LABOUR HISTORY

vol. 1; no. 3

"My Daddy was a miner, and I'm a miner's son,
And I'll stick with the Union, til every battle's won"

"Which Side Are You On?"
Pete Seeger

ISSN: 0703-1238 Labour History

Vol.1; No.3/Winter 77/78

Cover photo: Miners' union meeting, Ferguson, B.C., c. 1900.

Labour History is a journal of the Labour History Provincial Specialists Association of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

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All photographs used in this issue are courtesy of the Vancouver Public Library, Historical Photos Collection. With the exception of the cover photo and the Nettie Lake Miners, photos were taken from: Kit #19 - *The People's Story* by D. Adams; Kit #22 - *The Nanaimo Rebellions: Workers in Revolt* by D. Adams.

Special Thanks:

Janet Scully, illustrations
U.B.C. Archives, Special Collections and the Vancouver Public Library for research assistance.
Torvald Viland, "Pre-history of B.C. Mining"

Cartoons taken from "So Long,Partner" by Fred Wright, New York, United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America. 1975.

layout by volunteer labour - printed in a union shop

EXECUTIVE REPORT

ANNE FALL, VICE-PRESIDENT

The September issue of Labour History carried a projection of our activities and objectives for the year. We would like in this issue to bring you up to date on our progress.

Newsletter

We have been able to distribute over 3000 copies of the first (Logging) and second (Fishing) issues of the newsletter. They have gone to our membership, B.C.T.F. Geographical Representatives and a number of committees and individuals within the B.C.T.F. In addition, we have distributed newsletters to school district libraries, other labour history associations, university teachers and trade unionists. We also gave copies to the Fishermens' Union and to teachers in Port Alberni, Pender Harbour, and Prince Rupert for distribution. Both issues have received an enthusiastic response from educators, trade unionists and the university community.

Slide-Tape Shows

In the same way our two slide-tape presentations, "These Were the Reasons" and "Strike" are being widely accepted and used. The B.C.F.T. staff reports that the copies we gave to the Resource Centre are booked weeks in advance.

All the copies that we produced under our Legal Services grant (20 copies of each) have been sold. A number of school districts resource centres have purchased copies, as have the B.C.I.T., Brentwood College School (Vancouver Island), Northwest Community College (Terrace). The B.C. Federation of Labour and the C.L.C. Education Department have two copies of each production. We are reproducing ten extra copies of each show and are negotiating for a distribution service with the B.C.T.F. Lesson Aids.

In November "Strike" was shown to 600 delegates at the B.C. Federation of Labour Convention in Penticton. Frank Fuller was asked to introduce the presentation and also outlined the work of our P.S.A. to the delegates.

Workshops

In January Denis Ottewell and Frank Fuller gave a workshop on "Labour Studies" at a U.B.C. Faculty of Education conference.

The Social Studies P.S.A. have invited us to give four workshops at their April 21/22 annual conference at U.B.C. Please refer to the notice elsewhere in this issue for further details.

Annual General Meeting

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Sunday, March 26th, 1:00 PM in the Garibaldi Room in the Hotel Vancouver, just prior to the B.C.T.F. AGM. Come to the meeting and see what we've done!! How can you help? We need you if we are to continue to be effective in pursuing our enormous task of bringing an understanding of the history of the labour movement to the children in our schools.

AND...

In February, Frank Fuller was interviewed by reporter Karen Krangle and a story on our association appeared in the Vancouver Sun on Feb. 3rd. A week later Frank was interviewed on the C.B.C.'s Good Morning Show.

"For years Henry had me believing that the Union contract forbid him to do housework"

mailBox

All correspondence to the editor should be addressed to: Labour History, c/o The B.C. Teachers' Federation. Letters must be signed; however, names are withheld upon request.

As a teacher and a wife of a fishermen I really appreciated the last issue of the *Labour History* journal. Keep it up!

Fran Jovic,
Chatalech Senior
Secondary School,
Sechelt, B.C.

◆

I am writing to commend all of you working to put together the Labour History Newsletter. The newsletter is an excellent idea and the materials published thus far are a welcome addition to the resources, on the trade union movement, available to educators in British Columbia.

Your readers may be interested to know that our Federation provides class sets of a wide range of materials on the labour movement free of charge. Anyone interested in obtaining sample copies of what is available should contact me at the B.C. Federation of Labour, 3110 Boundary Road, Burnaby, V5M 4A2, phone 430-1421.

Ron Johnson
Director of Communications
and Education,
B.C. Federation of Labour

◆

Your newsletter is great and is exactly what should be going on in other parts of the country....

Finally, would it be possible to arrange an exchange of ads with you. I would be delighted to carry either an ad or at least a note about your organization to draw it to the attention of teachers in other parts of the country. Equally, I'd be delighted if you could perhaps insert the enclosed copy about Labour/Le Travailleur. Let me know what you think. Also could you put me on your mailing list for future issues?

Greg Kealey, Editor
Labour/Le Travailleur

◆

I have just now finished reading the second issue of the Labour History P.S.A. Newsletter, and I would like to offer my congratulations to your committee for an informative and inspiring piece of work.

Although originating from a "union-oriented" home, and having spend many years in British Columbia, I have only recently become aware of the extensive gaps in my own knowledge of the history of labour in this province. Partly through motivation engendered by the work of the Labour History P.S.A. I hope now to increase my own knowledge and awareness of labour history and problems so that I will be better prepared to bring to my students a greater awareness of the past and present contributions of workers to modern society, and to better understand the problems which touch us all.

Isabel Saunders
Port Alberni, B.C.

◆

I have read and thoroughly enjoyed both issues of the Labour History journal. What a need we all have for a history that has become buried. Keep up the good work!

Rosemary Brown, MLA
Vancouver, B.C.

◆

"Teachers have formed a Labor History Provincial Specialist Association under the B.C. Teachers Federation and although it has been in existence for little more than a year, it has a good deal to show for its efforts.

In addition to two slide presentations, which are available for showing in schools, and to interested organizations, it has issued two numbers of its Labour History Newsletter, the first on the forest industry and the second on the fishing industry--both, we might add, most readable."

The Fisherman (UFAWU)
December 2, 1977

◆

Congratulations on the publication of the Labour History Newsletter. I was most impressed with the quality and variety of the articles. I hope you have another issue soon.

Ilse Link
Past President,
North Vancouver Teachers' Association.

◆

Congratulations on producing publications and resource materials that are both interesting and useful to teachers, pupils and parents. This co-operative approach to providing resources for better teaching will help to make the study of labour history most interesting.

Ross Regan
(Victoria)

◆

I am extremely impressed with the excellent quality of the two newsletters produced to date by the Labour History P.S.A. Here at last, are resources for teaching the history of the working people of the province. The lesson plan and articles about organizing the fishing industry are especially useful and relevant to teachers and students of this area. Thank you, and keep up the fine work!

Jean Pickles
Prince Rupert School
District

◆

For how many years now have I looked at teachers' publications and groaned silently .... But this morning I was deeply touched to see a picture of some of the 'old boys' of the Relief Camp Workers' Union (1930's) on the front page of the October 1977 P.S.A. leaflet.

I, like thousands of others, was forced to live in the Relief Camps for a time. I was in Camp 200 near the University of British Columbia from December 1933 until June 1935. You will recall the Post Office riots and McGeer's reading of the Riot Act in Victory Square....

I recognize clearly the need for such a course as Labour History. My God! that's the proper way to teach history!

Morris Carrell
Vancouver Technical
Secondary School.

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Pre-history of B.C. Mining

TORVALD VILAND

This newsletter tries to help us remember. It reminds us of those who struggled for us. But those who struggled had memories too. The early British Columbia miners had parents and grandparents in England, Scotland and Wales who told stories of earlier struggles. This heritage undoubtedly affected the actions and thoughts of our miners. Thus, by looking back across the Atlantic we can find keys which unlock our understanding of our own history.

Newcomers to B.C. remembered the unfinished struggle for safe working conditions. The struggle against suffocation, explosions, and industrial disease.

There was a struggle for dignity; the desire to replace isolation with unity; the demand for recognition and respect not paternalism and charity.

And there was the struggle for better wages and working conditions; a struggle between Capital and Labour.

No clear victory was won--even today there are battles ahead--but British Columbia miners have a long history behind them.

GREAT GRANDPARENTS

A young miner in 1900 could easily have recalled the conditions under which his great grandmother had laboured in a Scottish mine around 1812. For that woman mining meant carrying coal from the 'face' (see insert) to the pit head. She made twenty-four trips a day. Each load of coal carried in a wicker basket weighed 170 lbs. In a single day she would have shifted two tons of coal for a distance of two miles and a vertical distance of 3000 feet. She worked for ten hours a day and received 8 pence for it.

Her husband and boys started work at 3 a.m. and worked a 12 hour day, six days a week. The husband was "bonded"--meaning that he had signed an annual contract with the mine owner to work whenever needed. He could not change employers. No miner was allowed to sign a bond without a leaving certificate from his previous employer, which meant that "troublemakers" could be weeded out.

Miners often lived in company housing and could be evicted at the whim of the owner. Many miners were paid in 'script' negotiable at the company store. This meant that a convenient way to cut wages was to increase the prices of goods at the company store. (This technique gained intellectual respectability in the work of John Maynard Keynes--and is one effect of wage controls).

Great grandparents of our miner found no security in technological change. Mine owners were slow to introduce expensive improvements. And even when improvements were made, the benefits were undercut by the ceaseless pressure to go deeper into the earth. Thus, for example, steam pumps and double shafts potentially improved ventilation and reduced the danger of suffocation, but the depth and length of the shafts and galleries stretched beyond ventilating capabilities.

Safety lamps reduced the danger of fire-damp explosions. But wage cuts, short-weighting and poor light pressed many a miner to use a candle in order to increase production. Production increased, profits grew, and the number of deadly mine explosions increased.

Great grandmother probably found her position as a beast of burden threatened by the introduction of carts running along wooden rails from the face to the shaft. In narrower seams small boys continued to do the pushing and pulling of carts, but gradually ponies were introduced. And mechanical hoists replaced the ladders in the shafts. But women did not leave the mines altogether. They continued to sort the coal at the pit head.

Organizing a union was virtually impossible. The term "strike" was not part of the mine owners vocabularly. Any combination of workers who acted in concert constituted a "riot." And "riots" were put down by force. The Dragoons were called in.

A whole generation of miners lived under the heel of the Combination Acts (1799-1825). This law made it illegal to form unions, and was enforced by magistrates coming from the mine-owning class. No legislative recourse was possible--miners, like all working people, did not have the vote.

Miners <u>did</u> organize and they <u>did</u> strike. But when a strike was broken the owners pressed their case. Strike leaders were

forced to sign public apologies and swear not to act against the owners again (as in the recent B.C. Tel strike).

Perhaps the hardest thing to understand is the isolation of early 19th century miners. Mining communities were isolated from one another. Generations passed without contact with other districts. This isolation did not stop organizing efforts but it did make united action more difficult. Clearly it was in the owners interests to keep it this way--while they lived in the cities.

Mining communities were not part of Society. Miners were not part of that stratum of society that published newspapers, printed books, or made public opinion. Miners and their families were known only for their alleged depravity and their tendency to "riot". Miners, it was believed, were a race apart. As late as 1862 when a young woman married a mine owner and went to live in a mining village her friends sent her messages of condolance rather as if she were a missionary leaving Civilization. The crudity of characterization can be found in 'feminist' novelist Elizabeth Gaitskell's works.

GRANDPARENTS

From the grandparents of our miner, living in the middle of the 19th century, the recollections would be somewhat different. There were no major technological innovations, but earlier improvements were being more widely adopted. Under the pressure of workers and humanitarians more safety measures were required. Women were excluded from work underground and a few restrictions were placed on child labour.

The coal industry was booming--coal was the major source of energy and industry had to be fed. But deeper mines meant more explosions and more accidents. What was new was publicity about these disasters.

The new popular newspapers thrived on sensational horror stories and mine disasters were a rich and plentiful source. Whereas once miners had been considered sub-human beasts inclined towards 'riot', they were now viewed as Victims.

At the beginning of the century mine owners had been relatively successful in thwarting investigative journalism about conditions in the mining districts. But by mid-century the Reports of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in Mines (1841-1843) were shocking the Victorian sensibilities of the urban upper class. Since the reports often included first-person accounts, the miners were given a voice to the public-at-large for the first time. The silence was being broken.

A host of abuses were uncovered. Gangs of children worked under a "butty" or subcontractor who had agreed to bring up a certain tonnage from the mines. The "butties" were often brutal men with no consideration for their child workers. And so public concern grew.

But this concern was selective and a moral concern--not general or political. The persuasive argument which took women out from the bowels of the earth was not concern over economic exploitation. Rather it was concern over the immorality of allowing women to work beside naked men in the dark hot mines. It was distress over the long working hours for children which prevented them from receiving instruction in Christian discipline that led to reforms. Even when economic abuses were mentioned it was a matter of cheating the miners out of wages by short-weighting--not the low wages which stimulated interest.

The morality of reform was essentially charitable and paternalistic. Collecting relief funds came before correcting unsafe conditions, passing high sounding statutes came well before inspectors to enforce them. For example, the Inspection Act of 1850 provided for only four government inspectors for hundreds of mines. And the penalties were highly discriminatory. An owner might get a small fine, the worker imprisonment.

The Victorian temperament was decidedly anti-union. But the struggle continued despite the disapproval.

Strikes were often disorderly and destructive. In 1830 some 20,000 miners went on strike. When some mines were kept open the strikers closed them forcibly--often by destroying the equipment. They ransacked the homes of unpopular overseers and, in one case, left the following note:

> *I see ye have a great lot of rooms, and big cellars, and pleanty of wine and beer in them, which I got a share of. Now I know some at your colliery that has three or four lads and lasses*

and they live in one room not half as good as your cellar. I don't pretend to know very much, but I know there shouldn't be that much difference. You masters and owners may luck out, for you are not going to get so much of your way. We're going to have some of ours now.

But not yet. The troops were brought in and the strike put down. Two years later they tried again. The miners were evicted from their hovels and scabs imported. The union was broken. Thus the events of the Vancouver Island Strikes were not new. (In Scotland, however, some bitter miners took to the hills and carried on guerrilla warfare for several years).

But the real change was in the attempts to create broad, powerful unions like the Mining Association of Great Britain which was able, in 1844, to pull out some 70,000 miners. They called for higher pay, for an end to the bonding system, and for better treatment of child workers. The strike followed the usual pattern: scabs, evictions and military force. Local shopkeepers who provided strikers with food on credit were threatened. The strike was broken after twenty weeks. But the bond system was ended.

The separateness of the miners was diminishing. Enlightened members of the ruling class, like William Roberts, a lawyer, came to the defense of strikers. He lobbied tirelessly in Parliament against bills detrimental to the miners. In 1862 a national miners' newspaper, The British Miner began publishing accounts from the coal fields. While the paper was anti-union it did expose unsafe working conditions and reported on mine strikes and struggles.

PARENTS

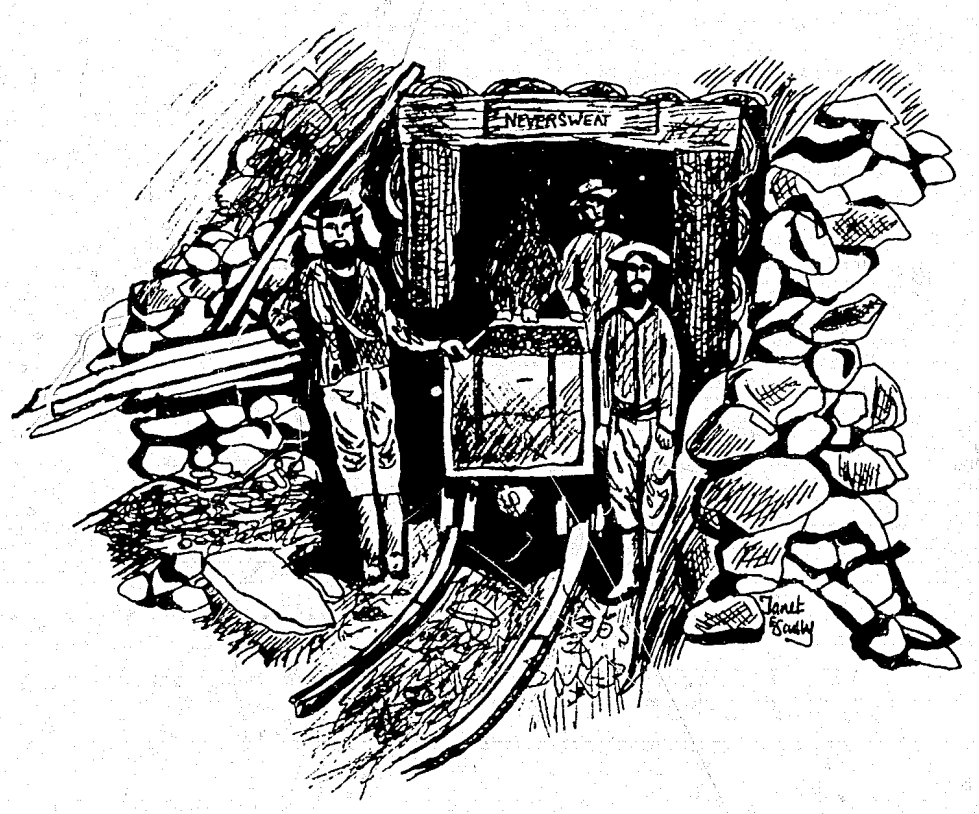
The parent's generation--the last quarter of the 19th century--witnessed the gradual advance of union organization in the mining districts. The economic goad was often a cut in wages. A mine explosion or accident could act as a spark which would ignite the miners into organizing.

More and more miners were attempting to place their situation in a larger context, into the framework of capitalism. This wider interest did not necessarily bring unity however. Some miners advocated pegging wages to the selling price of coal, a proposal which would permanently fix their position at the economic bottom of society. Others naively hoped that simply

Basic elements of a mine-or pit--include the shaft or vertical hole down which miners descend and coal is hauled up. At the bottom of the shaft there are sloping or horizontal galleries branching out to reach the coal or minerals. The face is where the coal is actually chipped, drilled, or blasted away. The coal was then hauled along the galleries in carts pulled by boys or ponies through a series of doors which directed the flow of air. Small boys or "trappers" sat in the dark opening and closing these doors. On the face men and sometimes boys--usually naked in the damp heat--hacked away at the coal with hand picks. Often the miners had to crouch and crawl along the narrow seams of coal--bands of coal--less than a meter high. They worked in the flickering light of a candle or a Davey Lamp (which was less likely to ignite the various explosive fumes (fire-damp, coal fumes) that collected in pockets throughout the mine.

There were many specialized skills, like the penitent who draped himself in wet cloaks and crawled along the floor to ignite pockets of fire-damp with a candle at the end of a stick. Or blasters who used explosives to loosen coal or rock at the face. Others helped to prop up the roof of the mine with beams to prevent cave-ins.

The greatest danger was explosion. Explosions accounted for about 90% of all deaths. The greatest long-term danger was black lung disease caused by inhaling coal dust. A strong man could by incapacitated by his fortieth year by black lung. Fall-ins, the breaking of hauling ropes and chains, or even being run over by a coal cart contributed to the figures.



restricting production would increase the price of coal according to the then-popular myth of supply-demand economics.

Actually unity was best founded on very specific demands. In 1889 the eight hour day unified miners in a single shaky federation, the Miners' Federation of Great Britain.

The union's strategy was to press for the eight hour day when wages were stable and to hold the line against wage cuts when they were not. The battle was joined time and time again on these issues.

And these issues could attract public support. In one of the worst lock-outs, in 1893, there was widespread public support for the miners. Money, clothes and food were delivered to the coal districts. Soup kitchens were set up. And gradually the owners began to give way. As the workers gradually trickled back to work it was often under much better terms. And finally even the Government of the day stepped in. The Foreign Secretary, Lord Rosebery was appointed to arbitrate and his decision was seen by many as a victory for the miners.

This kind of victory brought many unions into the fold. Gradually--and with very great difficulty--the struggle in the mines was taking on a modern appearance. The age of organized labour was on its way.

There are many parallels between the struggles abroad and those in British Columbia coal fields and mines. Many of the miners must have remembered--and surely they knew their struggles were part of a larger struggle against exploitation, indignity, and hazardous conditions. It was a struggle against pretentious moralism and paternalism; against the surrounding silence between the powerful and those who have so little in wealth, but so much in spirit. little in wealth, but so much in spirit.

notice

The next issue of *Labour History* will focus on unemployment during the "Dirty Thirties". Those wishing to submit articles should do so by April 10, 1978. Articles should be double-spaced and no less than 250 words. Mail submissions to: Labour History, P.S.A., c/o The B.C.T.F., 2235 Burrard Street, Vancouver, B.C.

the story of B.C. MINING

COLLEEN BOSTWICK

In order to view the industrial conflict so much a part of mining history in British Columbia, it is necessary to get even a rough idea of the social and economic factors which obviously affected the situation. During the fifteen year period we are about to review, from 1900-1914, coal mining employed only 25,000 workers in all of Canada. This was a mere two per cent of all non-agricultural labour in the entire country. Yet, strikes in the industry accounted for about five per cent of all strikes during the period, involving 24 per cent of all workers and 42 per cent of all time lost due to strikes. What are some of the reasons which may help account for this record?

Mining in Canada is confined to three main regions: Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, Nanaimo-Wellington on Vancouver Island, and Southwest Alberta-Southeast B.C. (We will look specifically at the regions in British Columbia for the purposes of this study.) Typically, miners have lived in extremely isolated conditions, both geographically and socially, usually gathered together in one-industry towns. Workers employed in the mines were usually unskilled -- in fact, mining has been called "a sinkhole for unskilled labour", drawing upon immigrant labour and displaced workers from other industries.

As well as being isolated, coal miners have a "peculiar immobility", both geographically and socially. This means that coal mining regions are particularly vulnerable to economic depression, frequently becoming "pockets of poverty": miners suffer from high unemployment due to technological change, declining world markets or depletion of resources. Periods of unemployment are frequent and prolonged, even during "boom" times.

Long hours, low pay, high risks of accidents and fatalities, dangerous and/or unsanitory living conditions, and gross exploitation are common in the mining industry where effective union organization has been lacking, or where workers have been unable to effectively strike for their demands. Thus, we find in strike after strike, the key issues have been better pay, improved working conditions and recognition of a union as sole bargaining agent.

At the turn of the century, British Columbia was undergoing tremendous economic expansion. The prairie provinces were being settled rapidly and there was a growing demand for B.C.'s primary products: fish, lumber, coal and metal. Railway construction added further stimulus to the southeastern region where development of the silver and lead mines was well underway.

Frontier areas have become known as the main centres of militant and radical movements, and B.C. was a frontier. By 1900 a well-established, militant and strongly radical working class characterized B.C., along with its booming economy. In addition, B.C. "specialized to an extreme degree" in industries notorious for their conflict between workers and owners: namely, coal and metal mining, maritime occupations and lumber production.

Provincial and federal government policy aided in stimulating rapid economic growth in the province, but it also was responsible for generating much hostility between labour and capital. Policies which made large grants of land, timber, mineral and other resources, as well as large subsidies to major business interests tended to promote corruption. These practices also aided in the rapid accumulation of wealth and conspicuous expenditure in a period of low incomes, widespread poverty and insecurity among the majority of the population. Thus, resentment ran high, particularly in the mining industry where workers' wages lagged far behind coal prices and earning on capital investment, and were generally lower relative to other industries and occupations.

The use of Oriental immigrants as a cheap and reserve supply of labour provoked deep ill-feeling among the white mine workers. Orientals were frequently used to break strikes.

Companies often resorted to intimidation and phony threats of deportation in order to employ the immigrants - regardless of the hazardous working conditions, against which the miners were often on strike. One cannot help but conclude that companies employing Oriental strike-breakers bare much of the responsibility for the racial tension that existed.

Besides having a large percentage of Oriental immigrants, B.C. also became the new home of workers coming from a strong socialist tradition. These men and women, from the militant and socialist working class developing in Britain, from the rising socialist movement in the United States, brought to British Columbia a political trade union consciousness. There can be no doubt that the labour movement in Western Canada was strongly influenced by the commitments these people carried in them.

This, then, was the setting for the first fifteen years of the century. It was a period when British Columbia coal mining was experiencing the greatest expansion of its history. In Canada, it was a period when major labour legislation was passed, often based on the experience of the mining industry. Much of the legislation was designed to limit conflict and maintain production. It was during this period that MacKenzie King was able to test many of his theories about industrial class conflict, freely using the mining industry as his laboratory. The decisions made and tactics developed by government during 1900 - 1914 were to be felt for decades, and indeed, are felt even to this day. The role of both provincial and federal governments as mediator between labour and capital was being developed and refined: the image of government as a neutral body was being born.

Columbia Kootenay mine boarding house

1901: Rossland

"In all the lower grades of labour, especially in smelter labour, it is necessary to have a mixture of races which includes a number of illiterates who are first class workmen. They are the strength of an employer and the weakness of the Union."

Edmund S. Kirby
Manager, War Eagle Mine

Mining in the Kootenay region of B.C. has shared its history with that of Idaho and Washington in the United States. Unlike Vancouver Island, where the mining industry was primarily dominated by the Dunsmuir family, the southeastern region of the province was made up of a number of medium and small sized operations. Many of these had their corporate headquarters in Britain and the United States, so that miners on both sides of the border were often involved in struggles against the same company.

The Western Federation of Miners was orginally formed in 1893 at Couer d'Alene, Idaho, as a more radical, militant alternative to the conservative craft unionism of the A.F.L. The union first made its entry into Canada when it set up a local at Rossland, B.C., in 1895. It became quite strong in this area, but did not spread to other parts of the region until it began organizing in defense of the eight hour day.

In February, 1899, the British Columbia legislature had passed a bill reducing the work day from ten to eight hours. This was due, in large part, to the efforts of the Western Federation of Miners in Rossland who had succeeded by 1898 in electing pro-labour candidates from their area. Company resistance to the legislation sparked numerous strikes, but by 1900 acceptance of the eight hour day was inevitable.

The refusal of mine owners to recognize unions was one of the major causes of strikes during the tumultuous period at the turn of the century. Though interior miners were organized into the Western Federation of Miners, company efforts to break the union continued unabated in the early 1900s. One of the largest of these companies was Le Roi Mining Company, a British concern with two mines at Rossland and a smelter operation across the Canada-U.S. border at Northport, Washington. The manager for both operations was Bernard MacDonald, a man well-known among the interior miners for his anti-union activities. Both the Rossland and Northport workers were members of the Western Federation of Miners. In 1901, a strike occurred which was to have a substantial impact on the history of the labour movement.

Early in 1901 the Northport miners had voted to join the Western Federation of Miners, but with 150 of the 350 workers dissenting. On May 18th, soon after the organizing drive had begun, MacDonald closed the smelter operation on the pretext that repairs were necessary. When he reduced production at the Rossland mines two days later, the workers became suspicious. On May 24th they learned that when the smelter operations resumed at Northport, union labour would not be re-hired. Those who quit the union, however, would be welcomed back. The Western Federation of Miners decided to call a strike against this discriminatory hiring policy, and those who had earlier declined to join came out in support of the union.

MacDonald promptly began recruiting workers from California--without telling them that a strike was in progress. Of the forty workers that arrived, only two actually ended up in the smelters, with the remainder supporting the striking W.F.M. Further attempts to import strikebreakers proved fruitless. Finally four of the six smelters had to be shut down.

The town of Northport was generally in support of the strikers. Despite pressure from MacDonald, nothing was done to prevent strikers from dissuading "scabs" from entering the smelters. Faced with this attitude, the mine management moved their U.S. headquarters to Idaho, where they succeeded in getting a sympathetic federal judge to issue a court order enjoining the union from interfering with the use of scab labour. This was a severe setback for the Northport workers, and the company was able to proceed unhindered, importing workers from Joplin, Missouri. Soon four of the six smelters were back in

Le Roi Mines, Rossland, 1900

operation.

In Rossland, meanwhile, MacDonald had been trying since February to break the union and had begun importing strikebreakers from Minnesota in preparation for a work stoppage. The Minnesota miners, however, joined the union upon arriving in Rossland, and exposed MacDonald's activities, which were in violation of the Alien Labour Act. When the union threatened to invoke the Act, MacDonald ceased his illegal endeavours for the time being.

By July, 1901 the Rossland miners were on strike against the Le Roi Mines and other Rossland operations as well: Centre Star, War Eagle and a number of smaller operations. MacDonald immediately enlisted the Joplin strikebreakers from the Northport smelters into the Le Roi Mines. In August the miners were finally able to obtain a conviction against MacDonald's labour contractor for violating the law - thus using the law in their favour. MacDonald retaliated on September 14th with a $25,000 civil damage suit, accusing the miners of interfering with mine operations resulting in a loss of revenues for the company. It appears that MacDonald ultimately dropped the charges.

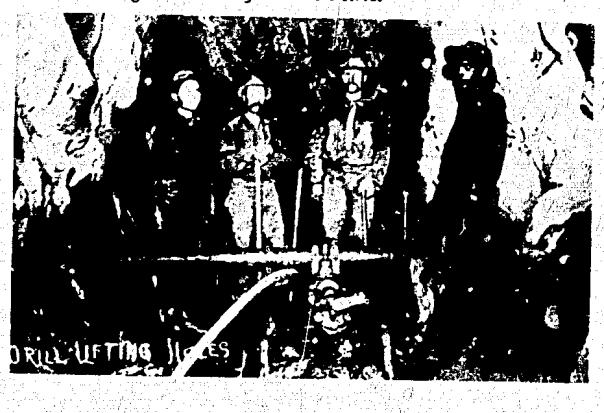
In October the WFM began picketing the Canadian Pacific Railway depot where strikebreakers, this time from Winnipeg, were arriving. On October 24th MacDonald was successful in getting a court injunction forbidding miners to continue pickets or to, in any way, interfere with the arrival of strikebreakers. This, together with MacDonald's civil damage suit, was reminiscent of the infamous Taff Vale case in Great Britain, and set a potentially dangerous precedent for the Canadian labour movement.

Towards the end of the year strikes had spread to other mines in southeastern B.C., so that in November the federal government dispatched W.L. MacKenzie King to investigate the situation. MacKenzie King focused his attention on the Rossland dispute and first contacted the manager of Le Roi Mines with a proposal that he, MacKenzie King, should act as a mediator between the two antagonists. The company, by this time under new management, refused to accept MacKenzie King's arbitration, accusing the union of attempting to disrupt the heretofore peaceful relationship between miners and mine owners.

MacKenzie King then approached the

miners with a proposal that the union had no choice but to reject. He told the miners he was prepared to mediate on the condition that the miners agree to accept his recommendations. The miners, knowing the company had already refused to acknowledge the recommendations, declined with thanks. It was clear that, while the company retained the right to reject a settlement helpful to the union, they themselves would be obliged to accept even an adverse decision. MacKenzie King left B.C. without resolving the dispute, covinced that the miners were in an unreasonable union, dominated by radical foreign leadership.

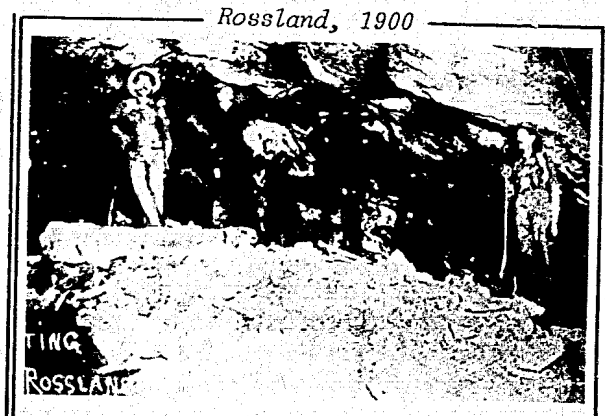
War Eagle Mine, Rossland



The strike continued for two months, but had really been nearly broken since October when the court injunction had effectively curtailed the efforts of the union. By January, 1902, the miners, with their funds depleted, their morale low and their union defeated, had to negotiate a settlement with the mine management. The London offices of Le Roi Mines had terminated MacDonald's contract in October, but the new manager was no more sympathetic to the cause of the miners than his predecessor. The company drew up a blacklist which drove over half the union miners out of Rossland.

The two mining companies, Centre Star and War Eagle, following the example set by MacDonald sued the WFM for damages of up to $12,500. The case lasted for two years, and the decision went against the union, making it the first time in B.C.'s history that a union was held liable for damages or loss of revenues due to a strike. The Rossland Union Hall and the remaining union funds were seized--the total value was less than the full amount. Three years later, in 1905, a further settlement was

Rossland, 1900



reached, the details of which were not revealed.

Although the miners lost the demands which had led to the 1901 strike at Rossland, this strike sparked an important legislative decision. Like the Taff Vale case in Great Britain, the charges against the union provoked a political response.

Smith Curtis, the MLA from Rossland, introduced a bill during the 1902 session which would have granted protection to unions against injunctions and the seizure of union funds. The bill failed to pass, but on the same day Joseph Martin introduced another bill to amend the existing law relating to trade unions. The Martin bill did not protect unions against injunctions, but did grant protection against liabilities incurred during a strike. In what has become known as a major victory for the labour movement, the bill passed on June 20, 1902. The dangerous precedent which had been set earlier was thus prevented from becoming an ongoing aspect of B.C. labour relations.

" I'm bored... Let's go down to the plant and watch the workers knock themselves out..."

1903: The Island

Nanaimo mines - entrance to the main shaft

In 1903 British Columbia experienced more industrial conflict than perhaps at any other time in its history. The magnitude and intensity of conflict reached such proportions that it is extremely difficult to examine isolated events without referring to a much larger picture. Politics and economic issues became inseparable; fundamental questions were being raised regarding every aspect of social organization; and the most vocal challengers were to be found in the Western Federation of Miners and their close allies, the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees.

THE STRIKE: VANCOUVER ISLAND COAL MINERS

Mining on Vancouver Island has been characterized by continuous strife almost from its beginning in 1849 when the Hudsons Bay Company first began operations. In 1861 the Company sold its interests to Vancouver Coal Mining & Land Co., which managed the operation until 1903 when it, in turn, sold out to the Western Fuel Co. Vancouver Coal Mining had exercised a remarkably liberal attitude and had, in the late 1890's, encouraged its employees to join the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Assn. (later to become the Nanaimo Miners' Assn.). When management changed to Western Fuel Co., miners found themselves confronting a much more hostile employer, wage reductions, and longer work hours.

The only other major firm was that of the Dunsmuir family, by far the larger of the two. Robert Dunsmuir had founded the Wellington-Nanaimo mines and soon had acquired a two million acre land and timber grant from the federal government in return for building a short railway on the island. Most of the coal strikes on Vancouver Island developed in opposition to the Dunsmuir's, who had a reputation (and a well-deserved one) of resolute, and at times violent, opposition to unionism.

In the forty-two years the Dunsmuirs operated coal mines on the island, no union ever achieved recognition, but the word 'strike' became synonymous with the names of Wellington and Nanaimo.

The working conditions of Island miners were truly appalling. The ratio of fatalities was high in relation to the actual number of workers employed. Between 1880 and 1900 there were almost 400 deaths due to explosions and cave-ins, and several times that number of accidents and injuries --all occurring among a labour force of about 4,000. This feature of Vancouver Island mining, in addition to low wages and job insecurity, was seen as a direct consequence of the miners inability to organize themselves into a union. It is not surprising, therefore, that even despite the frequent use of military force to suppress strikes, miners showed a determination and perseverance in their efforts to organize.

Prior to 1903 this task had been taken up by small, unaffiliated local unions who had suffered numerous defeats at the hands of the Dunsmuir company. It was obvious to the miners that they would have to affiliate with an established, well-financed union organization.

The 50,000 member Western Federation of Miners was, at this time, the only organization west of the Canadian Rockies and

had been carrying out a successful organizing campaign in the interior of B.C. In September, 1902, the miners of Western Fuel Co in Nanaimo voted to join the WFM and in March, 1903, the Dunsmuir miners followed. A Canadian organizer for the WFM was sent from the interior to assist the miners in their renewed efforts to organize and obtain recognition from the employers.

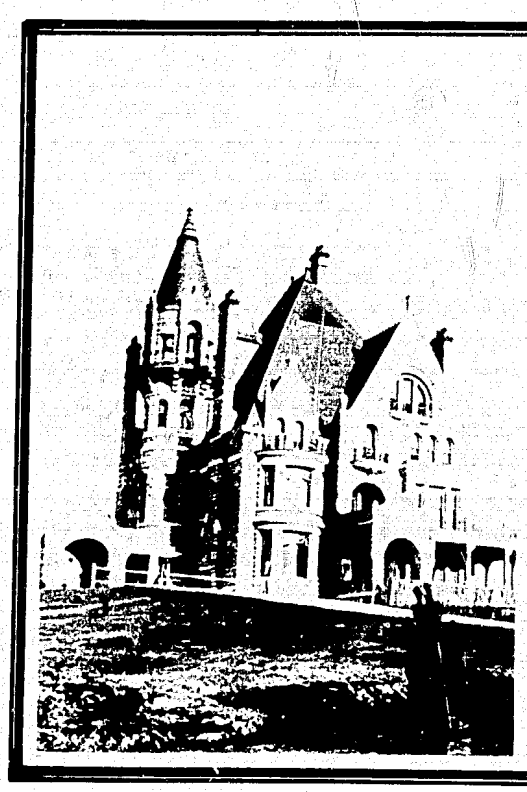
The Nanaimo miners had been striking for five days in February 1903, demanding a wage increase of 20%. They won recognition for the WFM as sole bargaining agent for the miners and obtained a wage increase of 10%. Similar efforts of the Dunsmuir miners, however, were to have different results and would lead to a federally appointed Royal Commission to investigate the conflict.

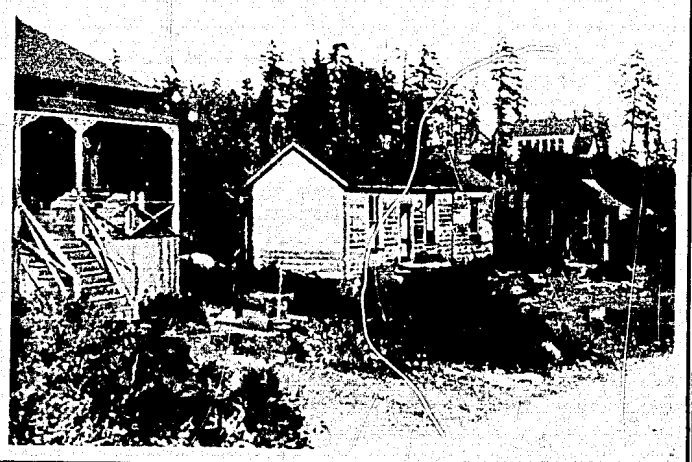
When the Dunsmuir miners joined the WFM, the company fired union leaders and members and threatened a lockout. The miners retaliated on March 11th with a strike demanding union recognition and a wage increase. The strike lasted until July when the workers were forced to go back to work without gaining union recognition. The struggle suffered a setback, a postponement, but efforts to organize Dunsmuir continued and led to another strike in 1912.

The Vancouver Island coal miners strike would have been negligible in the eyes of the federal government had it not occurred precisely when it did. There were already 1,500 interior coal miners on strike for union recognition, shorter working hours, and higher wages by the time the Dunsmuir miners went out. There was also a protracted strike by railway employees against the CPR. Sympathetic strike support for the railway workers came from longshoremen in Vancouver, from teamsters, steamship workers, telegraph messengers -- all refusing to handle "hot" CPR cargo.

The United Brotherhood of Railway Employees (UBRE) and the Western Federation of Miners had been political allies, working together to elect labour representatives to the B.C. legislature and supporting each others' demands during the eight-hour day struggle. To a Liberal Government in Ottawa, alarmed at the growing socialist movement and the militancy of B.C.'s working class, these events took on the appearance of a conspiracy to undermine Canadian sovereignty. The UBRE and WFM were considered "foreign agitators" who were misleading honest, hard-working Canadians. A solution was needed to bring an end to the conflict.

In April, 1903, the Federal government decided to act.





One of the demands of the miners was often for improved housing conditions. On the left is the Dunsmuir Castle; below, by way of comparison, are the strikers' residence in Extension.

The Royal Commission - 1903

"In studying the activities of MacKenzie King it is always necessary to distinguish what he persuaded himself he was doing; what he persuaded others he was doing; and what he actually did."

(H. Ferns & B. Ostrey, in The Age of MacKenzie King)

William Lyon MacKenzie King contributed a great deal to the evolution of Canadian politics and was a major influence on government policies during a time of transition in our history. In 1903 he was the Deputy Minister in the newly formed Dept. of Labour under Sir William Mulock. He had established himself as an advisor to the Government on matters concerning labour and took a consistent position in favour of legislation designed to strengthen government's power to intervene in labour disputes. His Harvard University economics and previous experience in labour-management conflicts gave him a combination of skills valued by federal officials. In addition, he spent a great deal of time portraying himself as the objective, dispassionate arbitrator--a friend to both labour and business.

In April, 1903, the Laurier Government appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the industrial difficulties in British Columbia. In a letter to the Prime Minister from Sir Wm. Mulock, we find the basis for the Commission:

> "The working people of Canada have, to a large extent, come under the domination of the American Federation of Labour, whom they recognize as their friends. Perhaps it would assist to disillusion them if an intelligent Commission, one in which the working people had confidence, were to point out the injuries that have come to them because of the interference of American unions. Such a pronouncement would have an educational effect."

The Commission was charged with determing "how far there should be legislation directed against foreign interference with Canadian workmen." It was to be an impartial body with the power to conduct a wide-ranging investigation of the numerous disputes raging in B.C. However, most of the evidence offered at the hearings and the conclusions and recommendations embodied in the final report concerned the coal miners on strike on Vancouver Island.

Appointed to the Commission were the Hon. Gordon Hunter, Chief Justice of B.C. and a political Liberal. (Ferns & Ostry have called Hunter a "sometime Conservative politician", while Jamieson cites him as a Liberal--using Who's Who) The Rev. E.S. Rowe, a prominent Methodist minister from Victoria was the other member. MacKenzie King was appointed Secretary to the Commission and seems to have been the dominant person. Neither of the other two had any previous experience in any field relating to labour matters. Rowe appears to have made it clear that the only issue under investigation was whether or not the miners had the right to join the WFM.

The hearings lasted for thirty days, with testimony and cross-examination of union and non-union miners, company officials, and James Dunsmuir, main owner of the Dunsmuir mines. The hearings revealed the long and bitter struggle of the miners to obtain a decent living wage and safe working conditions. Dunsmuir's adamant refusal to recognize the rights of his employees was also clear. He freely admitted firing known union members.

Miners testified to a long list of grievances against the company as the causes of the 1903 organizing drive. The Commission was told of Dunsmuir's restriction of free speech and civil liberties of his employees. The Commissioners heard of the firings of men opposed to Dunsmuir in the 1900 provincial election, of 10% wage cuts, of favouritism, refusals to appoint check-weighman, and of intolerable working conditions.

In early 1903, news of a 67% rebate to the company on coal shipped to San Francisco encouraged the miners to try and win back the rates paid them before the 10% wage cut. They realized that in order to do so they would have to organize to make their demands effective. It was these chain of events and grievances which led to the strike of March, 1903.

The miners also explained how they

Nettie Lake Mine, Miners underground, circa 1902

Who built the Seven
Towers of Thebes?
The books are filled
with the names of
Kings.
Was it Kings who
hauled the craggy
blocks of stones?
In the evening when
the Chinese Wall
was finished,
Where did the
masons go?

Bert Brecht

had been reluctant to testify against Dunsmuir at earlier provincial investigations and to the Royal Commission for fear of losing their jobs.

The miners' complaints were substantiated by numerous witnesses and hundreds of pages of evidence, but the Commission seemed impervious. The final Report contained little that was based on the hearings themselves.

The Commission concluded that the UBRE and the WFM were undesirable organizations for Canadian working people. They described both unions as revolutionary socialist organizations led by "foreign agitators" rather than trade unionists. They advanced the opinion that the two unions had conspired to bring about the Dunsmuir strike. Since the CPR depended on the Wellington mines for steam coal, a miners strike would suit the railway workers. The Commissioners did not take into account the fact that the Nanaimo miners, who had struck in February, had not gone out in support of either the railway union or the Dunsmuir miners.

The Commission was determined to make the conspiracy theory stick. In a rather shaky analysis they concluded that the success of a conspiracy depended largely "upon the predictable reaction of Dunsmuir to the formation of unions in his mines." Using Dunsmuir's own testimony--in which he blithely admitted his intransigence to unions--the Commission argued that the miners had joined the WFM knowing full well that they would find themselves locked out. The miners had, therefore, provoked the desired situation. This was, in their opinion, what had happened, despite the fact that not one witness to the hearings had ever suggested that the Dunsmuir miners had struck in sympathy with the UBRE.

The recommendations put forward in the Report were designed to limit and constrain the attempts of Canadian working people to organize into unions - and more particularly, international unions. The Commission recommended that all those who were not British subjects, or who had been resident in Canada for less than one year be subject to either fine or imprisonment for suggesting or in any way communicating the idea that Canadian workers should quit working. Further, the Commission recommended that Canadian trade unions be incorporated and made liable for any breach of contract or damages incurred by the union. They proposed, as well, that the federal government prohibit the practice of "scab" listings by unions and intimidation of non-union workers; that "radical, socialistic unions" like the WFM and UBRE be outlawed; and finally, that legislation should be introduced to restrict the activities of all American trade unions in Canada. The Commission also advised the government that both employers and workers should be required to give thirty days notice prior to a strike or lockout. In the case of certain public utilities arbitration should be made compulsory. The latter would apply to industries such as coal mining or railways if prolonged strikes threatened to damage the "public interest".

The Commission admitted in its Report that employers who sometimes indulged in arbitrary and unjust treatment of their employees provided legitimate reasons for the latter to organize and protect themselves from such abuses. Employers were therefore counselled to refrain from "arbitrary", "tyrannical" or "arrogant" actions and attitudes.

The Report also stated that shorter work hours, better working conditions and higher wages would make for a happier, more contented work force, and one which would be less inclined to unionize. However, it does not seem to have made any specific recommendations to bring about such a state of affairs.

Referring to the employers' practice of blacklisting, the Commission reported that time did not permit a full investigation, but believed it was a "natural" response to the "unnatural" activities of trade unions.

The impact of these recommendations, if implemented by the federal government, would have changed the history of Canada's political and economic development. The entire labour movement would have been very nearly destroyed, with impossible constraints placed on its role in the community. Implementation would have prevented workers from organizing to "employ their social power" and to protect themselves from exploitation. Efforts to unite working people across international boundaries would not have been merely curtailed, but made totally illegal.

The Commission had appealed to the more "intelligent and reasonable" leaders of the labour movement for support and understanding, but the consequences of the Report were clear to them. Henry Ferns and Bernard Ostrey, in their book The Age of MacKenzie King describe labour's reaction to the Report, and to MacKenzie King:

"When the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress met at Brockville in September, 1903, a strong attack was made upon the Report of the Commission, and the committee of the Congress appointed to inquire into their activities made a charge which hit directly at the Secretary and his endeavours to establish himself as a 'friend to labour'. The committee reported *'that labour interests and experience were neither directly nor indirectly represented on the Commission'*. The underlying theories of the Commissioners were rejected outright. *'The ground that appears to be taken is that the organization of a trade union is the natural cause of a strike, overlooking the causes that made trade unions an absolute necessity'*."

MacKenzie King ended up dissociating himself from the Report, but there is evidence to suggest that his was the persuasive role. As Deputy Minister of Labour, his views reflected those of the government he represented. It is probably true, however, that his carefully nurtured image of "friend of labour" was done irreparable damage - at least in B.C. and most certainly among workers in the mining industry.

The 1903 strike of Vancouver Island coal miners had offered MacKenzie King and the new Department of Labour the opportunity to strengthen a rather precarious position of neutrality between labour and capital. There had been considerable pres-

sure exerted on the government of the day by business interests across Canada who wanted to know "in whose interest the Dept. of Labour were proposing to be neutral". It is likely that the Report of the Royal Commission did much to further already existing suspicion among workers that government intervention in labour disputes would not likely be to their advantage.

The government did not immediately act upon the Commission's recommendations. (The proposals have, in fact, re-emerged continuously and are discussed to this day as possible answers to labour-management disputes.) However, four years later MacKenzie King authored the legislation that became the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907. This was based upon the Commission's recommendation that thirty days notice be given prior to a strike or lockout and that compulsory arbitration bind both parties in disputes affecting the public interest. The Act, spurred by a miners' strike in Alberta, is a reflection of MacKenzie King's basic theory of conciliation. It is a refinement of his earlier efforts in 1903 to design legislation which would prevent the occurrence of strikes, thereby placing an obstacle to the organization of labour and its power to bargain. But, obstacles are not finite barriers, as the history of the labour movement shows.

1912 - 14: "The Nanaimo Rebellion"

The 1903 strike by coal miners on Vancouver Island was a defeat for the Western Federation of Miners, who subsequently gave up organizing efforts. The task was resumed under the leadership of the United Mine Workers of America, an affiliate of the American Federation of Labour. There was relative industrial peace in the industry during 1904-1911, with the exception of one dispute, in 1905, which is worth looking at briefly.

The B.C. Legislature in an attempt to reinforce the law regarding hours of work, passed a new bill prohibiting work underground for more than eight hours a day. The Western Fuel Company in Nanaimo attempted to reduce the wages of the miners to "compensate" for the cutback in hours. When workers rejected this wage cut, 600 men found themselves locked out.

The federal Department of Labour eventually mediated the dispute, although initial efforts had been spurned by the company. The issue bacame, not the cutback in wages, but recognition of the UMWA as sole bargaining agent for the workers. MacKenzie King once again appeared on the scene, representing the federal government, and after four months had settled the dispute. His solution was one he proposed time and time again, earning him the title "Father of Company Unionism."

The solution was more a compromise for the miners than for the company. Under MacKenzie King's recommendations an Employee Representation Committee was established which would negotiate with the Western Fuel Company.

This was not recognition of the right to belong to a bona fide union. MacKenzie King's solution did not eliminate the problems experienced prior to the strike of 1903 when miners found they were ineffective as a small, isolated and unaffiliated union. It was this very situation that had prompted miners to join the SRM in 1903 and which would, eight years later, give way to what has been properly described as "one of the bitterest and most expensive strikes in the history of Canada"

NANAIMO

The Nanaimo coal miners strike of 1912-1914 epitomizes the continuous struggle of workers throughout B.C.'s history to establish themselves as a self-determining, self-conscious segment of our society. It severely underlines the incredible and unending diligence required to win even the very slightest gains, the most modest of demands for a better life, and a recognition that those demands are human rights seeking realization.

In 1911 Canada, now under Sir Robert Borden's Conservative government, was in a general economic depression, with high unemployment threatening workers in all major industries. Among B.C.'s coal mining companies the opening of the Panama Canal

promised new markets in the Eastern U.S. B.C. companies hoped to squeeze their American competitors--who employed union labour--out of the market. The Canal meant cheaper transportation costs for B.C. companies who employed cheaper non-union labour, and who could therefore supply coal at lower prices.

At the same time these factors emphasized the urgency for miners to organize. European immigration was on the rise. Thus, increasingly adverse conditions (surplus of labour) under which the task would be even more difficult were foreseeable.

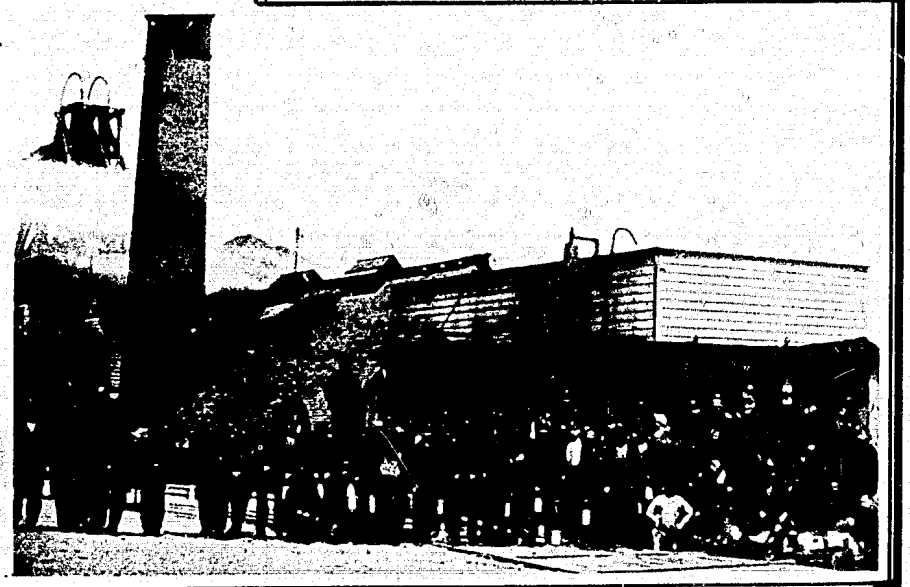
The UMWA launched its organizing drive among the coal miners at the Canadian Collieries Ltd. (formerly owned by the Dunsmuir family). Unsafe working conditions provided the stimulus for the formation of District 28, UMWA with 1,500 members. It then affiliated with the new B.C. Federation of Labour.

In 1911 the provincial government passed the Coal Mines Regulation Act, designed to prevent accidents in the mines. Under the Act miners could appoint representatives to a gas committee for inspection of possible leaks and other dangerous conditions. The committee was to report its findings to a government inspector who would, in turn, investigate and file recommendations. On June 15, 1912 a gas committee reported leakages. A month later the Inspector of Mines verified the complaint.

But the company (Canadian Collieries) fired one of the committeemen. This led to the strike. A strike which lasted for two years (Sept. 1912--August 1914) and affected some 7,000 miners at its peak. The strike cost millions of dollars and involved the use of special police and militia. There was considerable property damage, much violence, and very much bitterness.

In the end the miners won the right to belong to the UMWA, but the union was not granted recognition by the companies. The companies also continued the practice of blacklisting and discriminatory hiring and firing of union members (in violation of the agreement). UMWA locals disappeared one by one, only to re-emerge several years later.

> "During the progress of this struggle all modern instruments used to defeat men engaged in industrial struggles elsewhere have been used to defeat the men engaged in this contest Hardships, hunger, evictions, brutality, arrests, strikebreakers, false reports, illegal repression of vested rights, intimidation, political prostitution and armed guards are elements common to this battle for human rights.
>
> "However, nothwithstanding that the company have mustered every influence at their command, they have not been able to..discourage the men involved, and if solidarity, fidelity and courage are a harbinger of success, the end will see the United Mineworkers of America on Vancouver Island."
>
> Frank Farrington,
> U.M.W. Journal,
> 27 March, 1913



Vancouver Coal Mining & Land Co., Nanaimo

Many of the miners involved in this long struggle were brought to trial for their part in the strike. To organize a defense and to press for the release of those in jail, the Miner's Liberation League was formed. It included organizations like the B.C. Federation of Labour, the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the I.W.W., and the Victoria Trades and Labour Council.

The following are excerpts from a pamphlet published by the Miner's Liberation League in 1913, describing the events which led up to the strike, the strike itself, and the ensuing trial. The strike had not yet ended, of course, and its outcome was not yet clear.

The anger, the absolute determination to win, and the sharpness of lines between miner and management are evident in these quotations. From our vantage point we know that the miners would not gain the recognition they sought in 1914, but, at the same time, we can understand why and how things do change.

THE VANCOUVER ISLAND STRIKE

by Jack Kavanaugh
Issued by
The Miners' Liberation League
Vancouver, B.C. – 1913

In the twenty-eight years prior to 1912, 373 men were killed in the mines on Vancouver Island in consequence of explosions of coal gas.

The casualties are apart from the numerous accidents to life and limb, which were almost a daily occurence in the mines.

On June 15, 1912, Isaac Portrey and Oscar Mottishaw, the gas committee appointed by the men...reported having found gas in several places in the No. 2 mine at Extension.

Sept., 1912: A miner named Mottishaw is discriminated against by the Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd., for carrying out the law as laid out in the Coal Mines Regulation Act.

Sept. 17, 1912: The miners at Cumberland are "locked out" by the company for taking a holiday in which to consider this matter.

The Orientals employed in the mines had quit work in company with the rest of the miners.

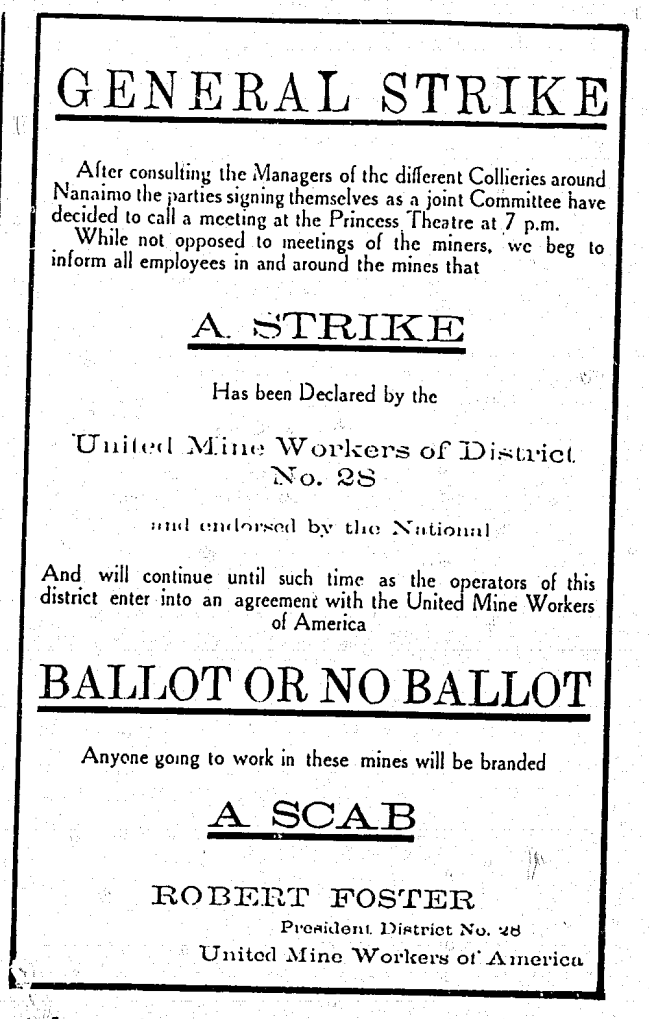
About Sept. 24th ten or twelve special provincial police arrived in Cumberland. Previous to their arrival white miners had had free access to the Oriental quarter, but this was stopped when the police arrived. It may be a coincidence, though undoubtedly a strange one, that a few days after the police had surrounded the Chinese quarters, the Chinese evinced a desire to return to work, although previous to that time they had no intention of so doing.

By October all miners employed by the Canadian Collieries Ltd. had been locked out. (This involved some 3,700 men at the Cumberland, Nanaimo and Extension mines, ed.)

October 1912: More police are sent in, mainly to annoy and harass the strikers.

President Sivertz, of the B.C. Federation of Labour...wrote to the Premier, asking him, as Minister of Mines, to intervene in this dispute. This request was politely evaded.

1913: A resolution introduced into the



GENERAL STRIKE

After consulting the Managers of the different Collieries around Nanaimo the parties signing themselves as a joint Committee have decided to call a meeting at the Princess Theatre at 7 p.m.

While not opposed to meetings of the miners, we beg to inform all employees in and around the mines that

A STRIKE

Has been Declared by the

United Mine Workers of District No. 28

and endorsed by the National

And will continue until such time as the operators of this district enter into an agreement with the United Mine Workers of America

BALLOT OR NO BALLOT

Anyone going to work in these mines will be branded

A SCAB

ROBERT FOSTER
President District No. 28
United Mine Workers of America

Provincial Legislature asking that an enquiry be held in connection with the trouble is defeated.

It had been decided at an executive session of the miners to declare a general strike of all miners on Vancouver Island in an endeavour to influence the government to intervene and bring about an investigation into the circumstances responsible for the lock out.

May 1st (1913) being the day celebrated by the miners as Labour Day, it was finally decided to issue the strike call on the evening of April 30.

May 1913: Complaints from Cumberland re: actions of special police, are ignored.

May 13, 1913: Western Fuel Co. allowed to use courthouse, Nanaimo, for the purpose of taking a ballot.

Early in July, Mr. Crothers (Federal) Minister of Labour, states his intentions of coming to the coast in order to look over the situation on Vancouver Island.

He was met at Vancouver by Mr. Farrington, the UMWA executive officer in charge of the strike. During (Crother's) tour of the mines the most notable feature was the scarcity of time at his disposal when being interviewed by the strikers and and apparent conviction that all men are liars, particularly if they happened to be miners on strike.

The strike dragged on, the Companies endeavouring to get strikebreakers. In this they were ably assisted by special police ...Two women were fined for calling "scab" at a strikebreaker, although he, escorted as he was by a special policeman, was permitted to use the most obscene language towards them.

A little prior to midnight on August 11th, five strikebreakers were brought in to Ladysmith by boat.... The strikers were out picketing as usual. The five men landed and were marched up to the Temperance Hotel, paying no attention to the question put to them by the strikers, between whom they were passing.

As all previous arrivals had spoken on being questioned, the miners thought that the silence of these five was due to sulleness.... They followed the strikebreakers to the hotel and congregated around on two sides of the building. The police were patrolling between the strikers and the hotel.

When the miners massed on the two sides of the building the inhabitants thereof crowded to the windows and an interchange of complaints, more forcible than polite, occured.

During the time the crowd was about the Temperance Hotel, a man named Alex McKinnon, who was acting as a strikebreaker, was coming down the street towards the hotel, but on seeing the crowd he immediately turned and hurried home. About 2 a.m. as a small group of strikers were approaching the group of cottages wherein McKinnon's house was situated, another explosion occured, blowing off the arm of McKinnon, who had the explosive in his hand, preparing to throw it into the street.

In the meantime clouds were gathering on the industrial horizon of the Nanaimo district.

For some days prior to August 11th officials of the Western Fuel Com. had been visiting those of the strikers whom they imagined were wavering, with a view to getting them to return to work. They were spreading the news that over 200 men had decided to do so.

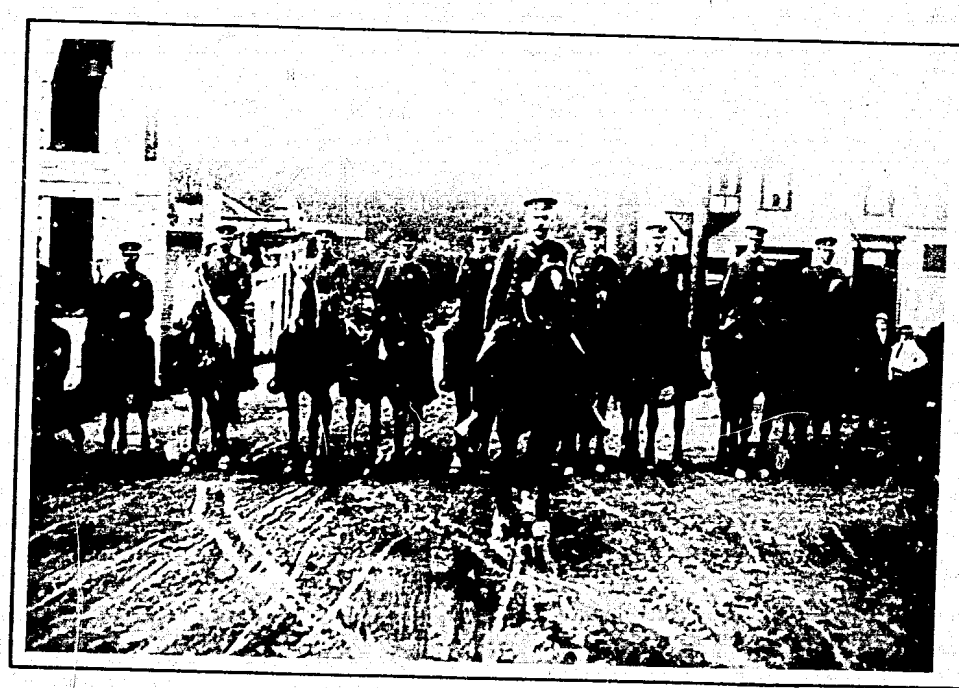
On Wednesday, the 13th, news came that twenty-three special policemen were coming to Nanaimo from Vancouver. When the policemen landed they were escorted back to the boat. One policeman named Taylor drew his gun..... Some of the cooler heads among the miners, realizing the danger the policeman had incurred by his action, attempted to get him to go back on the boat. He, in his fright, resisted their well-meant efforts to remove him and in the struggle received a pair of black eyes.

The miners then sent a message to Attorney-General Bowser stating that if the police were withdrawn they would undertake to preserve peace. This was answered by the following statement issued in the daily press:

Victoria, August 15--"When day breaks there will be nearly a thousand men in the strike zone wearing the uniform of His Majesty. This is my answer to the proposition of the strikers that they will preserve the peace if they are left unmolested by the special police."

The company had erected a searchlight which played on the houses wherein the strikers resided. The miners received the impression that some attempt was made to drive them out of the camp. They therefore approached the "Bull Pen" where many of the strikebreakers were lodged, in order to discover their intentions.

...As they drew near the mine the strikers were met by a fusilade of bullets.



Oakalla Troop, 1914

This drove them to shelter.

Flames commenced issuing from the "Bull Pen" and some of the shacks, and it is a well-known fact that the buildings were on fire before any of the strikers reached the "Bull Pen." The strikebreakers kept up a desultory rifle fire from the mine entrance and about midnight, on the 13th, the crowd dispersed.

On the morning of the 14th a detachment of militia from Vancouver, numbering 300, landed at Departure Bay. They moved into the city and encamped near the post-office. Later in the day a detachment went out to Extension and with the assistance of the strikers, got the strikebreakers out of the mine and rescued the remainder of the women and children.

One striker who guided the militia into the mine in search of an elderly strikebreaker was afterwards arrested for doing so.

The police and militia were being drafted into every mining camp on the Island.

Monday, August 18th, notice was issued that a union meeting would be held in the Athletic Club, Nanaimo, for the purpose of considering a proposed agreement between the Vancouver and Nanaimo Coal Co. and the Union.

When the meeting had closed the miners having voted to accept an agreement with the Van. & Nan. Coal Co., they were marched out in groups of ten single file, in charge of special police, a guard of soldiers, with bayonets fixed, on either side, and marched to the courthouse. There each man was searched, his name taken, and if he was desired, placed in detention. The remainder were then marched out to the ground at the front of the courthouse and kept there under guard until 2 a.m. before being allowed to disperse.

Nanaimo and the surrounding districts experienced an epidemic of military imbecility that is scarcely equalled in history. The floor of the Athletic Club was torn up in an effort to discover armouries of rifles. Hardware stores were raided and their stock of sporting ammunition confiscated.

At Ladysmith the miners were not holding a meeting, therefore no spectacular arrest could be made. However, commencing abour 1:30 a.m., August 19th, the special and militia went around to the houses of some of the strikers, woke them up and told them they were wanted at the police office. Here they were arrested. Among them was Sam Guthrie, President of the Union, and one of the greatest factors in the keeping of peace in Ladysmith.

The Daily Province in Vancouver, in reporting this occurrence, naively remarks, "At first it was planned to have the round-up occur simultaneously with that of Nanaimo, but this plan was abandoned for the method followed".

In all, 179 miners were arrested and thrown into prison where they were held, bail being refused.

The UMW of A engaged the firm of

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SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-ADVERTISER
August 20, 1913

****

"Nanaimo - Indications point to the possibility of the extension of power of the military authorities here over the telegraph and telephone lines leading out of Nanaimo and the strike effected district.

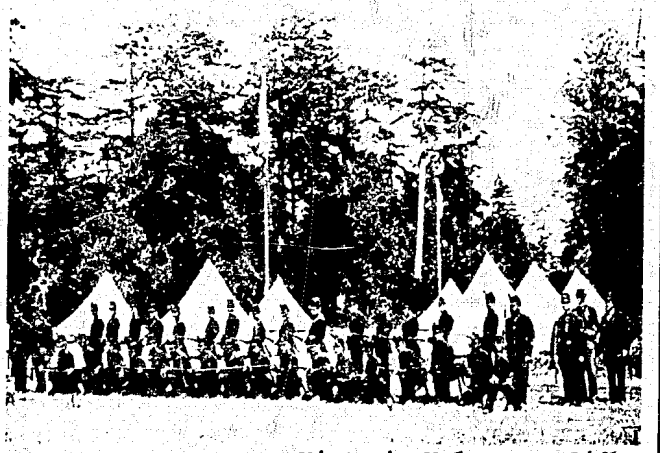
"Already the telephone headquarters here are under guard, and all messages, especially long distance ones, are overheard by a military representative.

"The telegraph lines to a certain extent are supervised, military men being stationed at the railway station here to overlook all messages received or sent.

"Now, or so the rumour emanating from the military headquarters indicates, the next step will be the exercising of some measure of control over the messages sent out by the newspaper representatives.

"Some members of the newspaper fraternity have had the suggestion made to them that they should first submit their press copy to headquarters, where it could be looked over before being sent."

Militia camp at Nanaimo, 1913



Victoria Volunteer Rifles

Bird, Darling and Leighton, together with J.W. DeB. Farris of Killam and Farris, to defend the miners.

The Vancouver-Nanaimo Coal Co., operating the Jingle Pot mine, having made an agreement with the Union, resumed operations. Towards the end of September, acting on the advice of their counsel,... some of the miners elected to take a speedy trial.

Thirty-nine men were tried. The sentences ranged from two years down to nine months, the sentences below two years carrying additional penalties.

An organization was formed in Vancouver, known as the B.C. Miners' Liberation League,...the object being to obtain the release of those who had already been sentenced and to prevent, if possible, the imposition of excessive sentences upon those yet to be tried.

A mass meeting was held in the Dominion Hall, Vancouver, on Nov. 10th, at which resolutions were passed demanding the release of the imprisoned miners. Similar meetings were held at Victoria, Edmonton and other places throughout the Dominion.

Following the meeting...bail was allowed to the majority of miners awaiting trial.

The first cases at the assizes were those arising out of the alleged riots at Cumberland. The jury found them "not guilty".

The next case was that of Cowler et. al, charged with assaulting the police, riotous assembly, etc., at Nanaimo on Aug. 12th. The jury found them "not guilty".

The next trial was that of Isaac Portrey and others, charged with rioting at Ladysmith. During this trial the fact that 39 other men had pleaded guilty and been sentenced for the same offence was

used against them. Judge Morrison, in summing up, denounced the Union, declared that the witnesses for the defence were perjurers and, in effect, instructed the jury to find them guilty. Eleven out of fourteen were convicted. Sentence has not yet passed upon them.

On Monday, Dec. 15th, commenced the trial of ten miners, including the president of the Local Union, on a charge of rioting, and destruction of property at South Wellington. This case is, at this time, Dec. 15th, in the hands of the jury.

In Cumberland, at the present time, the special police act as bank messengers for the Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd., going down to the bank on pay days and drawing money, which they afterwards convey to the company's office.

> "Then your counsel have spoken to me about your wives and children. They know that that is a plea that would strike a sympathetic chord -- but what do I find in the evidence? Woman is sympathetic and kind; that is one of the features in her character that most appeals to us --but what do I find!? I find in this case that the women, and in many instances your wives were in the crowd, singing "DRIVE THE SCABS AWAY!"; throwing stones themselves, and urging on the work of destruction. That takes very much from the strength of any such plea. The evidence before me shows, not only riot, but it shows that a far more serious charge might have been laid against you."
>
> His Honour, Judge Howay
> Passing sentence speech, Ladysmith

This pamphlet has not been written as an apology for anything the miners may have done. Even if they had been guilty of all the crimes charged to them by a prostituted press, still no apology would be offered.

The blame for all that has occurred on Vancouver Island rests upon the representatives of the master class, who are in power at Victoria and Ottawa, and, in the last analysis, upon those members of the working class who gave them that power.

If this but enlightens the reader, ever so slightly, as to the real function of governments, and interests him to the extent of desiring to learn more about his position in human society, it will have served the purpose for which it was written.

The emancipation of wage-slaves will not fall, like manna, from heaven. Nor yet will they be led into freedom, as into the promised land, by inspired leaders of mankind.

The workers will only be freed by those whose interest it is to do so--the workers themselves. ◆

RESOURCE MATERIALS USED

The Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike, by Jack Kavanaugh. Issued by the Miners' Liberation League, 1913, Vancouver, B.C. Used by permission of the U.B.C. Archives, Special Collections (#HD5329-C6-K1).

Report of the Royal Commission on Coal Mining Disputes on Vancouver Island, Samuel Price, Commissioner. 1913. Used by permission of the U.B.C. Archives, Special Collections.

Transcripts, Ladysmith Riot Trials, Rex vs. Alsopp, et. al. 1913: His Honour Judge Howay "Passing sentence speech". Used by permission of the U.B.C. Archives, Special Collections.

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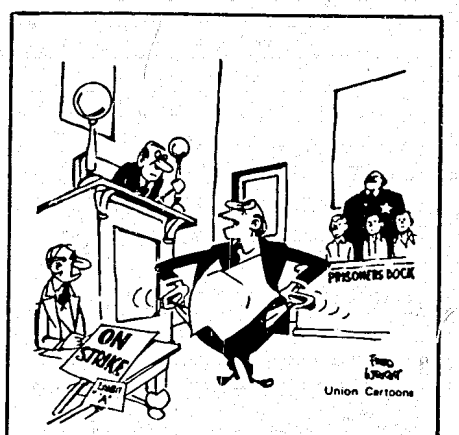


" and then the accused conspirators were observed signalling to each other, like this..."

REVIEWED:

1. The Big Strike

Tape Cassette 30 min.
produced by B.C.
Overtime.

GARY ONSTAD

"If I would have known then what I know now, I sure would have been a fightin' devil for labour. Yes, I would have." Those words, spoken by a Cumberland woman whose brother was jailed during the Vancouver Island Coal Strike of 1912, provide a fascinating insight into the lives of the families of miners who took part in the Big Strike.

All those interviewed for this half hour program speak from their direct experience of living in Vancouver Island communities during the strike. The interviews are interspersed with songs from the same communities and readings from two accounts first given in 1914, one from a labour leader, the other from a Methodist minister. The interviews and readings document the working conditions that the miners objected to. For example, in one four year period in Nanaimo and Wellington, three different explosions took the lives of more than 250 miners. A committee hired to report on gas leaks was promptly fired when it had the temerity to report the leaks. When the coal companies continued to break the few safety laws that did exist, the miners began to realize that collective action was their only hope.

But strike conditions in 1912 had far different consequences than they do today. Families of striking miners were forced out of their homes because they were located on company property. They lived in tents on a beach for the first winter of the strike. Wells had to be dug and leantos constructed to keep out the cold.

This professionally produced tape describes an impressive number of events and issues surrounding the Big Strike--picketing, blacklisting, racism, the roles of the Company police and the United Mineworkers of America, and the eventual arrival of the army from Victoria in the person of:

> "the handy, dandy, candy Seventy-Twa
> dressed up in kilts to represent the law,
> the emblem of the government and the Law."

Activities on and off the picket lines are vivdly described in first person accounts. A woman tells of an inci-

dent at the mine involving scabs brought in from the U.S. when six miners were shot by strikebreakers. "I don't know how I never got shot," she says, "I guess I was lucky." Another account recalls how the striking miners (on $4 per week strike pay) hunted for game and sawed wood in order to exist.

A dramatic account of a Saturday night meeting in Nanaimo between the Company and Union leaders portrays the realities of collective bargaining in 1914 in B.C. The meeting hall was surrounded by soldiers on all sides and Union leaders were arrested as they left the hall under the sights of a machine gun.

Interesting personal accounts abound in this high quality production. A miner's daughter recalls that the Judge in New Westminster who instructed the jury to find the union leaders guilty, had a brother who was boss of the mine at East Wellington where her father worked.

This cassette program is one of a series produced by B.C. OVERTIME. It provides a slice of B.C. history that is long overdue in our schools. The cassettes could be used by students on individual research assignments, in small group settings, or in presentations to a full class. A useful visual aid to accompany the tapes could be the Historical Photograph slide collection from the Vancouver Public Library which includes slides of the Big Strike.

The Big Strike is a stimulating aid for elementary, junior and senior secondary students. Get your Resource Centre to order it!

ORDER FROM: B.C. OVERTIME
333 Carrall Street,
Vancouver V6B 2J4

Prisoners of strike, Extension, 1913

2. Labour / Le Travailleur

VOLUME ONE, 1976; VOLUME TWO, 1977
Committee on Canadian Labour History,
Dept. of History, Dalhousie University,
Halifax, N.S.

TOM MORTON

This journal describes itself as "a bilingual annual review dedicated to the broad interdisciplinary study of Canadian labour history. Holding to no rigid position on the definition of labour, (it) hopes to foster imaginative approaches to both teaching and research in labour studies."

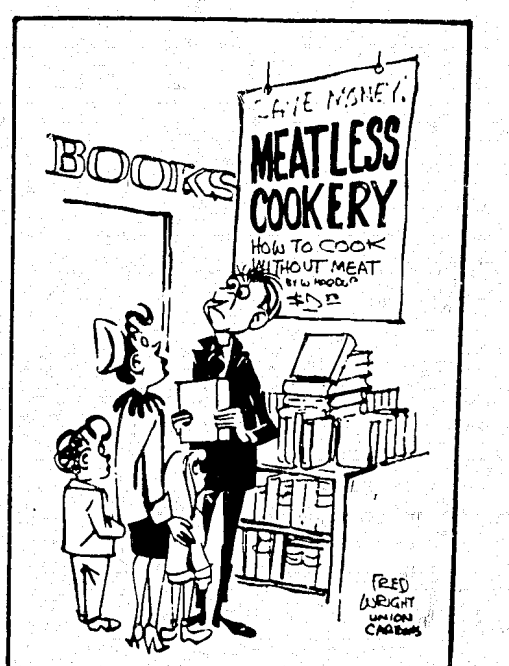
The latest issue fits the description. It contains an ecclectic assortment of fascinating essays--from a study of an early locomotive engineer's strike against the Grand Trunk Railroad to the recollections of Joshua Gershman, a "Jewish Professional Revolutionary." Although the review is for labour historians and students of labour history, the essays have clear relevance for teachers as workers and provide some useful materials for the secondary school classroom.

The essay "The Large and Generous View" on the debate over labour affiliation by the Canadian Civil Service between 1918 and 1928 (by Anthony Thomson of Cambridge University) raises issues paralleling those in the educational system. Thomson discusses the conflict between working class trade unionism and middle class professionalism (or "service ethic") The lack of a strong trade union consciousness among civil servants was directly related to the fact that wages were higher than those of manual workers and to the identification with the higher civil service by the middle levels. As their work and market position changed, so did their consciousness.

For British Columbia teachers, the article on the Cominco Strike in Trail in 1917 should be useful as a teaching resource on one industry towns. The strike involved not only working conditions and wages, but also immigrant labour and the price inflation during during World War I. It was after the failure of that strike that union leader Ginger Goodwin fled the draft to Vancouver Island where he was killed.

"The Liberal Corporatist Ideas of MacKenzie King" is perhaps the most original and important article. The author, Reginald Whitaker, draws from a thorough knowledge both of MacKenzie King and of his intellectual and historical milieu to analyze the consistent themes of MacKenzie King's ideology. The author bases much of his analysis on the famous diaries and the information is as interesting as his recently revealed "other world" visions. MacKenzie King, though rejecting his political premises, read and was interested in Fredrick Engels! Whitaker uses the information from the diary to show how he developed his idea for a unity between capital and labour as a solution to the class conflict in the early part of the century.

In addition to the annual review, the Committee on Labour History also produces two bulletins a year which include reviews and also source materials on labour history. The bulletins are more for the historian and student of history than the teacher or secondary school student, but are certainly very readable. They are also bilingual, but most of the content is, in fact, in English. Subscriptions are $6 per year and include both the bulletin and the journal.



" Do you have a book on how to cook without food..."

3. Work & Wages!

Sheils, Jean Evans & Swanky, Ben. Vancouver Trade Union REsearch Bureau - Granville Press.

GEORGE NORTH

Work & Wages! is a fitting title for the biography of Art (Slim) Evans, a man whose name conjures up memories of the 1935 "On to Ottawa Trek" and other struggles of the workers and the unemployed during the thirties. Before coming to B.C. in the mid-twenties, Toronto-born Evans had been jailed for participating in a free speech meeting in Kansas City in 1911 (he said his contribution was to read the Declaration of Independence), was wounded during the Ludlow, Colorado mine owners' massacre of women and children, and was a leader of the Drumheller coal miners during their sympathy action in support of the Winnipeg General Strike. He was sentenced to three years for "mus-using" union funds to feed striking miners and their families.

It was during the Depression that Evans became a national figure, helping to lead major demonstrations on behalf of the unemployed, including the memorable 1932 Hunger March in Vancouver. Little may be remembered of the bitter Princeton Miners' strike of 1932, but it was a significant part of the struggle against wage cuts, only one of many similar events during the Depression.

Art Evans' life, until he was fatally injured when struck by a car in 1944, was inextricably woven with key events ranging from the organization of miners at Consolidation Mining and Smelting Company in Trail to active support for the Loyalists during the Spanish Civil War.

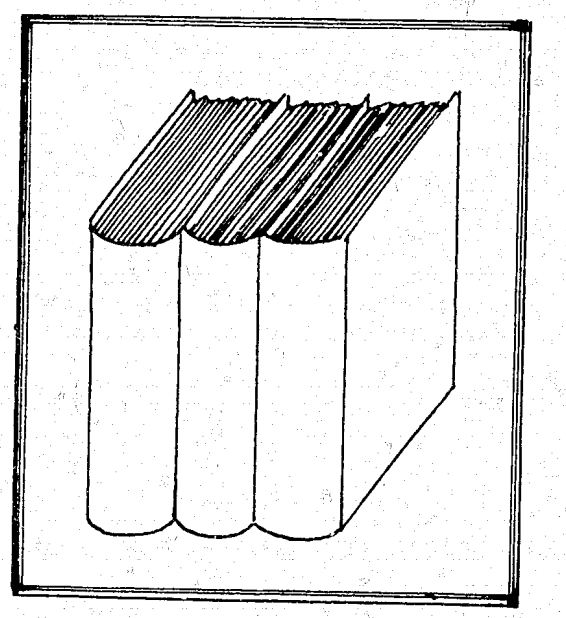
Work & Wages! was written and compiled by Jean Evans Sheils, Evans' daughter, and Ben Swankey, who has also written Man Along the Shore, the story of B.C. longshoremen.

The authors accurately describe the book as a semi-documentary, including excerpts from a number of personal letters newspaper articles, such documents as the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission, and many photographs. The use of long extracts tends to create a feeling that the books would have been better had the authors been more selective and had they edited the material more extensively.

What the book lacks in cohesion, however, it makes up for in a documentation that captures the fact and flavour of the events as they unfolded. Some of Evans' associates are alive and reasonably well--people like Stan Low, George Gee, Harold Malyea, and others who can authenticate the description of the depression period. The book is really indispensable for those who wish to deal with a period that has many lessons for today, including perhaps, the words of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, on June 22, 1935, when he met Evans and other members of the On-to-Ottawa delegation. "We want work and wages," Evans declared, "Give any of us work and see whether we will work." Bennett's position has a contemporary ring: "Work and wages. This is impossible. Where will we get the money for this?"

Members of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association will be interested to know that Chapter One of Work and Wages! is a 1944 article on Evans' Death, written by Al Parkin, A VESTA member, who retired in 1977 after 19 years of teaching in Vancouver.

◆



SOCIAL STUDIES CONFERENCE
Social problems and issues facing Canadian students

A Conference for Social Studies Teachers is being organized by the Social Studies Teachers' Association, April 21-22, 1978 at Totem Park, U.B.C.
The Labour History P.S.A. will be presenting four Workshops:

Women in the Workshop - Heather Knapp
Analyzing Power in Our Society - Gary Onstad
Forest Workers and the Organization of Trade Unions - Tom Morton
Major Events in Canadian Labour History - Frank Fuller

FOR INFORMATION: Mike Doyle of the Social Studies P.S.A., 12131 Schmidt Crescent, Maple Ridege, B.C., V2X 8A2.

LABOUR STUDIES

"The Labour Studies Program is committed to meet the special education needs of B.C. workers, their organizations, and the labour movement in general. From its inception in 1974, the Labour Studies Program has been a co-operative venture of Capilano College and the B.C. Federation of Labour...We offer a wide variety of labour related educational programs..."

INQUIRIES CONCERNING COMMENCEMENT AND SUBJECTS OF CLASSES: Ed Lavalle, Chairperson Labour Studies Program, Capiland College, 2055 Purcell Way. North Vancouver , B.C., V7J 3H5. Telephone: 986-1966, Local 334.

The Story of Ginger Goodwin

The following are quotations from men who knew and worked with Ginger Goodwin. This text has been taken from an article by Patti Weir of B.C. Overtime which appeared in the teaching manual for the slide-sound show "These Were the Reasons".

Goodwin was an organizer for the United Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Trail, B.C. In 1917, he led a strike of Trail miners for the eight hour day.

"Well, he was the head of the union, you see...and he worked on the hill. Any man handling ore worked eight hours; the rest of them worked nine and they wanted eight hours. The government passed a bill in October that the eight hours would go in, in April the following year. Everybody would go on and they gave the company six months to adjust for it. And of course the union, they wanted it right away and the company wouldn't give it to them and they went out on strike."

Toward the end of the strike, the Conscription Bill was passed in Canada. All men were called upon to be examined for the draft.

"Goodwin and I had our meals together in the dining room. Goodwin was a very, very sick man. His teeth were like little pieces of rusty barbed wire. He didn't have one decent tooth in his mouth. And Mrs. Holly, she operated the dining room, she told me he hadn't eaten a decent meal all the time he was there. Now previous to the end of the strike, conscription was involved and everybody had to go to be examined. If they didn't enlist, they were asked to go and undergo medical examination. I went over to Nelson with a bunch of Trail boys and Goodwin was exempted. Now that's important. He was exempted because of his physical state. Then after the strike was all over, some of them were called up for re-examination. Goodwin was called up and he was passed as A-1. He was a sick man all the time. He was small and thin and I don't suppose he ate a decent meal all the time he was here. He couldn't. Anyway, after this re-examination, he was expected to enlist, and he wouldn't enlist, so he beat it down to Vancouver Island and was hunted by the police for evading conscription."

Goodwin went into hiding in the bush around Cumberland, where he was well-known and liked for his help during the 1912-1914 coal miners' strike. The miners in the area kept him and other conscription evaders supplied with food while they were hiding.

"One evening we were there and this man came out of the woods to the cabin. We were sitting down to supper. Of course, he was well-known to all of us kids and it was him (Ginger). He talked about the police harassment and one thing and another and I remember my father asking him, 'What are you going to do - are you going to shoot back if they corner you?' and he said no, 'We're up here because we wanted to get away from war and we're not going to start a private one of our own.' The way they wanted it, they would just give themselves up...if they were cornered they would give themselves up."

But Ginger Goodwin was never cornered. Instead he was shot in the back in an ambush, and the bullet that killed him was a soft-nosed or dum-dum bullet, which explodes upon impact.

"Everything went quiet. That was when the word came out that Ginger had been shot and killed. And no more police went up after that. Just one man, that's all they were interested in. And this here Campbell that shot Ginger had said, 'I won't be like Rushford (that was the first policeman that went in) and just shoot over his head. If I confront him, he'll be killed.' And when Campbell shot him, he claims that Ginger drew the gun on him, packing a '22'. The bullet wound was right here and into his neck. That Campbell was hiding behind a tree, just waiting on the trail."

During conscription, a special federal police corps was formed to search for draft eavaders. Campbell, the man who shot Goodwin, was a member of this corps. When the details of the shooting came out, Campbell was brought to trial, but soon was deemed

innocent and allowed to go free.

Organized labour was shocked by the whole incident. In Vancouver, the first general strike ever held in Canada was called on the day of Ginger Goodwin's funeral. The strike was used as an excuse to turn the public against the labour movement over the conscription issue. Vancouver newspapers printed provocative articles under headlines like "German or British?". The strike turned into a bitter fight between trade unionists and war veterans.

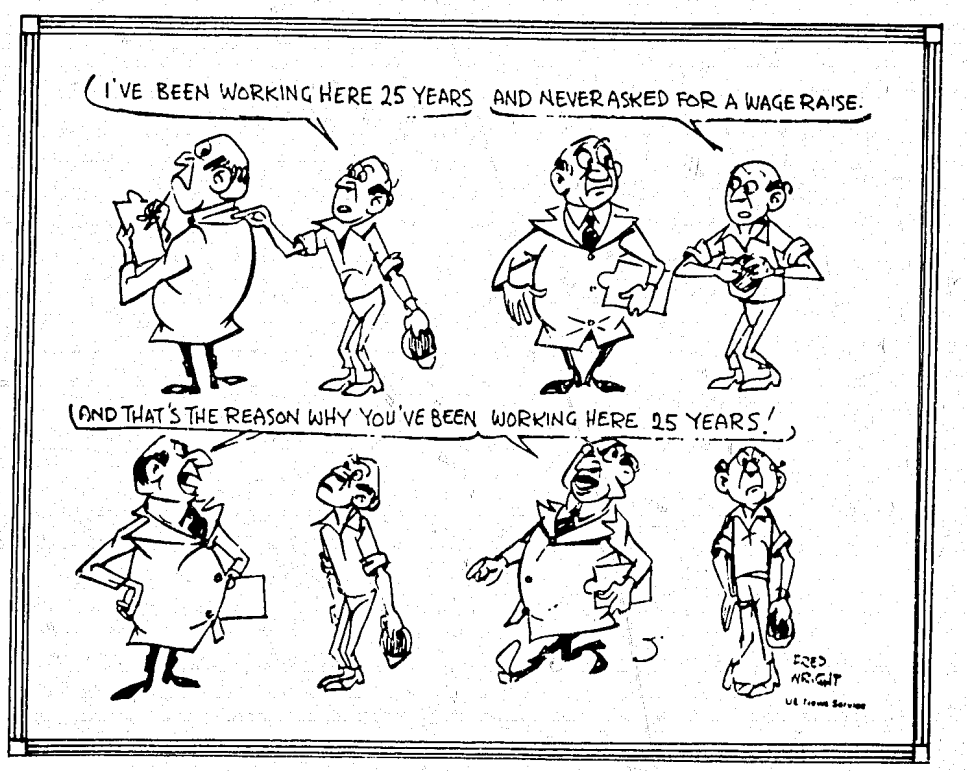
The following story is from a 1918 edition of a labour paper, the B.C. Federationist.

Riot Commences

Somewhere around 3.30 o'clock, word was received at the Labour Temple that about three hundred returned soldiers were on their way to the temple and shortly after, they arrived in motor cars and on foot. Addresses were given by various speakers, all of an inflammatory nature, from one of the cars, and cries of 'bring them out,' and threats of violence were used by the mob; sticks were thrown at the windows of the Trades Council and the Labour Temple offices and finally the mob entered the building; windows were broken as were the doors. Victor Midgley, secretary and business agent of the central body, was forced through the window on to the coping. He went along the coping to the office of the Labour Temple Company, and told the men who had entered the office that he was willing to address the crowd. The mob again attempted to push him through the window, but Miss Foxcroft, the telephone exchange operator, who was bruised considerably in the process, stood in front of the window and prevented this being done. He was then taken down stairs as he thought, to address the crowd, but the men who had taken him down on that pretense, turned him over to the crowd, who made him kiss the flag. He was then surrounded by the police and taken upstairs, not, however, before he had received a number of blows.

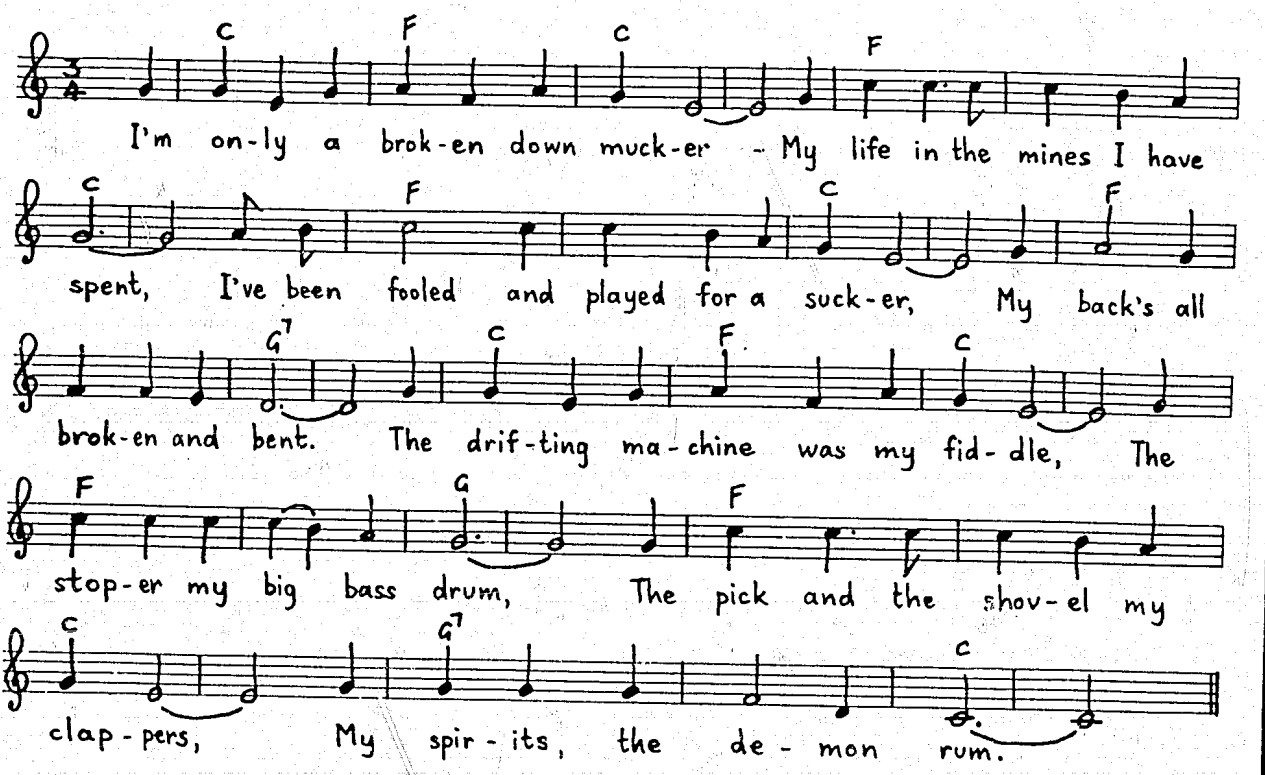
There is no doubt that if it had not been for Miss Foxcroft's intervention, he would have been hurled from the window, and that the police saved him from treatment that would have possibly resulted in serious bodily harm, if not death.

Meanwhile, Ginger Goodwin was being buried in Cumberland. The funeral, with a procession over a mile long, was the most largely attended in the history of the town. You can still see the headstone today, with the words, "LEST WE FORGET, A WORKER'S FRIEND".



I'm Only a Broken Down Mucker

P.J. Thomas Collection - from *Singing of Bill Booth.*



1. I'm only a broken down mucker--
   My life in the mines I have spent,
   I've been fooled and played for a sucker,
   My back's all broken and bent.
   The drifting machine was my fiddle,
   The stoper by big bass drum,
   The pick and the shovel my clappers,
   My spirits, the demon rum.

2. My youth was happy-go-lucky--
   Scarlet women were my delight,
   As soon as a wrong word was spoken,
   I'd put up my dukes and fight.
   But pay-day was my hey-day--
   On beer and rum I'd get drunk,
   Then I'd wake up in the morning,
   Broke and feeling so punk.

3. I scoffed at the man in the office,
   Called him belittlin' names.
   But I realize now that I'm older,
   I used my back where he used his brains.
   The drifting machine done for my hearing,
   The mine gases dimmed my sight.
   I know my last days are nearing,
   But I'll rally for one last fight.

4. I'm only a broken down mucker--
   My life in the mines I have spent,
   I've been fooled and played for a sucker,
   My back's all broken and bent.
   I know my last days are nearing,
   I know it only too well--
   I'll be working and sweating and swearing
   With a pick and shovel in Hell.

From the projected book "Where the Fraser River Flows and Other Songs of the Northwest" by P.J. Thomas. Fall, 1978, Hancock House Publishers.

BackGround

Phil Thomas

The song "I'm Only a Broken-down Mucker", albeit mostly in fragments, turned up in a number of widely separated places in British Columbia. What most informants remembered most readily were the first lines including,

> "I've been fooled and played for
> a sucker."

The feeling of betrayal in this line makes the song much more than a complaint and presents a contradiction to the tone of bravado. In the song, an all-but burnt-out labourer looks back on his life and concludes that he was duped, used, and somehow robbed of his human dignity. Who or what was responsible for this, he cannot say, but he hints at the existence of an unjust society.

It is well-known that there is a strong tendency for children to find occupations in the same social class as their mothers and fathers. In the case of unskilled labourers, this pattern is most evident for they have benefitted the least from the educational system, with its inherent service to middle-class notions of upward mobility and "free choice" in the selection of occupation. The conflict between the values of their working class community and the school is resolved either by rejection of their language patterns, their tastes, and the attitudes they share with their parents and neighbours, or by rejection of the school and all it stands for.

To reject the school with its demeaning attitude towards him/her as a person (and as a member of a class), the working class child must build or affirm a set of values which saves his self-respect. For the male, often these values emphasize and exaggerate masculine stereotypes of independence and virility: the song, with its celebration of youth, its zest for physical labour, its whoring, fighting and drinking could well be a catalogue of these traits. Crucial, too, in this list is the "belittlin'" of the office clerk, the man who chose the values of the school rather than those of his community.

His portrayal of himself as a "broken down mucker" with damage to his eyes, ears, and back conveys his realization that he can no longer fill the labourer's role. It seems to him now, as he reflects on his life, that he took the wrong path, that of "brawn" rather than "brain". But as we have seen, any other choice was, for all but a few, impossible. As is commonly the case, our mucker does not even ask how or why he ended up as he did. He has been so conditioned to individualistic and competitive views of the larger society that he accepts his lot, however jocularly, and eternity in Hell with his pick and shovel --sweating, swearing and defying to the last a world that has so abused him. That he should consider this his reward after a lifetime of useful work is a sad reflection on a society which values people so little.

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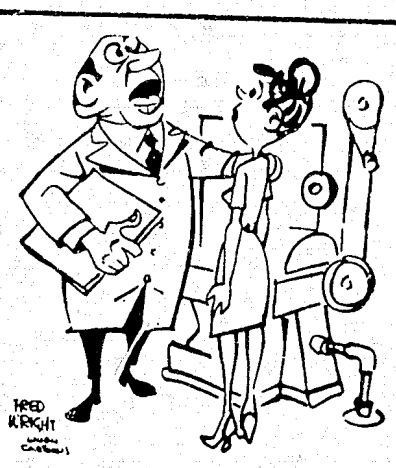
The song was sung for me by the late Bill Booth, the text collated with one Booth had made many years ago, now in the possession of Florida Town of Port Moody. It uses the tune of "I've Got No Use for the Women". It dates from the 1930's and 40's. ◆



"Management and labor must co-operate... I'll give the orders and you co-operate by obeying them..."


WHERE DO YOU GET THE MONEY TO PAY HIM?
I SELL PRODUCTS
WHAT DID YOU TELL THAT MAN JUST NOW?
I TOLD HIM TO WORK FASTER!
WHO MAKES THE PRODUCTS?
HE DOES...
HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY HIM?
$25.00 A DAY...
HOW MANY PRODUCTS DOES HE MAKE IN ONE DAY?
$100.00 WORTH
THEN INSTEAD OF YOU PAYING HIM... HE IS PAYING YOU $75.00 A DAY TO TELL HIM TO WORK FASTER!
HUH?
BUT THE MACHINES BELONG TO ME-
HOW DID YOU GET THE MACHINES?
I SOLD PRODUCTS AND BOUGHT THEM
...AND WHO MADE THOSE PRODUCTS?
SHUT UP... HE MIGHT HEAR YOU!
FRED WRIGHT
UE NEWS SERVICE

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Notes on Unions - a series of eight informative sheets, prepared and distributed by the Canadian Labour Congress. Contact the nearest C.L.C. office for this very worthwhile series.

EXTRA!

Copies of the first and second issues of *Labour History* are available upon request. Contact Denis Ottewell, Labour History, P.S.A., c/o The B.C.T.F., 2235 Burrard St., Vancouver.

This illustration, by Janet Scully, is of a photograph taken at Grand Prairie in the northern Okanagan about 1905. The camel died shortly after the photograph was taken -- the last of a group which arrived in British Columbia in 1862.

Camels were brought to B.C. during the Cariboo gold rush. They were to be used to pack goods between Lillooet and the Cariboo -- it was thought that their long legs would "enable them to breast deep snow drifts, the merest sight of which would disturb the equanimity of the strongest-nerved and best conducted jackass in British Columbia" (Victoria Colonist, Mar. 1, 1862). *Camels could carry at least twice as much as a mule, and required very little up-keep.*

Despite the enthusiasm which greeted the camels' arrival in Victoria in 1862, and the great hopes for their usefulness, the animals were found to be more trouble than they were worth. The last one died in 1905 -- and that was the end of camels in B.C.

Source: B.C. Digest, July, 1965, "Those Cariboo Camels", by Bruce Ramsey.

Major Labor Organizations in Canada

DATE	ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION	NOTES
1834	Printers' Union	Toronto union	– held strike in 1872, victory in the form of Trade Union Act
1871	Toronto Trades Assembly	Group of trade unions from Toronto	– campaign for shorter hours – instrumental in establishing the Trade Union Act – moved toward a National Labour Assembly
1873	Canadian Labour Union (CLU)	First national labor-center; Toronto base	– lasted for three conventions until an economic recession caused its end
1880s	Knights of Labour	Started in 1869, in Philadelphia; swept across Canada in the 1880s	– pioneers in industrial unionism – organized semi-skilled and unskilled workers – co-founded Canadian Trades and Labour Congress – declined because of conflict with American Federation of Labour
1886	Trades and Labour Congress (TLC)	Toronto base with delegates from across Canada; national labour body	– forerunner of Canadian Labour Congress of today – influenced by American Federation of Labour (AFL) – international union policy
1903 1927	National Trades and Labour Congress changing to Canadian Federation of Labour (CFL)	Aimed at building a purely Canadian trade union system	– formed after TLC opted for closer relations with the AFL and international unionism – anti-international policy
1905	Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies)	Originated in Chicago; aim to overthrow the capitalist system by and for the workers; had 10,000 Canadian members by 1911	– organized workers into industrial unions – pioneered strike on-the-job, mass sit-downs and organization of the unemployed, migrant and immigrant workers – declined during WW I when governments outlawed the organization
1919	One Big Union (OBU)	Predominantly western Canadian organization	– arose out of the fight for a united, militant, Canadian trade union movement – industrial unionism policy – short-lived strength
1927	All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL)	Started by the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE); came out of the CFL	– objective of achieving the complete independence of the Canadian labor movement
1938	Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)	American organization formed because of split in AFL over craft vs. industrial unions	– Canadian implication: TLC followed AFL example and expelled any CIO unions
1940	Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL)	Merger between CIO unions and All-Canadian Congress of Labour	– emphasized organizing the unorganized – autonomous Canadian body – flexible membership acceptance
1956	Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)	Merger between Trades and Labour Congress and Canadian Congress of Labour	– main central labor body of today – over two million members in 1976

The above has been taken from the teaching manual for the slide-sound show "These Were the Reasons", produced by B.C. Overtime.