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## Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920's

From 1867 to 1933 the military came to the aid of the civil power in Canada on at least 133 occasions.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the period the threat or apprehended threat of domestic disorder was the primary justification for both retention and expansion of military forces. It was the impetus behind the militia increases in the early 1880's,<sup>2</sup> and two decades later Sir Wilfred Laurier cautioned Lord Dundonald: "You must not take the militia seriously, for though it is useful for suppressing internal disturbances, it will not be required for the defence of the country, as the Monroe doctrine protects us from enemy aggression".<sup>3</sup> In 1909 Sir Frederick Borden, the Minister of Militia, declared: "The reason for the existence of the militia in this country is well understood. The principal object is perhaps the upholding of the Civil power in the different parts of the Dominion".<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, this significant role has received little attention from military historians. Col. C. F. Hamilton and Lieut. Col. D. J. Goodspeed completely ignored the theme,<sup>5</sup> while G. F. G. Stanley mentioned it only to demonstrate that in peacetime the militia "was not a waste of time or money".<sup>6</sup> The few articles that have concentrated on the subject usually leave the impression that the practice, while disliked by the military, was performed with patience and tact and was quite successful in restoring or preserving law and

1 Major J.J.B. Pariseau, *Disorders, Strikes and Disasters: Military Aid to the Civil Power in Canada, 1867 - 1933* (Ottawa, 1973). Pariseau's list of 132 incidents is the most comprehensive to date. One minor episode not mentioned centered on a racial riot in Glace Bay, Cape Breton on 2 September 1918.

2 W.S. MacNutt, *Days of Lorne* (Fredericton, 1955), pp. 177-178.

3 G.F.G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* (Toronto, 1960), p. 294.

4 *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*, 1909 (Toronto, 1910), pp. 277-278.

5 Col. C.F. Hamilton, "The Canadian Militia", a series of articles in *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 1928-32; Lt.-Col. D.J. Goodspeed, *The Armed Forces of Canada, 1867-1967* (Ottawa, 1967).

6 Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers*, p. 291.

order.<sup>7</sup> Desmond Morton, for example, in a recent study of the period prior to 1914, argued that, generally, the "arrival of uniformed, armed troops seems to have been sufficient to restore civil authority or to calm the apprehensions of timid magistrates. In many cases the militia only appeared when trouble had run its course".<sup>8</sup> More recently, Major J. J. B. Pariseau observed that the practice had a salutary effect.<sup>9</sup> Such generous assessments call out for qualification. In labour disputes, which accounted for almost half of the incidents in which military forces were used, the presence of troops may not have been viewed as a neutral, stabilizing force by other participants. If this was the case a reassessment would seem appropriate. With this consideration in mind, this paper will deal with three such incidents, all of which occurred in industrial Cape Breton in the 1920's. While they involved relatively large troop movements and were instrumental in effecting amendments to the Militia Act, they are not unrepresentative of labour disputes during the country's industrial development.

The year 1919, the year of the "Red Scare", witnessed a great deal of tension and unrest in Canada. Early in the summer Maj.-Gen. S. C. Mewburn, the Minister of Militia, piloted an amendment to the Militia Act through Parliament which doubled the authorized ceiling of the permanent force to 10,000. Mewburn used the traditional argument to bolster his case: the increase might become necessary because "circumstances have arisen throughout the whole country which seem to indicate an absolute necessity that Canada should have some force available for the preservation of law and order in this country".<sup>10</sup> In spite of an evident post-war reaction against military spending, Mewburn's amendment was successful.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, some high ranking military figures were eager to implement compulsory military training throughout the country. Brig.-Gen. J. H. MacBrien envisaged a comprehensive plan whereby, among other features, boys would commence training at six years of age and continue through various levels well into adulthood.<sup>12</sup> Maj.-Gen. A. G. L. McNaughton, who shared this desire for military training, argued that such a scheme would not only provide the men needed to quash any insurrection but would assist in removing those very

7 Major T.V. Scudamore wrote that the practice was "the most unpopular duty that the militia can be called upon to perform". "Aid to the Civil Power", *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 1932, p. 253. See also U. McFadden, "A Civilian's View of the Military", *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 1935, pp. 221-224; R.H. Roy, "... in Aid of a Civil Power, 1877", *Canadian Army Journal*, 1953, pp. 61-69.

8 D. Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867-1914", *Canadian Historical Review*, L1, (1970), p. 414.

9 Pariseau, *Disorders*, pp. 20, 38, 48, 50.

10 Canada, House of Commons, *Debates* [hereinafter cited as *Debates*], 1919, pp. 3967-3968.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 3966-3982.

12 J.H. MacBrien, "Memorandum on a Future Military Force for Canada", 1919, Sir Arthur Currie Papers, Public Archives of Canada [hereinafter PAC].

dangers by reaching "that element in the country which was most in need of education in responsibility and in citizenship".<sup>13</sup> Others were more realistic. Maj.-Gen. Sir Eugene Fiset thought the plan but a dream,<sup>14</sup> and Sir Arthur Currie explained to MacBrien that both Parliament and the public "were overwhelming[ly] against universal training at this time. There requires a great deal of educational work to be carried out before any such a thing can become a reality. I think it wise not to attempt to force the issue at the present time".<sup>15</sup> Currie soon moved on to McGill University and Fiset, after serving as Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence, retired in the early 1920's, but MacBrien became Chief of the General Staff and McNaughton remained a close associate. Perhaps in part because their desire for universal military training had come to naught, MacBrien and McNaughton considered the possibility of the domestic overthrow of law and order not only real, but the most pressing threat to the country.<sup>16</sup>

This mentality was reflected in the proposed re-organization of the military forces. As early as August, 1920, Currie had suggested to Arthur Meighen that the Department of Militia and Defence and the Naval Service be amalgamated into one administrative department. The idea received further support when it was learned that the United States was considering a similar move.<sup>17</sup> Then only a few days after the Liberal electoral victory in December, 1921, Maj.-Gen. Fiset recommended to Mackenzie King the amalgamation not only of the Naval, Air and Militia departments, but of the R.C.M.P. as well. Such an arrangement, Fiset argued, would decrease overhead charges to a minimum "and the fact that the Royal North West Mounted Police will be administered by the same ministerial head would enable a reduction in the Permanent Force by an equal number, and enable the Government to deal with 'Aid to Civil Powers in Time of Emergency' with a complete force under one control".<sup>18</sup> A few days later Fiset passed on to King a memorandum by C. G. S. MacBrien along similar lines; in this version the R.C.M.P. were envisaged as mobile squadrons closely aligned with the cavalry.<sup>19</sup> Mackenzie King was receptive. When his first cabinet was formed, George P. Graham, whom King had not wanted,<sup>20</sup> received the portfolios of Militia and Defence, and Naval Services, and early in April 1922, in the first session of Parliament, Graham introduced a bill to create the Department of National Defence which would include the R.C.M.P. Indeed, according to Graham, the R.C.M.P. had already been shifted from the Justice De-

13 J. Swettenham, *McNaughton* (Toronto, 1968), I, p. 183.

14 J. Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada* (Toronto, 1964), I, p. 69.

15 A. Currie to J.H. MacBrien, 12 April 1920, Currie Papers.

16 Swettenham, *McNaughton*, I, p. 182.

17 Eayrs, *In Defence*, I, pp. 224-225.

18 E. Fiset to King, 15 December 1921, William Lyon Mackenzie King Papers, PAC.

19 E. Fiset to King, 19 December 1921, King Papers.

20 R.M. Dawson, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1874-1923* (Toronto, 1958), p. 372.

partment and for the last few months had been administered by the Department of Militia and Defence.<sup>21</sup>

Few politicians disagreed with the re-organization of the military forces from the viewpoint of efficiency and economy, but strong opposition arose to the inclusion of the R.C.M.P. within the proposed Defence Department. Arthur Meighen maintained that, if the Mounted Police lost its civilian status, it would lose much of its public regard. He envisaged the R.C.M.P., which he thought better suited than the militia for preserving law and order, as a "mobile police reserve" which could be strategically located in a few points in the country, with its services at the disposal of local authorities when required.<sup>22</sup> General Mewburn, speaking for the Conservatives, also argued that the Mounted Police should be left alone. He then added the interesting observation that "We have had troubles in past strikes and that sort of thing, and although under the present Militia Act it is within the power of a municipality to call upon the militia to turn out for the preservation of law and order, that is the very last resort that should be adopted in this country . . . ."<sup>23</sup> Mewburn was followed in the debate by Mackenzie King, who brought out that only recently the Mounted Police had been requested by municipal authorities in Nova Scotia, but that "the government took the position that if we wished to create an industrial disturbance of very serious proportions, possibly the best way we could go about it would be to order the Mounted Police into those areas". He had, at that time, informed the local authorities that "if they were unable to maintain law and order themselves, as they were supposed to do", they could call in the militia but he assured them that they would be responsible for expenses incurred. King felt that "if you once open the door to having the Mounted Police called in to aid civil authorities on any occasion when there may be alarm on account of industrial disputes, you will in a very short time have the federal government discharging a function in the matter of keeping law and order which it was never contemplated it should discharge".<sup>24</sup> J. S. Woodsworth agreed that the R.C.M.P. was hardly an instrument of peace during industrial disputes, and suggested they be confined to the unorganised territories of the country. John A. Clark, a West Coast Conservative who had spent twenty years in the military and had participated in forces in aid of the civil power, spoke out against the use of troops in civil cases because it merely antagonized the working class, a prime recruiting area for the military. For him, echoing Mewburn, the Mounted Police was the appropriate force, but it should not be associated with the Department of National Defence.<sup>25</sup>

21 *Debates*, 1922, p. 734.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 665-675.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 666.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 667.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 670-673.

Graham attempted to defend his position by reading statements from the provincial authorities. Nova Scotia's reply should be noted. Aware of the accessibility of troops under the provisions of the Militia Act, and possibly thinking that inclusion of the R.C.M.P. under the Defence Department would also mean their availability under the Militia Act, the Nova Scotia government stated "that some advantage might be gained if it were able to call upon a federal police at any time".<sup>26</sup> Eventually, however, the strong opposition from Conservatives and Progressives alike was successful and the R.C.M.P. were excluded from the new Department of National Defence. One thing was clear; industrial disturbances were expected. Much of the debate had simply been a discussion as to which force could most effectively deal with them.

These disturbances were not long in coming. Industrial unrest was not a new phenomenon in Cape Breton; in 1876, 1882, 1904 and 1909 military forces had been sent to Cape Breton from the mainland. But since the war two new protagonists had appeared on the scene. One was District 26, United Mine Workers of America, representing 12,000 miners in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and quickly coming under the control of a number of fiery, articulate activists, many of whom were, or became publicly avowed communists and members of the Workers Party of Canada. The other was the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco), the largest industrial consortium in Canada at the time. Late in 1920 a yearly contract had been signed between these two bodies. Employees received significant increases, the highest wages the men would receive for more than twenty years. Then, in January 1922, Besco announced a reduction of 35%. Throughout the spring and summer of 1922 the industrial situation deteriorated. With a strike in the offing, King sent an urgent request to D. D. McKenzie, Solicitor-General and Cape Breton M. P., for information on the calling out of the Militia and the Mounted Police in aid of the civil power. In reply, McKenzie included the appropriate sections of the Militia Act and warned King that the federal government "... should not be a party to bringing out either the Police Force or the Military Force until sufficient pressure to that effect is brought to bear, not only by the industrial corporations concerned, but by the civil authorities as well".<sup>27</sup> He need not have worried; King was quite content to maintain a passive role.

On the morning of 14 August Besco president Roy Wolvin requested immediate military protection from the federal authorities on the grounds that the walk-out — scheduled to commence the following day — was to include maintenance men, a situation which would lead to deterioration of the mines. King replied that invoking military forces in such a situation was

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> W.H. Measures to D.D. McKenzie, 10 August 1922; D.D. McKenzie to King, 10 August 1922, King Papers.

not a responsibility of the federal government and enclosed a copy of McKenzie's recent memorandum on the procedures to be followed.<sup>28</sup> The strike began as planned on 15 August. Concurrent with the strike was an overwhelming victory for the radicals in the District 26 executive elections. Later that day D. W. Morrison, Glace Bay Mayor and Labour M.L.A., issued the following statement:

I have been today twice requested to sign a requisition for troops and have refused. I have refused because I felt that there is no need for troops in here. There is absolutely no disorder, much less violence. To bring armed men into the district under these circumstances is, in my opinion, unfortunate and ill-advised and totally unnecessary.

Today I had the Chief of Police make a careful investigation of the situation and he has reported to me that there is not the slightest necessity for outside interference; he states that there is not even need for special police from outside.<sup>29</sup>

Others obviously disagreed with Morrison's assessment. That same day County Court Judge Duncan Finlayson requisitioned troops under the Militia Act and the District Officer Commanding, Maj.-Gen. H. C. Thacker, immediately forwarded more than 200 Royal Canadian Artillery soldiers from Halifax and a 250 man contingent from the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> in Quebec.<sup>30</sup> The first troop train arrived from Halifax on 16 August and was met at the Sydney terminal by rock-wielding strikers and sympathizers. Undeterred, the R.C.A. pressed on to Glace Bay, accompanied by Lewis gun detachments and five 18-pound field guns.<sup>31</sup>

Two arguments were used to justify the military presence and to plead for more troops. With maintenance men included among the strikers the mines gradually began to accumulate water and since the mines, as the provincial government frequently pointed out, were owned by the public, they had to be protected.<sup>32</sup> There was also an irrational fear of the dynamic, outspoken, radical union executive, led by J. B. McLachlan and "Red Dan" Livingstone. Cape Breton M.P. George Kyte wired to Mackenzie King: "People in terror of revolution which radical element threaten. Rush more

28 R. Wolvin to King, 14 August 1922; King to Wolvin, 15 August 1922, King Papers.

29 *Halifax Herald*, 16 August 1922.

30 Canada was divided into military districts. District 6, with headquarters at Halifax, encompassed Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. A County Court judge since 1908, Finlayson had requisitioned the military during the bitter strike of 1909-10. D. Finlayson to D.O.C., 17 July 1909, Department of National Defence Records, H.Q. 363-15, vol. 8, PAC.

31 *Sydney Post*, 17 August 1922.

32 *Toronto Globe*, 16 August 1922.

soldiers with all speed".<sup>33</sup> Besco president Roy Wolvin maintained that 500 troops were totally inadequate and that a minimum of 2,000 more was required immediately. Wolvin added "that if any naval forces are available they should be sent to Sydney harbour immediately".<sup>34</sup> Similar views were expressed by Premier George Murray, Mines Commissioner E. H. Armstrong, and W. S. Fielding.<sup>35</sup>

Other less influential individuals disagreed with this assessment. The Mayor of Glace Bay continued to oppose the dispatch of troops and on 17 August forwarded the following message to Mackenzie King: "Do not consider militia necessary in Glace Bay. No disturbances of any kind. Not one arrest. Local authorities are able to cope with conditions. Town will repudiate payment of expenses incurred by Militia. Urge that you order withdrawal of troops as their presence here is aggravating the situation".<sup>36</sup> In a series of mass meetings in Cape Breton over 1500 "returned men" opposed the military presence. Great War Veterans' Associations in Sydney Mines and Glace Bay maintained that the appearance of troops "only tends to aggravate the situation" and a group of Acadian miners in the area objected specifically to the presence of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> for the same reason. Local union officials and some mainland unionists argued that the troops would be used to break the strike and that the procedure was productive only of harm while Trades and Labour Congress president Tom Moore regarded it as a "case of intimidation".<sup>37</sup> A few days later the Trades and Labour Congress reiterated its president's position,<sup>38</sup> and a Methodist minister in one of the mining communities informed King of the serious complications which resulted from the new situation, an aspect which generals Thacker and McNaughton both recognized and feared.<sup>39</sup> Mackenzie King attempted to placate those opposed to the military presence by denying that the federal government had any responsibility,<sup>40</sup> and he quickly persuaded Graham to issue a public statement explaining that the government had nothing to do with sending the troops.

On the same day as he made this declaration, however, Graham informed

33 G.W. Kyte to King, 18 August 1922, King Papers.

34 R. Wolvin to King, 16 August 1922, King Papers.

35 E.H. Armstrong to W.S. Fielding, 16 August 1922; Fielding to King, 17 August 1922, King Papers.

36 D.W. Morrison to King, 17 August 1922, King Papers.

37 *Debates*, 6 March 1923, p. 867; H. Spracklin, Wm. McDonald to J. Murdock, 16 August 1922; J. Guest to King, 18 August 1922; D.J. Aucoin *et al.* to King, 17 August 1922, King Papers.

38 A.P. Walker to King, 18 August 1922; T. Moore to King, 18 August 1922, King Papers; *Labour Gazette*, September 1922, pp. 968-69.

39 C.A. Munro to King, 17 August 1922, King Papers; Thacker to Ottawa, 19 August 1922; McNaughton to Thacker, 23 August 1922, A.G.L. McNaughton Papers, PAC.

40 King to H. Spracklin, 17 August 1922, King Papers.



Thacker that his request for an additional 500 troops was being acted upon.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, not content with almost 1,000 troops on or enroute to the island, the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council proclaimed Cape Breton County a police district and approved the raising of 1,000 special police for duty in the strike area.<sup>42</sup> Since there were no trained and experienced men to act as the nucleus of the force, the provincial Mines Commissioner, E. H. Armstrong, requested the assistance of the federal government and arrangements, during which both King and Sir Lomer Gouin, federal Minister of Justice, were consulted, were soon completed.<sup>43</sup> Within three days of the initial request ten N.C.O.'s from the R.C.M.P. were making fast for the east in their new roles as special advisors.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the miners exhibited a high degree of discipline and determination. When a train carrying the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> contingent began its short ride over coal company tracks from Sydney to the mining town of Dominion, it pushed before it an armed gondola which, with its three foot thick protection of sandbags, could apparently withstand a barrage of 18-pounders. Situated on the front corners were Lewis gun crews while the perimeter was occupied by dozens of armed soldiers. Undaunted, the strikers twice halted this military procession before it reached its destination while a group of miners quietly and efficiently searched the train for "scabs".<sup>45</sup> In spite of the continued lack of violence, on 19 August the District Officer Commanding suggested the addition of a large contingent of Mounted Police and the use of British battleships then in Newfoundland waters, requesting that they be authorized to land in a support role if necessary.<sup>46</sup> Not since 1884, when a British warship overawed the Indians on the Skeena, had British military forces intervened in a domestic dispute.<sup>47</sup> Nor was the General finished for the day. Through the Senior Naval Officer at Halifax, Canada's two destroyers, the "Patriot" and the "Patrician", received orders to proceed to Sydney to render assistance.<sup>48</sup> Upon hearing of this latest development, military headquarters cancelled the order directing the destroyers to the area and informed General Thacker that naval forces were not to be used "under existing conditions". General McNaughton, Acting Chief of General Staff while MacBrien was on vacation, directed Thacker to begin preparations

41 King to Beaudry, 17 August 1922, King Papers; Halifax *Herald*, 18 August 1922.

42 *Canadian Annual Review*, 1922 (Toronto, 1923), p. 731.

43 E.H. Armstrong to L. Gouin, 19 August 1922; J.E. Tremblay "Memorandum", 20 August 1922; J.C. Tremblay to E.H. Armstrong, 20 August 1922; Armstrong to Tremblay, 21 August 1922, King Papers.

44 J.E. Tremblay, "Memorandum", 22 August 1922, King Papers.

45 Montreal *Star*, 19 August 1922.

46 G.O. 6 to Militia Council, 19 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

47 Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power, 1867-1914", p. 419, n. 19.

48 Senior Naval Officer to Ottawa, 19 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

to call out the non-permanent militia to meet any future requirements.<sup>49</sup>

The same day that General Thacker attempted to create his amphibious force, Premier Murray met with the District 26 executive. An agreement was reached whereby maintenance men would return to the pits and, Murray informed King, the situation appeared "well in hand".<sup>50</sup> King in turn told McNaughton that "It would be a great mistake in view of this statement from the Premier of the Province to take the extreme kind of action suggested by the Group Officer Commanding without first having it endorsed by Premier Murray himself".<sup>51</sup> The Prime Minister then sent Solicitor-General McKenzie to the area as a "special advisor" and Thacker was informed by McNaughton that if any large number of additional troops were required McKenzie and Murray were to be consulted and their endorsement obtained "if possible". McNaughton then suggested that the military be brought into reserve as soon as the newly created provincial police force was available in sufficient numbers. He went on to offer some questionable advice to Thacker on the use of the Canadian Navy: "I am informed that such cannot be done except by authority of the Governor-General-in-Council, which if exercised will involve the assembly of Parliament. My own opinion is, that if the situation requires it, they can be used on requisition of the Civil authority in the same way as the military forces. Their entry on the scene at the present moment would, however, be difficult to justify, and their presence would probably be held to be an undue menace, and in consequence illegal".<sup>52</sup> The following day, General Thacker stated that 1,000 additional troops might become necessary and attempted once again to acquire British ships. It is also likely that he enticed a few sea planes from Dartmouth because the Air Board soon sent a directive forbidding such flights without authorization.<sup>53</sup> Thacker was unperturbed and a few hours later made an unsuccessful attempt to have an airplane squadron dispatched to Cape Breton.<sup>54</sup> The General's attempts to solicit both air and naval support are interesting not only because almost all the reports — including many of his own — mention that the situation remained quiet throughout but because neither force was included under the terms of the Militia Act.<sup>55</sup>

But the Militia Act was a curious document and many of the people involved were not entirely sure how it operated. While the forces being used

49 C.G.S. to O.C. 6, 19 August 1922; Naval Headquarters to Halifax, 19 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

50 G.H. Murray to King, 19 August 1922, King Papers; C.B. Wade, "The History of District 26, United Mineworkers of America" (unpub. ms., n.d., Public Archives of Nova Scotia).

51 King to McNaughton, 20 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

52 McNaughton to H.C. Thacker, 20 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

53 Air Board to Air Station Superintendent, Dartmouth, 21 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

54 General "Six" to Militia Council, 21 August 1922, McNaughton Papers.

55 Lt.-Col. R.J. Ode to C.G.S., "Employment of Naval and Air Forces in Aid of the Civil Power", 7 September 1922, McNaughton Papers.

were federal forces, the federal government really had little authority in the matter once the 'aid to the civil power' clause was invoked. The maintenance of law and order was a local concern. County Court Judge Finlayson was the only one who could cancel the requisition and General Thacker was the only one who could reduce, but not completely withdraw, the troops. And so while Thacker was ordered on 23 August to bring his forces into reserve as soon as possible, more Royal Canadian Dragoons arrived in Cape Breton by special train, with full equipment and additional horses, on the following day.<sup>56</sup>

By this time King was being criticized by the Trades and Labour Congress, who were holding their annual convention and saw little reason for the presence of the military in Cape Breton. King made it known he would like the troops withdrawn.<sup>57</sup> On 26 August, General Thacker passed on King's message to Judge Finlayson, but Thacker refused to press Finlayson to cancel the requisition and declined to reduce significantly the number of troops involved.<sup>58</sup> On the same day, August 26, an industrial settlement was reached, but it was hardly suggestive of a lasting peace. The union president later commented: "The wage schedule was accepted by miners under the muzzle of rifles, machine guns and gleaming bayonets with further threatened invasions of troops and marines, with warships standing to. The miners, facing hunger, their Dominion and Provincial governments lined up with Besco . . . were forced to accept the proposals".<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, a settlement it was. The provincial force, which never did manage to send a significant number over to the island, disbanded on 28 August. Three days later the R.C.M.P. advisors left the area.<sup>60</sup> On 1 September requisitions were cancelled and the troops began their homeward trek. According to the military authorities, the episode had served only to drain their already meager resources and interrupt their summer training.<sup>61</sup>

It is difficult to state definitely that the miners would have remained as peaceful as they did had the military not been conspicuously present. Yet, many people felt that the proximity of the military heightened rather than alleviated tensions. That there were no arrests throughout the period of occupation was essentially due to the miners themselves. Organized since 1879, and with activist, strongly supported leadership, the Cape Breton miners had a solidarity among Canadian unionists second to none. Military intrusions were not new to these communities. Throughout the strike they

56 McNaughton to Thacker, 23 August 1922; McNaughton to King, 23 August 1922, King Papers.

57 T.L.C. to King, 22 August 1922; King to T. Moore, 23 August 1922, King Papers.

58 G.O. 6 to Militia Council, 26 August 1922, King Papers.

59 *Glace Bay Maritime Labour Herald*, 23 June 1923.

60 "Report of the R.C.M.P.", Canada, House of Commons, *Sessional Paper* 21, LIX, 5, 1923, p. 14.

61 "Report of the Department of National Defence (Militia Service)", Canada, House of Commons, *Sessional Paper* 17, LX, 4, 1924, p. 12.

had massive but orderly parades and they suppressed the accessibility of liquor to their members during the dispute.<sup>62</sup> Perhaps this very cohesiveness was a partial explanation of General Thacker's reactions. Thacker's background was very much a military one and there is nothing in it to suggest that he was able to acquire a significant understanding of mining communities in general or Cape Breton miners in particular.<sup>63</sup> What was obvious was that Thacker was quite prepared to give industrial Cape Breton an appearance not unlike — in the bitter phrase of one Cape Breton veteran in a note to King — “an occupied region of Germany during the last war”.<sup>64</sup>

When a number of politicians, led by J. S. Woodsworth and Arthur Meighen, later questioned the necessity for troops in the Cape Breton dispute, the federal government simply repeated that, once properly requested, there was no alternative but to forward military forces. Nor did the government wish to alter the procedure; when Meighen further inquired if they were considering amendments to the Militia Act, he received a negative answer.<sup>65</sup> The Liberal administration would soon regret its lack of concern. On 28 June 1923, after a prolonged period of discussion and the adamant refusal of Besco to consider either a wage increase, a decrease of hours, or union recognition, the Sydney steelworkers went on strike.<sup>66</sup> Within hours Judge Finlayson again requisitioned the military “in anticipation of disorders that might arise”.<sup>67</sup> Thacker complied immediately.

Unlike the miners, the steelworkers had only a weak organization. The first evening of the strike a confrontation between strikers and corporation representatives occurred at one of the plant gates. The pattern was repeated the following evening. One local paper observed: “The crowd seemed to be aware that soldiers were on their way to Sydney and seemed determined to make as much trouble as possible in the few hours left before the troops would arrive”.<sup>68</sup> Early in the morning of 30 June, the rumble of a troop train was again heard in the vicinity of Sydney. Once again the armoured gondola,

62 J. Moffatt to F.A. Acland, 17 August 1922; C.A. Munro to King, 28 August 1922, King Papers.

63 Thacker, the son of a Major-General in the British Army, was born in India. His father retired to Canada and Thacker was educated at Upper Canada College, Royal Military College, and a variety of theatres of war. Editorial, *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 1927, p. 379.

64 H. Spracklin to King, 19 August 1922, King Papers.

65 *Debates*, 1923, pp. 863-899.

66 Sydney steelworkers had a seven day week, with day shifts of 11 hours and 13 hour night shifts. With a changeover every two weeks they were required to work a 24 hour shift. The Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers of America had experienced difficulty in getting established since its first appearance in 1917. At the time of the strike approximately one quarter of the steelworkers were members, a reflection both of the union leadership and the anti-union policies of the employers. Canada, *Report of Royal Commission to Inquire into the Industrial Unrest Among the Steelworkers at Sydney, N.S.* (Ottawa, 1924), pp. 17-21 [hereinafter cited as *Robertson Report*].

67 *Sydney Post*, 30 June 1923.

68 *Sydney Record*, 30 June 1923.

piled high with sand bags and bristling with machine guns, appeared.<sup>69</sup> These forces were the first of more than 1,150 troops to be sent to the island by General Thacker. A few hours later provincial police were requested. That evening, the pattern of conflict continued. The troops, stationed just outside the plant gate, fired over the heads of the angry crowd as they retreated out of range of the rocks.<sup>70</sup> This action was met by shouts of defiance and the crowd apparently did not disperse until a machine gun was placed in position and preparation was made to fire.<sup>71</sup> The following morning the provincial force, now known as "Armstrong's Army", arrived.<sup>72</sup> Before the day was complete this force had made a major contribution to Cape Breton's "Bloody Sunday". According to one reporter, "Mounted police charges on the mob, police raids, and steel-hatted soldiers advancing with fixed bayonets, lent a war-like and spectacular touch to the strenuous scenes [until] . . . the soldiers and police called it a day and retired behind their stockades".<sup>73</sup> This report neglected to mention that some of the recipients of the police charge were returning from evening church services and included women and children.<sup>74</sup> But as the *Liberal Record* observed: "Stamping out lawless violence is not apt to be a gentle process".<sup>75</sup>

After this display of authority, confrontations were rare. The main reason was the determination of the provincial police, supported by the military, to prevent any gatherings, including picketing. Meetings by militant unionists were regarded as unlawful assemblies and subject to visitations by both provincial and military forces.<sup>76</sup> As in 1922, military outfits with a high percentage of mounted troops, such as the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery and the Royal Canadian Dragoons, were very much in evidence.<sup>77</sup> Unlike 1922, however, there is no evidence of requests for naval or air forces.

The entire issue was soon hurled into the middle of the national political arena. The Cape Breton miners, 8,500 strong, walked out in protest against the authorities' measures on 3 July. This prompted the *Record* to declare the whole affair a "miniature rebellion".<sup>78</sup> Sympathetic strikes soon broke out in Pictou, Nova Scotia, and in the coal fields of Alberta; throughout the country opposition to the use of the military became intense. The Prime

69 *Sydney Post*, 30 June 1923.

70 *Robertson Report*, p. 14; *Labour Gazette*, August 1923, p. 869.

71 *Halifax Chronicle*, 2 July 1923; *Halifax Herald*, 2 July 1923.

72 E.H. Armstrong succeeded G.H. Murray as provincial Premier when the latter retired in January 1923.

73 *Halifax Herald*, 2 July 1923.

74 *Sydney Post*, 5 July 1923; *Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1923, p. 186; D. Fraser, *Narrative Verse and Comments* (Glace Bay, 1944), p. 269; R.C.M.P. Report 183, 12 July 1923, King Papers.

75 *Sydney Record*, 3 July 1923.

76 T. O'Shea, Correspondence with writer, October 1970.

77 "Report of Minister of National Defence (Militia Service)", Canada, House of Commons, *Sessional Paper* 17, LXI, 4, 1925, p. 67.

78 *Sydney Record*, 5 July 1923.

Minister was worried by "this very serious aspect of the situation" as both he and Labour Minister James Murdock were bombarded with telegrams of protest and warnings that they would be held responsible.<sup>79</sup> Organized labour was completely unimpressed with the federal government's explanation that the military presence in Cape Breton was not a responsibility of the federal authorities.<sup>80</sup> King then turned to his Acting Minister of National Defence, E.M. Macdonald,<sup>81</sup> and to Premier Armstrong, and declared that the workmen were "held in subjection by the presence of armed forces" which "seems to have exceeded all bounds of necessity or prudence". While requesting them to convey his feelings on the matter to Judge Finlayson, Mackenzie King also suggested that Armstrong might be able to substitute a special provincial force for the militia units.<sup>82</sup> Duncan Finlayson proved adamant. The judge stated that the troops would remain until he decided otherwise and that such a time had not yet arrived.<sup>83</sup> This prompted the federal authorities to seek a way around the impasse. It proved unfruitful; Finlayson was correct, although the departments of Justice and Defence were not in agreement in their interpretations of the Militia Act.<sup>84</sup> The troops remained.

Then, on 11 July, Mackenzie King admitted for the first time that the Militia Act needed amending. The tone of the statement, included in a reply to a protest by T.L.C. president Tom Moore, is suggestive: "The presence of troops in Cape Breton to the numbers there at the present time, and under circumstances which appear to render it most doubtful that the expense incidental thereto will be borne, as the law clearly contemplates, by the municipalities concerned, render it apparent that there is need for revision of the statute respecting the calling out of the militia in aid of the civil power".<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, although E.M. Macdonald had assured King and James Murdock on 8 July that military forces from Western Canada would not be sent to Cape Breton, an assurance which the Labour Minister eagerly utilized in an attempt to placate Canadian labour leaders, troops continued to arrive from Cape Hughes, Manitoba as late as 12 July.<sup>86</sup> This prompted a bitter note from Labour Minister Murdock to Acting Defence Minister Macdonald and a public statement by the former suggesting that the leading

79 King to E.M. Macdonald, 7 July 1923, King Papers.

80 Primary Correspondence Files, July-August 1923, King Papers.

81 Macdonald, whom King had also apparently desired to keep out of his cabinet, was acting Minister from 30 April to 6 September.

82 Dawson, *Mackenzie King*, p. 373; King to E.M. Macdonald, 7 July 1923; King to E.H. Armstrong, 7 July 1923, King Papers.

83 Macdonald to King, 8 July 1923, King Papers.

84 W.S. Edwards to E.M. Macdonald, 8 July 1923; G.S. Desbarats to D.W. Morrison, 11 July 1923, King Papers.

85 King to Moore, 11 July 1923, King Papers.

86 E.M. Macdonald to King, 8 July; J. Murdock to W.A. Sherman, 8 July 1923, King Papers.

provincial Liberals "make an effort to find out more about the human side of the situation".<sup>87</sup> But Murdock's methods proved far more effective in creating antagonism within the Liberal party than in returning the troops to their camps. Eventually on 17 July U.M.W. International president John L. Lewis intervened, deposed the radical district executive and, unconstitutionally,<sup>88</sup> appointed a provisional executive. By 24 July the miners decided to return to work. The steelworkers, with no chance of success, gamely limped on to 31 July. Troops began departing by 28 July and all were back on the mainland by 15 August.

Once again, it is difficult to assess just how effective the military presence was as a stabilizing force. Throughout the country organized labour was antagonized and a few sympathetic strikes developed. For various reasons the Cape Breton situation was more volatile than that of the previous year. There had been confusion and disagreement between the departments of Justice and National Defence regarding the Militia Act.<sup>89</sup> Similar, if more intense, feelings existed within the federal government. Unlike the miners, the steelworkers had no effective union organization and their discipline was weak. Nonetheless, one report did suggest that the knowledge that troops had been requisitioned had actually increased the violence. After the first few days there were violent outbursts but they were generally initiated by the provincial police force. The miners did not enter the fray until the provincial and military forces had entered the area. Indeed it had been the presence and actions of these forces which had prompted the walkout by the miners. When the dust had settled ten people were convicted of rioting or unlawful assembly — a small percentage of 10,000 strikers.<sup>90</sup>

It was time for a Royal Commission to investigate industrial unrest in Cape Breton. The chairman, appointed by the federal government, was Dr. J.W. Robertson, president of the Canadian Red Cross Society. Prior to the commencement of the Committee's work the Prime Minister wrote a "strictly confidential" letter to Robertson suggesting some aspects he could investigate carefully:

I have come to feel that the law as it stands governing the calling out of the troops in aid of the civil power at times of industrial unrest needs to be amended so as to prevent corporations from taking advantage of the powers which can be exercised, through any Judge to whom appeal may be made, where civil authorities themselves are unwilling to take the initiative required . . . .

87 J. Murdock to E.M. Macdonald, 12 July 1923, King Papers; Canadian Press Clipping, 12 July 1923, Arthur Meighen Papers, PAC.

88 *Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1923, p. 24.

89 Desbarats to Morrison, 11 July 1923; Edwards to Macdonald, 8 July, 10 July 1923, King Papers.

90 Sydney *Post*, 13 November 1923.

From what I saw last year of the telegrams . . . the effort then made not only to call out the militia, but to bring into play the naval service and the air forces as well — has led me to see how dangerous it is to the whole national situation that a power of this kind should be given to a few men without due restraints in the way of a control from a responsible source.<sup>91</sup>

A few months later General MacBrien, faced with another decrease in financial allocations to the military and apparently unaware of the highly variable winds by which Mackenzie King tacked through political seas, pointed out that aid to the civil power was one of the three main functions of the permanent force. Oblivious to the furor of the previous summer, MacBrien argued that:

One of the most serious threats to the reduction of the Permanent Force is that the Department of Defence will be unable to supply troops for aid to the Civil Power in the same measure as has been done in the past. Thus the government will be left without any force with which to maintain law and order in strike areas or in the event of any other national emergency arising.

When it is remembered that during the recent strike in Cape Breton last summer, practically all the combatant troops were collected at Sidney [sic] and brought from points as distant as Winnipeg, and even then an adequate number was not available, very serious consideration should be given before reducing the already limited numbers available.<sup>92</sup>

The argument proved unconvincing and actual troop strength continued to decrease.<sup>93</sup>

Early in 1924 the Robertson Commission completed its study on Cape Breton unrest. While not a particularly perceptive document it did, as King had suggested, recommend changes in the Militia Act.<sup>94</sup> After considering them for four months, the government, in early June, prepared to introduce what were essentially the Commission's recommendations. Henceforth, the provincial Attorney-General would, upon receiving notification from a superior or district County Court judge and satisfied that such a force was required, sign a requisition. The District Officer Commanding would then be required to call out the permanent troops or such portion as the D.O.C. considered necessary. The Attorney-General would be required to initiate an inquiry

91 King to J.W. Robertson, 21 September 1923, King Papers.

92 J.H. MacBrien to Minister, 16 February 1924, McNaughton Papers.

93 "Report of Minister of National Defence (Militia Service)", Canada, House of Commons, *Sessional Paper* 17, XLI, 4, 1925, p. 54; "Report of the Department of National Defence (Militia and Air Services)", *Annual Departmental Reports*, 1925-26 (Ottawa, 1926), II, p. 58.

94 *Robertson Report*, p. 24.



within seven days, with the report to be forwarded to the Secretary of State. The province would be responsible for the costs and, if necessary, the federal government would be able to retain any unpaid balance from the annual grant to the appropriate province. The Attorney-General would be responsible for recalling the troops.<sup>95</sup> The only differences between the Commission recommendations and the proposed legislation were the explicit statement of provincial financial responsibility and the method by which the federal authorities could, if necessary, acquire the money.

The proposed legislation brought a strong reaction from Nova Scotia Liberals in both Halifax and Ottawa. All but one of the Nova Scotian Liberals in Parliament opposed the legislation; the exception was E.M. Macdonald who, as Minister of National Defence, introduced the legislation. The provincial administration was equally adamant, with Premier Armstrong tersely arguing that the maintenance of peace, order, and good government was a "peculiar obligation" of the federal government and Provincial Secretary Cameron contending that, because the doctrines proclaimed by the radicals threatened the 'constitution', the costs should be absorbed by the nation.<sup>96</sup> Their concern for the nation's continued existence was doubtless intensified by their awareness of their new financial responsibilities.

In the federal House of Commons, E.M. Macdonald defended the changes, and set the theme for much of the debate which ensued, by referring to pecuniary considerations. He noted that on the 59 occasions in the last fifty years on which troops were invoked in aid of the civil power, only \$40,291 of the \$556,291 spent had been collected by the federal government. The two recent episodes had cost \$162,916 — not including pay and allowances — and the municipalities, true to their word, had refused to pay.<sup>97</sup> The use of the military was becoming expensive. But there were numerous objections to the amendments. Liberal whip and Cape Breton M.P. George Kyte echoed the provincial Liberals and argued that, as most of the disputes were in the coal fields and thus of national concern, the province should not be held responsible for the costs. William Irvine, the Labour M.P. from Calgary, had other criticisms. He maintained that judges were rather ignorant of industrial conditions and should be the last persons invested with the authority to call out the troops. He was also dissatisfied with the government for not including any additional regulations on the amount of military force which could be invoked. In the light of King's earlier comments to J.W. Robertson, this omission was curious and was immediately subjected to the penetrating glance of Arthur Meighen. The Conservative leader strongly objected to the vast discretionary power wielded by the District Officer Commanding. Relying less on the Robertson Report than on the realities of 1923, Meighen asked

95 *Debates*, 1924, p. 2862.

96 Armstrong to King, 4 June 1924; D.A. Cameron to King, 6 June 1924, King Papers.

97 *Debates*, 1924, pp. 2862-2872.

what would happen if the Cape Breton experience occurred again and, with the majority of Canadian troops in the area, the Saskatchewan farmers became aroused or the Winnipeg situation was repeated? Such a concentration of military forces, he maintained, "would leave the rest of the country utterly stripped, and the government would stand stark and helpless, unable to do anything". For Meighen it was a "preposterous condition of affairs".<sup>98</sup>

Meighen hammered constantly on this theme and eventually his argument had some effect. Before final reading, Macdonald offered another change whereby the D.O.C. would be required to contact the Adjutant-General, before going beyond his military district for additional forces and the Adjutant-General, in turn, would decide from which locations these forces would come. Unsatisfied, Meighen persisted, and finally Macdonald included a provision giving the Adjutant-General full discretionary powers concerning the use of troops from outside any military district.<sup>99</sup> In effect, this meant that if General Thacker, or any other District Officer Commanding, wished to bring in forces from outside his own military district the Adjutant-General would make the decision.

Aside from the financial alterations, the only changes in the Militia Act originally proposed by the King government were to abandon the initial role of the mayor or warden and to insert the Attorney-General between the judge and the military.<sup>100</sup> Macdonald was rather vague about the reasons for the deletion of the local, elected representatives from the procedure.<sup>101</sup> That municipalities were to be no longer held responsible for expenses was doubtless a factor, but it should be remembered that in the recent incidents some local elected authorities had declined to call out the troops and this was a period of intense labour involvement in local political activity with labour councilmen and mayors quite evident in the Cape Breton industrial towns. Whatever the reasons behind the alterations, the amendments, as King privately assured Premier Armstrong, were not very significant,<sup>102</sup> although they were satisfactory to the T.L.C. delegation, who in their annual pilgrimage to Parliament in January 1925 deleted their previously expressed desire for Militia Act amendments.<sup>103</sup>

The autumn and winter of 1924-25 were sluggish ones for the island's steel and coal industry with direct and dire consequences for the workers and their families. Employment in the mines was sparse and those who were working were managing one or two shifts a week. By mid-February a Glace

98 *Debates*, 1924, pp. 2872-2878.

99 *Ibid.*, pp. 4621-4628.

100 Although it had not been discussed during the debates, the final form of the amended act included a provision whereby the Attorney-General could also initiate a requisition. 14 and 15 George V, c. 57, s. 81.

101 *Debates*, 1924, pp. 2871, 4623.

102 King to Armstrong, 11 June 1924, King Papers.

103 T.L.C. delegation, 31 January 1925, King Papers.

Bay health officer reported that 2,000 idle miners and their families were "on the verge of starvation".<sup>104</sup> The situation became more desperate when Besco abruptly terminated all credit at its company stores in early March. Faced with little work and less food, the miners reluctantly went on strike a few days later. By April many families were dependent on donations from across the country merely to remain alive.<sup>105</sup> In spite of frequent prodding by J.S. Woodsworth, Agnes Macphail, Arthur Meighen and others, the federal government refused to intervene. Assistance of this type was not a federal responsibility and Mackenzie King maintained he would only intervene upon the request of the Armstrong government.<sup>106</sup> Armstrong, however, declined to seek relief assistance.<sup>107</sup> One prominent Halifax Conservative privately declared: "It looks as if governments are trying to create such a situation that there will be riots and bloodshed with the result that troops will be rushed in and men forced to return to pits".<sup>108</sup>

Finally on 11 June 1925 a clash between miners and Besco policemen at New Waterford resulted in the shooting death of one miner and the serious wounding of another. Five others were hospitalized, as were thirty policemen. The provincial police force, which had been secretly organizing for a week,<sup>109</sup> was immediately sent from Halifax to Cape Breton. Again Judge Finlayson was ready, and quickly sent a request for troops to the Attorney-General, W.J. O'Hearn.<sup>110</sup> The latter contacted General Thacker and, for the third time in four years, military forces began pouring into the area. The feelings of many were expressed by one western trades council in a bitter note to Mackenzie King: "It is our earnest hope that they will take sufficient feed with them as they will find little or none on their arrival. It would be a national catastrophe if troops on arrival suffered any hardships through insufficient nourishment".<sup>111</sup> Soon there were an estimated 2,000 troops on their way to Cape Breton.<sup>112</sup> General Thacker quickly used up all available district troops but a message to the Adjutant-General, which included the unconfirmed report that the workers were in possession of a machine gun and that while there was no ammunition for it a man had apparently left Sydney to obtain

104 Armstrong to King, 19 February 1925 (enclosure), King Papers.

105 Rev(s) M.A. MacAdam, A.M. MacLeod to Meighen, 2 April 1925; W.H. Dennis to Meighen, 2 April 1925, Meighen Papers.

106 *Debates*, 1925, pp. 1059, 1291, 1339, 1530, 3516-3517.

107 A few days after the Roman Catholic Bishop of Antigonish issued a pastoral letter describing conditions of the "direst want" and urging contributions, the provincial government gave \$20,000 to the Canadian Red Cross to assist in maintaining health standards in the area. It was a relatively insignificant contribution and was not repeated. *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 April 1925.

108 W.H. Dennis to Meighen, 2 April 1925, Meighen Papers.

109 Dennis to Meighen, 11 June 1925, Meighen Papers.

110 *Labour Gazette*, July 1925, p. 662.

111 J. Dealtry to King, 12 June 1925, King Papers.

112 *Labour Gazette*, July 1925, p. 663.

some, soon made short shift of the previous year's amendment prompted by Meighen's criticisms.<sup>113</sup> In Parliament, Defence Minister Macdonald simply explained that "Under the law . . . once the Attorney-general of a province requests the military forces . . . they are bound to be sent there. No discretion is left".<sup>114</sup> It was a familiar response.

There was a great deal of violence. What is interesting is not that it occurred but that it continued, in spite of the military presence. The first fire occurred on 11 June, several hours after the first troops had been requested. Raiding, looting and burning continued throughout the month of June.<sup>115</sup> The destruction was not wanton. Most of the company stores were looted and several were burned to the ground. Similar fate befell Besco warehouses, a coal bankhead, and two antiquated wash houses of which the miners had complained for years. In all, there were twenty-two fires, the last occurring on 30 June. Damages were between 500,000 and 1,000,000 dollars.<sup>116</sup> Eventually, quiet returned and the troops departed on 15 August. Only one person was ever charged as a result of the excesses of June, 1925: the Besco policeman accused of killing William Davis, the deceased miner. He was acquitted.

The role of the military in the Cape Breton industrial disputes of the 1920's does not easily fit into the pattern detected by previous historians. The absence of violence in 1922 was probably attributable more to the organization and solidarity of the miners than it was to the military presence. Spokesmen for the miners repeatedly stated that they viewed the dispatch of troops as a method of intimidation which intensified feelings, an interpretation shared, or recognized, by other individuals, not all of whom were labour sympathizers. With the forceful appearance of the provincial police the situation was altered somewhat the following year. It can be argued that the military presence in this instance did prevent even worse confrontations between the provincial force and the workers. But the roles of the federal and provincial contingents can not easily be separated. The miners went on strike, significantly broadening the dispute, because of the presence of both forces. The striking steelworkers and miners viewed the military presence as an intimidating one, a sentiment shared by highly vocal elements of organized labour throughout the country. Even Mackenzie King and James Murdock saw the troops as a force for "subjection" and an "unfair and indecent attempt to cow the men into submission".<sup>117</sup> Also, the provincial force was not on a permanent basis

113 *Debates*, 1925, p. 4243.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 4245.

115 On June 25 the reorganized and rejuvenated Conservative party under the leadership of E.N. Rhodes ended the 43 year Liberal rule in the province, winning 40 of 43 seats.

116 E. Forsey, *Economic and Social Aspects of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Toronto, 1926), p. 78; *Sydney Record*, 30 June 1925.

117 King to E.M. Macdonald, 7 July 1923; Murdock to Macdonald, 12 July 1923, King Papers; "Canadian Press", Ottawa, 12 July 1923, Clipping in Meighen Papers.

but was created to meet a particular situation and then disbanded. This the provincial authorities did at least four times during the period. Thus it was hardly a highly disciplined, stable force and it is at least possible that its members' enthusiasm and willingness to engage in direct, physical confrontations were increased by the knowledge that Canada's permanent troops were always close at hand. This evident facility in invoking the military may be a partial explanation of Besco's non-conciliatory policy, a policy detected in the corporation's contract negotiations throughout the period.<sup>118</sup> The quick and repeated requisitions for the military doubtless increased the bitterness of many workingmen in the area and gave those radicals committed to class warfare an excellent platform. Thus, the very legislation which was relied on so frequently in industrial disputes may have contributed to an increase in both the number of the incidents and the intensity of the conflict. When violence did arrive on a large scale, as it assuredly did in June 1925, a military force twice as large as the earlier contingents did not halt the miners from expressing their anger and despair. The apparent willingness of both the federal and provincial governments to ignore the acute distress, coupled with the recurring appearance of federal troops, doubtless contributed to these feelings.

Throughout the period neither the provincial nor the federal government exhibited a strong desire to alleviate the immediate or the fundamental causes for the frequent use of the military in aid of the civil power. The provincial administration, while hardly opposed to the use of troops, was strongly, and unsuccessfully, opposed to acquiring legal or financial responsibility. The federal government, under Mackenzie King, maintained a constitutional aloofness. Their concern, it became apparent, was less with limiting a power of this kind "to a few men without due restraints" than it was with correcting a financial situation which had proved quite costly to the federal government. After an extended controversy, Mackenzie King deducted \$133,116.73 from Nova Scotia's subsidy in 1929.<sup>119</sup> It was payment for the cost of the troops in 1925, but that sum was only a small fraction of the total costs resulting from the disputes. The effects of the disruption of production, the bitterness, deprivation and despair which accompanied these disputes were deep, lasting and incalculable. The steelworkers acquired a company union after their defeat in 1923 and did not become more effectively organized until the late 1930's, while the miners did not regain the elusive wage scale of 1920 until World War II. Major-General H.C. Thacker was less unfortunate; he became Chief of the General Staff in 1927.

118 Miners' perceptions of this attitude are expressed throughout the *Evidence Presented Before the Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mines of the Province of Nova Scotia* (Nova Scotia, 1925); see also Forsey, *Nova Scotia Coal Industry*, passim.

119 E.N. Rhodes to King, 12 February 1929, Rhodes Papers, Public Archives of Nova Scotia.