of Governor Robertson to the strike, and detailed the history, motivations, and outcomes for the major parties involved. Sewell held that the coal miners, who maintained legitimate demands, became swept up in the broad-brush assault on the nation's radicals. He concluded that "the nation was so

consumed by the paranoia associated with the Red Scare that a strike over wage rates frozen for two years became an attempt to topple the government in the eyes of many officials." He called Robertson's actions heavy-handed and ill conceived, and stated that the governor was hardly alone in his belief in a Bolshevik conspiracy.[32] Sewell skillfully portrayed the events in light of the rampant hysteria of the time, and produced the definitive work on the subject. The author agreed with the majority of historians on the First Red Scare about the overreaction on the government's part, so the interpretation remains nothing new. However, by his inclusion of the Oklahoma aspect to the nationwide coal strike, a topic never covered in such depth before, he provides a strong and detailed account of the First Red Scare in the state.

By the 1990s, new historians examined a greater array of topics from Oklahoma during this time period. One of these, Nigel Sellars, provided the most extensive research on Wobblies in Oklahoma ever to come out. In his 1998 publication, *Oil, Wheat, & Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930*, he decried mainstream historians and their neglect of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW; Wobblies) in the state. He maintained that the IWW's presence in the Oklahoma oil fields led directly to the massive state and federal efforts to prosecute and break the union completely, which was a central event in the IWW's history. He also sought to place the otherwise nameless rank and file Wobblies and their activities at the center of events. He stated that "although previous studies have focused on more colorful and highly publicized events such as mass strikes, free-speech fights, and high-profile trials, Wobblies were rarely made at such levels. They were made in the harvest fields and the pipeline camps and their fates were determined not in federal conspiracy trials but by

hostile townspeople, local laws against vagrancy and street speaking, and state criminal syndicalism laws."[33]

The book devotes extensive time to the destruction of the radical organization during the First Red Scare, especially during the years 1918-20. Sellers primarily focused on the legal methods utilized by the government, armed with the criminal syndicalism laws, to indict the beleaguered union members. He provided several sentences on the Drumright affair, which he implicitly called an overreaction on the governor's part. He concluded that Robertson had falsely implicated the IWW, and upon sending in the national guard, found the town quiet. There is some confusion when he stated that the police arrested eighteen persons on charges of riot but later dropped the cases.[34] One individual, Ed Welch, was actually brought to trial and found guilty of inciting riot, though he denied membership in the IWW. Sellars also mentioned the McAlester strike, again attributing it to overreaction from the governor who based his information on false reports.[35] While brief, the author offers his own conclusions about the two events rather than stating them as a matter-of-fact, and provides an alternative viewpoint to two instances glossed over by most historians. He also placed himself squarely against Green and Burbank, who gave little credence to the effect of radicals in Oklahoma. Whereas they argued that such organizations in Oklahoma were either deficient, transitory, or had little impact nationwide, Sellars maintained that the defeat of the IWW in Oklahoma was a major event that went a long way towards ending the movement nationwide. Sellars stood among the growing number of historians who refuted Burbank and Green, and offer alternative looks at the different aspects of Oklahoma during the early 1900s.

By 1999, the tide appeared to turn further against Green and Burbank. Jim Bissett similarly lent his voice to this growing cacophony when he published *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside 1904-1920*. At the outset, the author attempted to distance himself from Green, Burbank, and even Thompson. While mentioning his indebtedness to them for their scholarly work, he argued that categorizing the socialist movement in Oklahoma as fatally flawed and less legitimate was a mistake. He maintained that Burbank teetered close to outright distrust of the movement, as he called into question its own validity. He cited that Green provided a less disparaging interpretation of the leftist movement, but nonetheless held that Oklahoma socialists were only successful because they were "such good pupils" from outside experts and "real Socialists."[36] Bissett claimed the crucial difference between his work and those before him lay in the idea that socialists were no less legitimate than those from other states, and did not need to remake themselves into the party image from Milwaukee or New York. Instead the author attempted to show the unique qualities of Oklahoma that enabled citizens to mount an organized, effective movement to further the socialist cause, drawing on a critical mass of talented social activists who understood how to win political battles[37] He ended his pronouncement by stating that the root of these false claims about Oklahoma lay in a "thinly veiled anti-agrarian bias."[38]

Bissett's treatment of the events leading up to the First Red Scare appeared thorough, with ample time given to the buildup of the IWW, the Green Corn Rebellion, Unions, and the anti-radicalism that spread into Oklahoma. Unfortunately, he made no mention of the actual events in places such as Drumright and McAlester, or of Governor Robertson's harsh reactions. Throughout his book he did provide a balanced and even

favorable viewpoint of leftist movements without the condescending attitudes of previous historians. Still, the book's focus did not cover the events, and for the time being Sewell's work would stand as the only major publication on events during the First Red Scare in Oklahoma.

In 2002, a major scholarly work went back to the agrarian side of Oklahoma when Kurt Lively wrote his PhD dissertation on a history of farm tenancy in Oklahoma from 1890-1950. He said that the story of Oklahoma farm tenancy remained largely untold, and concluded that the practice ultimately succumbed to an increasingly entrepreneurial world by the 1940s.[39] Lively held that tenant farmers in Oklahoma exerted greater influence on policy than those in southern states, especially through the Socialist Party, of which the author held was more influential than in any other state. He maintained that the alliance between labor and farmers, created to combat similar perceived enemies, faltered as the two groups were too different. Essentially, labor wished to reform capitalism, while farmers desired to harness it and gain a larger share of wealth.[40] The author discussed the failure of Socialism in the World War I period, stating that its opposition to the war, coupled with the general prosperity and rising commodity prices undermined their platform, effectively making it unpopular to be a member in the party.[41] The thesis offers valuable commentary on one of the groups most prone to leftist and radical activity and provides a thorough history of its existence. Lively maintains a viewpoint on the Red Scare similar to mainstream historians, and while not devoting much time to the event, he does provide a thorough analysis of tenant farming, building on Green and Burbank's earlier work.

In the 21st century, new historians continually incorporated different aspects into Oklahoma history with increasing frequency. Topics such as gender, feminism, race, and other issues previously ignored appeared on the forefront of early 1900s Oklahoma historiography. In 2004, Bonnie Lynn-Sherow exemplified this when she wrote *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory*. This work expanded on the territorial studies done on Oklahoma before it became a state. She included in her book the important contributions of geography, specifically the environmental and cultural transformation that transformed the state.[42] She examined three county settlements as case studies in the territory's ecological and social development, and provided answers to several questions: how different peoples changed the landscape, how the simplification of the agricultural economy affected the human population, and who benefited or suffered from the mythology of opportunity.[43] Her inclusion of geographic elements amidst the racial makeup, and how this altered the ecological and agricultural landscape provided a unique look at Oklahoma's pre-state history, showing that historians could incorporate a greater breadth of interdisciplinary methods than previously used. While noting nothing on the Red Scare, her inclusion of different themes demonstrated the changing face of historiography of the state, and how historians increasingly used these themes.

That same year in 2004, Suzanne Schrems published another unique look at the different aspects of the state with *Who's Rocking the Cradle? Women Pioneers of Oklahoma Politics From Socialism to the KKK, 1900-1930*. Only four years after Nielson's work on anti-feminists, Schrems provided a counterbalance by exploring the role of radical feminists during this volatile period in Oklahoma history. Her main goal in writing was to add to the historiography of women in politics, including conservative

women in the discussion of women's political culture in the early twentieth century. She also stated that discussing roots of women's political philosophy aids in understanding many positions that divide women in the current day.[44] Throughout the book, she portrayed activist women that helped spread the gospel of socialism. Through their efforts, women on the left organized and became an important force in supporting issues including the right to vote, fighting against corruption, and improve conditions of men, women, and children within the state. She characterized the First Red Scare period as one that introduced instability and worry, especially among the political parties that saw the 1920 election up for grabs. This encouraged the parties to actively court women, who now had the right to vote, and who had a new opportunity to contribute to the political process.[45] The author claimed that as men positioned their parties along conservative lines in reaction to reform legislation, women continued to champion progressive ideals that remained unpopular in the political climate of the First Red Scare.[46] Schrems' covers little in the way of major events during the First Red Scare, instead focusing on the election of 1920 and how women mobilized to effect change through the electoral process. Her work on gender history and feminism during the time period provided a solid illustration of how historians had evolved to include a broader range of concepts, and how that evolution impacted Oklahoma historians as well.

Overall, the general feeling among historians towards the First Red Scare tended to state that the war heightened anti-radical sentiment among the population, with socialists and unions being lumped together in with the dangerous element of society. Wherever a labor dispute or act against the government occurred, authorities labeled it a revolt against the state and linked it to Bolshevik influences. The first major

interpretation on the national level came from Robert Murray, whose ideas on how the US overreacted to a panic in a misguided attempt to refocus its war-time patriotism and paranoia remained the cornerstone of Red Scare interpretation for decades. Slowly, historians challenged this viewpoint, with some claiming that businesses and elite interests manufactured the event to rid themselves of radical problems, and that the populace held no direct involvement or effect on the process. Murray's work, while the oldest, remains the most reliable interpretation of Red Scare events. While others are correct to include other disciplines and viewpoints to the scholarship, the discounting of the genuine popular support and encouragement of the Red Scare seems misplaced. Despite business and government clearly wishing to crush their opponents in labor, laying the blame solely on those entities as prime movers in the crisis is an oversimplification. From research gathered during this project, the population dramatically supported and encouraged harsh action, even suggesting harsher action than what the government already carried out. Thus, Murray's book remains a strong foundation for Red Scare scholarship, but future researchers that exclude important elements, laying blame definitively on one group should remain cautious. As the historiography evolved however, so too did the topics covered, from gender history to geography.

The same could be said of Oklahoma historiography. The two primary interpretations came from Burbank and Green, though they offered little in the way of Red Scare commentary. Most historians primarily wrote of Oklahoma during the period in terms of the socialist movement and its agrarian aspects. This changed slightly with Sewell, who wrote a major account of the state during the crisis, though little has been

done before or since. Sewell's article remains a key interpretation of the Red Scare in Oklahoma, at last giving credence a portion of the event that many ignored for too long. The scope of research, similar to the national historians, has come to include gender, geography, Marxism, and a whole host of previously neglected viewpoints, serving to enrich the material on the era. Despite this, no single work has touched upon the First Red Scare in Oklahoma with attention to detail, and this work seeks to fill that void. The following chapters will cover the foundations laid that gave rise to the Red Scare mentality, as well as the major events of 1919-1920. The Drumright strike and later the coal strike serve as the major chapters of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma, and will show, along with the rest of the work, that the main impetus behind the radical activity lay in the resources possessed by the state. The labor activity within Oklahoma centered around the major industries of coal mining and oil production, allowing for a wholly unique Red Scare experience, different from other states in the union. By the end, this study will provide an in-depth look into the major occurrences that made up the First Red Scare in Oklahoma, linking events to resources, and finally fill in a chapter of Oklahoma's history that historians have overlooked for far too long.

[1] Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), ix.

[2] Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), ix, 15.

[3] Robert Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: 1870 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1978), 139.

[4] Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 163.

[5] Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919-1943* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000), 18.

[6] Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 32.

[7] Schmidt, *Red Scare*, 34-40.

[8] Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Anti-feminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 10.

[9] Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Anti-feminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 4-5.

[10] Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Anti-feminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001), 139.

[11] Todd Pfannestiel, *Rethinking the Red Scare: The Lusk Committee and New York's Crusade Against Radicalism, 1919-1923* (New York: Routledge, 2003), xii.

[12] Pfannestiel, *Rethinking the Red Scare*, 9.

[13] Kenyon Zimmer, "The Whole World is Our Country": Immigration and Anarchism in the United States, 1885-1940" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2010), 356.

[14] Angie Debo, *Tulsa: From Creek Town to Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943), 101.

[15] Arrell Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 213-14.

[16] Garin Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), xii.

[17] Garin Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976), 189.

[18] Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red*, xv.

[19] Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red*, 127.

[20] Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red*, 128.

[21] James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), xii.

[22] Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, xxi.

[23] Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 375.

[24] Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 394.

[25] James R. Scales and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 95.

[26] James Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma, 1907-1949" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1949), 206-7.

[27] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 95.

[28] John Thompson, *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma,, 1899-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 10.

[29] John Thompson, *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma,, 1899-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 11-12, 16.

[30] John Thompson, *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma,, 1899-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 192.

[31] John Thompson, *Closing the Frontier: Radical Response in Oklahoma,, 1899-1923* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 226.

[32] Steven Sewell, "Painted Red: The Coal Strike of 1919," *Chronicles of* Oklahoma 75 (Summer 1997): 161, 78.

[33] Nigel Anthony Sellars. *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905-1930* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 12.

[34] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies*, 127.

[35] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies*, 127.

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[36] Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside: 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), xiv-v.

[37] Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America,* 4.

[38] Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America,* xv.

[39] Kurt Lively, "Where the Great Plains and South Collide: A History of Farm Tenancy in Oklahoma, 1890-1950" (PhD diss., Oklahoma State University, 2002), 19-20.

[40] Lively, "Where the Great Plains and South Collide," 177.

[41] Lively, "Where the Great Plains and South Collide," 183.

[42] Bonnie Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth: Race and Agriculture in Oklahoma Territory* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 3.

[43] Lynn-Sherow, *Red Earth*, 7.

[44] Suzanne Schrems, *Who's Rocking the Cradle? Women Pioneers of Oklahoma Politics From Socialism to the KKK, 1900-1930* (Norman, OK: Horse Creek Publications, Inc., 2004), v.

[45] Schrems, *Who's Rocking the Cradle*, 35-6.

[46] Schrems, *Who's Rocking the Cradle*, 63.

Chapter 2: Oklahoma and the Nation, 1907-1919

Resources played a key role in shaping politics and popular opinion on a host of issues since the state's inception, with agriculture forming the backbone of early labor disputes. The First Red Scare would greatly magnify hostilities over resources, striking hard in the mining and oil producing regions. The unrest that contributed to the event had early beginnings in Oklahoma history however, with foundations laid during its formative years. Disputes emerged as tenant farmers numbering in the thousands relocated to the state. By 1910, these landless farmers outnumbered landed farmers for the first time. Tenants did not own the land they worked on, and remained enslaved to the whims of owners who forced many to raise cotton, a commodity suffering from low prices in the South.[1] This struggle over control of resources and who would reap the benefits played into increasing tensions between owners and producers, cementing the struggle that would epitomize much of the First Red Scare. This harsh economic reality attracted a strong network of Socialist Party representatives to the state, with many farmers turning to the organization in desperation. Political leaders could only react with alarm at the growing popularity of the leftist movement. By 1917, coupled with national and state events, the World War I induced hyper-patriotism and growing fear of communist expansion provided politicians and wary citizens with a weapon to finally dismantle the anti-war Socialist Party in Oklahoma. Socialist aims for land reform and better control of resources were at once halted. These events directly laid the foundations for the First Red Scare, introducing a dark legacy of fear and repression that continued well into 1920.

Hearing of the dire conditions in the state, champions of the socialist cause quickly appeared on the landscape. They first arrived in the state in 1901, fielding

candidates for political office in the territory. They gradually increased their electoral success by producing a strong outreach program tailored to the needs of Oklahomans.[2] By appealing to the agricultural and religious background of the people, they managed to create a considerable amount of enthusiasm for the Socialist Party, a fact that proved a key element in the unprecedented election of 1914 where the Party's candidate for governor achieved second place. The German-born immigrant Oscar Ameringer proved vital in the spread of the movement's popularity. He started out as a trade unionist and spent portions of his life organizing labor organizations under socialist principles. He saw the deplorable conditions of the rural population, and was amazed when they flocked to hear his socialist message. As he put it, "these people had trudged in soaking rain… to hear a socialist speech… this indescribable aggregation of moisture, steam, dirt, rags, unshaven men, slatternly women and fretting children were farmers!"[3] He also said that "the Oklahoma farmers' living standard was so far below that of the sweatshop workers of the New York east side before the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and International Ladies' Garment Workers Unions had mopped up that human cesspool, that comparison could not be thought of."[4] He further described the desperation in uncompromising terms:

> I saw youngsters emaciated by hookworms, malnutrition, and pellagra, who had lost their second teeth before they were twenty years old. I saw tottering old male wrecks with the infants of their fourteen-year-old wives on their laps. I saw a white man begging a Choctaw squaw man who owned the only remaining spring in that neighborhood to let him have credit for a few buckets of water for his thirsty family. I saw humanity at its lowest possible level of degradation and decay.[5]

The Socialists' quest for improving the lives of the state's lowest citizens drew criticism from the *Oklahoman* who called the crusade for better wages a ploy by aging bums or mercenaries who did not want to work.[6]

Despite early condemnation, Socialists continually gained ground against both Democrats and Republicans throughout the beginning of the 1900s. During the 1910 election, they achieved over 24,000 votes. In the 1912 election, their votes swelled to over 41,000, an increase of almost 50 percent and over 16 percent of the total votes cast.[7] Socialists enjoyed considerable support from western counties, with leftist agitation attempting inroads in resource rich counties in the east.[8] With the rise in popularity, the party became increasingly militant. During the 1914 election season, the Socialist candidate for governor from McAlester, Fred Holt, unleashed his attack on capitalism and started his campaign in earnest that May. Holt, a local district organizer for the nationwide union United Mine Workers (UMW), had even run for Congress in 1912.[9] Pat Nagle, popular with the farming class, served as the party's nomination for senator.[10]

The size of Socialist popularity seemed inevitable. Dedicated and methodical proponents of the ideology, such as Patrick Nagle, Oscar Ameringer, and others, worked tirelessly in the agrarian regions of rural Oklahoma. Focusing primarily among tenant farmers, these organizers advocated systematic education rather than emotional agitation, and well-spoken lecturers stirred within the poverty-stricken population a need for opposition to what they saw as a ruthless and exploitative capitalist system.[11] The social and cultural alienation of the rural poor provided a void for socialism to fill, and that in doing so, the Socialist Party "was nothing less than a massive social movement to reconstruct the shattered social order of the countryside.[12] Working along with the party were the various unions that promoted improved conditions for its members.

Labor organizations remained an old and strong institution in the state, with the first doses coming from the Knights of Labor who immigrated to the territory in 1889.

Under the Haskell administration from 1907-11, the Socialists enjoyed an alliance with the Democratic Party, producing progressive oriented legislation during this time. Under the following one term governorship of Lee Cruce however, the alliance began to fracture.[13] The situation for tenant farmers, the key base of the Socialist Party, devolved to alarming levels of desperation. According to the 1910 census, tenants operated 47,250 farms in the state, while by 1920, the number rose to 104,137. Only 46,889 were free of mortgage debt, signaling a crisis in Oklahoma's farming community that would propel the Socialists to even greater heights of popularity.[14] This appears evident in one story among thousands that surfaced during the time period. A farmer recalled how he sold his cotton crop in 1905, and upon arrival in town looked for a reasonable buyer. The streets of the town were crowded with harvesters and men referred to as "street buyers" who brought together buyers and sellers. These agents, employed by local merchants, walked from wagon to wagon naming their price to each farmer for their crop. Their primary function, as employees of the merchants, was to drive the price of the commodity down as low as possible. When the farmer went to another purchaser, the price for their crop would be lower than the one before. Upon returning to the previous buyer, the price would be lowered yet again. After selling their product, farmers had to purchase supplies, usually from the same merchant who hired the street buyers.[15] The control of resources remained the key issue, and farmers became caught up in a system that appeared rigged against them, perpetuating their eternal poverty with no hope of escape. In their desperation, many turned to the Socialist Party, forming a large base of support and providing clout for the organization's platform.

Socialist demands followed the typical pattern laid out by Eugene Debs. Local organizations advocated public management of the banking system, governmental regulation of food, drugs, medicines, and clothing, national control of education and certification of teachers, government ownership of the railroads and other public utilities, strict regulation of petroleum production and cotton gin operations, public warehouses, currency expansion, abolition of middlemen in trade, a federal real estate exchange, a parcel post system, and taxation of churches. Oklahoma Socialists also asked for stricter controls over public accounts and the abolition of state control over city and county governments.[16] These requests saw support across a wide swath of the population and contributed to its growing popularity in time for the upcoming election of 1914.

As the state entered a heated campaign season, the unpredictable politics of the state created a perfect storm that saw the Socialist Party achieve its most impressive electoral success in Oklahoma history. The Democratic primary introduced a cacophony of individuals jockeying for the governorship, including Supreme Court Commissioner JBA Robertson, of Chandler.[17] The commissioner failed in his bid, as voters noted his lack of credentials in forming the original state government, his non-Southern heritage, and the backing of the unpopular and nearly impeached former Governor Lee Cruce.[18] The Democrats in this election represented a conservative mindset to the issues that beset the state while the Republican nominee showcased a progressive streak. The eventual Republican candidate for governor, John Fields, campaigned on the slogan "a cow, a sow, and a hen on every farm."[19] The Democrats eventually chose Robert L. Williams as their nominee, with the slogan "We will win with Williams."[20] The Socialists ran Fred Holt as their gubernatorial nominee and appeared poised to make considerable gains in

the election. One historian pointed out "the entire Democratic ticket in Oklahoma were running scared in 1914."[21] On voting day in November, Fred Holt, received 52,703 votes, roughly 21 percent of the total votes cast.[22] He maintained a strong showing in Marshall county, receiving over 40 percent of the vote, and also made an impressive showing in twenty-eight other counties placing either first or second.[23] More than 175 Socialists assumed local and county offices, with six sent to the state legislature after the election: five successful house members from western counties (Beckham, Dewey, Kiowa, Major, and Roger Mills), and one senator from the Beckham-Ellis-Roger Mills-Dewey district.[24] In both the third and seventh districts, the Socialists ran second to the Democrats, and ran close races in other districts, with Republicans narrowly beating them out.[25] The Socialist Party showed itself to be an earnest contender for the number two spot in state politics, positioning itself as the Democrats' main rival in many instances marginalizing the Republican Party. The Socialists, while achieving their largest success in state history, effectively divided the vote for the party in power, propelling Williams to power as the third governor of Oklahoma in January 1915.

The election of 1914 would remain the zenith of the party's power in the state. The fear and paranoia induced by World War I and the First Red Scare provided ultra-patriotic and anti-communist forces an opportunity to deal a fatal blow to the movement, crippling its organization in the state and across the nation. Later, as agricultural prices rebounded, the resource aspect slowly disappeared as a draw to join the party. Regardless, the 1914 victory, as one historian put it, proved "the last great effort of an agrarian movement of general strength, as the inheritors of the Populist tradition rallied for a last concerted assault on privilege before the World War intervened."[26] This

achievement set itself at odds with the populace in the post-war era, but for now, Socialists looked forward to their promised bright future. Within the state, they effectively fostered campaigns of education and recruitment, establishing summer Socialist encampments that allowed rural farming families to assemble and hear lessons on economic theory.[27] Prominent speakers from across the country came, including Eugene Debs, Walter Thomas Mills, Kate Richards O'Hare, and Caroline Low.[28] In 1914, one group of Socialists even organized an entire 278-acre community in western LeFlore, with offers of $50 lots at $5 a month offered to party adherents.[29] Several papers served as proponents of the party advocating their platform, such as the *Oklahoma Pioneer* and *Appeal to Reason*, with countless local outlets setting up their own dailies to increase party popularity**.** With the rise in attention, political leaders realized that the Socialist Party posed a serious threat to their success.

Politicians attempted to halt the advance of socialism, and incoming Governor Williams prepared himself to remove much of the momentum of their party by instituting several reforms. Offering a concession to labor, he reduced the hours women worked, an issue vetoed by Cruce two years prior.[30] He also passed welfare laws to protect widows and children, with the afflicted group receiving $10 a month out of a fund from each county which could receive no more than $8,000 a year.[31] Similarly, he created a $10 a month pension fund for Confederate veterans, which paled in comparison to the federal grant to Union veterans. The governor spearheaded legislation to regulate warehouses, bring cotton gins within the category of public utilities, and extend school land leases for five years. These measures, while seemingly progressive, showcased little more than a token effort to, as Democratic legislators explained, act as a "counterweight to

Socialism."[32] The growing fear of the party establishment against the increasing might of the Socialists appeared a legitimate one, as the far-leftists appeared poised to expand as rapidly as it had done in previous years.

Democrats continued to fear for their viability, and soon faced a serious crisis. In 1915 the United States Supreme Court annulled Oklahoma's grandfather clause, a major hindrance to equal voting rights for blacks. This unleashed a flurry of panic, as a proposed coalition of blacks, Republicans and Socialists threatened Democratic supremacy.[33] In response Governor Williams convened a special session of the legislature in January 1916. Lawmakers proposed an amendment to replace the grandfather clause, leaving in a literacy test for voting. This would also limit voters among the poor white population, many of whom were illiterate. A second measure proposed to amend election law forcing ineligible citizens from 1914 to register between April 30 and May 11, or be barred forever from voting. Republicans and Socialists combined their efforts, and after a special election ballot helped defeat the amendment. [34] Socialists achieved a small victory, and looked forward to continued electoral success.

With the arrival of the First World War however, the tide against socialism in the state and nationwide would irrevocably change, signaling a continual spiral into the realm of paranoia and persecution involving resources, radicals, labor, and business. These actions would lead directly into the First Red Scare, providing a basis for the overreaction and fear that characterized the event. In 1917, the United States declared war on the Central Powers, thus entering the great conflict among European nations. The Oklahoma government, eager to prove itself as a loyal state, initiated a strident campaign of liberty bond sales and military recruitment. With the upheaval in the international system,

Oklahomans increasingly saw anti-war and anti-government sentiments, often linked with socialism, as tantamount to treason. This required oversight and punishment and to that end, the Williams administration created an Oklahoma State Council of Defense headed by J.M. Aydelotte.[35] The government placed local community leaders in charge of the individual county branches, who promoted educating the civilian population on their duties during wartime. The council also evolved to include persecution of seditious activities, vigilantism, and terror. The targets of these acts invariably included the Socialist Party in Oklahoma, as it took a prominent anti-war stance.[36]

An unprecedented wave of paranoia swept across the state and nation against any seen as aiding the enemy or standing against the country's war effort. The government tolerated the hysteria and even encouraged elements of it, as it aided in the suppression of radical elements in society. This attitude formed an early basis of the Red Scare mentality after the war's conclusion. Certain citizens often wrote letters to the governor, suggesting that the war provided an "irresistible opportunity" to discredit and destroy the socialist movement.[37] Further displaying the growing sentiment that opposition to the war equaled treason, Oklahoma congressman Dick T. Morgan proclaimed that all patriotic Americans needed to purchase liberty bonds, claiming that “We will be derelict in our duty as citizens of this Republic if we do not respond to the appeal of the President.”[38] Such calls for Americanism and persecution of supposed disloyalty played a major role in destroying the Socialist Party nationwide.

To its detriment amidst the patriotic fervor, the organization attempted to take a platform of non-interference and pacifism in the war. According to one pamphlet, “If we send an armed force to the battlefields of Europe, its cannon will mow down the masses

of the German people and not the Imperial German government. Our entrance into the European conflict at this time will serve only to multiply the horrors of the war….”[39] The piece went on to state that the American working class had no quarrel with the German working class, and that they branded the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world.”[40] Early manifestations of fear and paranoia gripped the nation, and various newspapers portrayed socialists in alarming tones. The *Oklahoman* reprinted stories from other states highlighting the group's so-called deviancy. In one instance, the title of a headline was “Socialists Defy City Ordinance,” with the main article covering how an organizer was arrested while addressing a group of people, in violation of a new ordinance requiring a permit from the mayor to conduct street speeches.[41] Other incriminating headlines included “Socialist Fought Liberty Bond Sales,” with a story of how Socialist leaders were indicted for printing an advertisement in their paper urging readers not to buy liberty bonds. [42] A major blow against the Socialists occurred later as the public linked them with a local draft riot that threatened to spread to Washington, DC.

In August 1917, with threats of communism looming on the horizon, Oklahoma experienced its own event that represented a crushing blow to the socialist movement and the growing fear against radicalism. That month, local draft-rioters attempted to organize a march on Washington, DC. These individuals revolted against a war they believed was not their fight. Previously, in June of that year, state officials expected 215,000 Oklahomans to register for the draft, in accordance with the Conscription Act. Less than half that number did so with 72 percent of those registered claiming exemption to avoid military service.[43] The locations with the heaviest cotton farming, and the lowest levels of

development, principally in the south and the east, experienced the highest levels of disturbances during this time. In Okmulgee County, members of the Working Class Union (WCU) dynamited a local town's water works, while in Seminole County, a letter written by a local told of an imminent uprising of farmers that would destroy the town, and, being fully armed and numbering in the hundreds, would resist until death conscription.[44]

On August 3, an estimated 1,000 armed members of the WCU convened in southeastern counties along the South Canadian River in a planned march on Washington to force an end to the draft. Along the way, they would gather followers and sabotage transportation and communication lines to inhibit authorities' implementation of recruitment. They planned on living off the land, feasting on ripening corn in the fields, thus giving rise to the rebellion's name. Within three days, local authorities and posse members rounded up suspects and virtually destroyed the rebellion before it began.[45] Evidence of the dangers of the coup quickly surfaced, as investigators found hidden caches of dynamite, strychnine, and weapons. Officials arrested 450 alleged members of the conspiracy, causing *Harlow's Weekly* to respond that this sampling represented only a small fraction of the true numbers of trouble-makers. The major result of the rebellion was that government authorities and the public would associate all Socialists with this act, and suppression soon became systematic. By the end of the war, authorities jailed many of the major Socialist leaders in the state, including Fred Holt. The party's dues-paying membership went down to 65 percent, essentially resulting in its destruction from the war-related persecution.[46] That very same persecution continued after the war. With no main enemy to focus its attention on, the paranoia-induced suppression instead would

turn its head towards labor disturbances centered around resource production, magnifying countless cases into Bolshevik inspired coups. By war's end, however, the state turned towards electing a new governor. This new administration would play the largest part in magnifying the Red Scare hysteria, overreacting and hyping a number of labor disputes across the state, eventually calling out the national guard more times than any government in Oklahoma history.

As the war reached its bloody conclusion in 1918 the state went to the polls to elect a new governor, Democrat JBA Robertson. Supported by oilmen in the east, Robertson easily won the contest, defeating his rival Horace G. McKeever 104,132 to 82,865.[47] Thanks to the crushing effect of war paranoia and government actions against the Party, Socialist candidate Pat Nagle received a paltry 7,438 votes. Robertson, the first governor elected from the former Oklahoma Territory, was born on a farm in Iowa in 1871. He arrived in Oklahoma in 1893, and settled in Chandler teaching school, working as a section hand, raising cotton on a tenant farm, and studying law.[48] He eventually found employment on the district bench, which propelled him to membership in the State Capitol Commission and he later became Supreme Court Commissioner under Cruce for three years. He failed at attaining membership in congress, but remained active in countless extra-political organizations including the Knights of Pythias, Elks, Modern Woodmen of the World, the Freemasons, and was a regular member of the Episcopal Church.[49] Upon assuming office and in his first message to the legislature in 1919, he pointedly stated that “Oklahoma is no longer the baby state; we have passed the day of swaddling clothes, and have donned the habiliments of full grown manhood.”[50] And like any man seeking to prove their worth to their elder, Robertson sought to put Oklahoma

firmly in the camp of loyalty, and to rid the state of its image as Socialist leaning state with proclivities for anarchism that threatened the region's resources. To that end, the governor used the national guard more than all his predecessors combined, and before his first year as governor ended, had spent more than $100,000 in excess of appropriations for the Adjutant General's office.[51]

Robertson originally came to the governorship on a platform of state sponsored marketing cooperators for farmers, lower property taxes for businesses, support for school consolidation for educators, and support for anti-radicalism.[52] Laws passed under the governor soon turned towards suppression of dissent within the state, following a nationwide trend that fanned the flames of Red Scare hysteria. In 1919, the Seventh Legislature convened and proposed House Bill No. 80, providing for teaching only in English in public, parochial, denominational, and private schools through the seventh grade. The bill passed 94-3 in the House and was completely unopposed in the Senate 23-0.[53] Two other bills surfaced and passed the legislative session in January 1919. One law prohibited criminal syndicalism while the other forbade the display of red flags at political events. The author of the former measure, Luther Harrison, lived in Wewoka near the site of the Green Corn Rebellion. The legislature defined criminal syndicalism as a doctrine

> which advocates crime, physical violence, arson, destruction of property, sabotage, or other unlawful acts or methods, as a means of accomplishing or effecting industrial or political ends, or as a means of effecting industrial or political revolution, or for profit.[54]

Violators of the act could expect a maximum penalty of ten years in jail and a $5,000 fine. The bill also provided for the punishment of any owner or agent who knowingly rented a place to criminal syndicalism advocates. The law passed unanimously in the

Senate 35-0 and in the House 82-4. Oklahoma joined thirteen commonwealths and two territories in passing criminal syndicalism legislation, while thirteen other states enacted anti-sedition and anarchy laws, and twenty-nine adopted a similar red flag law. In Oklahoma, the maximum penalty for display of a red flag carried a $1,000 fine and ten years in jail. No test of the red flag law ever occurred in courts, while there have been only six prosecutions based on the criminal syndicalism law, with two in 1923 and four in 1940-41.[55]

The bills in Oklahoma represented the spirit of the nation, with rampant fear and a people eager to demonstrate their tough stance towards anti-Americanism. In other states, the hysteria ran just as deep. In Texas, ultra-patriotic elements utilized repressive tactics in preventing pro-union candidates from achieving electoral success. Texas governor Jim Ferguson was impeached by such methods, accused of harboring pro-German sympathies, and soundly defeated by his opponent in the 1918 election.[56] Near the end of World War I, Russia became engulfed in the throws of revolution. Communists continually gained ground against their enemies, and heralded the start of a worldwide Bolshevik revolution. The fear and patriotism drummed up during the war years was refocused by Oklahoma Governor Robertson against the new enemy, purported communist, socialist and anarchist agitators. On March 12, 1919, a letter sent to Robertson stated confidence in his ability in making America and its children safe from "Bolsheviki foreigners, I.W.W. or alien slackers."[57] The author claimed that America "should help purge our Nation of the un-desirables – the anarchistic foreign element and the alien slackers who have been and are now holding fat jobs as the expense of our men… We have the right to order our internal affairs as we see fit. Let's prove it."[58] A

movement by a congressman in Washington encouraged the naturalization of all aliens residing in the nation, and wrote specifically to Robertson, beseeching him to encourage all churches, temples and synagogues to promote the movement.[59] Public sentiment appeared on the side of the governor, allowing him to pursue harsher policies in response to domestic events. There were few outbursts against such legislation, coming primarily from left-leaning organizations and labor unions.

On March 17, 1919, John Wilkinson, president of the local UMW affiliate headquartered in Muskogee, took umbrage to the rash of anti-Bolshevik legislation. In a letter to the governor, he stated that he failed to see the necessity for such measures with regard to unions, as practically all vital industries of the state were organized and on record as being absolutely opposed to Bolshevism. He later said that "as far as our particular movement is concerned all that I can say is 'please leave the Bolshevists in our hands.'"[60]

The actions of Robertson that drew ire from leftist movements occurred within a context of larger national events that were reshaping the very fabric of post-war society. Prices of goods and the cost of living experienced a sharp increase, and amidst these economic troubles countless workers went on strike demanding renegotiation of their contracts signed during the war era that froze many of their wages for the conflict's duration. Upon the conclusion of the war, many businesses found renegotiation of the contract difficult. Compounding the situation, millions of men returned from the front and attempted to find jobs. Older workers tried to hang on to their old one's, and faced with an economic crisis that threatened to upset the entire country, the nation faced a series of dramatic strikes centered primarily around its major resource producing

industries. Workers demanded increased wages to offset the rising cost of living, while businesses proclaimed their inability to grant such concessions given the economic situation. As their only bargaining chip, laborers across America threatened and often did carry out strikes, paralyzing the nation's industry in the hopes of forcing a settlement. One early indication of this dissatisfied labor activity occurred in Seattle, and became one of the first major strikes that affected the country during the First Red Scare.

On February 6, 1919, Seattle, Washington, experienced one of the first opening volleys of the Red Scare conflict, and became the center of attention for the entire nation. Disturbed by the country-wide wage freeze that remained unaltered after the conclusion of World War I, Seattle shipyard workers threatened a walk-out unless they received a pay increase. Regulators refused and the Metal Trades Council, representing over 35,000 workers, declared a strike, effectively closing the shipyards. Shortly thereafter, 110 other local unions voted in favor of a sympathy walkout, creating one of the largest general strikes in US history.[61] Before the workers even closed shop, local newspapers painted the employees as lazy and suffering from Bolshevik influences. "Why these men gave up the highest wages they ever earned in their lives when there had not even been a suggestion of reduction, and like a pack of sheep, walked out… probably seems a mystery to the average American."[62] The article then portrayed a typical labor union meeting as a conglomeration of seditious behaviors spearheaded by Bolsheviks, and that they were criminals by instinct, desired to see Bolshevism supplant law and order, and their primary concern in Seattle was to stir up trouble.[63]

These lessons of suspicion and paranoia were not lost on Oklahoma, which looked towards the strike with alarming tones. The *Daily Oklahoman* reported in bold

headlines that "troops armed with grenades in cities where 70,000 strike."[64] News of the Seattle strike appeared prominently in countless Oklahoma papers, with readers eagerly taking in news of the disorder. Washington State, inspired by the dramatic events unfolding and following along Oklahoma lines, saw an influx of legislation aimed at curbing alien influences. One such bill, proposed by Representative Robert Grass, sought to prohibit foreigners from participating in strike movements. It held that "any person not a citizen of the United States who shall urge, advise, or advocate in any manner whatsoever any strike shall be guilty of a felony and upon conviction thereof shall be sentenced accordingly." The maximum penalty carried a fine of $5,000 and ten years in a penitentiary.[65] A combination of increased military and police presence, as well as union fears of a backlash contributed to the cessation of union activities however, and on February 11, labor leaders called off the general strike.[66] The strike served as a major warning throughout the entire nation, with lessons that resonated especially in Oklahoma. The first attack against controlling industry during the First Red Scare occurred centered on the nation's shipbuilders and metal workers. Future disturbances would occur involving the resources of the country, and by the summer, radical attacks against government officials propelled the Red Scare fear to new heights.

The national situation seemed to deteriorate, and by the summer of 1919, all the fears and anxieties brought about by the war-induced paranoia came to a head during the First Red Scare. That summer, a wave of anarchist bombings occurred throughout the country.[67] Targeting numerous government personnel, the act spread dread and panic across a nation that had not yet fully recovered from World War I and gave many individuals reason to fear for their safety.[68] After the incident, the US media seized on the

issue, with countless newspapers printing headlines escalating the hysteria. A public outcry soon called for the apprehension of those responsible for the violent terrorist acts and demanded their immediate prosecution.[69] Leftist organizations including anarchists, communists, and socialists bore the brunt of the blame, with the *New York Times* calling Socialism an "alien enemy," while the *Hartford Courant* urged further legislation to punish anarchists. These groups faced a wave of arrests and deportations spearheaded by US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Under his tenure, the Department of Justice conducted one of the most extensive raids in American history, rounding up thousands for proposed deportation. His flagrant violations of rights in conducting the raids held great support from the American people, as countless citizens feared for their safety in the wake of the successful Bolshevik Revolution, threats of communism spreading across the globe, and most recently the rash of radical bombings.

The population in Oklahoma appeared drummed up with hysteria as well, as national events continued to shape local policy. The government told the state to remain forever vigilant against the enemy of the nation, and after the bombing campaign, the governor contacted Palmer directly and sent word of a local periodical, the *Liberator*, which appeared disruptive in its language against the government.[70] The governor's office continually sent copies of the *Liberator* to Palmer throughout the summer.[71] The Department of Justice responded stating that the publication was under the observation of the Bureau of Investigation.[72] The magazine served as a political and cultural outlet for "radical intellectuals" and also acted as an unofficial organ of the Socialist Party during the war. The publication supported the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and aligned itself with the communist movement afterwards.[73] Thanks to the suspicious eye of Robertson

and his readiness to comply with the dictates of Palmer, the magazine remained another target of the alarmist sentiment of the time. Further events escalated the paranoia, and by September 1919, another strike made headlines across the country.

That month, the Boston police force faced a mounting crisis. Sharing much in common with labor related dissidents, the policemen requested adjustment to their fixed wages, long hours, and seven day work weeks. To accomplish this, they realized that their only hope lay in unionizing, as they thought it the best tool available to them for negotiating. To that end they turned towards the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for assistance. In response, Massachusetts's state officials suspended over a dozen union organizers among the police force, causing an internal crisis for the beleaguered officers. On September 9, with a vote of 1134 to 2, Boston policemen decided to go on strike. Immediately the press labeled the event as Bolshevist inspired, with one local newspaper stating that "behind Boston in this skirmish with Bolshevism stands Massachusetts, and behind Massachusetts stands America."[74] The lack of police presented the city with a severe problem however, as there was no protection against lawlessness. After several nights of hooliganism and minor destruction, members of the State Guard arrived and restored order. The two sides never reached a compromise, and on September 13 the police commissioner refused to re-hire the striking workers, opting instead to hire new recruits. The legacy of the strike showcased a populace eager to believe tales of revolutionary Bolshevism among the force, despite the lack of evidence. The Boston police force failed to achieve its goal of joining the AFL, and suspicion of organized labor increased.[75]

Disproportionate fear of Bolshevism remained a mainstay across the US and in Oklahoma, and strikes across the nation in many of its sensitive and resource producing areas only served to heighten this fear. In 1919, there existed roughly 75,000 members of the Communist Party within the US. Countless publications sought to increase that number however, with one estimating the number closer to 5,000,000.[76] This inflated amount caused severe panic among the citizenry and media, who remained all too eager to hype up the destructive threat of radical labor in the vital areas of resource production across the country.

As the volatile summer turned to fall, another major strike occurred that held startling implications for Oklahoma. On September 22, 1919, for the first time during the Red Scare, unions initiated a nation-wide strike over resources that affected states and workers across the entire country. The strike involved thousands of steel workers who desired to renegotiate their contracts. This act affected countless laborers who abided by national union rules, and meant that strikes were not merely limited to one location where dissatisfaction was highest. While Oklahoma was not directly involved in the strike, the event once again heightened distrust between the populace and labor movements, and predated by two months another national strike that would drag the state deep into the heart of Red Scare paranoia and overreaction. The event appeared a long time coming, as for several years, the AFL attempted to unionize steel mills throughout the country. Spearheaded in part by William Z. Foster, his National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers successfully recruited members into its group, with significant numbers coming from immigrant populations.[77] Foster represented all that was dangerous to business interests, following the teachings of William Jennings Bryan, maintaining

affiliation with Socialism, and holding previous membership in the radical IWW. With Foster's assistance, the AFL requested a meeting on June 20 with United States Steel's board of director to lay out demands for collective bargaining, eight-hour work days, one day off a week, double pay for overtime, and other important issues. After never receiving a reply, and future attempts at negotiation failing, the labor organization voted for a strike on September 10, with the actual walkout occurring on September 22 of 1919.[78] When the fateful day arrived, approximately 275,000 workers walked out, with their numbers increasing to over 365,000 by the end of the week.[79] Immediately, the national press painted the conflagration in paranoid terms, with the *New York Tribute* calling it "another experiment in the way of Bolshevizing American industry."[80] Socialist newspapers did not aid matters either, increasing the rhetoric calling the strike "open class warfare," "the last battle with the industrial overlords of America," and "possibilities of revolution."[81]

Oklahoma newspapers reported on the events with alarming tones, following the mainstream media with sensationalist articles. In one piece, the *Oklahoman* told of a gun battle between police and rioters at the Carnegie Steel Mill plant in Pennsylvania. On October 4, events occurred that severely undermined the striking worker's position. In Gary, Indiana, radical calls rang out for open revolution. Deadly rioting occurred after steel companies introduced strike breakers to the situation, and the Governor of Indiana, James P. Goodrich, ordered the state militia into Gary to quell the unrest.[82] The rioting grew exponentially after this, with 500 strikers attempting to breach the United States Steel Corporation plant. The governor immediately called for federal troops, which soon arrived under the command of General Leonard Wood, who placed the town under

martial law.[83] Samuel Gompers, founder of the AFL, attempted to resolve the situation, and after negotiations ended in failure, he bowed out of the issue. The strike situation soon collapsed, as public support turned against labor, and the government set up a commission to discover the causes of the incident.[84] Despite this, the causes remain clear as the growing struggle over control of resources, pitting labor against business amidst the fearful climate of the time, guaranteed that the nation would paint the strikers as Bolshevist inspired. Logic gave way to reason as entities found ways to link wage disputes with radical communist elements that admittedly desired to overthrow the US government, thus enabling them to squelch their opposition.

On November 1, 1919, yet another major nationwide strike occurred that the government and media painted as communist-inspired. This time, the disturbance centered around the vital coal producing regions of the country, including Oklahoma, when members of the UMW walked off the job. Once again, resources served as the primary focal point for disturbances in the ongoing troubles of the First Red Scare. The ensuing strike affected countless states, over 400,000 miners, and caused Oklahoma to declare martial law for fear of a Bolshevik uprising. The event stands as a main pillar of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma, becoming a major cause for hysteria and discord in the state. Several other states also called out the national guard, as authorities viewed the striking workers as communists who threatened the nation's supply of fuel for the coming winter. The two sides reached an agreement on December 10, but not before severe damage had been done to the reputation of miners nationwide.[85] The cause of labor against business over control of resources took a severe hit, with the country showcasing its willingness to link genuine appeals for better conditions with a growing communist

conspiracy. Much of 1919 revolved around this developing hysteria, and clashes between authorities and leftist movements only increased in frequency and volatility.

Displaying the bloody nature of the growing conflict, a dramatic incident served to round out the year in Centralia, Washington, on November 11, 1919. During an Armistice Day celebration, clashes erupted between the American Legion and workers affiliated with the IWW. The American Legion, an organization representing veterans of the United States, had descended on Centralia to participate in a local parade. As members of the American Legion passed in front of the hall of the Wobblies, shots rang out and killed members of the Legion. The IWW claimed the right-wing group became enraged at the sight of their meeting place and charged up the steps to do them harm, so the union fired in self defense. Authorities arrested many in the socialist group and placed them in jail. Soon after, a mob formed around the suspects and eventually took one of the IWW leaders from his cell. The frenzied and hate-filled group proceeded to beat his teeth in with a rifle butt, castrate him, tied a noose around his neck, and threw him over a bridge three times before his neck broke. The man in question was named Wesley Everest, a union member and World War I veteran. He had stood in front of the IWW hall and was reported to have said "I fought for Democracy in France and I'm going to fight for it here. The first man that comes through this hall, why, he's going to get it."[86] After his death, the town's coroner reported Everest's death as a suicide and he was later buried in an unmarked grave. Eight IWW members were later convicted of murder and given sentences of 25 to 40 years in prison. No community members were ever brought to trial for the lynching. The despicable act set off a reaction of police and mob violence across the West Coast, resulting in roundups and arrests of countless members of the

IWW.[87] This, along with the earlier bombing campaigns and strikes, gave rise to a severe need among the public for the government to take swift action against all manifestations of radicalism, either real or implied.

Helping to allay these fears, Attorney General Palmer continued in his drive against agitators, stepping up raids by December 1919 and into January of the new year. By early 1920, the country was further engulfed in the fires of Red Scare fear. In this maelstrom of labor unrest, union radicalism, and paranoid induced repression, Oklahoma faced its own troubles as the country threatened to explode. Not merely an isolated state separated by thousands of miles from the troubles in the East and the West, Oklahoma remained profoundly affected by the actions taken around the country during the First Red Scare. The state witnessed events on the national scene and became swept up in a similar frenzy. Influenced by events across the country, Oklahoma's leaders would look to their own labor issues in alarmingly similar fashions, portraying countless incidents of disorder as radical plots aimed at toppling the government. The populace also played a role, abandoning the Socialists in favor of the national pro-war fervor. By the end of 1918, Oklahomans had all but deserted the party and signaled its death knell. Disputes over resources, existing since the state's inception, would continue to act as the primary focal point for disturbances across the state, mimicking events across the country. These events played a large part in influencing the heavy-handed response by Oklahoma and other states, and helped create the ingredients for the Red Scare mentality of fear and paranoia to thrive. Particularly in eastern Oklahoma, in the rich Cushing-Drumright oilfields, and in Tulsa, radicals would make inroads that contributed to the panic shared by the populace, businesses, and the government. As sentiment grew against such groups

in the climate of fear, the state laid further foundations to the increasingly solid structure of Red Scare terror.

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[4] Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, 233.

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[6] "Sons of Rest are Welcome Guests in Harvest Time," *Daily Oklahoman*, June 21, 1914.

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[8] Creel, "Socialists in the House," 146.

[9] James R. Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma 1907-1949" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1949), 150.

[10] "Socialist Ticket Ready for Filing," *Daily Oklahoman*, May 27, 1914, 9.

[11] James Scales and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 150.

[12] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 69.

[13] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 151.

[14] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 151; Thirteenth Census Abstract, Supplement for Oklahoma, 642.

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[17] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 60.

[18] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 168.

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[26] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 174.

[27] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 174.

[28] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 71; Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 174.

[29] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 175.

[30] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 183.

[31] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 76.

[32] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 184.

[33] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 83.

[34] Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 83-4.

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[45] Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 151; Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 88.

[46] Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism*, 151; *Harlow's Weekly*, August 8, 1917; Scales and Goble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 88-9.

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[49] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 202.

[50] Scales, "Political History of Oklahoma," 203.

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Chapter 3: Oil Fields and Labor Unions in Oklahoma, 1917-1919

With the increasing instability across the nation caused by World War I and the foundations for radicalism and disputes over resources laid by Oklahoma's past, the state further integrated itself into the hyper-patriotic and paranoid mentality prevalent in America that characterized the First Red Scare. The state continued to give in to the irrational fears of the day and acted harshly towards unions that attempted to provide better conditions for workers. Violent clashes also occurred in eastern Oklahoma as law enforcement fought in a lopsided battle with labor during 1917-1919. These disturbances centered around important oil rich regions with resources once again acting as a catalyst for agitation and hostility. Through such labor disputes and irrational fears, overzealous officials and citizens created the perfect storm for the First Red Scare to flourish in the post-war era.

As witnessed on the national scene, nearly every major disturbance centered on labor issues and control of resources. Workers continually appealed for increased wages and better treatment, while representatives of business stated they were neither willing nor able to comply with demands, given the economic situation. Unions played a major part in this struggle, and fought heated battles in Oklahoma to improve the wages and conditions of laborers in the state's primary resource industries. This attracted a number of radicals as well, providing further fuel to the flames of paranoia. Prominent unions in the state included the Oklahoma Renters' Union, which represented a number of sharecroppers in McClain County hoping to resist rent increases from landowners. In Choctaw County in the southeast, a Grower's Protective Association recruited 9,000 members to fight usury in the courts.[1] One of the largest of such organizations, the

Working Class Union, extended from its home state of Arkansas into the cotton belt of eastern Oklahoma. Founded in 1914, it represented between 18,000 and 35,000 members at its zenith. In the troubled time of the World War I and post-war era, the WCU espoused radicalism and anarchism to achieve its goals. Rejecting the nonviolent methods of socialists who sought to effect change through voting, the WCU resorted to burning barns, flogging opponents, shootings, and robbing banks.[2] Government officials quickly linked these radical union actions with the broader socialist movement and initiated campaigns and crackdowns on suspects through the 1910s. The media played a large part in these efforts, linking the Socialist Party with nearly every disturbance, and questioning the mild reformist ideas that earlier authorities had granted a fair hearing.[3]

The United Mine Workers (UMW), remained strong in the state. Founded in 1898, and made up of socialists, the group originally espoused militancy to achieve its goals. With the success of the Twin Territories Federation of Labor in electing delegates to the Oklahoma constitutional convention, the UMW turned towards the democratic process and utilized peaceful methods to achieve its aims.[4]

Lead and zinc industries in northeastern Oklahoma also attracted workers, with the region forming the tri-state mining district with Kansas and Missouri. The area remained low for radical activity during the First Red Scare, as authorities had earlier stamped out all forms of resistance from the unions. Originally, the radical labor union, the IWW, had established roots in the area in 1906, with a base located in Joplin, Missouri, from which to spread out its recruitment arm. The Knights of Labor also had initiated activities locally as early as 1889. In June 1915, three thousand miners in the tri-state district struck for better wages, with mines shut down for three weeks. Operators

later broke the strike, and promised to pay a sliding scale of wages based on the average price of ore. The ill-fated strike utterly demoralized the cause of tri-state mine unionization for twenty years. Unsuccessful attempts were made to increase unionization but met with little success, so that by the time of the First Red Scare in 1919, there existed little apparatus for resistance.[5]

The Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies, persevered in Oklahoma, however, becoming part of the largest disturbances in the state at that time. The union propagated the abolishment of the capitalist system and hoped to usher in a new revolutionary society.[6] Founded in 1905 in Chicago, the group quickly spread across the nation wherever labor needed their particular brand of assistance. In 1906, at the time of their second convention, the Wobblies established themselves in Oklahoma, setting up three branches in Oklahoma Territory and two in Indian Territory.[7] By 1907, with the large number of unskilled and impoverished laborers in the state, the union found success and recruited a few thousand dues-paying members. A major focus of the group lay in propaganda and agitation, with the organization regularly spreading leaflets and flyers denouncing the capitalist system and espousing their own ideals. This caused great alarm among business interests and the citizenry, especially as the Wobblies spread into the oil-rich locations of eastern Oklahoma. Authorities and the media continually linked major disturbances to the IWW, including the Green Corn Rebellion, and by the time of the United States' entry into World War I, the radical union appeared to the public as a dangerous, disloyal menace prone to anti-American rhetoric and violent acts against government and business interests.[8] Nevertheless, the group found some success among the poor and the immigrant populations of the state, and encountered its fiercest battles in

the oil rich towns of eastern Oklahoma. As the *Tulsa World* later put it, the eastern half of the state "appears to be the section most attractive to the anarchists because of its immense oil and other industries."[9]

The IWW came to the region primarily because of its resources in the oil fields. Several important oil towns thrived in these fields, including Cushing, Drumright, Oilton, and Tulsa. This particular area in Oklahoma rested on the Central Red-Bed Plains and the Northern Limestone-Cuesta Plains, two areas rich with abundant supplies of petroleum. The site of a major oil strike in 1912, the region became a leading center in the industry. By 1915, the area produced over 8 million barrels of oil per month. It served as a key railroad hub, with the Stillwater Central connecting to the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe line that crisscrossed into neighboring states. It also maintained an important link to the cattle ranching industry, increasing its desirability both as a target of agitation, and as a goal to be protected.[10] The massive and sudden industrial influx caused by the oil industry created an abundance of jobs, attracting the attention of the IWW who sought to win over converts. As with other locations across the state and the country, the location of resources played a key component in attracting the level of agitation and Red Scare activity.

While the Wobblies attempted to make inroads in the east, one of its oil towns, Cushing, remained resistant to its advances, and held some of the lowest turnout of votes for Socialist Party candidates in the years leading up to the war.[11] The IWW however, possessed a certain appeal to many who looked with desperation on the capitalist system they saw as taking advantage of the tenant farming working class. As one Cushing oil worker put it, “The IWW has got the clearest and cleanest cut declaration of any outfit

going. I know the organization has got no halfway grounds with the capitalists."[12] The local oil companies maintained a strong anti-union stance, and encouraged many acts of violence against workers by Ku Klux Klan members and local police.[13] From a resource point of view, the IWW attempts at gaining a foothold in the Oklahoma oil industry proved risky, as the relatively new resource would be closely guarded by the federal government. During the war years of 1916 and 1917 however, the IWW enlarged its member base nationally from 40,000 to 100,000.[14]

As the organization gained clout, authorities took measures to counteract its growing influence. On October 29 in the eastern oil hub of Tulsa, an explosion damaged the home of the manager for Carter Oil, J. Edgar Pew. Immediately the media blamed the IWW, and a report in the *Oklahoman* claimed that the city was on its toes all night, expecting at any moment to hear dynamite explosions in or near the oil refineries, or shots fired. Tulsa sought to raise a defense force of 250 men while the council of defense worked with the governor to procure ammunition for the eventual witch hunt. The city immediately boosted its defense around major refineries, with the Cosden refinery, one of the largest in the nation, protected by over three hundred men. The Carter Oil company stated that they had tripled their guard, and expected explosions before dawn. The article concluded with a warning, saying that unless IWW members made a secret retreat, bodily harm would come to them, and that all persons not able to give a good reason for being on the streets that night would be ordered by authorities to head for their homes as soon as possible.[15] The hunt was on for the suspects in the bombing, and local forces from the start took matters into their own hands.

Suspicion against union members increased dramatically throughout the war years, and intensified with each event, whether they were at fault or not. In Ada, one day after the explosion in Tulsa, fires occurred so frequently that county officials feared the Working Class Union was behind the action. They admitted that the organization had been inactive since the rounding up and arrest the previous August of several hundred members. Nevertheless, officials claimed that the fires in Ada could not all have been accidents.[16]

In Tulsa, authorities commenced raids on IWW headquarters on November 5, 1917, causing the eventual crippling of the network in Oklahoma. The action netted eleven men, and as one local headline put it, "war on the IWW was declared by the city of Tulsa last night."[17] Authorities, for lack of evidence, placed a charge of vagrancy on the individuals, and bluntly stated they planned to arrest every man known to belong to the "un-American organization."[18] The *Tulsa World* categorized most of the men as uncouth in appearance and described the Wobbly base as rife with seditious paraphernalia. On the day of the raid, police found the members simply gathered around a table playing cards and reading. They offered no resistance upon arrest, and the paper reported that as they marched to their cells, their heads remained erect, with sneers on their faces and "looking for all the world like 'martyrs' marching to their doom.[19] Displaying the paranoid attitudes that made freedom of expression difficult during that time, the paper surmised that any attorney in Tulsa risked attracting contempt from "loyal" citizens by representing the defendants. Captain Wilkerson of the Tulsa Police Department later stated his intent to arrest every man found loitering around the IWW headquarters, and if they got out of jail only to head back there, he would arrest them "again, and again and

again. Tulsa is not big enough to hold any traitors during our government's crisis, and the sooner these fellows get out of town the better for them."[20]

During this time of unionism and suppression in the eastern oil fields, the public worried over the region's image, afraid that all the radical attention gave it a bad name. An article encouraging pro-Americanism appeared two days after the much publicized Tulsa raid, stating that the city required a new face. Detailing stories of draft resistance, dynamite bombings, and other instances of violence, the paper said that "upon such stories people often base their opinion of a state or a community. Not a rosy picture of Tulsa and Oklahoma is it?"[21] The *World* claimed that, since Oklahoma was practically a new state, strangers could associate the area with outlaws and radicals. To combat the negative publicity generated by the rampant disorder, the paper intended to produce a run of stories detailing Oklahoma's positive contributions to the country. This example detailed a growing fear that the area would be known for its radicals, and served as a partial explanation for why authorities so ruthlessly hunted down any and all suspects of anti-Americanism.[22]

Further revealing the xenophobic tendencies of the populace, the State Council of Defense warned that "a blank wall and a firing squad may soon be the remedy for the pro-Germanism in Oklahoma in the few sections where it exists."[23] Channeling the fear that was already in the process of redirection to Socialist and Communist elements, the council went on to say that the man not aiding in America's fight against Germany was aiding instead the Prussian to slaughter his neighbor's sons. "We must realize that a disloyal remark is an assassin's shot at every boy wearing khaki. Those living in American can be of but two classes, Americans or enemies."[24] The article concluded with

a near prophetic warning to those making anti-American remarks, stating that, while they may not be molested now, a "day of wrath is coming in America," and that the State Council of Defense was already hard at work turning over information concerning disloyal statements to federal authorities.[25] The stage for the state to enter the First Red Scare appeared completely set, with the entire population drummed up with irrational fear and suspicion, ready to pounce on the slightest hint of disloyalty, especially in geographically strategic areas.

On November 8, 1917, the trial for the suspected radicals netted in the Tulsa IWW raids began. In sworn testimony, one IWW member named Johnson, who spoke in broken English, had only arrived in Tulsa three days earlier with just a penny in his pocket, and hoped to find a job soon. Five detectives appeared to testify, and all maintained that the headquarters of the Wobblies held a reputation as being a place where men congregated to "defeat the aims of the government."[26] The prosecution asked the members of the union if their organization sanctioned the violent actions featured in many strikes staged by the IWW, but the *Tulsa World* reported that their answers came concealed in sarcasm. Regarding the reputation of the headquarters, the prosecution queried members of the union, who all spoke in broken English and responded that they thought the place exceedingly orderly.[27] During cross-examination, one IWW member spoke of the increasing prices and low wages, prompting persons in the courtroom to burst into applause. After the outburst, the judged warned he would arrest anyone who applauded thereafter.[28] On November 9, prosecutors rested their case based on the defendants' IWW membership. Police failed to prove their guilt in the bomb attack on Pew; however, the judge found the members guilty of not owning Liberty Bonds to

support the war effort, in addition to vagrancy. Similarly, authorities arrested five defense witnesses for the same offense, finding them guilty. The court fined all the men $100, and the judge concluded that "these are no ordinary times."[29]

Persecution of Wobblies continued throughout the year, and in Drumright federal agents invaded the local IWW hall in November and raided the office of a sympathetic attorney. In a subsequent raid, agents smashed furniture and windows of a local hall, arresting members for vagrancy.[30] The local government used the excuse of a storage tank explosion in Cushing, blaming the IWW for it, and also accused the group of planning attacks on troop trains.[31] Storage tank explosions and fires in the oil fields remained a constant danger, though more often from lightning strikes than sabotage. Drumright even kept a cannon on standby to shoot holes in the tanks to release oil should a fire occur.[32] The increased tension and fear from the war provided authorities with the perfect opportunity however, allowing them to rid themselves and their resources from the threat of the radical Wobblies once and for all.

On November 9, shortly after the Tulsa trial ended, policemen loaded seventeen prisoners into three automobiles for transportation to the county jail. At 11:00 PM that night, a crowd of roughly fifty men in long black robes and masks stopped the vehicles, and diverted them to a secluded area where they lashed each prisoner with a cat-o'-nine-tails. They then applied a coat of hot tar to the bleeding backs of the men, and applied feathers to conclude their work. The robed vigilantes belonged to the Knights of Liberty, an organization dedicated to expunging anti-American sentiment from the country. One witness reported that with each strike of the instrument, a black-robed man in charge of the ceremony uttered: "In the name of the outraged women and children of Belgium."[33]

Another observer told of an old man who pleaded for mercy, explaining that he had lived in Oklahoma for 18 years, raised a large family, and was not a member of the IWW. An individual in the party remembered his arrest at the union headquarters, however, and the mob gave the man no quarter.[34] After the ceremony, the Knights of Liberty forced the men, wearing nothing but their trousers, into the Osage hills, firing hundreds of rifle and revolver shots in their direction, causing the victims to flee "with the speed of kangaroos." One "knight" yelled at the fleeing men "let this be a warning to all IWW's to never come to Tulsa again! Now get!" The *Tulsa World* surmised that the plot remained a carefully planned operation, indicated by the machine-like precision of its execution.[35] Other scholars, such as Sellars, postulated that the police actually aided in the mob action, and that the Knights of Liberty received their weaponry from the Tulsa Home Guard.[36]

This action, later called the "Tulsa Outrage" by the Wobbly community, inspired even more serious action against suspected radicals. That same day, Muskogee suffered serious fires when their cotton gin storehouse burned to the ground. Three other fires accompanied it, and while harboring no proof, authorities immediately blamed the IWW for starting the blazes. The Sapulpa cotton gin, the oldest and largest in Creek County, also suffered from a severe fire which eventually destroyed the structure. Losses from both events came to over $275,000, and with the recent publicized persecution of the Wobblies, citizens appeared anxious for more. Newspapers quickly hyped the events, with the *Tulsa World* telling of an alleged IWW member arrested by police who knew how to create quick-acting poisons that could not be detected in the body after death.[37] The public widely supported the vigilante actions upon radicals, and the *Tulsa World* reported that Oklahomans buzzed with excitement in reaction to the actions performed by

the Knights of Liberty. "Everyone talked about the incident and everyone seemed to approve of the actions that had been taken. There seemed to be a feeling 'in the air' that the 'Knights of Liberty' would be heard from again."[38]

The recent and much-publicized actions against the Wobblies caused even more instances of vigilantism against the group, with similar measures occurring elsewhere to drive the organization out of the state. Reports from Guthrie indicated that two victims of the tar and feathering arrived, boarded a train and fled the state. In Drumright and Bartlesville, among other towns, authorities and vigilantes arrested and ran out other IWW members. The *Tulsa World* reported that the Knights of Liberty "have apparently started a movement that will lead to the breaking up of the organization in the Oklahoma oil fields and prevent the strike that they have threatened for some time."[39] Across the state, citizens and officials attributed any major act of violence to the IWW. In Henryetta that year, a local newspaper blamed a passenger train wreck to the organization. Evidence later exonerated the Wobblies, pointing instead to a metal machine part left on the track by children. The newspaper refused to retract, arguing that such an action remained consistent with IWW tactics.[40]

By Fall 1917, war hysteria caused the public to accept the extra-legal persecution of dissent. The tide against radical labor turned sharply, and authorities systematically dismantled the IWW in Oklahoma and across the nation, convincing many members to abandon its ranks. On November 12, the *Tulsa World* reported a major success against radicalism and explained that the Tulsa Outrage convinced one member of the Wobblies to quit from the organization. The paper proclaimed that the Knights of Liberty "made a believer" out of at least one IWW who was flogged, tarred and feathered that night,

giving a solid backing to this method of conversion. In a telephone conversation with the local sheriff, the former Wobbly pleaded to go back to work, and only desired an opportunity to return to Tulsa and show the people he was no longer a member of the IWW. The sheriff responded, telling the man he could come back as long as he was convinced that the US government did not need the advice or active rebellion of the radical organization.[41] Police later arrested a man outside the city jail, and later found IWW literature on him and a copy of a newspaper detailing the harsh methods of the Knights of Liberty. Officers had no evidence, but held the opinion that he planned some retaliatory act before they caught him.[42]

Incriminating news against radical labor appeared in torrents, and on November 14, local newspapers in Tulsa reported a theft of high-yield explosives with enough force to blow up the entire business district of the city. The paper told of missing nitroglycerin, twenty sticks of dynamite, and fuse caps. This occurred during the nationwide coal mining strike that severely affected the state and increased tensions against labor groups and rumored Bolshevist conspiracies. Reportedly, mine operators immediately believed the IWW was behind the theft. One mine employee said that the robbers knew how to use the materials, and they "either wanted to do some shooting for another company or... get rid of some buildings and people who stand in their way."[43] Other instances dogged the state, and on November 16, newspapers reported another instance attributed to the Wobblies. Sources indicated that they blew up a major gasoline plant in Payne County operated by the Standard Oil Company of Indiana. In a letter sent to the sheriff of Pontotoc County from a person identified only as "A Member," an individual provided details of a meeting between the IWW and Working Class Union where they laid out

plans for destroying troop trains, murdering officers, and destruction of property. The purported member of the group who sent the letter explained that he had quit the organization, and they would kill him if they found he informed on them. He said that he betrayed them for "the people's sake," and told authorities to look out for sabotage. The *Tulsa World* claimed that threat of the IWW had Oklahoma "sleeping with one eye open and a finger on the trigger," evidenced by a recent shooting of a Wobbly by the chief of police in Sapulpa.[44] After an investigation into the causes of the explosion of the gasoline plant, authorities disproved the idea of IWW involvement.[45] The actions against the radical labor union provoked a positive response from the populace, and also caused a great amount of alarm from its leadership.

The union attempted to investigate these matters, and sent nine-year veteran Wencil Francik to Oklahoma on November 16. Within five hours of his arrival in Tulsa, a local detective placed him under arrest and forced a confession out of him of being a prime mover in radical labor activities in the state. After authorities escorted Francik to the station, he claimed that all he desired to do was to find out what "Americans of Tulsa are going to do about the treatment given the members of the IWW in this city."[46] Further examples of the paranoid mentality that featured so prominent during the First Red Scare occurred when on November 19, the *Tulsa World* reported on a wild rumor from Shawnee that IWW members had dynamited the city jail there, killing twenty-nine people. The town sent back a reply stating "rumor erroneous. No destruction here and better not be." The newspaper applauded the firm showing of spirit in the reply, and attributed such determination as the reason no instances of destruction occurred in the past several days.[47]

As authorities and vigilante groups continued in their dismantling of the IWW, the radical union's efforts in the oil fields ground to a halt. The foundations of paranoia laid during the war years remained however, and by the time of the First Red Scare in 1919, manifested itself in a number of alarmist articles. In one example, newspapers exaggerated reports of a telephone strike in neighboring Drumright, claiming that Bolshevist elements had fomented violence in their sister city.[48] The *Cushing Citizen,* reported in dire terms the state of the nation, portraying every strike as an attempt to destroy constitutional authority.[49] The *Cushing Citizen* also refused to call communists by their name, instead referring to them by the slang term "reds" and "anarchists."[50]

By 1919, authorities, media, and the populace fully completed the foundations allowing for the First Red Scare mentality to thrive in Oklahoma. The state, with its history of socialist agitation, anti-draft movements, and labor struggles over resources appeared poised to react to any disturbance. The IWW was crushed as it tried to make in-roads in eastern Oklahoma, and the population remained drummed up with hysteria over suspected saboteurs, radical agents, and communists. While the Wobblies were indeed a far-left revolutionary organization, this did not give state and local officials the right to ruthlessly persecute them. Oftentimes, the media, judges, and the civilian population would disregard laws and decency itself to harass members of the IWW, whether they had committed a crime or not. The Tulsa Outrage remains a potent symbol on the dangers of illogical paranoia as it illustrates the depths that frightened people would go to protect themselves against supposed threats. All of these elements of fear and suppression would come to a head by 1919 with further labor disputes occurring in the east in Muskogee, Drumright, and other places. Coupled with the irrational fear and threats to resources,

events that year would propel Oklahoma into the darkest reaches of the First Red Scare, standing as a paradigm of overreaction and fear during a time of national uncertainty.

[1] James Scales and Danney Goble, *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 81.

[2] Scales and Gobble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 81.

[3] Scales and Gobble, *Oklahoma Politics*, 81.

[4] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 10.

[5] Arrel Gibson, *Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 227-29.

[6] Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 87.

[7] Sellars, *Oil, What, and Wobblies*, 17.

[8] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 11.

[9] "Oklahoma Sleeps With One Eye Open for IWW Depredations," *Tulsa World*, November 16, 1917, 1.

[10] Goins, Goble, *Historical Atlas,* 5, 29, 173, 191.

[11] Goins, Goble, *Historical Atlas*, 161.

[12] James S. Koen to John L. Burk, Winslow, Arkansas, August 10, 1916. Vertical Files, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Ok.

[13] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies,* 63.

[14] Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*. 349-50.

[15] "Tulsa Expects Bloodshed and Bombs by Morning," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 30, 1917, 1.

[16] "Fires Blamed Upon Working Class Union," *Daily Oklahoman*, October 31, 1917, 12.

[17] "IWW in Tulsa Raided by Police," *Tulsa World*, November 6, 1917, 1.

[18] "IWW in Tulsa Raided by Police," *Tulsa World*, November 6, 1917, 1.

[19] "IWW in Tulsa Raided by Police," *Tulsa World*, November 6, 1917, 1
.

[20] "IWW in Tulsa Raided by Police," *Tulsa World*, November 6, 1917, 1.

[21] "Bloody Stories are Detriment to Tulsa," *Tulsa World*, November 7, 1917, 8.

[22] "Bloody Stories are Detriment to Tulsa," *Tulsa World*, November 7, 1917, 8.

[23] "Defense Council Warns Traitors," *Tulsa World*, November 7, 1917.

[24] "Defense Council Warns Traitors," *Tulsa World*, November 7, 1917.

[25] "Defense Council Warns Traitors," *Tulsa World*, November 7, 1917.

[26] "IWW Tried in Night Court," *Tulsa World*, November 9, 1917, 3.

[27] "IWW Tried in Night Court," *Tulsa World*, November 9, 1917, 3.

[28] "IWW Members Are Held Guitly," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 2.

[29] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 107.

[30] *Drumright Daily News*, November 4, 12, 1917.

[31] *Drumright Daily News*, November 15, 1917.

[32] Eileene Russell Huff, *Lakes of Oil: Ben Russell's Rare Photo Record of an Early-Day Oklahoma Oil Boom* (Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press, Inx., 2006), 50-51.

[33] "IWW Members Flogged, Tarred and Feathered," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 1; this quotation references the outrages committed against the neutral Belgium population by German during World War I.

[34] "IWW Members Flogged, Tarred and Feathered," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 1.

[35] "IWW Members Flogged, Tarred and Feathered," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 1.

[36] Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 108-9.

[37] "Four Gin Fires One Day's Work," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 1; "Alleged IWW Knows of Quick-Acting Poison," *Tulsa World*, November 10, 1917, 1.

[38] "IWW Danger in Tulsa Not Ended," *Tulsa World*, November 11, 1917, 1.

[39] "IWW Danger in Tulsa Not Ended," *Tulsa World*, November 11, 1917, 1.

[40] Robinson, *Anti-Sedition Legislation*, 6.

[41] "Tar and Feathers Converted IWW Who Wants to Quit," *Tulsa World*, November 12, 1917, 1.

[42] "Tar and Feathers Converted IWW Who Wants to Quit," *Tulsa World*, November 12, 1917, 1.

[43] "High Explosive Stolen In Night," *Tulsa World*, November 14, 1917, 1.

[44] "Oklahoma Sleeps With One Eye Open for IWW Depredations," *Tulsa World*, November 16, 1917, 1.

[45] "Cause of Norfolk Blowup Unknown," *Tulsa World*, November 17, 1917, 1.

[46] "Organizer of IWW Comes to Investigate 'Tar Party:' Jailed," *Tulsa World*, November 17, 1917, 1.

[47] "IWW Outbreak Not Feared Soon," *Tulsa World*, November 19, 1917, 1.

[48] "Drumright Telephone Strike Causes Riot" *Cushing Citizen*, September 25, 1919.

[49] "Situation is Threatening when Strikers Parade," *Cushing Citizen*, October 9, 1919.

[50] "Red Government Near an End," *Cushing Citizen*, October 23, 1919.

Chapter 4: Strikes in Eastern Oklahoma and the Drumright Affair, 1919

As Oklahoma entered 1919, the state plunged headlong into the First Red Scare, joining the rest of the nation in fear and paranoia. The Seattle strike in January and the anarchist bombing campaign in April rocked the country, with worry exacerbated over an imminent communist coup. Thrown into the mix were Oklahoma's growing labor problems, with disturbances increasing in frequency and volatility. Overreaction and harsh persecution of the IWW put the state on edge and increased panic over attacks on the oil-rich region. Muskogee, Tulsa, and later the town of Drumright, located near the rich Cushing-Drumright oil field, would experience their own series of troubles as workers demanded improved conditions from business owners. Amidst the full-blown paranoia of the First Red Scare, authorities, media, and the populace reacted illogically, yet in a manner wholly consistent with the rest of the nation. These groups construed efforts at renegotiation as dangerous and un-American, threatening the vital services and resources of the state.

The Drumright strike especially represented what the First Red Scare was all about. Originally consisting of a group of harmless striking telephone operators, the demonstration turned into one night of minor lawlessness with no serious damage or injuries reported after an unknown individual discharged a weapon. Overblown reports rang out across the nation portraying the event as a major riot and a Bolshevist conspiracy to overthrow the government. By the end of the event, the national guard occupied the town, faulty reports of communist conspiracy thrust Drumright into national headlines, and Oklahomans received a major taste of what the First Red Scare was all about. The Drumright affair represents a key pillar in Oklahoma's disturbing journey

through the First Red Scare. While exact details may never be known, the event, along with the other strikes in Eastern Oklahoma, stand as warnings against overreaction and the dangers of people succumbing to paranoia and fear.

Shortly after the nationwide bomb attacks in May 1919, a disturbance occurred in the eastern Oklahoma town of Muskogee when the Muskogee Central Labor Union and Building Trade Council supported a strike by the Street Car Men's Union. Authorities immediately attempted to settle the strike by force, resulting in a near riot.[1] After six weeks of wrangling, the mayor of the city endorsed a plan of arbitration, raising the fare to put the Muskogee Electric Traction Company in a position to pay an advance in wages and improve their equipment and services for the workers. The company later selected four men to represent them in negotiations.[2] Talks broke down once more, dragging the situation into August. A lawyer working on reconciling the two sides later wrote a letter to Robertson, conveying the general despair by the owners as well as the mayor of Muskogee. The company maintained that they remained ready, able and willing to proceed with the operation of cars and would gladly permit the men to return to work and settle questions by arbitration. Bringing up the economic inequalities in the post-war period, the lawyer opined that he saw no hope for any solution of labor troubles until "there has been a substantial reduction in the cost of living, and it must be conceded that the great price of all commodities is somewhat of an excuse for the increased demands for pay." He also concluded "if the ninety per cent of those who suffer will organize against the ten percent of those who are profiteering it seems to me that in a very short time some good may result."[3]

Efforts at reconciliation continued, and the board of arbitration finally reached a settlement. This lasted for all of a week before the men decided to strike once more. The central labor union of Muskogee later spearheaded an investigation and succeeded in obtaining further concessions from the company. The union men of the city approved of the contract, but the president of the carmen's union Jess Green repudiated labor's action by refusing to go back to work. Labor leaders then voted on August 17 to withdraw support from the street car union, at which time members outside the union agreed to operate the cars.[4] By August 23, the *Daily Oklahoman* declared that the street car strike was lost, as the Central Labor Union, the backbone of support for the workers, withdrew its support after car men refused to go back to work following concessions by the company. During the strike, authorities signed in one thousand members of the citizens committee to protect the cars during non-union operation.[5] The street car company later agreed to reorganize the union and put the men back to work if they elected new officers. After a month of operation by non-union men, the Muskogee street car strike situation improved further. On September 26, the Muskogee Carmen's Union did just that and fired Jesse Green, president, and G.W. Ritchie, secretary, electing their replacements.[6] Eventually both sides reconciled, and street car service resumed in Muskogee. While both sides resolved the matter peacefully, the event illustrated the dangerous territory striking workers embarked upon in the new social climate. This prolonged action by the union at first resulted in a near riot, and newspapers reported negatively on the strikers. Other labor disputes appeared across the state, prompting local authorities to appeal for greater measures taken against strikers.

On August 8, concurrent with the Muskogee strike, Tulsa policemen walked out protesting for shorter hours and higher pay, a matter evaded by commissioners for over a month. The officers stated that they were not asking for recognition of their newly formed union, as in the Boston police strike, but instead asked for a raise from $110 a month to $125 for patrolmen and $150 for drivers and others, and an eight-hour day instead of a twelve-hour day. The city commissioners declared that they were unable to settle these demands, as the city lacked sufficient funds to grant the pay increase. The policemen countered stating that "there seemed to be sufficient funds a month ago to raise the salaries of men in all the other city departments." Newspapers categorized the strike as a major threat, stating that they left the city "without protection from the numerous thugs and holdups."[7] The absentee workers asked Robertson to send a company of the state militia to guard the city in their absence until they reached a settlement. Police Commissioner F.M. Bohn ordered all men to turn in their guns and badges, and planned on calling out the reserves to take charge. The *Daily Oklahoman* commented warily "just what the reserves are is a subject for some speculation among Tulsa citizens." The act spread alarm across the city, with countless citizens stocking up on weapons and ammunition.[8]

While Governor Robertson considered appeals for national guard intervention, the police commissioner made every effort to recruit returning soldiers to duty in protecting the city along with plainclothes officers who refused to walk out. By August 11 however, five soldiers employed in guard duty walked out after a number of striking policemen called them "scabs" and told them they took bread out of babies' mouths.[9] Harkening to the anti-radical sentiment common in the Red Scare, important officials including former

US District Judge Ralph Campbell called the striking policemen traitors and deserters, and said they should be punished as such.[10] On August 21, Joseph Meyer, labor conciliator for the federal government, received orders directly from Washington instructing him to proceed to Tulsa to conduct an inquiry into the difference between the police union and the city.[11] Robertson refused the demands of the union, and stood fast against acceding to their requests. During the crisis, the governor utilized former Deputy US Marshal Chris Madsen to investigate the situation. He traveled to Tulsa on August 13, and met with the mayor and several striking policemen with whom he was acquainted with. He discovered that a major had not been in favor of the strike, but were led into joining by radicals with "smooth talk and fine promises." After finding little help from the populace and the city administration, most were willing to return to their old jobs if they could be granted enough of their demands to save face. Madsen told that no demonstration of sympathy for the police occurred during a Labor Day parade, even though several of the strikers marched. Of the twenty-eight patrolmen who went on strike, sixteen returned on September 1, assigned to duty on probation for sixty days an granted a pay increase of $15 per month. Officials denied their demand for shorter hours and recognition of their union.[12] Madsen reported that authorities reinstated Ed Hahn, president of the union, though he refused to walk the beat assigned to him or take orders from the sergeant. They promptly fired him fifteen minutes after going to work. The informant gave much credit to the city administration for their handling of the situation, as they prevented a serious condition had they joined or encouraged the strikers.[13]

The tough stance taken by local officials forced policemen to cancel their strike with less than what they hoped for, and the two parties eventually reconciled and settled

the strike, bringing back order to the city. The events of the First Red Scare in eastern Oklahoma proved that radical agitation surrounding labor and business interests remained strong, and followed along national lines in levels of severity. A far great disturbance would occur in the sleepy town of Drumright, located near the robust oil fields, standing as one of the two major overreactions the state experienced during the First Red Scare.

In late 1919, a local event occurred that epitomized the First Red Scare and the paranoid attitudes surrounding it. On September 22, as a group of striking female telephone operators demonstrated peacefully in the sleepy town of Drumright. During the march down main street, an unidentified individual fired off a gun, causing supporters of the strikers and the local police force to engage in a brief scuffle. There were no injuries, with only two shots fired in the air, and by the next day the trouble had ended. Later, after an intense investigation, a governor appointed State Board of Arbitration determined that there was no proof of IWW involvement or major violence. Initial reports told a far different and highly sensationalized story, with initial associated press telegrams telling of serious violence, and a mob that rounded up the mayor and law enforcement officers demanding their resignation. By the end of the event, the national guard occupied Drumright to "restore order," the local newspaper engaged in a feud with the *Tulsa World* over the latter's negative portrayal of the town, and false tales of a Bolshevist conspiracy flooded the national media.

The buildup to the incident offered little indication of the dramatic series of events that would follow. In the sleepy town of Drumright, situated near the eastern oil fields of the state, the worries of Bolshevik uprisings appeared far off. On September 2, a Labor Day parade occurred without incident as labor organizers, pastors, judges and

citizens gathered to celebrate the holiday.[14] The local newspaper, the *Drumright Derrick*, took a casual approach to labor disturbances occurring in other parts of the state. A strike in Shawnee by telephone operators was met with relaxed undertones by the *Derrick*, with the outlet reporting on ongoing mediation and possible reconciliation.[15] Another report told in little threatening language that police killed some strikers and wounded fifteen in a battle between law enforcement and employees of the Standard Stock Car Company.[16] Drumright soon approached their own troubles, as local operators later threatened phone service across the town. A report circulated before the walkout that phone service was inadequate. Heralding an early warning of the event, the article pointed out that "Here in Drumright, we are told, that much of this inefficiency of service is due to poor equipment, a lack of modern facilities and too much work being placed on a few operators, long hours and low pay for the operators."[17] A pattern of overworked and underpaid workers appeared, as demand skyrocketed, with 200 more phones desired by the town.[18]

On Saturday, September 20, eighteen out of twenty-one female telephone workers of the Southwestern Bell Company went on strike.[19] The workers demanded recognition of their organization, better hours and pay, and received support from the Drumright Trades' Assembly, which represented every union in the town.[20] The women demonstrated the rising tide in female activism that became a staple during the early 1900s. While barred from outright participation in politics through voting, they nonetheless took matters into their own hands and championed for their own rights against a company dominated by men. The telephone operators later conditionally went back to work pending a decision from the State Board of Arbitration.[21] The town kept relatively calm during the event, and the *Derrick* reported that the strikers were "very

quiet," and that they were "quietly abiding the decisions of the company and are not making any demonstrations."[22] Several workers put out statements regarding the conditions at Southwestern Bell, revealing their unacceptable conditions, and their 10-11 hour work days.[23]

On September 22, the Drumright Strike took a turn for the worse. The telephone operators were conducting a demonstration in the middle of town with several hundred sympathizers when, as the *Derrick* explained the following day, "some kid with a howitzer about as big as himself took a shot at one of the policemen and when the attempt was made to arrest the kid the riot started."[24] When police attempted to arrest the youth, the strike supports and law enforcement squared off. The newspaper reported that some over-zealous sympathizers took Police Chief Jack Ary into custody, disarmed him and made him promise to resign his office. The *Derrick* reported that "good natured Jack didn't seem to be very badly scared, neither did he resign from the office."[25] The newspaper humorously stated that "with all the excitement there was no serious disturbances and no one was hurt, but it was bully fun while it lasted and there were many who thought that there would be rioting and killing."[26] It proclaimed that the only serious side of the trouble appeared the next morning when twenty special officers appeared on the streets armed with Winchesters, intent on keeping a wary eye on all who had the appearance of making trouble.[27] Unfortunately for Drumright, the brief brush with violence coincided with the nationwide steel strike that affected thousands of union workers. The striking ladies quickly and permanently took a back seat to the developing story, as US newspapers categorized the major walkout as a coup masterminded by radical labor and communist supporters who intended on overthrowing the government.

News of the outburst spread far and wide across a nation already gripped by the fear of Bolshevism, with many papers choosing to escalate the hysteria. *Harlow's Weekly* characterized the event as "The first serious attempt to dethrone constituted authority by mob law."[28] They stated that authorities believed the IWW and bolshevist elements perpetrated the so called riot, despite a signed statement from unions and the striking telephone women that organized labor held no support for the outburst.[29] The same day the *Derrick* printed its version of events, the national media took hold of the story and reported on the exaggerated events based off the faulty associated press reports. Hundreds of miles away in Mississippi, the Biloxi *Daily Herald* declared that "mob members assume control of Oklahoma Town: law and order apparently thrown to the wind in Drumright as result of telephone strike."[30] They reported the unsuccessful attempts to reach Drumright, citing a mob taking over the wires. The *Herald* also brought up the town's choice location in oil rich Creek County, and told of reports stating a mob drove the police department from the city and assumed control, disarming the chief of police and threatening his life if he did not resign. They mentioned an unconfirmed report from Oilton that stated a group was attempting to burn the Bell telephone building down at Drumright.[31] The *Herald* further claimed that not only had the majority of police been driven out and the police chief threatened with death, and the telephone building threatened with destruction, but three women operators who refused to strike were reportedly held prisoner by the mob in the telephone building where their friends were refused admittance or the right to supply them with food. The paper clarified that the trouble supposedly started when a policemen clubbed a picketer that morning. [32] From as far away as rural Wyoming, news of the Drumright affair made front-page news.

With an entire section devoted to strikes and disturbances across the country, the telephone strike made headlines, with the *Wyoming State Tribune* stating "Oklahomans shoot up streets and otherwise conduct themselves scandalously."[33] They further claimed that a mob detained Mayor W.E. Nicodemus, Councilman Barter, and Chief of Police Jack Ary, but later released them that same day. [34]

The event made headlines in countless other newspapers across the country, From Idaho where an outlet trumped up the foreign influence of the riot, to Michigan, New Mexico, and Ohio. Stories told of how one individual, a union leader named Ed Welch, led oil field workers on a rampage.[35] Welch would later be one of the few individuals actually convicted of inciting a riot, though he received a light sentence. One uncharacteristically calm portrayal of events came from the *Lexington Herald*, which reported that that the town was "perfectly quiet." It said that "there were no deaths, no hospital cases and no property damage," and that after the telephone operators went on strike, "considerable feeling developed in the community and there was some disorder, in the course of which two harmless shots were fired."[36] The newspaper elaborated that the first shot was aimed at Henry Carlos, assistant chief of police, who was on guard at the telephone office in front of the mob-like crowd. City Commissioner John Baxter seized the assailant's weapon and fired a second shot in the perpetrator's direction. Far from being detained by a group of angry Bolsheviks, the paper claimed that Chief of Police John Ary escaped the crowd and made his way to neighboring Cushing, where he signaled alarm and returned with three deputy sheriffs.

Apparently, city officials insisted that political opponents of the mayor who sympathized with the striking workers brought about the demonstration to hurt

Nicodemus' administration. [37] This ran counter to the national tendency to sensationalize, with most papers printing stories similar to the *Tucson Citizen*, which told of IWW involvement in the riots. [38] It went on to say that Nicodemus made a statement linking Bolshevist and IWW elements among the oil field workers, again repeating the sensationalist line fed by the mayor. [39] Papers that reported in dire tones about the issue were among the first to introduce notions of the closeness of the event to the nation's vital resources, and the ethnic makeup of those committing the lawless acts, and were also prone to exaggeration. The *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, for its part, linked the oil richness of the area with the day's outburst in its article, repeated the story that one of the perpetrators came from Germany, harkening back to World War I fears of infiltration.[40]

Reasons for the sensationalist reporting dates back to the troubles the oil-rich region in eastern Oklahoma discussed in the previous chapter. Keenly aware that the IWW played a large role in the area historically, reporters took no chances in assuming the Wobblies played a large role in the Drumright affair. Despite authorities crushing the union at the end of the war, the historical experience from 1917 and the year prior helped thrust the media and populace into a panic that the organization had returned in some form to exact revenge.

The *Drumright Derrick* condemned the Associated Press, which irresponsibly sent out exaggerated telegrams to dozens of other newspapers.[41] On September 23, the same day news outlets across the country told of anarchist rule, the *Derrick* explained that "There is no mob and there has been no semblance of one. However, there are millions of people throughout the country who are hearing of Drumright… who would probably never know the town existed."[42] It called the Associated Press releases

sensationalist pieces that maintained no regard for the truth.[43] The *Derrick* also attempted to bring clarity to the situation, saying that "there has been no attempt to destroy property. Chief of Police Ary and Mayor Nicodemus have not disappeared and the Chief of Police has been attending to his duties as usual today. Mayor Nicodemus is well and hearty and smiling."[44] The editor for the *Derrick,* obviously outraged by the faulty reporting, printed a direct rebuttal against the *Tulsa World,* saying that their stories were a "misrepresentation of fact, in other words, it is a story manufactured out of the vivid imagination of some one who wants to resort to sensationalism and such a statement as appears in that paper of this morning only lends to inflame an element that is always inflamable[sic]."[45] The feud between the two newspapers escalated, as the *World* would later print their own counterargument. In the meantime, officials attempted to keep the situation calm. On September 23, the union president of the Drumright central Trades and Labor Council H.M. Boyle requested that there be no mass meetings that might disrupt law and order, and instructed all union affiliates to that effect. Lois Reenh and Ina Woods, representing the striking telephone operators also put out a statement, requesting their friends and sympathizers to in no way or manner cause any disturbances on the streets and not to make demonstrations that would cause trouble, owing to the false reports that had went out of the town. [46]

That same day, however, Governor Robertson took action that severely undermined the attempts at normalcy during the Red Scare. He sent in the national guard to quell the supposed revolt adding further fuel to the erupting firestorm.[47] Under orders from Robertson, Adjutant General Charles Barrett and roughly 200 soldiers from Companies H, I, M, G, Supply, 2nd Infantry, and Companies B and D 1st Separate

Battalion, fully armed and equipped, marched intro Drumright.[48] Barrett informed the governor that night that intelligence showed the situation as "extremely dangerous," and citizens expressed "grave alarm for fear mob may resort to fire and more intense rioting."[49]

During and after the incident, descriptions tended to play up the severe nature of the disturbance. Most histories of the event portray the affair as a serious threat and that a large, threatening mob actually existed and did detain the local mayor and police chief. Articles, newspapers, and recollections from the commander of the national guard all corroborate the sensationalist point of view. Nevertheless, according to various primary sources, no such dramatic event occurred. While there was undoubtedly some kind of a disturbance in Drumright, many news outlets in the state and nation succumbed to the illogical fears of the First Red Scare, and sensationalized the event. Throughout the papers of the day, alarmist stories of communist disturbances prevailed, giving rise to the unease and overreaction that characterized the period. Article titles included “Red Troops are Nearing Capital,”[50] in reference to the Bolshevist victories in Russia, and “Riots and Disorder Prevail in the East.”[51] News stories carried further headlines incriminating strike leaders in the national steel strike as radical members of the IWW.[52] Whether large scale violence in the town appeared or not, the *Derrick* took a positive view of National Guard troops entering. It stated that “The authorities backed by every peace loving citizen stand behind the troops and are backing them up in the effort to see that law and order is maintained and that a repetition of Monday night’s trouble is not repeated.”[53] The newspaper went on to state that “violators will be severely dealt with. This is a country of

free speech but free speech does not consist of allowing… agitator[s] to inflame the lawless and incite them to acts of violence."[54]

Authorities initially arrested nine suspects in connection with the disturbance, and according to a Sapulpa dispatch two of the men "are alleged to have been sent to the United States from Germany by the Bolsheviki element for the purpose of inciting unrest in this country."[55] *Harlow's Weekly* portrayed the action by protestors as revenge against Drumright's mayor, who achieved victory over a socialist challenger in the previous election, and the telephone strike was used as a means of embarrassing and overthrowing the administration.[56] Trumping up alarmist calls of revolution, the newspaper also mentioned that "Whatever the underlying cause of the Drumright disturbance may be, the fact stands out in bold relief that it was the first serious attempt in Oklahoma to substitute mob rule for constituted authority and thus the situation calls for the most careful consideration. Good citizens were thoroughly aroused and brought to a realization that the bolshevist element, although doubtless in a hopeless minority, is attempting to rear its head in Oklahoma."[57] In a piece written for *Harlow's Weekly* by Orville Hall, he said that developments with the disturbances in Drumright "have removed all doubts that the disturbance was caused by the IWW or bolshevist element."[58] Hall claimed that bolshevist elements used the telephone strike as an opportunity to unseat the government and that that while some initial reports appeared overblown, criticisms of Robertson's handling of the situation remained unfair. He maintained that the troops sent by the governor kept a restraining effect on supposed radicals, and forestalled a superior show of violence.[59]

The situation remained at a standstill between operators and Southwestern Bell, though the citizens of Drumright appeared indignant at the false reports sent out to the nation. Practically every citizen in the city supported the striking women, and the *Derrick* held that their newspaper was "for the girls and as their demands are within reason, and should be granted, we hope that the telephone company can be made to see that their claims should be granted."[60] The *Derrick* went on to say that the early reports sent out that escalated the hysteria resulted in much damage to the city. "In so far as the statements of rioting and destruction of property is concerned each and every one is a point blank lie and the man or men who sent them to the press associations are barefaced liars as every citizen in Drumright knows. There has been not one single man, woman or child hurt or injured and aside from the fact that some one threw a rock through the sign of the Southwestern Bell telephone Co.'s sign, there has not been five cents worth of damage done to any property in the city."[61] Countering the *Derrick's* earlier reports and attacks on their journalistic integrity, the *Tulsa World* printed a rebuttal on September 25, after troops had "restored order" in the town.

On September 25, the *Tulsa World* printed a scathing editorial on the entire affair, allowing fears of Bolshevism to override the common sense coming from the *Derrick*. It told its readers that if one wanted to know the true situation in the town, then one needed to go to Drumright and talk to the people. They claimed that while initial reports of the rioting were exaggerated, the causes leading up to it "must be written in terms of red card Socialists and Bolsheviki and terrorism."[62] They labeled the event a reign of terror by radicals, and painted one of the suspects, Ed Welch, as a radical extremist and even an IWW member. The *World* told that from his jail cell, Welch admitted as much, and that

he and the element he represented did not like the way the local government had conducted itself during the strike. The article went on to say that the instigator's intention was to force Mayor Nicodemus and Councilman Baxter and the chief of police to resign. The suspect denied that the mob had used violence though, and that he merely wanted the officials out of office.[63]

To support their credibility, the *World* mentioned that there was an active IWW organization in Drumright, which routinely agitated for membership. The newspaper maintained 1,195 Wobblies still resided in the town, and that they were the one's responsible for the recent affair.[64] The news outlet characterized the situation as a fight between radical and conservative elements, and became bitter especially during the last city election. "It was so intense that the ordinary political lines were wiped out and the contest for office was fought out in the lines of the conservatives against the radicals."[65] Nicodemus headed one ticket, while a radical, chosen by Welch, headed the other. Eventually, the town elected Nicodemus, which created a near final obstruction for the leftists, that eventually culminated in the lawlessness of September 22. The paper went on to say that the telephone strike was a minor matter and had nothing to do with the demonstration, "it merely provided an excuse."[66] The article concluded that

> upon the head of Welch is heaped bitter condemnation. He is the man who organized the Oil Field Workers Union. He is the business secretary of the organization. He does no work except to look after the affairs of the union. He has lived in Drumright several years and bears the reputation of an 'extremist.' There are some who call him a Socialist and one of the officials of the central trades union declared that he is an IWW by sympathies if not even an actual member.[67]

Welch later denied these accusations, and emphatically said that he refused to consider any application to his union if he knew he was a member of the IWW. Welch called

himself a pacifist by nature and opposed all violence. He maintained that he prevented the lynching of the chief of police, and persuaded mob members not to burn down Councilman Baxter's home. Of the 150-200 men that composed the mob, with 1,500-2,000 onlookers lining the streets, Welch mentioned that he was involved, but issued a complete denial of any physical part in the demonstrations, though he was part of a group that desired members of the administration to resign.

The *Tulsa* rebuttal, directly contradicting the *Derrick,* also reiterated that the mob had indeed disarmed the police and threatened his life unless he left town. The chief, not wanting to become a martyr, decided to feign agreement and fled to Cushing where he sent out calls for help. The newspaper claimed he was later joined by other officers and Baxter, who escaped the scene in an automobile. The mayor stayed off the streets and sent out calls to the governor's office asking for troops to be sent, and upon hearing affidavits describing the event, Robertson agreed. Purportedly, a band of 300 oil workers intended to come in on September 23 to finish the job begun by the mob, and upon finding out, officials deputized over 100 citizens to defend the streets.[68]

Labor unions denied responsibility for the event and offered to supply their men for patrol duty. Citizens expected the small army of radical oil workers to invade, and, as the *World* attested, reasons why no such event occurred was not known, though they suggested it was due to a false report in the first place. It later chalked up the lack of appearance to the arrival of the troops, who deterred any would-be invader. The *World* warned how seriously near Drumright came to anarchy, and that "it was not only a riot that was stopped in Drumright Monday night. Bolshevism in an aggravated form has been squelched and now energies are being turned toward wiping it out."[69] In the wake of

troops arriving, few newspapers attempted retractions. One exception appeared in the *Colorado Springs Gazette*, which called the riots "greatly magnified."[70] This remained a unique example, as most outlets opted to continue the hysteria.

The reporting by the newspapers did considerable harm to the image of Drumright, and Governor Robertson attempted to repair the town, and by extension the state's image. He contacted Earl Foster, the County Attorney for Creek County on September 25, and said that the disturbance at Drumright incurred great expense to the state and gave it exceedingly undesirable notoriety. He called on the attorney to prosecute all those guilty of perpetrating the riots, and expected officers of Creek County to "spare no effort in bringing about the immediate arrest, prosecution, and punishment of the offenders." He offered to give the attorney all the assistance in his power to support the investigation, and stated that he had directed the attorney general to make a special investigation of the matter.[71] To that end, he sent a letter to the attorney general, telling him, if necessary, to call a grand jury, and to "kindly use all the machinery of your office looking to the immediate arrest, prosecution and punishment of those guilty."[72]

Judge Lucien Wright, representing the county attorney's office, responded to the governor's letter. He offered his assurances that they remained busy in procuring evidence for the preliminary hearing of those arrested, and also said that he was away from the county at the time of the occurrence and all knowledge he had of the event was from hearsay. Nevertheless, he vowed to assist Robertson in his crusade against the trouble-makers of Drumright.[73] Mayor Nicodemus for his part, appeared more than willing to assist in the investigation, and offered profound thanks to the governor for sending in troops. Despite earlier claims from the *Derrick* that nothing of note happened

during the riot, and that the mayor was not in any danger, Nicodemus stated that since the county attorney and sheriff were away the night of the event, they were unable to "fully realize the seriousness of the situation."[74] A complete statement of the situation was sent to the Governor on September 26 asking him for arbitration.[75]

By September 27, authorities released a majority of the men arrested as they had posted their bail bonds.[76] Judge Gaylord Wilcox, of the superior court of Creek County, sent a letter to Robertson explained that authorities had indicted twelve men in all, and that the real trouble stemmed from the war. He told how local officers had to deal with the IWW and socialists, and the revolutionary element in the oil field, "where there are thousands of men employed, more than any other place in this state." He reiterated the *Tulsa World's* influential article rebutting the *Derrick*, and after a failed bid for electoral power running, radicals took the opportunity of the striking ladies to exact revenge. He praised Robertson exceedingly for his decision to send in troops, saying that "the best possible thing and the only proper thing, in my judgment, under the conditions, was to do just exactly what you did."[77]

That same day phone service resumed in Drumright, though none of the operators on strike went back to work.[78] By October, law enforcement officials rounded up and indicted sixteen men for rioting, with all but two able to make bail.[79] Later, the State Board of Arbitration, appointed by Governor Robertson, attempted to solve the crisis between Southwestern Bell and striking operators.[80] Their eventual report served as the major piece of evidence in debunking the sensationalist tales from the *Tulsa World*, and newspapers across the country.

The State Board of Arbitration, appointed by Robertson, remained in Drumright to conduct an investigation of the differences between the company and employees, and on October 9, they issued a statement recommending the course of action for the opposing parties.[81] A key demand of the State Board was that all employees of the telephone company be immediately reinstated without discrimination of membership in any organization which they may or may not belong.[82] Such language targeted directly membership in the Socialist Party or other far leftist organizations, and showcased a remarkable sense of clarity in the hysteria laden time period. The Board also recommended the institution of an eight hour work day, attention given to sanitation and ventilation, and the appointment of a three-man group appointed by Southwestern Bell and the telephone operators to assist in reaching a satisfactory agreement.[83]

The official report of the board sent to the governor's office concluded several key facts about the riot in Drumright. The document emphatically condemned the early reporting on the strike. "We believe that the spread of false and misleading statements concerning the early stage of the strike situation in Drumright was the cause of a lot of dissention in this community, and was put out by unknown, irresponsible parties."[84] In one telling example of inaccuracies, the Board commented on reports of hundreds of shots fired by rioters, the claim that Mayor Nicodemus, Councilman Baxter, and the chief of police were jailed by the mob, and mob demands for resignation of the officials under threat of lynching. The report declared that "we have been unable to find any truth, whatever, in this report. Relative to the question of violence in Drumright, we will state that the State Board of Arbitration and Conciliation has been unable to find the slightest evidence which directly connects the telephone strike with it."[85]

After the report came out, Ed Welch saw his day in court in Sapulpa, the county seat of Creek County. On November 3, Judge Lucien Wright presided over the case against the indicted agitator in the *State vs. Ed Welch*. County Attorney Earl Foster, assisted by R.B. Thompson engaged in prosecution, while John Hill of Drumright and Judge E.B. Hughes of Sapulpa acted as defense. The court proceedings occurred in an atmosphere rife with Red Scare paranoia, as just two days earlier, on November 1, the nationwide strike of coal miners occurred. This added further fuel to the fearful sentiment of the time, as many saw the walkout as a communist conspiracy aimed at destroying the US government. Governor Robertson refused to comply with demands of miners in the state, and Judge Wright commented on issue during the trial. He praised Robertson for his tough stance against labor during the crisis, and ended his letter by stating that "I am just beginning to realize the insidious spread of Bolshevikism. In my judgment it is imperative that those of us who believe in the perpetuation of the principles on which our government is based, stand shoulder to shoulder against radicalism in every form."[86] The private opinions of the judge presiding over the case of an accused radical demonstrated how predisposed Wright was to suspect Welch.

On November 6, the trial concluded, reaching a verdict of guilty of riot for the defendant, with the jury assessing his punishment as a misdemeanor. The court sentenced Welch to thirty days in jail and a fine of 500 dollars. The event showcased the true exaggeration of the Drumright riot, as the judge was hard-pressed to even convict a single individual for the disturbance. Originally, the first ballot on return to the jury room was six for conviction on a felony and six for acquittal. The jury took another ballot resulting in eight for conviction and four for acquittal. In a letter to Robertson betraying the

confidentiality of secret trial proceedings, Judge Wright slandered the four jurists voting for acquittal, calling them socialists. He later said that an individual advised him that one of the four saw jail time for obstructing the draft. This information came too late to effect the outcome of the trial, the judge lamented, and originally the four jurists intended to remain for acquittal, "but it having been intimated to them that court would remain in session for some days and that they would be kept together indefinitely, they finally announced that they would assent to a verdict of guilty if the punishment were assessed as a fine of 500 dollars and thirty days in jail."[87] The eight who stood for conviction assented to the verdict, Wright said, to prevent a mistrial. The judge complained that while this was not the result the county attorney and others were looking for, it would have a constructive effect on individuals so inclined as the defendant was. He went on to say that County Attorney Foster "conducted one of the most vigorous prosecutions I have ever seen, confronted as he was with the difficulty of securing witnesses who were willing to testify to the truth and that four men in the jury box evidently opposed a conviction from the start."[88] The governor responded to Wright's letter, stating that while he regretted the light penalty, he felt it a victory nonetheless.[89]

Later in February 1920, an inquiry by the US Bureau of Investigation into the riot revealed conflicting information. The agent on-hand interviewed Mayor Nicodemus and Police Chief Jack Ary, who confusingly told that the riot occurred on September 21, rather than the 22 as papers at the time reported. They reiterated that the leaders of the riot were Secretary of the International Oil Field Workers J.M. Fitzgerald, and Recording Secretary of the Labor and Trades Union Ed Welch. Members of the International Oil Field Workers Association remained under indictment for rioting, of which Ed Welch

was the primary suspect and the only one so far to receive a penalty. Nicodemus and Ary claimed that Welch, along with the other indicted men, were members of the IWW as they had been told from hearsay accounts that the group regularly attended Wobbly meetings. The police chief continued in the report, saying that all the other suspects were confirmed IWW members, who kept association with local radicals, including one "notorious IWW woman attorney of Drumright." The two local officials in question classified the incident as "serious rioting and disturbances," though with no deaths, no major acts of violence, and lasting only one night, one can call into question the definition of serious.[90] The report remains part of a larger series of investigations done by the federal agency into Wobbly activity in Oklahoma. The testimony by Nicodemus and Ary does little to clarify the situation, and contradicts earlier information given by newspapers and townspeople. Despite this, it shows how concerned US officials were of radical activity in the state, and their willingness to investigate a headline grabbing incident that thrust Oklahoma into the heart of the First Red Scare.

Order was restored in the town, though the rampant hysteria claimed another victim. Newspapers failed to help the matter, and acted only to make the situation worse. The town of Drumright served as a microcosm for the fear and paranoia that gripped the nation, as no town, no matter how small, was safe from the irrationality of the times. Strong blame lay directly with Governor Robertson, as the ordering in of the national guard into a situation that was, by all accounts, no where close to a riot, proved to be a gross overreaction. As a major test of leadership, he gave in to the prevailing attitudes and committed forces to what would have been, in any other time period, an insignificant event in the history of Oklahoma. The overall labor situation in the state appeared to

improve. A telephone strike in Shawnee as well as a street car strike in Chickasha ended without serious problems.[91] Years later, important figures in the event would attempt to glorify their role in the Drumright affair.

Adjutant-General and commander of national guard forces Charles F. Barrett demonstrated that he still succumbed to the hysteria when, writing in 1941, labeled the incident a Bolshevist and IWW riot. He argued the events in the town, though originally a simple telephone operators' strike, "were directly traceable to IWW influences and leadership."[92] Contradicting the State Board of Arbitration, he repeated the alarmist and inaccurate storyline, saying the rioters "had gone so far as to disarm and assault the chief of police, drive the mayor out of the city, and to threaten to 'burn up the town.'"[93] Barrett maintained the situation looked for a time like a second Omaha affair, where during race riots the local mayor was hanged by a mob. He told how the county judge of Creek County, along with the mayor of Drumright, requested military protection from the governor, and by the time of the national guard's arrival on September 23, they faced an armed group recruited by Wobblies from the surrounding oil fields that intended to make good on their threats to local officials.

The sudden and unexpected appearance of the Guard in large numbers alarmed the mob, causing them to disperse, and allowing for the restoration of order.[94] No Guard members fired any shots, according to Barrett, and "no person was hurt or injured from the time the Guard reached the scene of the disturbance, but the timely presence at Drumright of a formidable number of fully armed troops undoubtedly prevents wholesale destruction of property and the possible loss of lives."[95] From his remembrance of the event, one can see the Red Scare mentality manifesting itself yet again. Barrett likely

would have scoffed at the idea of downplaying the event, as in his version of events, the National Guard achieved a heroic victory, standing as a bastion of order against a lawless chaos that threatened to engulf an entire town. According to the State Board of Arbitration, the truth of the matter was far simpler. For Barrett and his men however, much like the media and general public, deeds of daring and sensationalism far outweighed the necessity for truth.

This attitude remained prevalent through the rest of the year and the remainder of the First Red Scare in 1920. Fears of labor discontent appeared on a constant basis and on September 30, Oklahoma City faced a strike by printers. Headlines raged across papers stating every printing office in the city was tied up, with demands made for $1.00 an hour and a 48 hour week by union printers.[96] Every disturbance appeared through the lens of fear. With communist uprisings raging across the globe, each labor dispute or strike, and every protest against the government was viewed as somehow inspired by agitator elements with foreign influences. Within the confines of this viewpoint, the Commander-in-Chief of the Sons of Veterans sent a letter to the governor, wherein he laid out his order's goals in support of the government. He maintained that they "vigorously oppose all Bolshevik movements and tendencies, and all efforts that make for the destruction or impairment of our constitutional Union."[97] He went on to demand of "citizens one hundred percent Americanism. That we call upon congress to provide necessary laws for the deportation of all unregenerate aliens, and those who do not in good faith seek to become citizens."[98] The domestic environment continued to spiral out of control. Already, Robertson failed his first major test during the Red Scare in his willingness to succumb to the alarmist sentiments of the media. His overreaction proved that Oklahoma was willing

to commit military units to overblown reports that portrayed threats near the major resource centers of the state. Future strikes were seen through the lens of paranoia, and the governor performed his utmost in protecting the vital industries of the state, portraying Oklahoma as a stable and loyal state of the union.

Coinciding with the events in Drumright and strikes elsewhere, the state also shuttered with anticipation over an announced visit by President Woodrow Wilson, scheduled to take place on September 26th. He intended to tour Oklahoma, among other states across the country, and gather support for the United States to enter into the League of Nations treaty.[99] Governor Robertson immediately began preparations to host the head of state, and created a committee to oversee the process. The governor, in an attempt to show support to the president, encouraged counties to draft resolutions of support to US entry into the League of Nations. To engage in this operation, he worked with local Democratic Party leaders, who in turn engaged their constituents and organized mass meetings to procure the vote. A letter from a community leader in Nowata stated that "we are complying with your request, and that the resolutions will be adopted and brought down to Oklahoma City to you."[100] On September 26, as Wilson was en route from Kansas City, Missouri, his staff wired a telegram to the governor saying that the visit would be cancelled on account of poor health.[101] Unofficially, the president had suffered a stroke and his staff hastily prepared for his return to Washington DC.

Eventually, the League of Nations would be defeated in the US legislature. So too would Robertson's attempts at portraying Oklahoma in a state of normalcy for the president. The strikes of Muskogee, Tulsa, and Drumright wreaked havoc on the state during the First Red Scare, plunging Oklahomans deeper into a sense of paranoia and fear.

They viewed communist conspiracies as everywhere, threatening the vital resources of the state. The disturbance in Drumright especially epitomized what the First Red Scare was all about. The town entered into the national spotlight, appearing as one of dozens of local events blown out of proportion by a news media swept up in hysteria. What began as a symbol of female activism quickly escalated, with the striking ladies taking a back seat to the dramatic pronouncements of doom from major newspapers. For the first time, the state was making national headline news, becoming a central story in the First Red Scare. Oklahoma would suffer yet another major panic before the paranoia concluded, only this time the event would become part of a nationwide strike that involved hundreds of thousands of miners. This walkout, spearheaded by the UMW, affected the mines around McAlester, caused the government to send in troops to protect its mineral interests, declare martial law, and drew the state further into the bowels of fear. It would be the last major event during the First Red Scare in Oklahoma, and along with Drumright, served as the second major pillar of hysteria during this traumatic period.

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[2] "Perey Steidly to Robertson," July 16, 1919, Folder 4, Box 13, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[3] "N.A. Gibson to Robertson," August 5, 1919, Folder 4, Box 13, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[4] "Carmen Lose Help of Muskogee Labor," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 18, 1919, 1.

[5] "Street Car Strike at Muskogee Lost," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 24, 1919, 12.

[6] "Union Leaders at Muskogee Ousted," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 27, 1919, 4.

[7] "Police Force at Tulsa on Strike," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 9, 1919, 1.

[8] "Police Force at Tulsa on Strike," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 9, 1919, 1.

[9] "Soldiers on Tulsa Police Force Quit," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 12, 1919, 3.

[10] "Police Strikers Called Traitors," *Daily Oklahoman*, September 20, 1919, 3.

[11] "Federal Probe for Tulsa Cop Strike," *Daily Oklahoman*, August 22, 1919, 1.

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[13] "Madsen to Robertson," September 8, 1919, Folder 9, Box 12, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[14] "Labor Day in Drumright was Attended by Many and Fine Time Enjoyed," *Drumright Derrick*, September 2, 1919.

[15] "Hello Girls at Shawnee go on Strike," *Drumright Derrick*, September 5, 1919.

[16] "Strikers Killed and 15 Wounded," *Drumright Derrick*, September 4, 1919.

[17] "Inadequate Phone Service is Daily Complaint Made by Patrons in Drumright," *Drumright Derrick*, September 6, 1919.

[18] "Inadequate Phone Service is Daily Complaint Made by Patrons in Drumright," *Drumright Derrick*, September 6, 1919.

[19] "Telephone Operators Go On a Strike This Afternoon at 2:30 and Service is Tied Up," *Drumright Derrick*, September 20, 1919.

[20] "Telephone Operators Go On a Strike This Afternoon at 2:30 and Service is Tied Up," *Drumright Derrick*, September 20, 1919.

[21] "Telephone Girls Will go to Work," *Drumright Derrick*, September 22, 1919.

[22] "Phone Strike is Very Quiet," *Drumright Derrick*, September 22, 1919.

[23] "A Statement Made by a Girl Who Worked for the Bell Telephone Company," *Drumright Derrick*, September 22, 1919.

[24] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

[25] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

[26] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

[27] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

[28] Hall, Orville D., "Radicals Attempt to Dethrone Drumright Officials," *Harlow's Weekly*, September 24, 1919.

[29] Hall, Orville D., "Radicals Attempt to Dethrone Drumright Officials," *Harlow's Weekly*, September 24, 1919.

[30] "Mob Members Assume Control of Oklahoma Town," *Daily Herald*, September 23, 1919.

[31] "Mob Members Assume Control of Oklahoma Town," *Daily Herald*, September 23, 1919.

[32] "Oklahoma Town in Hands of Mob," *Miami Herald*, September 23, 1919.

[33] "Mob Demands Resignation of Officials," *Wyoming State Tribune*, September 23, 1919.

[34] "Mob Demands Resignation of Officials," *Wyoming State Tribune*, September 23, 1919.

[35] "State Troops Control City in Oklahoma," *Jackson Citizen Patriot,* September 24, 1919; "Mob Rules City in 'Phone Strike," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, September 24, 1919; "Telephone Co. Attacked by a Rioting Mob," *Morning Olympian*, September 24, 1919; "Troops will Patrol Streets of Drumright," *Pueblo Chieftain,* September 24, 1919; "State Troops go to Western City," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1919.

[36] "Troops Sent to Oklahoma City," *Lexington Herald*, September 24, 1919.

[37] "Troops Sent to Oklahoma City," *Lexington Herald*, September 24, 1919; The *Herald* incorrectly reported the chief of police's name, which was actually Jack Ayers.

[38] "State Troops Patrol Streets at Drumright," *Tucson Citizen*, September 24, 1919.

[39] "State Troops Patrol Streets at Drumright," *Tucson Citizen*, September 24, 1919.

[40] "State Troops go to Western City," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 24, 1919.

[41] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious," *Drumright Derrick,* September 23, 1919.

[42] "Sensational Report Sent Broadcast Over Country Regards Telephone Strike," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

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[44] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

[45] "Telephone Strike Becomes Serious: Big Riot Last Night Was Narrowly Averted," *Drumright Derrick*, September 23, 1919.

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[50] "Red Troops Are Nearing Capital," *Drumright Derrick*, September 24, 1919.

[51] "Riots and Disorder Prevail in the East," *Drumright Derrick*, September 24, 1919.

[52] "Strike Official Said to be IWW," *Drumright Derrick*, September 24, 1919.

[53] "Arrival of State Troops Last Night Put a Crimp in Plans of the Lawless," *Drumright Derrick*, September 24, 1919.

[54] "Arrival of State Troops Last Night Put a Crimp in Plans of the Lawless," *Drumright Derrick*, September 24, 1919.

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[56] Hall, Orville D., "Radicals Attempt to Dethrone Drumright Officials," *Harlow's Weekly*, September 24, 1919.

[57] Hall, Orville D., "Radicals Attempt to Dethrone Drumright Officials," *Harlow's Weekly*, September 24, 1919.

[58] Hall, Orville D., "Drumright Strike Situation Being Probed," *Harlow's Weekly*, October 1, 1919.

[59] Hall, Orville D., "Drumright Strike Situation Being Probed," *Harlow's Weekly*, October 1, 1919.

[60] "Strike Situation Between Operators and Company Remains Unchanged Today," *Drumright Derrick*, September 25, 1919.

[61] "The False Statements of Rioting and Lawlessness Big Injury to Drumright," *Drumright Derrick*, September 25, 1919.

[62] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World*, September 25, 1919.

[63] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World*, September 25, 1919.

[64] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World*, September 25, 1919.

[65] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World*, September 25, 1919.

[66] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World*, September 25, 1919.

[67] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World,* September 25, 1919.

[68] "Political Grudge, Bolshevism and History Tear Drumright," *Tulsa World,* September 25, 1919.

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[70] "Riots at Drumright Greatly Magnified," *Colorado Springs Gazette,* September 25, 1919.

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[72] "Robertson to Freeling," September 25, 1919, Folder 22, Box 3, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[73] "Lucien Wright to Robertson," September 30, 1919, Folder 22, Box 3, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[74] "Nicodemus to Robertson," September 26, 1919, Folder 22, Box 3, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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[80] "Arbitration of Phone Strike Refused by Co.," *Drumright Derrick*, October 2, 1919.

[81] "Statement by State Board of Arbitration," October 3, 1919.

[82] "Regarding the Telephone Girls," *Drumright Derrick*, October 9, 1919.

[83] "Regarding the Telephone Girls," *Drumright Derrick*, October 9, 1919.

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[85] "Recommendations of the State Board of Arbitration," Folder 10, Box 26, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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[87] "Wright to Robertson," November 6, 1919, Folder 4, Box 13, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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[89] "Robertson to Wright," November 13, 1919, Folder 4, Box 13, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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[93] Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, 204.

[94] Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, 204.

[95] Barrett, *Oklahoma After Fifty Years*, 204.

[96] “Oklahoma City Printers on Strike,” *Drumright Derrick,* September 30, 1919.

[97] Commander-in-Chief of Sons of Veterans to Robertson, September 24, 1919, Folder 6, Box 9, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors’ Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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[99] "Minutes of Meeting of General Committee on Arrangements for Visit of President Wilson to Oklahoma City on September 26, 1919," Folder 2, Box 12, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors’ Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[100] "Wilkinson to Robertson," September 23, 1919, Folder 2, Box 12, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors’ Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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Chapter 5: The Coal Mining Strike of 1919

The United Mine Workers of America initiated a strike on November 1, 1919 against perceived unfair labor practices by mine operators. The walkout of hundreds of thousands of the nation's miners left the country paralyzed from lack of coal and fuel, and with the threat of a harsh winter looming, hurled the major mining states farther into the grips of Red Scare paranoia. Reactionaries incorrectly portrayed the miners as foreign Bolshevist radicals, intent on usurping power by holding hostage the resources of the country. Oklahoma, possessing valuable deposits of coal in the southeast, became a part of this national uproar, producing their second major Red Scare overreaction in 1919. By the end of the tumult, Governor Robertson had called out the national guard yet again, initiated martial law in several coal producing counties, and pandered to xenophobic tendencies of the people. A report later released by the state government revealed that foreign miners had few if any ties to communism, were not part of a Bolshevist plot, and threats to Oklahoma's supply of coal by radicalism were unfounded. The overreaction by Robertson remains a stark example of the paranoid fear of the time, and the miner's strike in the state stands alongside the Drumright affair as one of the two unfortunate yet main pillars of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma.

The cause of the entire ordeal revolved around the precious resource of coal. Oklahoma contained an ample supply, with a mining area that included a string of towns next to McAlester, the county seat of Pittsburg County, along with Coal County and Latimer County, within the Marginal Hills Belt, a prime area for the mining industry.[1] This important location drew migrant laborers from various European countries, thus raising suspicion for the area as a major location for trouble during the First Red Scare.[2]

Railways provided important links that carried supplies of coal to neighboring states and across the country. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railway, running 921 miles in Oklahoma, had major stops in McAlester, Coalgate, and other major mining towns, with transfers to other lines that went into Missouri and Colorado.[3] McAlester showcased the dramatic effect of the abundant resources coupled with the rail system. Originally the site of a store operated by entrepreneur J.J. McAlester in 1869, by 1900, the population grew to over 3,000 and had had quadrupled to 12,000 by 1920.[4] This dramatic increase in residents was replicated on a smaller scale all along the mining regions of Oklahoma, with influxes of workers streaming in from across the country and the world in search of work. These migrants would later draw suspicion from a population drummed up with war-hysteria, trained to fear foreign elements. In the meantime, they worked the land and attempted to make new lives for themselves in the relatively new state.

The immigrant distribution in the region was highly diverse, with a record number of immigrants arriving yearly in towns such as McAlester as well as neighboring Krebs. Using McAlester as an example, its distribution of white population stood at 9,393, or over three-quarters of the total population. However, foreign-born whites and African-Americans numbered 392 and 2,090 respectively.[5] Italy held the record as the country with the most foreign nationals in Pittsburg County, with over 900 registered. The largest areas of occupations for Oklahoma remained in agriculture, though the coal industry boasted nearly 8,000.[6] The various nationalities that helped make up the working classes drew much anger and criticism, bearing the brunt of assaults as reason gave way to paranoia during the First Red Scare. During 1919-1920, countless letters into the governor's office warned against foreign nationals infiltrating the country and causing

great harm to the state.[7] After the war, Oklahomans needed little encouragement in xenophobic tendencies. The influx of immigrants coupled with the history of the region caused many citizens and government officials to view the miners with distrust. Pittsburg County reported some of the highest levels of socialist voting patterns in previous elections. During the 1914 election, for example, when Oklahoma voted for Socialist candidates in unprecedented numbers not seen before or since, Pittsburg County's vote for the Socialist candidate for president totaled 25-29 percent.[8] Historically, McAlester held a much higher proclivity for leftist candidates. In 1911 townspeople voted in two Socialist Party aldermen.[9] The influx of immigrants and the region's pro-socialist past all came to a head by 1919, as the forces of labor and business engaged in a volatile disputes centered on the state's mining industry. The disagreement culminated in the nationwide walkout of miners on November 1, creating a firestorm of fear and overreaction that few could have imagined.

Having deferred demands for higher pay during the war, workers now wanted increased wages to offset the high cost of living. Originally in 1917, the government had signed a contract with mine workers fixing wages until World War I ended. At the conflict's bloody conclusion, the government refused to raise the workers' pay, citing economic difficulties. In October 1919, the justifiably agitated miners held a conference in Cleveland, Ohio, and presented mine operators with demands for better pay and fewer hours.[10] The conference attendees included employers and employees of the Central Competitive Field (Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois) with no representation from western miners in states such as Colorado, New Mexico, and Oklahoma. However, in times past, decisions made by such conferences still affected

mining districts outside the Central Competitive Field. The demands included an increase of sixty percent of current wages paid for day labor, a reduction to six hours of work per day, five days a week with exceptions made during emergencies, and during such instances time and a half for overtime be granted along with double wages for work done on holidays, with Saturday and Sunday regarded as such. Also, workers would only work double shifts during emergencies, miners violating their contract would not be required to pay any penalty as was then the case, and that in event coal operators did not accept all demands made by the union, a strike would be called on November 1.[11] The demands laid out at the Cleveland convention became the basis for all contracts under negotiation in the United States.[12] With the two sides unable to reach an agreement, the threatened strike appeared ever more likely.

As the walkout of workers loomed across the nation, mine operators struck the first blow in a bid for public support. On October 20, the Colorado and New Mexico Coal Operators' Association sent a letter to dealers and consumers of coal playing up the danger of the situation. They quoted John Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers of America, who said that "the government cannot stop the threatened strike of coal miners," and that unless coal operators accept their demands, they would shut down every coal mine in the country without question or modification.[13] The letter further claimed the strike maliciously punished coal consumers of the entire nation as well as operators. It concluded that the limited number of operators in the eastern and middle states were not able to grant the workers' demands, labeling them "oppressive, despotic and tyrannical." Furthermore, the wages paid remained sufficient, and there was no logic in the request for a decrease of work hours. They compared the earnings of mine workers to other

professions, saying that their $250 a month exceeded even that of doctors, lawyers, and merchants.[14] The mine operators argued that the decrease in hours would reduce the output of the mines to an alarming rate. They produced mathematical calculations showing that a mine producing 50,000 tons per month would not even be able to produce over 30,000 tons under the UMW demands, and the production capabilities during the critical winter season would not exceed sixty percent of its former output. The letter concluded that citizens needed to express their opinions to governmental leaders, and that if the public refused to support mine operators, they would be forced to accede to the demands because the populace could not survive without coal. This in actuality bolstered morale for UMW members, who saw that if they successfully held out long enough they would force mine owners to capitulate to their demands. The document ended in threatening tones, stating that "the high cost of living can only be remedied by increasing production. It cannot be remedied by decreasing output. If the union succeeds in the demands, the increase in cost and price of coal to you will be for all time and not a temporary matter."[15] Further letters attempted to demonize the miners, calling their demands unreasonable and their methods akin to radicalism.

On October 24, the Southwestern Interstate Coal Operators' Association sent a letter to Governor Robertson detailing their conversations with Governor Henry Allen of Kansas, and how they planned on solving the situation. The association had told Allen that unless the government took serious measures, the strike would cause "untold suffering and misery." The letter explained that the wage increase was unjustified by the present cost of living, and if the government granted it or any other increase above present rates, it would be an outrage to Americans everywhere. The coal operators

predicted that the strike would create a crisis unparalleled in the history of American industry, and called for "the most drastic and vigorous governmental action in dealing with the Bolshevic[sic] spirit shown in these demands."[16] They further urged state representatives to enact legislation to hold labor legally responsible for their acts and to enforce existing anti-trust laws against them, thus protecting the welfare of citizens against such "autocratic acts of radicals in union labor ranks."[17]

As mine operators demonized their opponents and labeled them incorrectly as radicals in the lead-up to the strike, Governor Robertson attempted to prevent a strike in his own state. To that end, he called a conference in McAlester, inviting both sides of the dispute to participate.[18] He wished for miners to stay on the job regardless of the national strike, while those workers desired to follow the directives of the United Mine Workers of America.[19] Negotiations collapsed, and all evidence pointed to the walkout going on as planned on November 1.[20] Revealing his biases and anti-miner sentiment, Robertson responded to the workers with indignation at their threat to cut off coal supply to the nation, stating “we’ll see who’s running this old USA,” and that the strike was “nothing short of a lawless conspiracy.”[21] After adjourning the conference, the governor bluntly stated that the coal mines of Oklahoma would remain in operation. "I made that statement this morning and I meant it," he explained. Robertson saw little use in prolonging the summit and instead chose to convert it into a meeting of patriotic American citizens. He proclaimed that all who cared to stay for that kind of meeting were welcome. No one left the room, and the governor began the task of ensuring that the fierce bite of winter would not affect his constituents. To heat Oklahoma homes, he proposed the importation of coal from New Mexico and Colorado mines, worked by non-union laborers. He had originally

opposed such a move as it would have harmed Oklahoma union miners, but now that they were on strike, he felt no compulsion to assist them.[22] Hearkening to the fears of immigrant labor and their supposed ties to radicalism, the governor sent a telegram to US Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, claiming "About 30 or 40 percent of the miners in this state are alien non-citizens. Their refusal to work is due largely to failure to appreciate our government and renders them and their presence undesirable in every way."[23] This unsympathetic language demonstrated Robertson's harsh stance and his unwillingness to compromise with the so-called enemies of America, a common attitude he held throughout the crisis, and a holdover from the paranoid World War I era.

Countless groups and individuals supported the governor's overly harsh rhetoric against the mine workers, with reams of letters flowing in to his office. One correspondence framed the conflict in patriotic terms, stating that "We desire to congratulate you on your stand for Americanism, and heartily endorse your attitude in requesting the deportation of all aliens. If we only had more public officials who would champion the cause of the general public, the Anarchists, Socialists, IWW and other tendencies towards destroying our American institutions would soon be a thing of the past."[24] One unique form of support came from G.J. Rousseau, a minister at First Baptist Church in Norman. He sent a letter to the governor expressing his admiration and support for the harsh stand taken against the miners, and also enclosed a copy of a sermon he planned on delivering the following Sunday. This lengthy oration served as an enlightening look into the popular notions of average Oklahomans, and the level of politics mixed with preaching that pervaded the chaotic period after World War I. In his address, the pastor opined on the strike: "is it to remedy oppressive conditions of labor

that the coal miners are striking and tying up the commerce of the country and subjecting 110 million of people to misery, sickness, and semi-starvation with a bitter winter setting in?"

Rousseau, displaying in full force his tendency to believe the alarmist calls of the day, introduced a comment from the *New York World*, which claimed that nine tenths of present strikes occurred not from honest desires to improve conditions but from a skillful body of revolutionary leaders whose sole object was the disruption of the present social system.[25] Using newspapers to further the red hysteria, the sermon reprinted quotes from the *New York Evening World*, which stated that there existed revolutionary bodies, such as the IWW, which aimed at overthrowing the institutions of government and currently controlled over 30 percent of all organized labor. Endorsing the current labor-capital relationship, he went on to conclude that the situation demanded "square-jawed Americanism," and that it was time to "skim the scum from the melting pot" and deport the foreign reactions who had abused American hospitality.[26] Bringing in the legacy of war paranoia, the pastor proclaimed that citizens should show the government the same solidarity and singleness of purpose that they used to defeat the "Hun," and that "we should break the back and crush the head of that rattle snake of radicalism within the labor unions."[27] The pastor concluded that if the teachings of Jesus were applied, the Bolshevik would "shave his whiskers, take a bath and go to work; applied to predatory labor unions it will cause them through their constituencies to give fair value to fair value received."[28]

This sermon fully laid bare the reactionism that a pervaded all levels of society. Not only from the media and government was paranoia preached, but also from the pulpit

as well, creating a virulent strain of suspicion that enabled the public to believe in even the wildest notions of communist infiltration, and support any action to dislodge this menace. This held profound ramifications for deeply religious Oklahoma, as the faithful received weekly doses of indoctrination in fear from many of their trusted religious leaders. One by one, the major institutions and centers of influence fell to the Red Scare hysteria. It was not long before these sentiments impacted schooling, as the media drummed up fears that education would succumb to communist infiltration.

The same day the nationwide coal strike began, the *Daily Oklahoman* reported on a group of high school students that threatened a strike of their own. Twelve boys and girls asked for shorter hours, among other concessions, and held gatherings to convince school authorities to accede to their demands. The newspaper portrayed the event in dramatic undertones, saying that "For two days the trouble had been brewing… During the 'fifth period' yesterday, about 200 determined pupils gathered in the front corridor. Bloodshed was averted when the class bells rang for the next period."[29] The *Oklahoman* went on to say the remainder of the "angry throng" scattered for class rooms, and possibly planned a future strike.[30] Those who were caught in the act were detained for an extra hour after school, and, according to school officials, the only display of violence during the disturbance occurred when one of the so called rioters, "in the heat of passion forgot herself and, in the hearing of several bystanders, exclaimed 'Oh, fudge!'"[31] An editorial in the newspaper dramatically exaggerated the event, calling the students a juvenile soviet whose actions were "extremely deplorable." It complained that the determined stand taken by the would-be strikers displayed a well-defined spirit of bolshevism among students, who sought to emulate radical adults. The newspaper

concluded that the cure for these young communists was a good spanking.[32] The dramatic tendencies of state papers to exaggerate events to revolutionary proportions were truly a skill greatly utilized by the media during the first Red Scare. With threats of radical activity coming from newspapers, the government, schools, and the pulpit, no realm of society was safe from harmful paranoia. This attitude dramatically effected the coal mining strike, and influenced the governor's actions in dealing with the supposedly Bolshevist inspired UMW.

With the public receiving paranoid indoctrination across all levels of society, the coal mining situation continued to deteriorate as supplies threatened to diminish. Desperate pleas soon rolled in to Robertson's office regarding the lack of fuel. One telegram told how the town of Brinkman remained out of coal for two weeks and that the people there "are badly in need."[33] Another from Chickasha ruefully explained that the city was out of coal and that if the mines shut down suffering would result.[34] Despite the appeal of citizens, Robertson still rebuffed the idea of concessions for the workers. On November 1, 1919, the strike became reality as 8,000 miners in the state and 400,000 nationwide refused to work in protest of better wages and conditions. The ensuing debacle lasted for thirty-seven days and cost Oklahoma $10,000,000.[35] By November 3, Chief Mine Inspector Ed Boyle sent out a letter to all assistant mine inspectors regarding the attitudes that the government office needed to take to diffuse the situation. He clearly endorsed a non-confrontational posture, instructing his staff not to take sides in the dispute or use the power of the office to aid one over another. He next took a jab at Robertson, whose famous escapade during the Drumright ordeal remained fresh in the minds of Oklahomans. Boyle explained that, while officials had a right to personal

opinions in any controversy that arise, they had no right to inject their opinion in official acts and that one needed to stand openly for law and order. Any group, miners or operators, deserved the same if they violated laws and civil authority.[36] Perhaps predicting Robertson's eventual overreaction, the chief mine inspector said that if the governor decided to suspend civil authority and establish martial law, the duties of the mine inspectors in enforcing mining laws would cease until civil rule was restored. Until then, all inspectors should carry out their duty, he wrote.[37] While Boyle acted rationally throughout the event, Robertson believed that a vast Bolshevist conspiracy lay behind the miner's actions.

In preparation for the walkout, the governor once again called out the national guard under the command of Adjutant General Barrett. The general's men numbered over 2,000, and occupied positions in effected areas, including McAlester, Henryetta and Coalgate.[38] Countless citizens offered their praise to the governor for his action. Soon after, Robertson sent a call out for volunteer miners to provide coal for the people of Oklahoma.[39] The American Legion sent a letter to Robertson pledging their support in "upholding Law and Order in Oklahoma"[40] and offered to dig coal, do police duty, or any other wish the state desired. The governor responded, thanking the Legion for their "patriotic" offer.[41] Countless citizens viewed the summoning of the Guard as a positive development. Over twenty years after the event, General Barrett looked with pride on the work of the National Guard in what he saw as the state's "first supreme test." He framed the situation as a foreign threat, stating that a large percent of the miners came from other countries and recognized only the orders of mine officials as supreme law.[42] He lauded the governor for his actions, saying that Robertson had tried by intercession

with mine leaders to avoid the distresses of the strike, but his pleas had little effect. Barrett maintained that while historical troubles plagued the Ohio and Pennsylvania mining communities, Oklahoma and Arkansas miners had "no particular grievance," and only struck out of sympathy to show solidarity for their brothers in other states. The general claimed that the prompt calling out of the guard and its efficient service in protecting lives and property, as well as the supplying of coal, was welcomed as a great and necessary public service.[43]

Small-scale disturbances occurred throughout the mining community during the guard's deployment. One operator told of a striker who chased two mine company officers away. The miner late threatened the operator's home. General Barrett quickly issued a threat to mine workers stating that if any further disturbances occurred, he would exert military control over the entire mining district.[44] As the general later recounted, however, some troops encountered favorable conditions among the miners, who welcomed them and expected to get along well with them.[45] He explained the miners themselves thanked the guard for the fair and considerate treatment they had exhibited toward them.[46] Overall the general claimed a great victory for the guard, and held steadfast in his belief that the governor's actions combated the foreign menace of the union workers. Robertson continued to act upon his xenophobic tendencies, and attempted to curtail alien influence in the state.

In statements made during the crisis, Robertson explained his desire to rid Oklahoma of foreign radicals. The population met these statements with overwhelming support. One citizen from Ardmore declared of Robertson that “You hit the bullseye when you said let us deport these aliens.”[47] Another individual wrote in an

uncompromising letter that "I trust you will insist upon the President causing all foreign miners, who refused to work, after Nov. 1, be deported. If they don't like our 'Uncle Sam' let them go back to their own beloved country."[48] The actions of the governor continued to influence the populace, as citizens appeared on the lookout for suspected Communist activity. One letter from an individual in Oklahoma City maintained "As a patriotic citizen I congratulate you on good stand regarding the mining strike. Will you kindly inform me to whom one should report a man for Bolshevistic talk?"[49] These sentiments hardly appear surprising. The near complete inundation of fear spurred by the government, media, pulpit, and schools helped promote such ideals, with each group influencing and feeding off each other at the expense of common sense.

Showcasing his similar lack of rationality and unwillingness to compromise, Governor Robertson called the strike an insurrection leading to anarchy, and an act of disloyalty to the government. He condemned the laborers, and said "The state of Oklahoma cannot abdicate its sovereign rights at the dictates of any foreign controlled labor oligarchy and it will not surrender while I am Governor to a conspiracy among labor leaders that measures the supremacy of our laws, the orderly progress of civil government and the very lives and physical welfare of our people."[50] In an open letter printed during the time, one citizen encouraged harsher laws to protect against agitating workers. "Congress should immediately propose and pass laws to confine the labor unions to their original beneficent purpose, and to control the criminal conspiracy commonly called 'strike.'"[51] The individual called for the execution of union leaders to protect unions from future invasions of anarchists.[52] Shortly after the UMW walkout on November 1, Governor Robertson contacted Attorney General Palmer and told of the dire

situation in the state. He mentioned that the coal strike was 100 percent effective, and that he still believed the deportation of aliens was advisable. He concluded by offering his further services to Palmer, stating that he desired to cooperate with him "in every way in the entire matter."[53] While threatening removal of foreigners from the mines, Robertson faced the difficult task of filling gaps left by the striking workers.

Robertson fully intended to use volunteer as well as convict labor to work the mines and on November 2, he released a statement justifying his decision to call out the guard. He explained that its purpose was to give every man who wished to work in the mines the opportunity of doing so without interference from the strikers. The governor maintained he would operate every mine in the state where he could receive sufficient help, and admitted to using criminals from the prison farm at McAlester to act as convict labor.[54] Robertson faced a challenge, however, as some states including Illinois and Oklahoma had laws requiring examination of miners before allowing them to work. Chief Mine Inspector Boyle also disagreed with the governor, fearing the influx of inexperienced miners. He stated that he would forbid any operations with "green men," including soldiers.[55] General Barrett later referred to Boyle as a "mild degree of anarchist," and reportedly called him and his deputies lunatics.[56]

Boyle attempted to stymie the governor's plans and on November 10, one of his deputy state mine inspectors unsuccessfully tried to prevent convict laborers from working the mines. Under orders from the chief mine inspector, the deputy inspector went to the McAlester penitentiary to stop operations at the Hiawatha mine. General Barrett took the man into custody, releasing him two hours later. Barrett later issued orders stating that any person who attempted to go through the guard lines to prevent

further mine work was to be held by troops. He stated that "wherever our lines are established, martial law is established. Martial law puts out of operation the civil law under which Boyle claims the authority to prevent the working of the mines by convicts." He went on to say that any further attempts to prevent the digging of coal would only lead to more arrests, and he would hold the prisoners until convinced they would not try to make any more trouble.[57]

While the national guard oversaw the mining camps, an undercover special agent, former Deputy US Marshal Chris Madsen was sent in to examine conditions. The sending of undercover agents to assess the situation was not new during the strike. Earlier, the US government employed several investigators to infiltrate and damage the reputation of the United Mine Workers and its president, John Lewis.[58] An injunction handed down by the government in October forbidding the UMW to take part in the proposed strike helped set up a legal precedent for federal investigation once the violation occurred.[59] Afterwards, Attorney General Palmer sent out word advising US attorneys to cooperate with US Marshals and Bureau of Investigation agents to search out violators of the injunction.[60] Madsen figured prominently into the aforementioned plan and was dispatched to the coal mines to uncover the supposed intentions of the strikers. He interviewed the superintendent of the mines, and attempted to discover the state of the situation. Madsen reported that the surface mines “can be worked at any time with unskilled labor.”[61] He commented on the status of explosives at the mines, and the lack of sufficient guards to protect the stores from being raided by striking miners. Madsen explained that the superintendent consented to put more men to watch the magazines and to confer with the military officers and abide by their decision to employ more guards. He went on to tell

how he secretly interviewed miners and strong union members, and how some of the men sought work on other places such as the lead fields.[62] Reiterating the non-revolutionary aims of the workmen, Madsen reported that that they did not want the public to suffer, and would make no objections to anyone working in the mines. The special agent also told of the poor working conditions miners had to endure, and how both they and mine operators suffered from it. "The miners in this district are practically broke… not withstanding the bold face they have shown they will be compelled to work or stave in a very short time or else go to work at other occupations."[63] Madsen's report presented a clear rebuttal to the fear-mongering sentiments of the government, media, and public. His conclusions revealed that the union miners were not influenced by radical, communist ideology, nor were they opposed to non-union laborers working to provide coal for the state. They merely wished for operators to improve their conditions and would not violently stand in the way of the government.

Robertson ignored Madsen's report, and continually sent other operatives undercover as intelligence agents, including national guard personnel. A report issued by the national guard in the McAlester coal mines provided information about the suspected cases of radicalism among the workers. The document revealed that IWW leaders started courting UMW laborers that they thought could be useful to their cause. "He is then asked quietly to join. In the event of refusal, he is asked two more times; if he refuses the third time, he is shot from ambush. One instance of this kind happened near Hartshorne."[64] The report went on to dispel rumors of radical support, maintaining that the strikers as a body did not endorse the IWW, and in fact, seemed very much afraid of them.[65] In another report from the 2nd Infantry, an undercover officer reported that few

strikers expressed a willingness to go back to work except under a written order from their UMW superiors. The mood of the strikers appeared extremely sullen, with some reports of resentment towards the national guard. One example told of a certain doctor in McCurtain who pretended to be a friend of the guard and offering his medical services. After treating an injured hand of one of the men, the doctor later went away and stated that he wished it had been the guardsmen's neck instead of his hand that was injured.[66] As witnessed, not everyone remained pleased with the calling out of the national guard. One telegram from the Oklahoma School of Mines requested the governor to remove all troops from the buildings and campus. They complained that school was impossible and that if not removed at once, students "will quit."[67]

Despite minor setbacks, the guard continued in its duty to protect the mines, as national representatives of both sides sought an end to the conflict. To that end, a federal judge issued an injunction against the UMW's leaders, with the union filing a countersuit demanding the order be lifted. After threats and legal wrangling, the union agreed to an order issued by Judge A.B. Anderson to withdraw the strike order. After a lengthy debate between the two parties, at around 4:10 in the morning John Lewis voiced his compliance with the court, stating that "we do it under protest. We are Americans. We cannot fight our government. That is all."[68] The union later issued a statement to all its workers:

> In obedience to the mandate issued on November 8 by the United States court district of Indiana, Judge A.B. Anderson presiding, the undersigned hereby advises you that the order of October 15 directing a cessation of operations in the bituminous coal fields of our jurisdiction is withdrawn and cancelled.[69]

By November 13, coal miners and operators once again convened at the meeting table to negotiate a new wage scale. Over 200 operators and 100 representatives from miners

attended the conference. Spirits remained high as miners expected to receive improved wages while the government and public at large expected them to resume work in the mines. While the strike recall order had been received, Illinois district President Frank Farring stated that he did not believe the men would return to work. Alexander Howat, President of the Kansas miners, numbering around 10,000, was quoted as saying he looked for no general resumption of production. The *McAlester News-Capital* reported in hopeful tones however, stating that "from West Virginia, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah came optimistic reports. In the majority of mines in those states it was believed normal production would be reached by Monday."[70] On November 18, the *News-Capital* reported that national guardsmen intended to leave per orders from General Barrett. He informed Robertson that, in light of the successes in negotiation, continued presence of the guard was useless. The guard had arrived on November 1, the day the strike began, and as the local McAlester paper stated, had little to do during the crisis. "Sent purely as a precautionary measure, there has been no hint of trouble which would occasion their use."[71]

The conference between mine operators and labor stalled, as both sides argued over proposed wages. By late November, the talks collapsed. Frustrated with the lack of progress, the US government threatened to take over all idle coal mines if owners failed to increase production.[72] On November 29, mine owners offered to open up the work sites to non-union men.[73] Robertson selected President of the State Board of Agriculture and Chairman of the State Council of Defense J.A. Whitehurst to oversee the use of volunteer labor in the state. Whitehurst proposed that rations of coal be based on number of volunteers each county supplied to work in the mines and fixed wages based on the

last government offer at the conference with the UMW, which was a 14 percent increase from current wages.[74] Robertson appealed for federal troops to protect the volunteer force, and again called out the National Guard. One member of the State Council of Defense declared that "volunteers by the hundreds from all sections have offered their services in manning the coal mines of the state." He told of scores of offers and telegrams pouring into his office, and all throughout the state citizens volunteered to work in the mines. These efforts eventually produced 3,000 tons of coal, but provided less than one-half of the state's daily demand, estimated at 7,000 tons.[75]

Unfortunately for Robertson, comments he made early in the crisis came back to haunt him. As the strike began, the governor had encouraged citizens to practice self-preservation and seize any coal supply they could possibly lay their hands upon. This caused some individuals in western Oklahoma to steal coal from freight trains passing through the state. In one instance, an engineer reported that a mob confiscated his shipment of coal after they were informed his train carried an entire car of the precious resource. The locomotive originally intended to carry the coal to Tipton to supply the town. The train engineer recommended that distribution of coal be stopped altogether unless they had public support.[76] On December 2, 1919 these actions forced Robertson to backtrack from his earlier statements, as the federal regional director of railroads instructed the governor to cancel his call for self-preservation or else he would halt all trains operating in Oklahoma. Robertson was attending a coal conference in Chicago at that time and hurriedly rushed back to the state to rescind his previous call to action.[77] The governor's irresponsible handling of the strike compounded the already difficult situation, and demonstrated his aversion to reason during the panic-induced event.

By the time Robertson returned to Oklahoma, an increasing number of volunteers had arrived to work in the mines. To protect the workers from the supposedly violent conditions, Robertson declared martial law on December 4, 1919 in Pittsburg, Latimer, Leflore, Haskell, Coal, and Okmulgee counties.[78] Officially, Robertson declared that he sought to protect the lives of citizens, uproot sedition, prevent sabotage and criminal syndicalism, and secure coal for fuel purposes whereby the lives and health of the people may be properly protected.[79] The governor then requested 1,000 federal troops to assist. A controversy arose when the commander at Fort Sam Houston offered to include two black infantry companies. Robertson protested fiercely and prevented them from being called out. The governor later wrote that owing to his protest, the government would call for white troops only.[80]

With the freedom allowed the government during martial law, breaks in union solidarity slowly appeared as Robertson took harsher actions. The governor ordered all strikers and their families evicted from company houses at the Dawley mines southeast of McAlester. After negotiation, the miners agreed to go back to work as volunteers if troops would protect them. General Barrett surmised that only half would return to work. The *News-Capital* assessed that an ultimatum had forced the miners back to work recommended such actions as the only path to future success.[81]

By December 9, both parties agreed to a conference in Indianapolis to solve the issues. Attorney General Palmer remained confident that workers would accept the new government proposal, which included a 14 percent wage increase and a guarantee from President Wilson to create an investigative committee for the purposes of wage readjustment given the increased cost of living. The two sides reached a compromise,

leaving Robertson severely unhappy.[82] The governor dramatically opposed the compromise in Indianapolis. In a letter to an acquaintance, he wrote "You must not forget that this coal strike was settled against my wishes. I have at all times opposed any compromise. I was very much opposed to the compromise effected at Indianapolis."[83] He also said "If I had been consulted in regard to the matter at all, there would have been no compromise at all. As it was, however, I was compelled to withdraw the volunteers and troops after the order had been issued from Washington."[84] Robertson concluded his letter by mentioning the effect of the volunteers and cited their intelligence and patriotism as the key weapon that helped stem the tide of the strikers.[85] By December 11, the *News-Capital* reported in bold headlines that over four thousand union miners would return to the McAlester mines for the first time since November 1, with others heading back to work nationwide. After the settlement, the paper portrayed the miners in a understanding tone, saying that "their strike was a sympathetic one. While they demanded an increase in wages and while they will profit by the 14 percent increase... they had no personal quarrel with any of the operators of Oklahoma. They stopped work when miners and operators of the central competitors did."[86]

Despite this sympathy for the miners, numerous citizens lavished praise upon Robertson for his heavy-handed actions during the strike. Contemporaries saw his policies as a reinforcement of the paranoid hysterical attitude that prevailed during the time period. Robertson expressed no regrets. Pioneer Cotton Mills stated that the stand Robertson took against the miner's strike was commendable, writing "Every good citizen of Oklahoma will be willing to back you up in whatever step it might take to see that your orders are obeyed." Another congratulatory letter from the Clerk of the Supreme Court of

Oklahoma explained "As far as I have been able to ascertain, all the anarchists, socialists, and criminals at large are bitterly opposed to your recent conduct toward the miners' strike."[87] President of Central State Normal School John G. Mitchell wrote to the governor making note of a criticism by a member of the United Mine Workers, and explained that such a harsh denunciation was a distinct honor. "I take this opportunity of saying to you that your action in this crisis should meet, and in my judgment will meet, the hearty endorsement of a grateful public," he argued. "If there is anything that Central State Normal can do further to assist you please command me."[88]

After union workers returned to the mines, a commission appointed by Robertson released a report in January 1920, attempting to solve questions over the causes of the strike. The information was collecting through hearings conducted in November and December of 1919, with the final report reaching the governor's desk at the dawn of the new year. Particular credence in the report was given to the ethnic and international make-up of the miners, and whether they adhered to any socialist tendencies. No evidence of such was found.[89] Taking place in McAlester, committee members interviewed key individuals involved in the strikes, from General Barrett, to local mine operators, and even workers. This report provided a scathing indictment of the Red Scare hysteria, proving that much of the claims of IWW links and foreign-born agitators seemed fraudulent. One of the first questions asked to the adjutant general involved the number of foreigners present in the mines. Barrett replied that 55-60 percent of the workers were American citizens. The committee then asked if foreigners were the most dangerous, to which the general said that the worst element in the mines were the

Americans. The questioner asked again "not the foreigners?" Barrett replied "not the foreigners."[90]

This notion at first seemed unbelievable to the committee members, but as the hearing wore on, the supposed communist and foreign element of the coal strike seemingly evaporated. The general also revealed that the majority of people in the affected coal counties, those closest to the action, held great support for the striking miners. This stood in stark contrast to places where anti-miner and Red Scare sentiment abounded, areas farther away from the actual event.[91] In questioning Major Johnson, a member of the national guard at McAlester, the committee again inquired whether foreigners influenced the position of American miners. He replied emphatically that such was not the case, and reiterated Barrett's earlier statement that foreign miners were the best behaved, and were humble, meek, and fearful of trouble.[92] After the report came out, no connection with Bolshevist activity was seen in the miner's demands and the foreign threat appeared made-up.

The event turned into yet another spectacle of the Red Scare that showcased the irrational fear of the people and government. The key argument in favor of calling out the national guard and taking strong action against the miners involved workers' links to communism, foreign influence, and threats to the security of the nation and the state's resources. As soon as the strike occurred on November 1, the people in Oklahoma and across the country called for strong action from the government, demanding the deportation of foreigners, suspected radicals, and any other supposed menace that threatened the security of the state. All sectors of society in Oklahoma, including the government, media, religion, education, and the civilian population succumbed to the

hysteria and overreacted to what in any other year would have been a simple labor dispute. The report issued by the government, similar to the Drumright report, proved conclusively that rumors of radicalism were overblown. The foreign miners were actually the best behaved of the group, with the greater threat coming from Americans. The miner's strike along with the Drumright affair stand as the two major pillars of the First Red Scare in Oklahoma. They illustrate the willingness of a population to forgo reason in favor of reactionism and fear, and as the report by the government revealed, the greatest threat came not from the foreign element, but from Americans themselves. The paranoia endemic to the Scare soon expanded on the national level, and after the end to the coal mining strike, calls against radicalism reached their peak. As 1919 came to a close and the US fearfully entered 1920, a new wave of arrests, deportations, and hysteria would rock the nation, after which Oklahoma and the rest of the country would finally recover their senses and slowly come to realize the irrationality of their actions.

[1] Charles Goins and Danny Goble, *Historical Atlas of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 5.

[2] Goins, Goble, *Historical Atlas*, 25.

[3] Goins, Goble, *Historical Atlas*, 191.

[4] http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/M/MC001.html; 1920 US Census, (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 1922).

[5] 1920 US Census.

[6] 1920 US Census.

[7] Commander-in-Chief of Sons of Veterans to Robertson, September 24, 1919, Folder 6, Box 9, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[8] Goins, Goble, *Historical Atlas*, 161.

[9] *Appeal to Reason*, May 20, 1911.

[10] Sewell, Steven L., "Painted Red: The Coal Strike of 1919," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 75 (Summer, 1997): 161.

[11] "Statement by Coal Operators," October 20, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[12] Sewell, "Painted Red," 161.

[13] "Statement by Coal Operators," October 20, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[14] "Statement by Coal Operators," October 20, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[15] "Statement by Coal Operators," October 20, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[16] "Southwestern Coal Operators to Allen," Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[17] "Southwestern Coal Operators to Allen," Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[18] "Strike Called for Nov. 1 is Still Menacing," *McAlester News-Capital*, October 22, 1919.

[19] Sewell, "Painted Red," 162-3.

[20] "Workman Hold Little Hope for a Settlement," *McAlester News-Capital*, October 23, 1919.

[21] "He's Going to Find Out Who's Running the U.S.," October 29, 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Sewell, "Painted Red," 163.

[22] "He's Going to Find Out Who's Running the U.S.," October 29, 1919, Folder 9, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[23] "Governor Robertson to A. Mitchell Palmer," October 30, 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[24] RK Hughes and A. Mitchell to Governor Robertson, October 31, 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[25] "Rousseau to Robertson," November 7, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[26] "Rousseau to Robertson," November 7, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[27] "Rousseau to Robertson," November 7, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[28] "Rousseau to Robertson," November 7, 1919, Folder 2, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[29] "Student's 'Kept In' For Trying Strike," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 1, 1919.

[30] "Student's 'Kept In' For Trying Strike," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 1, 1919.

[31] "Student's 'Kept In' For Trying Strike," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 1, 1919.

[32] "The High School Strike," *Daily Oklahoman,* November 1, 1919, 6.

[33] I.R. Warren to Governor Robertson, October 31, 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[34] Wootten, R.K., C.P. Lamons, J.A. Ryndak, C.H. Van Valkenburg, and others to Robertson, October 31, 1919, Folder 1, Box 11, General Correspondence, Governor J.B.A. Robertson, Governors' Papers, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

[35] Kenny Brown, "Peaceful Progress: An Account of the Italians of Krebs, Oklahoma," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 53 (Fall 1975): 332; Murray, *Red Scare*, 158.

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Chapter 6: The End of the First Red Scare, 1920

By 1920, major disputes over labor, resources, and radicals associated with the First Red Scare had ended. After confronting the IWW in the east, and the overblown handling of the Drumright and McAlester strikes, the domestic scene in the state entered a period of relative calm. Minor strikes still occurred, and the state still gave in to the paranoia exhibited on the national scene. However, no major disturbances or radical activities occurred on the level of those in the previous year. This resulted from the security of the state's resources. The government and populace had successfully crushed the IWW in the oil fields and the presence of the national guard in Drumright served as a warning to any other imagined Bolshevist that threatened the region. The miners in the coal fields agreed to go back to work, and for now the state's mineral resources appeared safe. While across the nation the First Red Scare would reach its zenith in the beginning of 1920, Oklahoma appeared on the sidelines only. The state still gave in to the hype and paranoia, though since its resources remained secure, no instances on the level of the events of 1919 occurred. By the summer of 1920, the ludicrous spectacle would burn itself out, leaving behind a startling legacy of post-war fears and insecurities, stemming from the volatile relationship between resources, radicals, and reactionaries.

On the national scene, Attorney General Palmer continued in his drive against radicals and initiating the Palmer Raids in December of 1919. By January he, assisted by J. Edgar Hoover and the Department of Justice, rounded up thousands for deportation to the Soviet Union.[1] Abuses of detainees appeared evident from the start, though few spoke out about it. Acting Secretary of Labor Louis F. Post, a staunch believer in due process, cancelled the warrants of over 2000 suspects, and stated that party membership

did not violate the Sedition Act of 1918.[2] By April 1920, Kansas Representative Homer Hoch introduced a resolution to impeach the secretary of labor for his unpatriotic actions.[3] Despite the groundswell of animosity towards the acting secretary, the government cleared him of all charges and stated that he acted accordingly within the law.[4]

Governor Robertson continued in his steadfast belief of the dangers of radicals, and plainly said as much during a special session of the legislature convened in the off-year of 1920. In his opening address, the governor told how "no wise man can shut his eyes to the dangers which face us and which, at times, to my mind, threaten to engulf us."[5] He went on to say that "The public mind, in these days, is anything but stable; the fact that some people, ordinarily very reasonable and responsible, cannot see and properly appraise the dangers of the situation is the best evidence of the need of conservatism in every line of human activity."[6] Robertson again defended himself before possible critics, recalling how the coal strike necessitated only the most prompt and vigorous action on his part. "The situation was such that nothing but immediate and energetic action would answer and, whether or not the conduct of this affair could have been improved, the fact remains that the state did the very best it could under the circumstances, and I am free to suggest, judging from the newspaper reports, resolutions of civic bodies, letters and other means of communication, that the action of the state… was endorsed by ninety-five percent of the people."[7]

Going against the prevailing tide, and possibly sensing the end was near for Red Scare hysteria, Oklahoma Senator Robert L. Owen spoke of on the issue of restrictive legislation in January 1920. He proclaimed that that such measures

> can become and will become dangerous in the highest degree to the liberties of the people of this country, so that there would be hanging over the head of every man who desires free speech or freedom of the press the menace of some bureaucrat who could suddenly arrest, interfere with, and treat him as a criminal with all the powers of this gigantic Government brought down upon the head of the little citizen, who would find it difficult to defend himself against an autocratic bureaucrat.[8]

He also commented on the irrational fear that pervaded the environment: "We passed laws, under the excitement and hysteria of war, with a view to punishing the so-called Bolsheviks in this country; and I pause to say that in my judgment there are very few Bolsheviks in the United States. The atmosphere of the United States is not such as to encourage bolshevism."[9] The tide began to turn against reactionaries, with more politicians, officials, and members of the public speaking out.

One of the major turning points of the First Red Scare nationally occurred in May of 1920. Earlier that April, Palmer predicted a massive anarchist attack on May Day, similar to what happened in 1919 during the bombing campaign.[10] The nation girded itself, with some towns and cities organizing a patriotic "America Day" to counteract the socialist activities.[11] There existed much trepidation towards the coming day, with many newspapers fostering the scare tactics.[12] The holiday passed without incident though, and the media began to question the attorney general's reliability.[13] Attacks on Palmer appeared with frequency in newspapers across the country, with even members of the Republican Party attacking him for abuse of power. Republican Senator MacCrate of New York stated that "no radical leader had done more to unsettle the nerves of the American people than the Attorney General."[14] Another decisive piece of evidence came out that helped drive the final nail into the coffin of the Red Scare paranoia.

On May 30, 1920, a report came out, endorsed by twelve distinguished lawyers, entitled *To the American People: Report Upon the Illegal Practices of the United States Department of Justice*. Authored by many pre-eminent scholars including Zechariah Chafee Jr. and Felix Frankfurter, this document contained damning evidence against the raids conducted by the attorney general, and served as the major blow to ending the round-ups and hysteria perpetuated by the American press. The piece received publication by the National Popular Government League (NPGL), an organization founded in 1913 by Judson King with the aims of progressive-oriented reforms in America, with Oklahoma's Senator Owen as an organizer.[15] Originally created with the intent to promote direct democracy, the group eventually stood for protection of civil liberties by the time the Palmer Raids started.[16]

Harkening back to the outrageous actions against radicals in Oklahoma, the publication reported numerous incidences that revealed the true extent of Department of Justice violations. The opening pages charged the federal office with arrests without warrants, depriving the detained their right to habeas corpus, destruction of property, provocative agents, compelling subjects to be witnesses against themselves, and abuse and mistreatment.[17] The document went on to detail various instances that showcased the wanton disregard for law when federal officials carried out the raids. In one example, it told how a group of workers came together to discuss the purchase of an automobile. In violation of freedom of assembly, the police raided the meeting and arrested sixty-three persons without warrants. Later releasing sixteen, the remaining members were kept in squalid conditions with little or no food, and no soft bedding.[18] Further incidents included warrants issued to certain persons, and being held in secret confinement. Later, one

person in holding committed suicide by jumping out the window of the Department of Justice building.[19] A sworn statement came from one detainee, whom authorities arrested without warrant and beat in the presence of other agents as they tried to get him to furnish evidence of his guilt.[20] In another case, a student, by the name of Nicaoli Melikoff was attending class when detectives came into the building. The student recalled how the men searched everyone, took the twenty dollars he had, never giving it back, and ordered everyone outside the room where they were promptly assaulted by other agents in waiting. The attack was particularly severe for Melikoff, who remembered being struck repeatedly, held down with a man on his back, and thrown down the stairs.[21]

Following the release of the *Report on Illegal Practices*, the enthusiasm in favor of punishment for radicals dramatically switched across the country. Instead of blind support for the deportation of suspects, new calls were heard throughout the nation questioning these crimes.[22] Congress soon called the attorney general to testify before them on the charges made against the Department of Justice.[23] During the hearing, attorney for the prosecution Jackson Ralston stated right off that a majority of the arrests had been identified as bogus, and that the Department of Justice forged evidence in many of the cases forwarded to the Bureau of Immigration.[24] Palmer proclaimed his innocence, and stated he had simply fought against a wild strain of anarchism that threatened to consume the world. He proclaimed the government's inherent right to protect itself, while proclaiming the insanity of those rounded up.[25] The attorney general further complained of how the "ultra-radical press" had maligned him, and how they only clung to the strictest interpretation of constitutional government when it suited their purposes.[26] The attorney general continued his diatribe against the media, complaining of liberal bias, and

how they remained more inclined to see the mistakes made by the government than its successes.[27]

At the close of the hearings, congress cleared Palmer of his charges, though his reputation remained dubious at best.[28] With the discrediting of the attorney general, the report released by the NPGL, and the canceling of arrests, the raids effectively ended. The First Red Scare hysteria receded into public memory, and the nation attempted to carry on a new sense of normalcy it so longed for since the end of the war. Throughout the chaos, the major battlegrounds of the First Red Scare occurred primarily near the resource rich areas of the country. As battles waged between labor and business over control, the US redirected its war-time hysteria and paranoia on its new foe, communism. Sensing the radical and foreign influenced elements in unions, the government and public surmised that all labor had to be Bolshevist inspired. To that end, the media and authorities framed nearly every instance of discontent as a communist plot to overthrow the government, turning in what any other year would have been an ordinary labor dispute, into a full blown crisis. Oklahoma followed along national trends with its reaction to these events. Its distinctness can be seen however, in the unique resources it possessed. Without its combination of coal mining and oil production, the First Red Scare in Oklahoma would have turned out much differently. Assuredly Oklahoma would have succumbed to the Red Scare mentality. But the harsh reactions taken by Robertson appear in doubt without the strategic interest in the areas of resources that attracted large numbers of workers as well as government attention.

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[24] House Committee on Rules, *Charges Against the Department of Justice*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 1920, 4. [Hereafter referred to as HCR, *Charges*].

[25] HCR, *Charges*, 7-13, 18, 19, 26.

[26] HCR, *Charges*, 27.

[27] HCR, *Charges*, 34.

[28] "Find Palmer in Right in 1920 Raid on Reds," *New York Times*, April 11, 1922.

Conclusion

The events throughout the First Red Scare in Oklahoma demonstrated that resources were a key driving force behind labor instability, contributing directly to the rampant fear and paranoia in the state and across the nation. Simple labor disputes over control of these resources exploded into irrational fears and animosity that propelled Oklahomans to react negatively and harshly to any instance of perceived radicalism. The preceding chapters illustrated how the state laid the foundation for the Red Scare mentality to thrive, showing how poverty, control of resources, unfair labor practices, and unions played a part in shaping Oklahoma's experience during this turbulent time. The location of resources determined where and how severe the disturbances would be. This work also showcases how Drumright and McAlester, the two key events in the state's Red Scare, became examples of what the Red Scare was all about, with rampant and illogical fear guiding whole groups of people to acts of depravity and hatred towards their fellow man. The two events, especially Drumright, thrust Oklahoma into the national spotlight, with the state taking center stage for a brief period in time in the unfolding saga of paranoia.

The state shared much in common with the rest of America. The fear and hatred expressed in the state was not unique. All across the country labor disputes, deportations, deprivation of rights, violence, and murder occurred in heightened form. Oklahoma created its own unique experience, however, based on the resources it contained. The coal mining and oil production industries helped shape the state leading up to and during the First Red Scare. Without oil, IWW presence in the fertile fields of eastern Oklahoma

would have been lessened. The Drumright affair and Tulsa Outrage would have occurred very differently, if it all, had it not been for the taint of radicalism left by the Wobblies.

The coal fields also played a role. Without mine owners and operators feuding over poor conditions and lack of sufficient pay, the nationwide coal strike would not have affected Oklahoma in the way that it did. Oklahoma still would have suffered through fuel shortages, but the falsely reported threat of foreign miners within the state would not have existed. This circumstance directly altered how Oklahomans viewed events during the First Red Scare. The anti-foreign xenophobia that existed during World War I exploded during the mining strike and expressed itself in highly disturbing ways. Preachers, citizens, schools, and government officials all made disturbing accusations against foreigners in the state, with some going so far as to demand deportation and even execution of the supposed radicals.

While Drumright and the mining strike represented the zenith of overreaction over resources in the state, the Red Scare mentality would continue in Oklahoma and across the nation in 1920. Only by the summer of that year, with the discrediting of Attorney General Palmer, did the excesses of the witch hunt appear evident. By then the damage had been done, and the cause of labor would be dramatically harmed.

The coverage of these events have been scarcely covered in Oklahoma historiography. While the national portrayal of the First Red Scare is abundantly full of various interpretations and authoritative works, no previous comprehensive study explored the topic for Oklahoma. Hopefully the preceding chapters fill in this gap, and provide a clearer picture of the overall event in the state. By adding a geographic viewpoint, that of resources as the key motivator for labor action and disputes that stirred

up significant Red Scare panic, this thesis shows how Oklahoma's Red Scare experience was shaped by its coal and oil industries.

For decades, no single work ever covered the Drumright affair in any significant depth, and as this work illustrates, the event thrust Oklahoma into the national discussion of the First Red Scare. The state also became a part of larger events as its miners joined with the UMW to strike for better working conditions. Mine owners unfairly rejected the worker's demands, and Governor Robertson failed as a leader for not considering the validity of miner's demands. The two events illustrated how central resources were to the struggles during the First Red Scare, and the total fear that consumed the state and nation during this turbulent time. Coal and oil played major roles in Oklahoma's outlook, crafting a unique experience that stands as a stark warning of overreaction in a time of national crisis.

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