

## Minto, New Brunswick A Study in Canadian Class Relations Between the Wars

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## *Minto, New Brunswick:* *A Study in Canadian Class Relations* *Between the Wars*

Allen Seager

"THE PROVINCE of New Brunswick", commented one western Canadian radical sheet during the 1920s, "stands as a black splotch on this Dominion. Its backwardness . . . an anathema to those who would advance civilization's progress."<sup>1</sup> Certainly the province's experience stands as virtually a blank page in the history of radical, working-class, and popular movements in this country.<sup>2</sup> Although this phenomenon is partly accounted for by a tradition of scholarly neglect, it is also reflective of the fact of the relative quiescence of New Brunswick in terms of an explicitly political context of class conflict and popular protest. The province was left largely undisturbed, for example, by the great socialist and populist movements of the 1930s. As New Brunswick's submission to Rowell-Sirois in 1938 dourly noted, the "men and women of our Province have buckled down to work, and have taken, as necessity compelled them, whatever measures were possible in working out their livelihood."<sup>3</sup>

These measures, however, could include protest and rebellion. Situated in the geographical heartland of the province, on the north shore of Grand Lake, 40 miles east of Fredericton, lies Minto, during the inter-war period, the centre of a bustling coal industry. Here, in the late 1930s, was fought one of the most bitter strikes which accompanied the rise of the C.I.O. in Canada, when close to 1000 mine workers struck for recognition of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW). "Nowhere on the American continent," commented the *UMW Journal* in 1937, "is there a strife which combines the elements of greed,

<sup>1</sup> *One Big Union Bulletin*, 19 August 1926.

<sup>2</sup> The small volume of literature which does exist includes Richard Rice, "A History of Organized Labour in Saint John," M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968; G.H. Allaby, "New Brunswick Prophets of Radicalism, 1890-1914," M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1972; and James K. Chapman, "Henry Stuart Harvey, 1873-1952: New Brunswick Reformer" *Acadiensis*, 5 (1976), 79-104.

<sup>3</sup> *Submission of the Province of New Brunswick to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Fredericton 1938), 19.

harshness, cold, suffering, and want, as exists [in Minto]."<sup>4</sup> The strike of 1937-38 moreover, while the most extensive to that date in Minto, involving no less than 11 collieries, was not the first. From 1916 onwards, groups of militant colliers, centred at the Minto Coal Company, New Brunswick's largest mining firm, had been waging a heartbreaking struggle for trade-union rights. Although all but forgotten to labour history, C.B. Wade wrote three decades ago that they were "a group of men . . . who well deserve to be recorded in the chronicles of the Canadian Labour movement. . . . Small in numbers, isolated amidst the dirt roads and the New Brunswick forest, the Minto miners on their own have carried on a battle, no less courageous and no less persistent than that fought by workers in larger centres."<sup>5</sup>

Minto is worthy of attention not only in deference to the trade-union pioneers, but also because it offers an excellent local context for a study in Canadian class relations. Minto was ethnically and culturally heterogeneous, and broadly representative of the Canadian community. Typical of scores of smaller industrial centres in the more settled regions of the country, it was neither rural nor wholly urban, but reflected a point of contact between the agrarian and industrial ways of life. Although dependent on coal, Minto was not, in a strict sense, a company town. Its economic life combined elements of both large and small-scale production, and was directed by a number of employers, all of whom, however, were ultimately subject to formal or informal control by large resource-extraction and transportation interests.

More crucially, Minto speaks to some of the central questions concerning class formation, class conflict, and class accommodation under the conditions of industrial capitalism. At the level of the workplace and community, working-class militancy co-existed with a strong thread of "loyalism," which cannot be understood by reference to a simple dichotomy between large and small-scale production, or to some of the cruder economic notions of labour-aristocracy or of workers being somehow "bought off" by industrial capitalism.<sup>6</sup> Minto was also typically North American in that the level of industrial militancy that was achieved was not matched by a high degree of political "consciousness" among the workers. There were no independent labour politics in Minto until the 1940s when, on two occasions (1944 and 1948) coal miners were put forward for the legislature on the C.C.F. ticket. Although, in a New Brunswick context, the emergence of a C.C.F. movement was certainly significant, social democracy was relatively feeble. During the

<sup>4</sup> *United Mine Workers' Journal*, 15 December 1937.

<sup>5</sup> Beaton Institute, Sydney, N.S., C.B. Wade, "Minto: They Never Gave Up" (typescript, 13 pp., part of Wade's manuscript *History of District 26*, Glace Bay, n.d.), 1.

<sup>6</sup> My use of the word "loyalism" refers most directly to relations between employer and employee: obviously this has political implications. For a sensitive discussion of this problem in another context see Paul Faler and Alan Dawley, "Working Class Culture and Politics in the Industrial Revolution: Sources of Loyalism and Rebellion," *Journal of Social History*, 9 (1976), 466-80.

federal elections of 1945, the C.C.F. party polled between 13-16% of the popular vote in the mining wards of the Minto parishes. Perhaps one in three colliers was a consistent supporter of the C.C.F. during that party's brief hey-day in the province of New Brunswick.<sup>7</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s there did exist a core of radicals in Minto, who did achieve some success in organizing a short-lived radical industrial union (the One Big Union) in 1925-26. The political content of the union's impact on the rank-and-file level is, however, problematic. Politics in Minto were, until the mid-1940s, wholly dominated by the "old line" parties and the local elite, which in turn were largely under the sway of the tiny bourgeoisie of the local mine owners. Minto's habit of returning Liberal or Conservative coal operators to the legislature, which was not broken until 1935, provides some clues as to the traditionalist context of class politics in the community.<sup>8</sup>

The apparent conservatism of the Minto coal miners is all the more interesting given the fact that coal miners in other parts of the country generally deviated from this pattern. Miners tended to be "peculiar people." In Canada, they provided a good deal of popular support for the programme of the extreme left. At one time or another, the miners movement of Vancouver Island, Alberta, or Cape Breton went through a "red phase."<sup>9</sup> The Canadian Districts (18 and 26) of the United Mine Workers each had their charters revoked (in 1919 and 1923 respectively), by the International office after they had fallen under the leadership of revolutionary socialists. These radical leaders (men such as Phil Christophers of Blairmore, Alberta, or J.B. McLachlan of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia) were not only popular trade-union officials, but were capable of translating their support in the unions into political constituencies.<sup>10</sup> During the 1930s the Communists could seize control of the odd village council in the Alberta coalfields, while moderates in industrial Cape Breton could find it "hard to get a hearing" for "constitutional" programmes.<sup>11</sup> In 1936-37 the

<sup>7</sup> From data in the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer*, 20th General Election (1945), 476-77, 488-89.

<sup>8</sup> Coal-owner representatives included G.H. King (Liberal, Queen's County, 1917-1925), Alton D. Taylor (Conservative, Sunbury, 1925-35), and W. Benton Evans (Conservative, Queen's 1925-35). Taylor and Evans continued to stand for the Conservative Party in these ridings up to and including the election of 1944. See relevant entries in the *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1917-1948.

<sup>9</sup> This apt phrase is found in David Frank and Donald MacGillivray's "Introduction" to Dawn Fraser, *Echoes From Labour's War* (Toronto 1976), 20. The literature on the Canadian miners' movement also includes Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers: A History of Labour in Cape Breton* (Toronto 1976); A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries* (Toronto 1977); and David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Christophers, for example, sat in the Alberta legislature as member for the Crows' Nest Pass from 1921 to 1930. Although never successful in attaining electoral office McLachlan was a significant power in the politics of industrial Cape Breton from 1921 to 1935.

<sup>11</sup> Moses Coady, *Masters of Their Own Destiny* (New York 1939), 56-57; Allen Sea-

Communist Press was being circulated on a regular basis in nearly every major coal town in western Canada (20 centres) and in Nova Scotia (8 centres), but not in New Brunswick. A few of these coal towns (on Vancouver Island and in Saskatchewan) were, like Minto, non-union camps where employers wielded extensive power over the lives of their employees.<sup>12</sup>

The primary reason why there were no Communists in Minto during the so-called "red decade" lies in the fact that local class relations were based on a relatively firm foundation of what Antonio Gramsci called "social hegemony": the "spontaneous" consent of the governed which occurs to a greater or lesser extent in any class-based social system.<sup>13</sup> According to Gramsci, a key component in the stability of such a system lies in the "active or passive affiliation" of members of the subordinate classes to the "political formations" of the dominant social group. This was certainly the case in Minto working-class support of, or acquiescence to, the rule of the Liberal and Conservative parties in New Brunswick during the 1920s and 1930s.

In Gramsci's formulation, a number of tasks confront the student of class relations, and, in particular, the development of popular movements, in any given context. One must examine first the "objective formation" and "quantitative diffusion" of a local working class by "developments and transformations in the sphere of production." The cultural matrix is of equal importance to the structural. The workers' "origins in pre-existing social groups, whose mentality, ideology and aims they conserve for a time" must also be searched out. As a marxist, Gramsci saw the breaking down of structures of social hegemony — or class accommodation — as inevitable in the context of the emergence of revolutionary organizations assertive of the "integral autonomy" of the lower orders. Clearly this did not happen in Minto. Along Gramsci's "line of development," however, there are many useful signposts. Particularly important is the theme of the co-existence of class conflict and accommodation. Behind the "affiliation" of working men to the dominant political formations lie "attempts to influence the programmes of these formations" whose consequences "in determining processes of decomposition (and) renovation" must be explored, as well as the emergence of new formations, such as trade unions, which the workers "themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character."<sup>14</sup> Thus the absence of political insurgency in Minto during the 1920s and 1930s does not negate the importance of class and

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ger, "Three Alberta Coal Towns During the Great Depression," paper presented to the C.H.A. annual meetings, 1979.

<sup>12</sup> University of Toronto Archives, Robert Kenney Collection, Box 9, File "Misc.," documents *re* Dominion Convention, Communist Party of Canada, 1937, "Report of the Publisher, *Daily Clarion*, Contrast of Bundle Orders" (giving towns and circulation).

<sup>13</sup> See Quintin Hoare and G.N. Smith, eds., *Selections From the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (New York 1971), *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-3.

class conflict in the community. Rather, it provides an important example of the management of class conflict by the authorities in such a way as to maintain the political allegiance of the subordinate group.

Organized industrial conflicts, of which Minto had a number, do not provide the only insight into the nature of class relations in the community, albeit they are the most easily documented. In a recent discussion of the "cultural hegemony" of the pre-industrial English ruling class, E.P. Thompson has made some observations which have a curious ring of veracity in the context of early twentieth-century New Brunswick. Rejecting the popular thesis (in the absence of evidence of organized class conflict) of a "one-class society," Thompson has detected, on the "underside" of hegemony, "a reciprocity . . . some mutuality of relationship which is difficult not to analyse at the level of class relationship."<sup>15</sup> Probing the "underside" of the phenomenon of the mine-owner parliamentarian in Minto we find similar themes. The employees of the politicians, two of whom, Alton Taylor and W. Benton Evans, owned or managed large-scale coal operations, were among the least militant workers in the coalfield. They also considered themselves among the most fortunate. It was sometimes hard to rigorously enforce the norms of industrial discipline when "our votes could mean a lot on election day."<sup>16</sup>

The structure of hegemony could co-exist with various forms of "class struggle" and class culture, in Thompson's England, for example, with "characteristic forms of revolt" such as the "counter theatre" of popular "ridicule or outrage against the symbolism of authority." Insights into these kinds of themes are difficult to obtain, given the nature of the sources. However, the reports of ritualistic working-class behaviour in Minto during the "big strike" of 1937-8 (see below) are intriguing, given the fact that this was the only time during the period under discussion when the industrial community received intensive scrutiny by the press. In any event, these occurrences during a 1930s-era industrial conflict make it hard not to concur with Bryan Palmer's assertion that "working-class culture was cut from a whole cloth, a finely textured quilt of the traditional and the modern, the residual and the emergent, progressive and reactionary."<sup>17</sup> In another sense, however, the dilemma of the working-class movement was perhaps that it was caught between two worlds, the world of close relations between master and man, of patronage and loyalty (tempered perhaps by pre-industrial forms of class expression) on the one hand, and that of absentee-ownership, unions, strikes, and class politics on the other. For these reasons it was difficult to arrive at an industrial or political consensus. Through it all, the system managed to survive without too much overt questioning. Class conflict, though at times quite real, did not generate much

<sup>15</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Class Struggle Without Class," *Social History* (1978), 144-5.

<sup>16</sup> Public Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Minto Mining Collection, "Recollections of Michael A. Tooke, 1907-1972" (typescript n.d.), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-

rhetoric of class, and only a faint echo of proletarian radicalism.

No tidy "model" is put forward here as a means of explaining the course of class relations in the industrial community. Rather, it is argued that an understanding of these phenomena can only be approached by addressing the process of interaction between various factors: "structure," "culture," and the almost infinite variables of concrete, local experience.

## I

LARGE-SCALE enterprise, a basic component of industrial-capitalist class relations, was slow coming to the Grand Lake coalfield, even though the area was noted as "the only place in America that hath coals that we know of" by the famous English diarist, Samuel Pepys, as early as 1667.<sup>18</sup> Central New Brunswick, of course, remained a wilderness until the early nineteenth century, but the first settlers and gentry do not seem to have taken long in exploiting this valuable resource. Fisher's *History of New Brunswick* (1825) takes note of the very beginnings of mining society in both its economic and social aspect:<sup>19</sup>

The country in the vicinity of Grand Lake abounds with coal . . . particularly at a creek called New-Castle [later the village of Newcastle Bridge, 4 miles east of Minto proper] where large quantities have been dug. . . . The Grand Lake is well settled, and has a resident minister belonging to the Established Church [Church of England] . . . likewise a Methodist chapel, but no stated minister of that denomination.

By the 1850s, significant quantities of "Newcastle coal" was being shipped down-river to Saint John, and the coal measures of Queen's County had been the centre of a bitter legal and political feud between the "landed interest" and "mining speculators."<sup>20</sup> The former group won a qualified victory, and until well after the turn of the century "the owners of the soil in the Grand Lake region were permitted to mine coal under their own land without obtaining a license from the Crown" or paying any royalties.<sup>21</sup> "Speculators" did come and go, but neither they nor the land-owners were successful in advancing the status of the industry beyond a small-scale, highly seasonal, "crop-pit" level of operation. Production was "always . . . uneven and uncertain" probably averaging, during the latter part of the century, 6000 tons annually.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Entry for 8 September 1667 as cited in the *Report of the Royal Commission on the New Brunswick Coal Industry 1958* (typescript, library of the Université de Moncton), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Reissued by the Historical Society of N.B. (Saint John 1921), 63.

<sup>20</sup> W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick: A History* (Toronto 1963), 383-84.

<sup>21</sup> New Brunswick, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, 1911 "Report of the Crown Lands Department," xxi. In 1910, owners of coal lands were required to obtain licenses from the Crown for their operations and/or leases; in 1915, the custom of non-payment of royalties on coal shipped by water was finally brought to an end. *Report of the Royal Commission, 1958*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> This estimate for later nineteenth-century levels of production given in the "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1904, xxix. Quotations from Wade manuscript, 2, and the *Canadian Annual Review*, 1910, 463.

During the 1890s, New Brunswick's political leadership looked longingly at the industrial revolution being fueled by coal in Cape Breton and mainland Nova Scotia, and at the tens of thousands of dollars accruing to the treasury of the neighbouring province through coal royalties.<sup>23</sup> Under the leadership of the long-entrenched Liberal administration of Andrew Blair, the first steps towards sponsorship of more profitable exploitation of the coal resource were taken by the local state. Government-commissioned surveyors reported in 1893 the existence of over 50 million tons of coal (this was later revised upward to 150 million) lying buried at Grand Lake. The coal was reported to have been "good for any purposes," but was handled in a primitive fashion, being hauled to port by horse-drawn wagon and left exposed for long periods of time on the Newcastle wharves. It "often reached the market in bad condition and so much broken as to be unsaleable for any but steam purposes or blacksmiths' use — commanding only a low price."<sup>24</sup> The Blair regime responded to the challenge by passing legislation designed to "assure speedy development" of the coal-fields by rationalizing existing regulations concerning prospecting, encouraging county authorities to grant tax exemptions to worthy entrepreneurs, and authorizing state expenditures for "proper, modern, improved machinery and appliances for exploration and boring purposes."<sup>25</sup>

The state, however, would have to do much more than this. It would have to build a railroad, that great engine of the industrial revolution, to Grand Lake. As originally conceived, the Minto railroad project was to make the area "the most prosperous place in Canada."<sup>26</sup> It failed to do so and, incidentally, temporarily destroyed the Liberal Party in New Brunswick. It did ultimately, however, lay the basis for industrial-capitalist social relations, and overt class conflict, in the counties of Queen's and Sunbury.

By 1900 the railroad was tantalizingly close to the colliery district. The New Brunswick Central, one of the plethora of privately-owned, but publicly-funded, railways in the province, ended at Chipman, some 15 miles north-east of the site of Minto, named after the retiring Governor-General, Lord Minto, in 1905. From there the Central ran south to Norton, on the Intercolonial branch line between Moncton and Saint John, a distance of 45 miles. The "Act to

<sup>23</sup> For the importance of royalties see J. Murray Beck, *The Government of Nova Scotia* (Toronto 1959), 329.

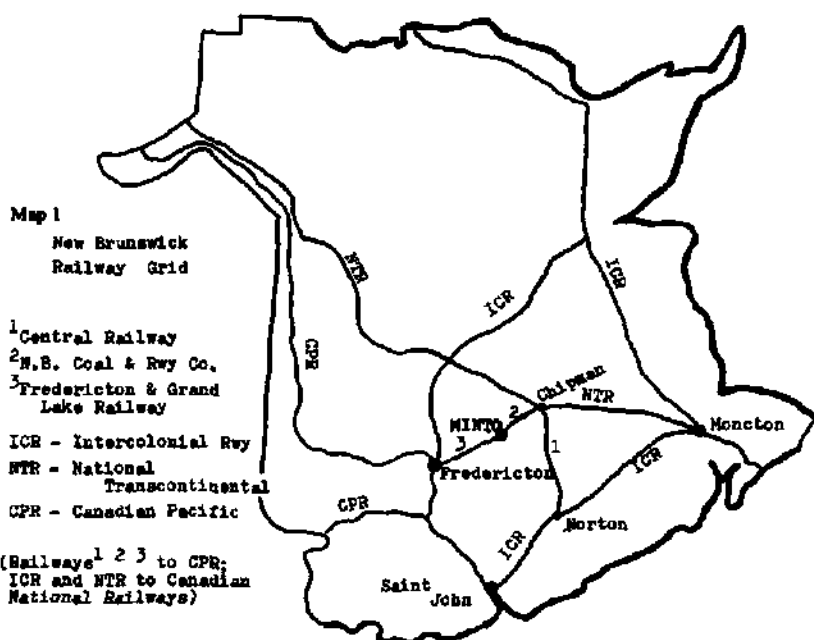
<sup>24</sup> Report cited in the "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1904, xxx. Actually, Minto coal is of inferior quality to the Nova Scotia product, containing a relatively high proportion of sulphur and ash.

<sup>25</sup> Examples of these are found in the *Statutes of New Brunswick*, 'An Act Relating to Mines and Minerals' 54 Victoria, chapter 16 (1891); 'Amended,' 55 Vic., ch. 10 (1892); 'An Act to Encourage the Development of Mines' 56 Vic., ch. 11 (1893); and 'An Act to further Amend the Mining Act' 59 Vic., ch. 27 (1896). In 1892, the first state-chartered mining firm, known as the New Brunswick Coal Company, entered the field, but the project did not meet with success. *Royal Commission, 1958*, 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur T. Doyle, *Front Benches and Back Rooms: A Story of Political Intrigue and Corruption in New Brunswick* (Toronto 1976), 18.



Provide for the Development of Coal Areas in the Counties of Queen's and Sunbury" (1 Edward VII, chapter 12), introduced by Premier L.J. Tweedie in 1901 (in deference to Tweedie's memory, a colliery was later named after him) was designed to save the fortunes of the Central's shareholders, and complete the link from Chipman through the coal district to Fredericton. Here it would connect with the Canadian Pacific, which through the agency of Blair, now federal Minister of Railways, had agreed to purchase a minimum of 60,000 tons per annum, six times the recorded level of coal production in New Brunswick in 1900.<sup>27</sup> A quarter of a million dollars in bond guarantees was offered by the state to entrepreneurs willing to undertake this task, and later, when a contract was signed, the deal was sweetened by the granting of 65 square miles of land, much of it coal-bearing, previously owned by, or forfeited to, the Crown in the district.<sup>28</sup>



The Liberals' offer was taken up by a group of Maritimes businessmen, heavily weighted with Saint John merchant capital.<sup>29</sup> The special project of

<sup>27</sup> *Synoptic Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick, 1901*, 109-110.

<sup>28</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1904, xxx; 1908, xxiii.

<sup>29</sup> The most complete list of New Brunswick Coal and Railway Co. share-holders found in printed sources was published in the *Synoptic Report* of 1905, 68. These include

Attorney-General William ("Slippery Bill") Pugsley, whose political career was badly damaged by the subsequent "scandals," the New Brunswick Coal and Railway Company represented essentially an attempt by the local bourgeoisie, with the help of their own state apparatus, to seize control of Minto's destiny.

By 1904 the line from Chipman had been completed as far as Minto (and merged with the existing Central); branch lines being subsequently extended to service eight existing collieries, the most important of which were the properties of the King family (Senator G.G. King and his son George H. King, Liberal M.L.A., 1917-25), Harvey Welton, and W. Benton Evans. The opening of a direct rail link from Minto to Saint John, and more especially, of the railroad (locomotive fuel) market itself, resulted in probably a three-fold increase in the production of Minto coal. Unfortunately, the extant statistics do not include non-royalty coal which was shipped (until 1915) by lake-schooner from the Newcastle wharves, and are further complicated, until World War I, by the 4000-odd tons of low-quality coal produced at Beersville, Kent County, annually, during this period. In 1904, 9112 tons of royalty coal was produced in New Brunswick; in 1907, 34,584 tons (See Appendix 1). Of the latter 27,382 tons were shipped out of Minto by rail (and 10 cents per ton royalty paid thereon), "and was principally used by the Intercolonial railway."<sup>30</sup>

By this time, however, almost a million dollars in state subsidies and guarantees, all but \$70,000 of which came from Fredericton, had been sunk into the NBC & R project, "that bottomless hole," as one Opposition spokesman described it.<sup>31</sup> All hope for completion of the railway had been abandoned, and the company itself had failed to set up a viable large-scale colliery operation in Minto. Through graft and incompetence, the state and its business friends had thrown away their great opportunity. Huge sums had been siphoned from the industrial project into the pockets of the contractors, politicians, and the shareholders. In 1905, the government was forced to take over the property after the line of credit from institutions such as the Credit Foncier and the Bank of

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Chas. Bruce (St. John's Nfld.), Chas. E. McLaggan (Halifax, N.S.), Ernest Hutchison of Douglastown, Willard Kitchen, George W. Allen and J.J.J. Winslow, all of Fredericton, the Stetson Estate, C.N. Skinner, A.I. Trueman, George McAvity, Chas. F. Sanford, and J.M. Smith, all of Saint John, and James Robinson, of Chatham, New Brunswick.

<sup>30</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1907, xxix.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in the *Synoptic Report*, 1906, 23. The story of this scandal has never been written, and we shall not attempt it here. A brief account is found in Doyle, *Corruption*, 18-19. The general outlines can be drawn from the *Synoptic Reports of the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick*, 1905-09, or more conveniently, from the relevant sections of the *Canadian Annual Review*. There are no Premiers Papers for New Brunswick until the time of Louis Robichaud. 'Corruption' was characteristic of early Canadian capitalism and politics, and not, as Doyle implies, particular to New Brunswick. See R.T. Naylor, *The History of Canadian Business 1867-1914*, 2 vols. (Toronto 1975).

British North America was cut off. In 1908 the Tweedie government was finally brought down over the "Central Railway Mystery," and the Conservatives were saved from a generation of political oblivion.

The Conservatives, led by J. Douglas Hazen, attempted to sponsor another group of local capitalists (a group which seems to have included at least one member of the new Premier's family) to take over the project, under the name of the Fredericton and Grand Lake Railway Company.<sup>32</sup> But the new group failed utterly in its attempt to revive the venture, and the government apparently abandoned its attempt to develop Minto under local control. At first it seemed as though American capital would be drawn into the field,<sup>33</sup> but this development was to wait for several years. Certain central Canadian interests had had their eyes on Minto for some time. In 1906, an offer had been made on behalf of some "thoroughly responsible" clients (who insisted on anonymity) by Greenshields of Montreal to take over the N.B. & C. R. charter for a 999-year lease at \$21,000 per annum.<sup>34</sup> The Liberals, however, evidently waiting for a better offer from the (Liberal) Grand Trunk, then thought to be contemplating entry into New Brunswick, turned it down. The Greenshields' client was undoubtedly the Grand Trunk's (Conservative) arch-rival, the C.P.R.

Covert in its activities in the byzantine world of New Brunswick industrial politics, the C.P.R. took charge in Minto through the agency of an old and trusted former servant, Montreal financier Sir Thomas Tait.<sup>35</sup> In 1912 Tait took over the presidency of the F. & G.L. Railway Co., and had its charter amended in such a way as to separate its mining properties from the railroad assets.<sup>36</sup> After Tait fulfilled his obligations to the New Brunswick government by actually building (in 1913) the ill-fated railway line to Fredericton, he turned his full attention to coal development, and allowed the F. & G.L. to fall under the wing of the C.P.R.

The founding of Sir Thomas Tait's coal operation, the Minto Coal Company, marks the emergence of industrial capitalism in the field. Invariably described as being "a branch of," or "controlled by," the Canadian Pacific, this

<sup>32</sup> Principal shareholders named in the act of incorporation, *Statutes of New Brunswick*, 10 Edward VII, ch. 53 (1910).

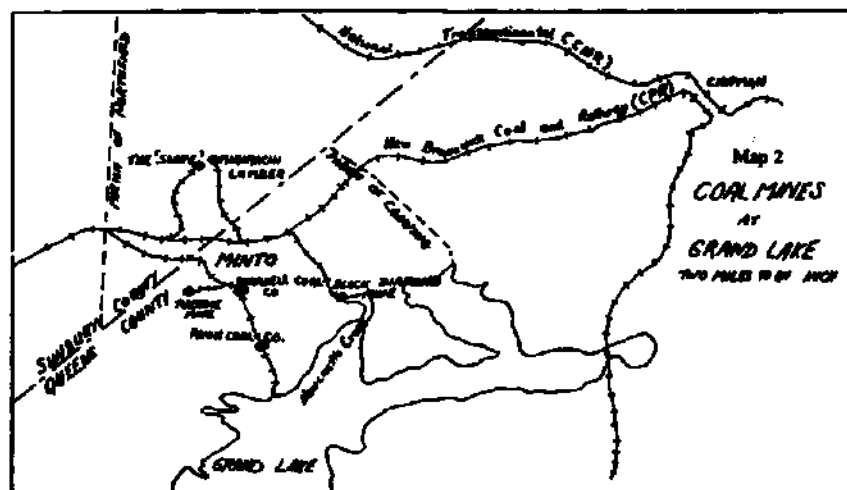
<sup>33</sup> *Canadian Annual Review*, 1910, 463.

<sup>34</sup> *Synoptic Report*, 1906, 115, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> Tait was one of the original contractors for the C.P.R., rose to high executive office, then assumed, in the first decade of the twentieth century, chairmanship of the Australian National Railways, for which he received his knighthood. By 1910 he was back in Montreal, in business on his own account, in a wide range of activities, judging from the directorships he ultimately acquired in paper, gold, oil, and salt. In 1916, he served briefly as Director of National Service under the Conservative Government. His modest stone mansion, bequeathed to McGill University in the 1930s, still stands, serving as the student employment centre. For biography see the *Annual Economic Review*, 1911, 76; *Lethbridge Herald*, 18 September 1916; *Financial Post*, *Directory of Canadian Directors*, 1931, 363.

<sup>36</sup> See the amendments to the charter of the Fredericton and Grand Lake Railway, *Statutes of New Brunswick*, 2 George V, chapter 96 (1910).

well-financed operation soon dwarfed all competition.<sup>37</sup> Minto Coal tapped two solid industrial markets, the C.P.R. itself, and the Marysville (Fredericton) textile mills, to which a spur line was completed in 1913-14.<sup>38</sup> It "energetically developed" its large holdings, particularly at South Minto (Tweedie mine) where the first coal strikes in New Brunswick were later fought. By 1914-15, Minto Coal employed 200 mine workers. Evans, the King family, and Welton, on the other hand, employed only 80, 30 and 25 mine workers respectively at this time.<sup>39</sup> Available statistics also show that Minto Coal was the only company in the field to employ mine workers on a non-seasonal basis prior to 1921 at least.<sup>40</sup> The men of Minto Coal were subject to a regimen of industrial life which had not previously been known in the district. It is thus not surprising that they were the first to organize collectively.



In quantitative terms, the entry of Minto Coal and the completion of the Fredericton rail link resulted in a jump in the coal statistics for New Brunswick from 44,780 tons in 1912 to 98,049 in 1914. In 1915, another railway market was opened up with the completion of the National Transcontinental (later, with the Intercolonial, the New Brunswick branch of the Canadian National system) from Moncton to Edmundston, which ran through Chipman. Then

<sup>37</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 27 December 1920; *ONU Bulletin*, 21 January 1925; *The Worker*, 7 April 1934.  
<sup>38</sup> Tait used his "friendships, largely of a personal nature" with corporate officials to win contracts for his coal company. See Department of Labour Papers (Public Archives of Canada), Lecelles Files, Royal Commission on Coal Mining in the Maritime Provinces, *Proceedings* (typescript) at Fredericton, 1920, evidence of Mr. Chas. Coll. Minto Coal Company, 33-34.

<sup>39</sup> "Reports of the Crown Lands Department," 1914, xxii-xxiii; 1915, xvi-xix.

<sup>40</sup> Production of coal by month per company, 1919-1921, for New Brunswick is found in D.B.S., *Coal Statistics of Canada*, 1921, and not, apparently, anywhere else in printed sources.

came World War I. Coal production rose steadily, peaking at over 260,000 tons in 1918. In 1919 (the first year for which such statistics are available) Minto Coal accounted for almost 60 per cent of the province's output, as compared with 10 per cent for Harvey Welton, 8 per cent for the Avon Coal Company (a new-comer), 5.5 per cent for the Kings, 4 per cent for Benton Evans, and 12 per cent for eight minor operators.<sup>41</sup>

The Minto Coal Company was to remain the biggest coal producer in the province, but it did not become a quasi-monopoly such as DOSCO in Nova Scotia. Its share of the industry's total production declined steadily after 1919, standing at 25 per cent at the time of the "big strike" of 1937-38.<sup>42</sup> In 1937, 281 mine workers were on the Minto Coal payroll, 220 of them at the "Slope" in North Minto, New Brunswick's largest colliery, opened in the 1920s. By this time Sir Thomas Tait had died, and the Company had fallen into the hands of the Bank of Nova Scotia.<sup>43</sup> The Company had already produced one generation of militants, including the two working-class politicians (Frank Vandenborre and Albert Goodwin) who later ran for the C.C.F. in Sunbury County.

After Tait and the C.P.R., the most significant entries into the coalfield were companies controlled by the pulp and paper interests. A close parallel can be drawn between the two; in fact, in each case, financial control extended from the consumer to the point of production. This inevitably had an impact on the price structure, a point to which we will return later. In 1917, the Oxford Paper Company of Portland, Maine (through its New Brunswick subsidiary, the Nashwaak Pulp and Paper Company) founded the Avon Coal Company in South Minto (Queen's County). As has already been noted, this company had already carved out a goodly share of the market by 1919, at which time it was reported to have been "sending all their product to Fairville for the use of the Pulp Mill."<sup>44</sup> By 1937, the 152 mine workmen on the Avon Coal Company payroll were producing 10 per cent of New Brunswick's coal. In 1920, the largest paper producer in the world, International Paper of New York, purchased and merged three of the minor operations in Minto as the Mirimachi Lumber Company. This was done under the direction of one of the former owners, Alton DisBrisay Taylor, a native New Brunswicker who retained the post of general manager of Mirimachi throughout the period of discussion. Taylor, university educated, was the most articulate of the Minto elite, acting as the "acknowledged spokesman" of the coal operators during the crisis of 1937-38. Taylor was also the Tory M.L.A. for Sunbury County from 1925-35, and also sat on the Minto school board. By the late 1930s, Mirimachi Lumber was the second-largest coal company in New Brunswick with 15 per cent of the

<sup>41</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1919, 65.

<sup>42</sup> "Report of the Department of Lands and Mines," 1937, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Wade manuscript, 12; employment figures from data in n. 42.

<sup>44</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1919, 64; PANB, Minto Mining Collection, L.E. Johnson, "Coal Stripping Operations of the Avon Coal Company" (typescript, 1962), 1. For the use of coal in paper-making see John Dales, *Hydro-Electricity and Industrial Development* (Boston 1957), 80-81.

market, and 212 mine workers on the payroll, most of whom worked in North Minto, not far from the "Slope."<sup>45</sup>

The local entrepreneurs, however, had survived the onslaught of the American and central-Canadian interests, and expanded their share of provincial coal production from 30 to 50 per cent in 1919-37. The largest of the pre-war operators, W. Benton Evans, for example, produced 10 per cent of New Brunswick's coal in the late 1930s, and employed 120 men at his Rothwell colliery in South Minto. Although Evans' business experience differed profoundly from that of Taylor, his political career was exactly the same — Conservative Party M.L.A. for Queen's County, 1925-35, and Minto school trustee.<sup>46</sup> Evans was probably most typical of the traditionalist Minto employer. Union leaders admitted that he was a "fair" man, but charged that he dealt with his workers on a "low," paternalistic basis.<sup>47</sup> He actively challenged the U.M.W. for the hearts and minds of his men in 1937, and won. Because of his success in this endeavour, the Rothwell colliery was the site of violence and sabotage during the "big strike." Evans, however, was no reactionary. He sensed the need for flexibility in the application of the principle of paternalism, and put his ideas into practice by sponsoring a non-militant organizational alternative to the U.M.W., the so-called "yellow dog" union.

By the late 1930s fully one-quarter of New Brunswick's coal industry lay in the hands of interlocking companies headed by two of the pioneers in the field, George King and Harvey Welton, together with a parvenu, John Henderson.<sup>48</sup> Henderson, formerly of Inverness, Cape Breton, was general manager of the Minto Coal Company until 1920, when he went into business on his own account. The largest of these firms was the Black Diamond Coal Company, which employed, in 1937, 160 mine workmen at Newcastle Bridge. King, as previously noted, was a former Liberal politician. Welton was a Tory, and Grand Master of one of Newcastle Bridge's most important social institutions, the Orange Lodge. The Lodge had undoubtedly evolved as a means of cementing relations between various social strata, and must have helped to solidify the structure of plebeian Conservatism in Queen's County. It is interesting to note, however, that Newcastle Bridge became one of the strongholds of militant trade unionism in the Minto district.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> For background on the company, see PANB, Minto Mining Collection, "Recollections of Michael A. Tooke," 6-7; for Taylor, his entry in the *Canadian Who's Who*, 1936-37, and the *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1926, 434. Statistics as in n. 42.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> PANB, oral history collections, transcript of an interview, Gary Chaisson with Joseph Vandenbroeck, former president, Minto L.U. 7409, U.M.W. (typescript, 1975), 20.

<sup>48</sup> These companies as follows (number of workers employed, in 1937): King, Welton and Henderson (strip mine, 16); King Lumber (60); Harvey Welton Ltd. (75); and Welton and Henderson's (160).

<sup>49</sup> Information on Welton's politics and fraternal associations courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason, formerly of Newcastle Bridge, N.B. Elsewhere it has been argued that Orangeism in the working-class community could play a role in shaping working-class

Of the minor operators, who accounted for the remaining 15 per cent of New Brunswick's coal capacity in the late 1930s, little is known. The most basic data are difficult to obtain, but 20 of these hold-overs from the era of "crop-pit" mining were counted in the *Atlantic Gazetteer* of 1939. Because of the shallowness of the Minto coal seams, a mine was relatively cheap to start in the district, and it is possible that entrepreneurship provided an avenue of social mobility for the odd thrifty and enterprising coal miner. In 1931, for example, it was reported that "lessened opportunities for labour started several independent operations" in the area.<sup>50</sup> Only a handful of actual working-class entrepreneurs could have been involved in this process, but their example may well have had a significant impact on the nature of working-class consciousness in Minto.<sup>51</sup>

What little room there may have been for aspiring capitalists in Minto during the period between World War I and II is accounted for mainly by the continuing vitality of the industry as a whole. Unlike Nova Scotia coal and steel, for example, coal mining in New Brunswick continued to expand after the recession of 1919-21. Recovery in Minto was well under way in 1922, partly due to the impact of the great soft-coal strike led by the U.M.W. in that year. At this time, Minto was one of the few non-union coalfields north of the Mason-Dixon line. After 1924, production levelled off at about 200,000 tons per annum. Roughly 600 jobs were available, one-third more than were taken during war-time. The railroad trade provided the livelihood of most of these workers, accounting for two-thirds of all coal sales during the latter 1920s. (See Appendix 1.)

From an economic historian's point of view, the most interesting phenomenon of Minto's history is its experience during the 1930s Depression, which forms the immediate background to the "big strike" of 1937. Minto "boomed" when the rest of the country went bust. There was a downturn in 1930-31, but from 1932 onwards, steady growth. The decade, 1929-39 saw production and employment double. At the time of the "big strike," which took place against the backdrop of Minto's second industrial revolution, there were over 1,000 jobs available in the industry.

The Minto "boom" resulted primarily from expansion of traditional markets. In 1939, railroads, "industrials and large heating units" together accounted for 91.5 per cent of all sales, the domestic (household fuel) market for less than 10 per cent. Just less than 40 per cent of the coal produced was taken by the railroads, one-third by the pulp and paper mills. Aside from

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militancy, while remaining "divisive" on a political level. See Gregory S. Kealey, "The Orange Order in Toronto: Religious Riot and the Working Class," in Kealey and Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto 1976), 13-34.

<sup>50</sup> D.B.S., *Coal Statistics of Canada*, 1931, 46.

<sup>51</sup> For an extended discussion of the political implications of limited mobility see Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass. 1964).

Marysville, the only other major consumer was the state, which took about 6 per cent for the thermal power unit at Newcastle Bridge, opened in 1931, and another 1-2 per cent for the provincial hospitals.<sup>52</sup> These markets remained elastic largely because of "attractive prices," that is the ability of the New Brunswick coal operators to keep pace with the deflationary pressures of the era. They were not plagued, for example by the "sticky wage rates" which prevailed in unionized industries, such as their major competitor, Nova Scotia coal. Given the open shop, the operators had a free hand in cutting labour costs, which they did ruthlessly.<sup>53</sup> Wage cuts and Depression-induced migration into the coal district negated the beneficial impact which the "boom" might have had on the mine workers' incomes.

The operation of the free market, facilitated by the powerlessness of labour, was not wholly responsible for these developments. Although some officials blamed the minor independents for price-cutting, it is highly doubtful that those consuming interests which controlled one half of the industry (or for that matter, the state) put up much resistance to the general tendency. The C.P.R., for example, probably played as great a role in depressing coal prices as it did in the better documented context of Alberta, where it was accused by a conciliation board in 1938 of driving miners to starvation, and all but its favorites to bankruptcy.<sup>54</sup> Its creature, the Minto Coal Company, is known to have reduced its average selling price from \$4.55 per ton in 1930 to \$3.58 in 1935.<sup>55</sup> The \$3.50 price was general for railway coal (C.N.R. as well as C.P.R.) until the war, a figure equivalent to the average cost of production in the field. The paper companies probably paid a similar figure. The prices paid by the New Brunswick Power Commission are unknown because, as a government spokesman replied to Opposition questioning on the subject, such information was not in the "best interest of the Public."<sup>56</sup>

Inevitably, price-cutting led to falling rates of profit, until by 1939, only

<sup>52</sup> Fragmentary data on markets from D.B.S., *Coal Statistics in Canada*, and New Brunswick "Department of Lands and Mines," annual reports, 1935-39.

<sup>53</sup> There are numerous references to wage cutting during the period. This is best seen in the statistics for aggregate earnings, taken from D.B.S., *Coal Statistics in Canada*. In 1930, the average New Brunswick collier worked 230 days and earned \$878; in 1936, 232 days for \$663. Although they were able to work on a more steady basis than their unionized fellow-miners in Nova Scotia during the Depression, the earnings of the New Brunswick group were 25 per cent lower than the former throughout the 1930s.

<sup>54</sup> Glenbow-Alberta Archives, West Canadian Collieries Ltd. Collection, File 447, documents relating to board of conciliation, District 18, U.M.W., 1938.

<sup>55</sup> The figure for 1939 is only a penny per ton higher. See the *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 176-77.

<sup>56</sup> *Synoptic Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, 1935, "Appendix," 36; for railway prices, testimony of Lachlan Currie at the board of conciliation in *Dispute Between Various Coal Operators in the Minto District and their Employees*, quoted in the *U.M.W. Journal*, 15 February 1938; and the report of the board, *Labour Gazette*, 1938, 730. By this time, the publicly owned C.N.R. purchased the lion's share of Minto's railway coal.



one major New Brunswick coal operator had failed to show a loss. The exception was, of course, the Minto Coal Company, although it is difficult to see how the paper companies could have suffered from "losses" sustained by their fuel subsidiaries because of the price structure.<sup>57</sup> As New Brunswick's submission to Rowell-Sirois sadly noted, it was "only a question of time" before a wave of bankruptcies engulfed the industry.<sup>58</sup> Capital was slated for a major re-organization and concentration in Minto when World War II intervened to save the independents and minor operators. In the meantime, the best that could be done by the businessmen was to hold the line against labour, for by the late 1930s the open shop, long an integral part of the political economy of the New Brunswick coal industry, had become the life-line of Minto's bourgeoisie.

The open shop, of course, was only the tip of the iceberg. There existed a traditional wage gap between union and non-union coal miners in the Maritimes, this being stretched to 40 per cent (for contract miners) during the Depression.<sup>59</sup> Probably the worst aspects of working-class life in Minto related to the issues of safety and health care, in the context of which the absence of a union played an equally negative role. New Brunswick was the last coal-producing province in Canada to have mines regulations placed on the statute books (1933), a delinquency on the part of the state which materially affected conditions in the pits. During the 1920s and 1930s New Brunswick's coal mines were more deadly, for example, than those in Nova Scotia or Alberta, even though the absence of gas in the seams should have made them the safest in the country. There were also an incredible number of non-fatal accidents. From 1933 to 1937, for example, the first years in which mines regulations became effective, was recorded an average of one such accident per 2.4 mine workers annually. The upper hand held by the employers in Minto encouraged a deadening conservatism in all things. Worker innovations designed to improve safety could be rejected out-of-hand by the bosses, because "the idea was that they were the operator."<sup>60</sup>

For some years, the state assumed no responsibility for the victims of the industry. Miners and quarrymen were specifically excluded from New Brunswick's first workmen's compensation act, passed after lobbying by the Saint John ship labourers by the Tweedie regime. The Liberal Party did rectify this gross omission in 1918; during the 1920s and 1930s a mine widow or crippled workman could look forward to a meagre allowance from the compen-

<sup>57</sup> Financial data on major coal companies in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 173-178; in the aggregate, Dominion Fuel Board publications "Distribution of Operating Costs — Canada," August 1938.

<sup>58</sup> *Submission of the Province of New Brunswick*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> "Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada," supplements to the *Labour Gazette*, January 1927; January 1935; and March 1939.

<sup>60</sup> PANB, Chiasson/Vandenbroeck interview, 27. Accident statistics found in the *Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 295, and the "Report of the Department of Lands and Mines," 1937, 57.

sation board.<sup>61</sup> In other areas, however, the state was wholly deficient. It is hard to believe that a mining community of 4,000 had no hospital facilities as late as 1939, but this is the case. As the 1938 conciliation board reported:

A few of the mines have fair first aid stations, others not so good, and some have none at all. When the roads are open an injured man may be moved quickly to hospital at Fredericton . . . but when roads are closed to motor traffic in winter, if a man is injured after the train leaves Minto in the early morning . . . [he] must wait until next day. . . . Last spring in case of serious injury the patients were removed to Chipman . . . and thence by fast freight train to Moncton. The religious requirements of the community are [however] well met.<sup>62</sup>

Altogether, the picture of the industrial community is not an idyllic one. Employers, particularly the absentees, tended to be authoritarian. Although Sir Thomas Tait is said to have entertained "advanced views" on the "labour question," these do not seem to have filtered down, for example, to his local managers. The general manager of the Minto Coal Company, Alan D. King was a priggish English accountant who "lorded it over the workers" and liked to deal with grievances by punishing, if possible, workmen who complained of conditions.<sup>63</sup>

One half of the industrial population lived in company housing, and even the best of this, a housing project built by Tait during the World War I had fallen into a state of disrepair by the 1920s. Whatever the justice of their claims, workers at the Minto Coal Company had the idea "fixed firmly in their minds" that they were being rack-rented.<sup>64</sup> Companies claimed to have lost money on housing operations, but the system did have its advantages. In 1920, for instance, strikers at Minto Coal were evicted from their homes, and threats of wholesale evictions were used by the employer group as a club against the workers in 1937-38. A large proportion of the housing in the community consisted of jerry-built tar-paper and beaver-board shacks which "beggared description." The housing problem was most acute during the "boom" of the

<sup>61</sup> For the 1903 act, which also excluded "a servant [in] . . . lumbering or in driving, rafting or booming logs" (i.e., the province's key industry), see *Statutes of New Brunswick* 'An Act Respecting the Liability of Employers for Injuries to Workmen' 3 Edward VII, chapter 11, *Synoptic Report of the Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly*, 1903, 182-84. In 1918, the scope of the act was broadened to include all industrial workers, a board established, and appeals by workmen to the common law courts abolished. Death benefits were fixed at a maximum of \$1500, compensation for disabled workmen at \$6-\$17 per week. These latter rates remained unchanged throughout the period under discussion, although death benefits and provisions were liberalized by amendments to the 1918 act (8 George V, ch. 37) in 1920 (10 George V, ch. 12) and 1932 (22 George V, ch. 36).

<sup>62</sup> Report of the board, *Labour Gazette*, 1938, 726.

<sup>63</sup> Evidence of Charles Coll, Fredericton, 1920; PANB, "Recollections of Michael A. Tooke" 5, 14; Chiasson/Vandenbroeck interview, 20.

<sup>64</sup> Report of Commission Re Minto Coal Company, Ltd., *Journals of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly*, 1926, 68. The houses had already been moved once from the original townsite.

1930s.<sup>65</sup> None of the homes had indoor plumbing or running water, a fact which must have adversely effected the general level of public health in the community. Numerous cross-currents in the Minto experience, such as the "arrangements" by which store bills were collected by the employers, often leaving the workers with a blank pay-check at the end of the month, are suggestive of rather vigorous exploitation of labour in the New Brunswick coalfield.<sup>66</sup>



*Living conditions were not idyllic. Front entrance to typical company-owned, working-class housing in Minto. Family pet stands guard against the rodent evil. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

To the academic observer, the workplace at which the bulk of the mine workers plied their trades presents a picture of sheer horror. The bosses cannot be blamed for the thinness of the coal strata in central New Brunswick (18-40 inches), although geological factors did lend a certain righteous fervour to working-class propaganda during moments of crisis. *The Truth About Minto*, published by the U.M.W. strikers in 1937, reminded the public that "the Minto miners work in places about 22 inches high . . . on their knees or flat on their backs. Very often they kneel, sit, or lie in water all day long."<sup>67</sup> Most of the miners plied their trade in traditional fashion, alone or in pairs, with the use of explosives and hand tools, using the room-and-pillar technique. During the inter-war period, however, the main plants of the two biggest companies, Minto Coal and Mirimachi Lumber, were converted to the long-wall system.

<sup>65</sup> See statement of D.W. Morrison, *UMW Journal*, 15 November 1937.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Excerpts published in *Ibid.*, 15 March 1938. This description of general conditions has been verified by information given me by Mr. D. Bennett of Montreal, formerly of the fuel department of Canadian National Railways, who had occasion to inspect all of the major workings in Minto during the 1930s.

This involved the mobilization of larger, more disciplined work-gang units, and more extensive use of machinery.<sup>68</sup> Table I outlines the general character of the mine labour force in New Brunswick, and shows the impact of mechanization over the 15 year period, 1922-1937.

Table I

New Brunswick: Mine Labour Force, 1922-37		
	1922	1937
Office staff, foremen etc.	5.5%	5 %
Mechanics and tradesmen	5 %	4.5%
Hand cutters and helpers	66 %	42.5%
Machine cutters, machine loaders and helpers	.5%	22.5%
Other workers	23 %	25.5%
	N = 611	N = 1050

SOURCE: D.B.S., *Coal Statistics of Canada*.

It would be tempting to speculate that the rise of machine production lay behind the development of labour unions in Minto, but in fact there is little evidence to support this thesis. There was industrial conflict at the Minto Coal Company prior to the introduction of new work methods, while Mirimachi Lumber was never one of the strongholds of unionism in the field.

It would be difficult, however, to make sense out of Minto by looking only at the size and nature of the units of production, the rhythm of the business cycle, or indeed, the various stratagems and policies of the employers to keep out organized labour, which seem to have ranged from patronage to simple terrorism. For one would not find here, or anywhere else, the industrial revolution "working upon some nondescript undifferentiated raw material of humanity."<sup>69</sup>

The forging of Minto's working class was not a gradual, inexorable process of proletarianization of the established agrarian population, as has been documented, for example, in the case of the transformation of the peasantry in Carmaux, France, during the nineteenth century.<sup>70</sup> Any permanent working-

<sup>68</sup> For a description of long-wall mining in the Maritimes see the *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 58. I am also indebted to Mr. David Frank for information on this subject.

<sup>69</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London 1968), 213.

<sup>70</sup> Roland Treppe, *Les Mineurs de Carmaux*, 2 vols. (Paris 1971). The extent to which any significant degree of proletarianization had occurred in Minto prior to 1900 is problematical. According to the *Report of the Royal Commission on the New Brunswick Coal Mining Industry, 1958*, "coal was still being mined primarily by the farmers" in 1895 (18).

class element in the area prior to World War I must have been very small: only 66 coal miners were counted in the province in 1911. The discontinuity between this group and the militant labour element which emerged in Minto during the war is accounted for by the fact that the rise of industrial capitalism here was accompanied by a significant "rush" of working-class immigration, originating in various parts of continental Europe as well as Great Britain. By 1921 immigrants comprised 37 per cent of the labour force (See Appendix IV), a proportion which was probably higher before a disruptive strike in 1920. The employment of immigrants probably reflected both the disinclination of native New Brunswickers to enter the mine labour force at a time when other opportunities were available (including out-migration) and the corporate policies of the Minto Coal Company. The Minto Coal Company needed not only skilled miners, but workers who would be available at any time of the year. The records of surveys taken of the company's payroll during the war demonstrate the extent to which these requirements were met by workmen of European origin, primarily Belgians, Germans, "Austrians," and to a lesser extent (because they seem to have been fairly transient) Italians.<sup>71</sup>

Table II

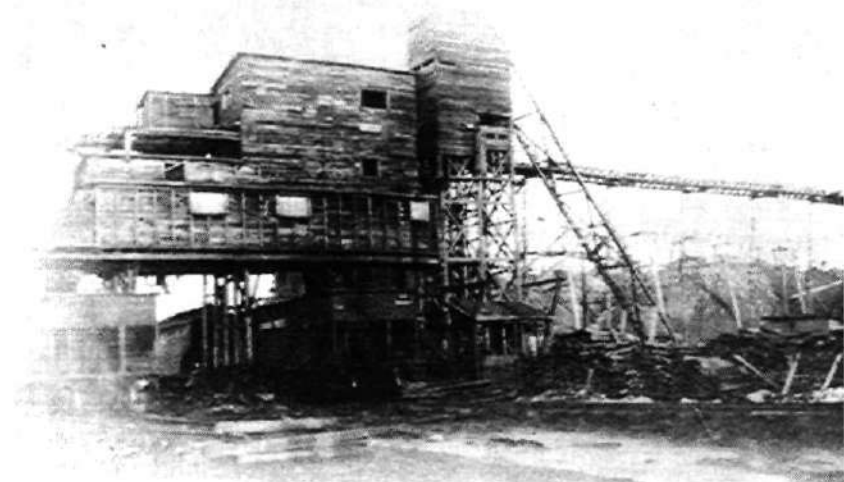
## Minto Coal Company: Nationalities of Mine Workmen, 1915-16

	1915	1916
Belgians	21.5%	26%
Germans/'Austrians'	13 %	26%
Italians	30 %	8%
Russians	3 %	—
'French-speaking Canadians'	12.5%	20%
'English-speaking'	20 %	20%
	N = 200	N = 250

Less precise records from some of the other firms show that the immigrants were sprinkled around some of the smaller pits, but the Minto Coal data are clearly the most important. It proves that General Manager John Henderson's claim that "foreigners" were responsible for the early labour troubles in Minto is correct.<sup>72</sup> In 1916, the year of the first strike in Minto, 60 per cent of the workers at the company's plant were "foreigners," and probably an additional 10 per cent were British immigrants. Immigrants continued to play a disproportionately large role in the working-class movement long after they had dwined

<sup>71</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1915, xvii; 1916, xvii.

<sup>72</sup> *Fredericton Daily Gleaner* (hereafter cited as the *Gleaner*), 20 November 1919.



*Industrial capitalism comes to Minto, N.B. Mine tipple and slag heaps of the Welton & Henderson coal company. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

dled to minority status. Of the two major local strike leaders in 1937-38, for example, one, Mathias Wuhr, was a German and the other, William Walker, was an Englishman. Frank (Gus) Vandenborre, Minto's first union leader and the first C.C.F. candidate in Sunbury County, was a Belgian who emigrated to Minto with his family in 1907.<sup>73</sup>

Most of Minto's "old time" immigrants, the Belgians, the Britishers, the Germans and "Austrians" were routed to New Brunswick by way of the Nova Scotia mines. The bulk of the two latter groups were enemy aliens whom Sir Thomas Tait managed to have released from the internment camp at Amherst, Nova Scotia during the war. John Henderson was responsible for the presence of the Belgians, throughout this period, Minto's largest and most stable "ethnic" group. His home town of Inverness contained the major colony of Belgian mine workers on Cape Breton Island, and there is additional evidence of the direct links between the Inverness and Minto communities.<sup>74</sup> Less is known about the second wave of immigration into the field, composed primarily of Polish and Hungarian workers, which occurred in the 1920s and early 1930s. This was probably the result however, of direct or indirect stimulus from the Railways Agreement of 1925-30, under the terms of which thousands

<sup>73</sup> Background on Mr. Walker courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason; on Mr. (Gus) Vandenborre, from the Wade manuscript, 2.

<sup>74</sup> See Chiasson/Vandenbroeck interview (PANB) for a first-hand account of migration patterns between Belgium, Minto, and Inverness. The Belgians in Inverness mutinied in 1910, after which their community was disrupted by blacklisting. Henderson may have recruited many of these displaced workers. See Dan Moore, "The 1909 Strike in the Nova Scotia Coalfields," unpublished paper, Carleton University, 1976, 93-94, for details.

of eastern Europeans, mainly agrarian, were brought to Canada by the C.P.R. and the C.N.R.<sup>75</sup>

According to the 1931 census, 37 per cent of the 616 New Brunswick coal miners counted were native-born Canadians of Anglo-Saxon stock, 27 per cent were French-Canadians or Acadians, 22 per cent were continental Europeans, 13 per cent were Britishers, and 1 per cent were Americans. The proportion of immigrants in the labour force declined further from 36 per cent to 17 per cent in 1931-41, standing at about 25 per cent at the time of the "big strike" of 1937-38. (See Appendix IV.) From a variety of sources, mainly parochial census returns and surviving payrolls, a rough outline of the distribution of the ethnic groups in and around the Minto-area collieries during the late 1930s can be drawn.

The original concentration of continental-European immigrants at the Minto Coal Company was broken up by the mid-1920s with one very important exception — the Belgians. The removal of the main plant of the Minto Coal Company across the county line in 1922 was accompanied by a shift in the locus of the Belgian population of the industrial parishes of Canning (Queen's County) and Northfield (Sunbury County) from the former to the latter. The only other major colliery in Northfield, Mirimachi Lumber, does not seem to have employed many "foreigners," judging from the sprinkling (8 per cent) of Flemish, German, and Italian surnames on a list of its employees dated 1940. Both Minto Coal and Mirimachi Lumber employed significant numbers of Acadian workers. Eighty per cent of the Acadian population of the industrial parishes in 1931 lived in Northfield, and 35 per cent of the names on the Mirimachi list are French.

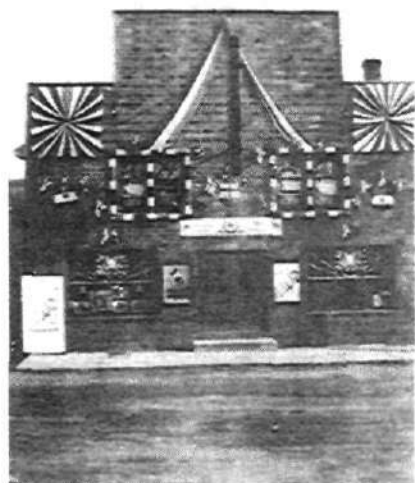
Virtually all (99 per cent) of the Poles and Hungarians in the industrial parishes in 1931 lived in Canning, where the Black Diamond, Avon, and Rothwell collieries were located. Most found employment at the Black Diamond and Avon collieries. W. Benton Evans, the owner of the Rothwell mine, does not seem to have liked foreign workers. During the strike of 1937-38 he bragged about his loyal, "100% British" employees, and in 1940, only 4 per cent of his workmen had non-British or Canadian names. Seventy-six per cent had Anglo-Saxon names, the remainder being French. More than two-thirds of Evans' employees shared surnames with each other, a further clue to his preference for native-born New Brunswickers.<sup>76</sup>

Employers tried, at various times, to stir up strife in Minto by appealing to nativism. They argued that unionism was illegitimate because foreign workmen were its most militant supporters. There is no evidence, however, of overt cultural conflict in Minto along the lines of "white men" versus "foreigners,"

<sup>75</sup> Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada 1896-1932* (Toronto 1978), ch. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Evans quoted in the *Gleaner*, 6 November 1937. Lists of workers at the Evans and Taylor mines are found in the PAC, Canadian Labour Congress Papers, v. 91 "Defunct Unions," Mirimachi and Rothwell Mine Workers' Unions files.

which was characteristic of contemporary Canadian society.<sup>77</sup> The division of the native-born group into French and English-speaking factions (there is no evidence of overt conflict between these either) may have had something to do with this. The small numerical size of the "ethnic" groups also may have contributed to cultural peace. (See Appendix II.) The largest of them, the Belgians, most of whom seem to have been Flemish in origin, were a group which had little difficulty in adapting to the dominant milieu. As far as can be determined there were no formal "ethnic" associations in Minto, certainly none of the Communist variety which served as targets of anti-radical nativist activities in other parts of the country. The Orange organization in Newcastle Bridge was not belligerent, a former resident insisting that the annual ritual of the Glorious Twelfth was simply a community event. Another described Minto in the 1940s as a "melting pot, where wanderers from far-off lands were turned into good Canadian citizens... adopted Canadian ways... and abandoned their mother tongue."<sup>78</sup>



*The industrial community expressed its loyalty to the Crown on the occasion of the Royal Tour in 1939. Their Majesties, however, by-passed Minto in that year. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

The pressures of assimilation in Minto were undoubtedly stronger in Minto than say, in a Prairie coal town. Perhaps this is the reason why the local Belgians found political expression in the C.C.F. rather than in parties of the extreme left, as was the case in places like Blairmore or Drumheller, Alberta. The point of the importance of residual culture, however, still stands. The Belgian coal-miners, for example, came from a society brutally divided on

<sup>77</sup> Anne B. Woywitka, "The Drumheller Strike of 1919," *Alberta History* (Winter 1973) and Duart Snow, "The Holmes Foundry Strike of March 1937," *Ontario History*, 69 (1977), 3-32.

<sup>78</sup> Interview, Mrs. Doris Nason; PANB, Minto Mining Collection, Marion Upton, "Coal Mining Centre" (typescript 1948), 1.



class lines, which had a working-class movement with a strong revolutionary and socialist tradition.<sup>79</sup> This must account for part of the union militancy at the Minto Coal Company. In the same way, traditions of class struggle brought to Minto by other industrial immigrants, such as the Germans or the British also played a role in the development of the local trade-union movement. Although less prominent at the leadership level, eastern and southern European immigrants seem to have been solid, rank-and-file unionists. There is enough evidence from other parts of North America to show that the traditions of popular culture among these groups could be channelled into both trade-union and political militancy in an industrial context in the new world.<sup>80</sup>

It is fairly clear that both "loyalism" at the workplace and the broader structure of "social hegemony" in Minto rested on the shoulders of the native-born, although concepts of ethnicity and culture must not be mechanically applied in this context. Writing in the mid-1950s, Hugh Thorburn sought an explanation for the failure of socialism in New Brunswick in the province's "Acadian and Loyalist traditions." New Brunswickers were said to have been "conservative and give a cool reception to any doctrine which seeks to upset the established pattern."<sup>81</sup> Although this argument undoubtedly has some validity, it is probably more relevant to examine the overall rural matrix of Minto society. Minto was continuously fed, from the 1920s onwards, by an internal migration from the declining rural areas of New Brunswick. As of 1941 (the only year for which such data are available), 87 per cent of the Canadian-born mine workers in New Brunswick had always lived in the province.<sup>82</sup> The seasonal rhythm of much of the coal industry, moreover, allowed the flow to run both ways. A large number of mine workers lived in Minto "only during the winter months, returning to their native place, often not far way" during the off-season.<sup>83</sup> The values of "home" must have been strong in the industrial community.

These values did not mesh with the marxists' conception of class-consciousness. The observations of John Barton, a pioneer Socialist, on the "Eastern Canadian Proletariat" published during World War I, are probably worth noting here. Arguing against the stereotype of the "reactionary" French-Canadian, Barton theorized that conservatism was characteristic of native-born Canadians in general. "Saturated with the ethical and social standards of reputability prevalent on the farm, and a bush farm at that, during the last century" the individual agrarian migrant took "no other ideas with him

<sup>79</sup> For an insight into this history see Louise Henneaux Dépôt, *Misères et Luttres Sociales Dans le Hainaut* (Bruxelles 1959).

<sup>80</sup> Victor Green, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labour in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (Notre Dame 1968); Avery, 'Dangerous Foreigners'; Seager, "Three Alberta Coal Towns."

<sup>81</sup> *Politics in New Brunswick* (Toronto 1958), 103.

<sup>82</sup> A survey of manuscript census materials relating to Canadian mining communities was published in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 284.

<sup>83</sup> *Labour Gazette*, 1938, 725.



*The son of an artisan from western New Brunswick, mine blacksmith Rufus Nason was one of hundreds of Maritimers who sought economic opportunities in the Minto coalfield during the Depression. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

when he goes out from home . . . his archaic standards make him a poor brother with whom to go out on strike, and render him a poor subject to respond to the revolutionary propaganda." His only saving grace, in Barton's jaded view, was that he found industrial discipline "irksome" at all times.<sup>84</sup> These general themes must be considered in the context of Minto, together with traditions which seem to have been peculiar to New Brunswick, such as habits of deference like the use of the term "squire," which were observed in the local countryside as late as the 1920s.<sup>85</sup>

The workers' "archaic standards" did not always work in the bosses' interests. Benton Evans succeeded in weaning his men from the U.M.W. in 1937. On the other hand, he could not make them work a six-day week, for "a man who is subject to rheumatism may be laid up 2 or 3 days a week" after one shift in the Rothwell mine.<sup>86</sup> Pushed long enough and hard enough they would fight back hard. Religious affiliation, both to the Catholic Church and Protestant sects (see Appendix III) was probably strong among the rural-based workers, and may well have acted as a mechanism of "social control." On the other hand, when workers convinced that they were "Christians and not slaves" believed that they were being treated otherwise, they could rebel.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Barton's "Eastern Canadian Proletariat" series published in the *Western Clarion*, February-March 1917.

<sup>85</sup> Information from unpublished research into the history of Saint Mary's parish, York County, N.B., courtesy of Meredyth G. Kezar of Lachine, Quebec.

<sup>86</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, *Proceedings* (Fredericton, 1920) 55. For a lengthy analysis of the problem of mine-worker indiscipline, especially in non-union fields, see Carter Goodrich, *The Miners' Freedom* (Boston 1925).

<sup>87</sup> Wade manuscript, 6; statement of Thomas White, Minto labour leader. *The impact of*

Nevertheless, the native-born worker who came to Minto was far more integrated into the *political* structure of class accommodation than the immigrant from Belgium or Germany. The process of alienation from the dominant political formations, from the state, would have to proceed at a much faster pace in his case before an autonomous ideology such as socialism could take hold. Let us now consider how the politicians, the coal operators, and the labourers worked out their respective destinies in Minto.

## II

"WE, THE MINE workers of this community," declared a strikers' manifesto in 1937, "have organized for our own protection. We have done this many times before, and always we have been suppressed with the most ruthless determination."<sup>88</sup> They had done so, by that date, almost half a dozen times. The first occasion was in June 1916, when 200 mine workers employed by the Minto Coal Company went on strike for three weeks to demand pay increases to keep pace with the cost-of-living. No formal trade-union organization was involved. The strikers did win a meagre compromise which allowed for "bonuses" of about six per cent to be paid miners "whose production exceeded a certain amount of boxes" per month. However, there was repression, "a number of workmen of alien enemy nationality concerning the dispute" being incarcerated by the authorities.<sup>89</sup> In September 1918 there were two brief and unsuccessful strikes at the same plant over economic issues. Either immediately before or shortly afterwards, Minto's first Miners' Union, an unaffiliated home local, was formed under the leadership of two Belgians, Frank (Gus) Vandendorpe and Arthur Vanheddagan. These two workers, president and secretary respectively of the Union, had previously journeyed to New Glasgow, Nova Scotia, to confer with an organizer for the American Federation of Labor, C.C. Dane.<sup>90</sup> The Union had no success, however, in negotiating with Minto Coal. According to Vandendorpe's account, he was told by management that "because I was a Belgian I had no right to discuss better mining conditions with anybody," and was then fired.<sup>91</sup>

The Minto militants appealed to the Nova Scotia miners for help. Cape Breton miners' leader Silby Barrett came to Minto in response to the call, and in May 1919, the New Brunswickers received their first union charter as local 4552, District 26, United Mine Workers of America. District 26 must have seemed like a sure bet for the mine workers, for the organization had, in the

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Christianity on the miners' movement is discussed at some length by Herbert Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labour Movement," in *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York 1976), 79-117.

<sup>88</sup> *New Glasgow News*, 29 November 1937.

<sup>89</sup> *Labour Gazette*, 1915-16, 1486, 1874.

<sup>90</sup> Wade manuscript, 2; *Labour Gazette*, 1919, 611, 680.

<sup>91</sup> *Sydney Record*, 17 September 1919.

interim, won a contract, which included the eight-hour day, from the Dominion Coal Company of Nova Scotia, the largest operator in eastern Canada. Local 4552 put forward similar demands for union recognition, the eight-hour day, and a ten per cent wage increase. At first, the union attempted to gain their demands by reference to conciliation under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act. Despite long delays in the proceedings and exhortations to strike by some of the more militant leaders of the District, the unionists trod cautiously. This earned them the approval of the Nova Scotia press, which praised the New Brunswickers for continuing to produce coal "patriotically" in defiance of the "red" and "scarlet" group at union headquarters in Glace Bay.<sup>82</sup> More than likely, however, the immigrant workers were responding in rational fashion to economic conditions, for extensive stockpiling by the railroads and industrial users had "had the effect of closing down most of the operations in the Minto Coal Fields" not long after the Armistice of November 1918.<sup>83</sup> Pleas from local leaders such as Minto's Catholic priest may also have had an effect.<sup>84</sup>

The conciliation board finally handed down its report in November 1919, with the workers' nominee, John A. Walker of Inverness, dissenting. The board rejected all the union's demands except one, recommending a pay increase of about one per cent. J.B. McLachlan, secretary-treasurer of District 26, called the results of conciliation "a joke."<sup>85</sup> The strike commenced on 6 December, when 250 men walked out of the Minto Coal Company's mines.

The strike, which lasted for twelve months, the longest in Minto's history, was a failure. Sir Thomas Tait had prepared a surprise for the troublesome labourers. On the day after the strike began, he played his trump card: a strip mine which was ready to go into operation immediately to retain the business of the Marysville cotton mills. The miners tried to picket the new plant, but were ordered to desist by their imported strike leader, William ("Doc") Hayes, a moderate from Springhill. Hayes assured the miners that unionized steam-shovel operators and C.P.R. railwaymen would not "scab" on them by handling the hot coal, but he was quickly disabused of this fond hope by representatives of the labour organizations concerned.<sup>86</sup> In subsequent months there were also a number of strike-breakers brought in from Montreal to help work the idled pits.<sup>87</sup>

More militant Nova Scotia unionists urged the Minto men to "stand shoulder to shoulder and they would make Sir Thomas Tate [sic] and all the other crooks to recognize the union."<sup>88</sup> This became more and more remote. By February, according to Vandenborre, "just about 60 miners" had left the coal-

<sup>82</sup> *Halifax Herald*, 2 December 1919.

<sup>83</sup> "Report of the Crown Lands Department," 1919, 62.

<sup>84</sup> *Gleaner*, 24 November 1919.

<sup>85</sup> *Sydney Post*, 18 November 1919. For the report of the board, *Labour Gazette*, 1391.

<sup>86</sup> *Gleaner*, 6-12 December 1919.

<sup>87</sup> Wade manuscript, 4.

<sup>88</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, Strikes and Lockouts Files, Box 318, 406. Acting Commissioner, R.C.M.P., to Deputy Minister of Labour, 14 January 1920.

field.<sup>99</sup> At least 75 left in the end, some or all of them with help from the United Mine Workers. Some remained idle, living on meagre allowances from the union, others picked up work elsewhere, many from their former adversary, John Henderson. There was some debate in the ranks as to whether working for Henderson constituted strike breaking, but U.M.W. officials assured them that they could "use" Henderson or anyone else to further the cause. Henderson himself had no qualms about hiring Tait's strikers to get his own operations started. He had left the Minto Coal Company under a cloud, accused of embezzling company funds, and there was no love lost between him and Sir Thomas Tait.<sup>100</sup> There was no violence during the strike, although, in common with the rest of District 26, the Minto strikers held a May Day demonstration in solidarity with the leaders of the Winnipeg General Strike (then imprisoned) in 1920. This was the only place in New Brunswick where May Day was celebrated. The demonstration must have infuriated the management of Minto Coal, for two weeks later, 60 families were evicted from the company's homes.<sup>101</sup>

In July 1920, the federal government appointed a Royal Commission, under the chairmanship of Eugene McGrath Quirk, to investigate conditions in the Nova Scotia coalfields, then building up to the great confrontations of 1922-25. Minto was placed on the agenda, and in August hearings were held in Fredericton. Charles Coll, acting general manager of Minto Coal, told the Commission that as far as the key demand for recognition of the United Mine Workers was concerned, "this company has already taken a definite and unalterable stand. We are not prepared to consider this question under any circumstances." The Commission, which reported in the fall, did recommend the advisability of the Minto Coal Company's recognition of the union, of its improving the water supply in its housing project, upgrading conditions at the workplace, and sundry other items. A very favorable wage increase of \$1.00 per day was also recommended.<sup>102</sup>

The government did not force Sir Thomas Tait to recognize the U.M.W. The Minto Coal Company did agree to the recommended pay increase, the cost of which was passed on to the C.P.R. The union abandoned its struggle for recognition. On 21 December, Robert Baxter, President of District 26, announced that he had "ordered the strike at Minto at an end as a result of information given me by E.M. Quirk," undoubtedly to the effect that there was no hope for better terms. To underscore the point, Tait declared, in order that there be no misunderstanding, that the settlement "was in no way due to any change in the attitude or the policy" of his firm towards the U.M.W.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, Vandenborre to Deputy Minister, 9 February 1920.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, Acting Commissioner to Deputy Minister; PANB, "Recollections of Michael A. Tooke."

<sup>101</sup> *Sydney Post*, 15 May 1920.

<sup>102</sup> *Labour Gazette*, 1920, 1176-79.

<sup>103</sup> *Saint John Globe*, 27 December 1920; *Sydney Post*, 28 December 1920.

The last phase of the history of Local 4552 is obscure. There was black-listing, but the union continued to function for a time. The virus of unionism spread, largely as a result of the diaspora of the Minto Coal employees. In January 1921, the Mirimachi Lumber Company took "steps to enforce a bigger tonnage per man and to make effective working conditions which in the past several years could not be enforced" (perhaps because of the threat of union trouble from the Minto Coal organization, since defeated). Taylor's men walked out in protest, and won certain adjustments in the programme.<sup>104</sup> Then, in April, a general attack was made on the miners' wage scales. Another strike ensued, involving numbers of workmen estimated variously at 122 or 250, at Mirimachi Lumber, as well as the Evans, Henderson, Welton, and L.W. Reid collieries. In July, pit committees reached compromise settlements (cutting back the wage reductions by 50 per cent) at the Taylor and Evans mines.<sup>105</sup> These events show that, in the context of the general upheavals of the immediate post-war period, the New Brunswickers as a whole were ready for organization, and could have been organized if a beach-head had been established at the Minto Coal Company. The chance would not come again until the C.I.O. period. In 1921, apparently during the course of the strikes of that year, the charter of Local 4552 was withdrawn by McLachlan, Baxter, and Hayes "on grounds that not enough men supported the local." The local leadership was upset, but it is doubtful this move made any real difference.<sup>106</sup> Tait had beaten the miners.

The defeat suffered by Local 4552 in Minto foreshadowed the tribulations which would bring the United Mine Workers' organization in Canada to the brink of dissolution by 1925. The national coal crisis reached a low point in June, when there were riots by desperate strikers in New Waterford, Nova Scotia and Drumheller, Alberta, troops and police were called out in both provinces, and working-class blood was shed. Minto too began to stir. In June, the workers at the Minto Coal Company suffered a wage cut, and started to re-organize, this time as a branch of the One Big Union, the first and only radical labour organization in Minto's history.

The One Big Union idea, it is reported, came from Frank Vandenborre, who had managed to get back on the Minto Coal payroll in the interim.<sup>107</sup> Another prominent leader in the movement was Mathias Wuhr, a "stocky German" who later served as head of the U.M.W. in Minto during the late 1930s and again in the 1950s. Wuhr was the only labour leader in Minto to ever gain

<sup>104</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 318, 406, clippings, 10-11 January 1921.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 324, 40, reports of strike by Vandenborre and John Moffat, *Labour Gazette*, Maritimes correspondent.

<sup>106</sup> Wade manuscript, 4.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 5. According to another account, the One Big Union idea originated from "some either Belgian or French[man] who had worked out here and had worked out West in Alberta also," which may have been Vandenborre, or another immigrant radical. PANB, Chiasson/Vandenbroeck interview, 8-9.

public recognition, although not for services rendered in the union movement. In 1932, he was awarded \$1,000 from the Carnegie Foundation of New York for the heroism he displayed during a perilous mine rescue operation in Minto.<sup>106</sup> Men like Wuhr seem to have been blessed with the sterling qualities of character required of the trade-union pioneer. Wuhr and Otten Coffin, apparently another German, are listed as the executives of the Minto Unit of the One Big Union in the Department of Labour's *Report on Labour Organizations in Canada* for 1925 (that of 1926 also lists a Unit in existence at Newcastle Bridge, headed by one G. Straatman, apparently a Fleming, and James Everitt).

Wuhr admitted that "we were only a few" prior to January 1926. Alan King, the unpopular general-manager of the Minto Coal Company, had posted notices of further wage cuts of 25 per cent. This sparked a strike of 290 workers, led by the One Big Unionists, which commenced on 4 January 1926. The strike had been probably provoked by the company in order to flush out, and destroy, the union incubus. In a telephone conversation with Labour Department officials on 12 January, Sir Thomas Tait conceded that the wage reductions had been "drastic," and claimed that they were the work of an over-zealous Alan King.<sup>107</sup> However, if an honest mistake of sorts had been made, no attempt was made to rectify it. King certainly took no responsibility for the strike, blaming it on "communistic agitators from the West" and describing the walkout as an "offshoot" of the troubles in Alberta.<sup>108</sup> Tait is reported to have recruited strike-breakers in Montreal, but it is not clear how many came through. The One Big Union had recently showed some signs of life in the metropolis, and claimed to have foiled Tait's efforts by picketing the Windsor Station.<sup>109</sup> The Winnipeg-based organization certainly took Minto seriously, sending in its leading Montreal organizer, J.A. St. André, to the strike zone, along with "Comrade Murray," from Pictou County, the stronghold of the O.B.U. in Nova Scotia. Murray was a coal miner, while St. André (who was bilingual) "surely put some life into the French-Canadian workers around Minto." Acadian, English-speaking, and immigrant workmen all took an active part in the struggle, as shown by the surnames of the local workers who served as O.B.U. officials and committeemen: eight British, three French, two Flemish and two German.<sup>110</sup> Another feature of the strike was the involvement of the women of Minto, who "decided that the time had come to organize

<sup>106</sup> *Sydney Post*, 12 January 1938.

<sup>107</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 336, 3, Wuhr to Frank J. Plant, 11 January 1926; E.M. Quirk to Department, 12 January 1926; H.H. Ward to J.H. King, 15 January 1926.

<sup>108</sup> *Gleaner*, 12 January 1926.

<sup>109</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 21 January 1926. The Winnipeg-based union was then engaged in an important organizing drive in Quebec and in Nova Scotia. See Mary Jordan, *Survival* (Toronto 1975), and Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, the two monographs on the union's history, neither one of which make any reference to the Minto episode.

<sup>110</sup> Names drawn from the relevant entries in the Department of Labour's annual union

themselves like their men folk" and formed a union auxiliary. The women's auxiliary movement, typical of left-wing unionism in the period between the wars, attracted some 106 adherents.<sup>113</sup>

The One Big Union episode attracted the attention of the provincial government, which, for the first time, intervened directly to mediate class conflict in Minto. The local Liberals had been in power during the strike of 1920, but in 1925, the Conservatives were returned to power under the leadership of J.B.M. Baxter. The Baxter government seems to have been anxious to impress the working-class electorate of the province, without alienating, of course, its business supporters. Two new government back-benchers, Benton Evans and A.D. Taylor, of course, were Minto coal operators. Both gentlemen were evidently anxious to settle the trouble at Minto Coal before it spread. A delegation of the independent operators converged on Fredericton, demanding state intervention. Baxter proposed a Royal Commission, and secured the approval of Sir Thomas Tait. The workers seem to have been suitably impressed, for on 15 January, they agreed to return to the pits pending the Commission's report, confident that the government would do them justice.<sup>114</sup> We may note that the response of the New Brunswick government towards the One Big Union in 1926 was significantly different from that of the federal state in 1919-20, when it incurred repression of the most severe and uncompromising kind.

The Commission, chaired by E.R. Teed, "was taken right into the mines" and homes of the workers. In the former, the delegation "had to plod along through mud and water [and] some places the timber supporting the roof was all broken down . . . the coal dust and lack of air almost choked them." Visiting 12 of the "shacks:"

nine of them were found in awful condition. Doors would not close properly, roofs leaking . . . the children seemed to all have whooping cough. Sanitary conditions were awful bad, some of the toilets not having been cleaned for over six months . . . the Commission went home, wet, tired, and feeling disgusted with the whole job.

Amongst other things was "proved conclusively that boys thirteen years of age were working in the mines."<sup>115</sup>

The miners, however, received no immediate satisfaction from the Commission. Its proposals for settling the wage dispute were rejected by a meeting of the Minto coal employees on 14 March, which also passed a resolution demanding that A.D. Taylor and Benton Evans, their mine-owner M.L.A.'s, introduce an eight-hour law at the next session of the legislature. In the meantime, "great interest" was being aroused throughout the coalfield in the proceedings. Sixty-six members from other local collieries signed up for the

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directory, *Report on Labour Organizations in Canada, 1925-1928*, and the *Gleaner*, 14 January 1926.

<sup>113</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 25 March 1926.

<sup>114</sup> *Gleaner*, 14-18 January 1926.

<sup>115</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 25 March 1926.



O.B.U., and it was also reported that lumber workers in the Minto district were "also awakening to the necessity of organization." Premier Baxter must have been getting worried, for he launched a public attack on the One Big Union for stirring up trouble in Minto on 16 March, in a speech, not to businessmen, but to the New Brunswick Federation of Labour in Saint John.<sup>116</sup> It does not seem however, that the Minto workers were being unduly manipulated by their left-wing friends. "Throughout the negotiations," the Commission later reported, "the men adopted the principle that their representatives must refer any proposal to a mass meeting for approval before it could be binding." The real problem was the very high degree of class feeling in the community, "the entire lack of confidence between the contending parties regarding their motives, aims, and representations."<sup>117</sup> "Can one wonder," asked the *One Big Union Bulletin*,<sup>118</sup>

about the lack of confidence the workers have . . . when they see their fellow workers crushed, dismembered, and brought to the surface in a bucket . . . when the miners know there is not one law on the statute book to protect them from the avariciousness of the Minto Coal Company . . . there is not a red-blooded man or woman in Canada who has one iota of confidence in the Minto Coal Company.

A call for resumption of the strike was issued on 16 March, which met with 100 per cent response from the rank and file.

Would the state and the bosses now combine to crush the radical union? Not quite. The Commission re-convened, and seems to have persuaded Tait and King to make concessions, paring their wage cuts to 12 1/2 per cent. On 26 March, the mine workers voted to return to work, "full of courage and hope." Having, after all, "forced the hand of the legislature," thus "demonstrating the power of industrial solidarity and action," they had reason to be.<sup>119</sup> Premier Baxter was also pleased. The Minto Coal Commission had proved that New Brunswick was governed by men "to whom labour . . . could appeal direct."<sup>120</sup> We are thus faced with a paradox. Although Minto had once more been rent by open class strife the legitimacy of the political authorities had, if anything, been strengthened by the confrontation. The One Big Union itself had played, indirectly, a large role in this latter process. Because it believed, on ideological ground, in rank-and-file organization, which precluded the necessity for such bureaucratic paraphernalia as a check-off, its leaders had not pressed the demand which might have made accommodation impossible: union recognition.

The impact of the union's radical philosophy *per se* on Minto is difficult to measure. R.B. Russell's biographer asserts that the union's push into franco-

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Report of the Commission Re Minto Coal Co. Ltd., 1926, 70.

<sup>118</sup> *OBV Bulletin*, 19 August 1926.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 March 1926.

phone Canada in the mid-1920s (of which the Minto affair may be viewed as a part) was partly motivated by a belief that it had a "good chance of organizing... where the 'Bolshevik' label on the O.B.U. was comparatively unknown."<sup>121</sup> Obviously men like Vandenborre knew what the union stood for, but many rank-and-filers undoubtedly viewed it as a miners' organization and nothing more. Alan King's assertion that the union was "communist" may have been taken with a grain of salt by men who confronted the general manager on a day-to-day basis. There seems to have been little political content in the struggles of January-March 1926, except insofar as it involved demands for attention to the miners' grievances by the ruling party. After the struggle was over, however, the O.B.U. may have stepped up its activities on the ideological front, as suggested by the following report:

The Minto miners have learned a great deal... since they joined up with the O.B.U. Lectures on working class problems are given from time to time, and the Bulletin is often used as a text-book and explained from the point of view of the class struggle. The social side... is not neglected. Dances are held regularly and are well attended. Tomorrow will be a Gala night, for the big dance in aid of the British miners is to take place. Everyone is agog, and that it will be a huge success is a foregone conclusion.<sup>122</sup>

Perhaps if the O.B.U. had been a stronger and more generally viable organization, its impact would have been significant. It had, after all, no rivals in the field. Had it penetrated more deeply into the rural base by actually organizing the loggers (there is no concrete evidence of this), had it been able to win more benefits for the miners, had the activities of its womens' organizations and social clubs continued, the O.B.U. might have altered the political context of Minto's popular culture. Minto, however, was anti-union territory. By 1928, the O.B.U. had simply disappeared in the district, its most stalwart supporters having probably succumbed by this time to the pincers of discrimination. Aside from Newcastle Bridge, the only other mine besides Minto Coal which had any O.B.U. organization was that of the Avon Coal Company. One Big Unionism had certainly failed to crack the crust of deference, even temporarily, at the Taylor and Evans collieries.<sup>123</sup>

As C.B. Wade remarked of the Minto union militants, "they never gave up." When the Depression first hit Minto, a local sawmill worker, Thomas McDermott wrote to Glace Bay and to the Toronto headquarters of the Workers Unity League, a Communist labour organization, for help. He urged the W.U.L. to "send Jim McLaughlin [sic]... down here as he understands how to

<sup>121</sup> Jordan, *Survival*, 226-7.

<sup>122</sup> *OBU Bulletin*, 29 July 1926.

<sup>123</sup> There was a brief strike at Avon Coal in 1928 over conditions of work, which was settled through the intervention of federal Minister of Labour Peter Heenan. PAC, Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 338, 26; *Labour Gazette*, 1928, 112, 251. The O.B.U. units in the Minto area disappeared from the Department of Labour's directory in 1929.

organize the men . . . we want him here in the worst condition."<sup>124</sup> The Communists, however, did not respond to the appeal.

There was, nevertheless, trouble brewing in Minto. New Brunswick's new Conservative Premier, L.P.D. Tilley, seems to have been determined to head it off through reform. In 1932-33, steps were taken to eliminate some of the conditions which the Royal Commission had uncovered in 1925. This led to New Brunswick's first mines act, passed into law in April 1933. The act abolished child labour in the mines. It set out detailed regulations for the workings of a colliery, to ensure that workers breathed "sufficient oxygen," and would not be needlessly killed or injured. One potential source of conflict with the coal-owners was avoided by side-stepping around the miners' certification issue. A man at the face had to have a certificate, but this could be one issued "by any Official Mining Board in Canada or the British Isles," or simply a paper "signed by a well-known coal operator." Another troublesome issue, however, was not. The act stipulated that no workman could be employed underground for more than eight hours a day. Long-wall operators were given until 31 December 1933, to change their work methods accordingly.<sup>125</sup> It is possible that the legislation was approved of by most of the mine owners, but not evidently, by the Minto Coal Company.

Militants at the Minto Coal Company's plants took the government's reforms as a signal to re-organize. Wage cutting sparked a short-lived and unsuccessful strike movement at the Tweedie mine in June.<sup>126</sup> The main activity, however, was at the "Slope" in North Minto. When manager King showed no sign of adherence to either the spirit or the letter of the new law, the pit was pulled out on strike on 3 January 1934. The Company's attitude was well expressed by Sir Thomas Tait, who described the trouble as "undoubtedly instigated by Nova Scotia interests who are annoyed that Minto has mined under lower prices and secured greater property than formerly."<sup>127</sup> The leader of the strike movement was one Thomas White, whose background is unknown. John Henderson noted that "No person seems to know who Thomas White is or where he came from, not even the R.C.M.P., although all believe he is a RED and a paid agitator."<sup>128</sup>

White was not a Communist. He was a moderate who believed that the provincial government should and could side with the mine workers, given the evident justice of their cause. This optimistic view was given credence by the events of January 1934. W.E. McMullen, the New Brunswick mines inspector

<sup>124</sup> Public Archives of Ontario, Communist Party of Canada Papers, Box 2, File 16, McLachlan to Tom Ewen, 10 June 1931; McDermott to Ewen, 12 July 1931.

<sup>125</sup> *Statutes of New Brunswick*, 'An Act to Amend (the Act) Respecting Mines and Minerals,' 23 George V, chapter 23.

<sup>126</sup> *Labour Gazette*, 1933, 683-5.

<sup>127</sup> Wade manuscript, 6.

<sup>128</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 361, 82, Henderson to Department, 11 May 1934.

appointed under the terms of the 1933 act, reported to the Premier the real cause of the strike. King had insisted that the long-wall crews at the "Slope" stay below ground until their traditional "cut" of 40 feet per day was completed, a job which took up to 12 hours.<sup>129</sup> Tilley came to Minto, and at a mass meeting at the Cady's Theatre (where the O.B.U. rallies of 1926 had been held) "laid down the law to A.D. King," who was in attendance:

You say that they cannot leave it [the cut] unfinished. That they must have their places cleaned up. If they don't clean it up in 8 hours then you say to them don't come around and expect to get work again in our mines. I think I have laid the finger on the whole trouble here.<sup>130</sup>

Tilley called a conference of the parties to the dispute, at which it was agreed that the eight-hour law had to be enforced on a basis of eight hours face-to-face, and that King would either make the necessary changes in the operations of the Minto Coal Company to accommodate this, or pay his men over-time. The strike ended on 10 January.

King responded to this rebuff by chiselling on the pay scale and firing most of the miners' helpers.<sup>131</sup> Meanwhile, a new organization, led by White and Dell Hartt (formerly active in the One Big Union) began to take shape. The strategy was to assert the legitimacy of the organization by stressing the fact that it was entirely under local control. This was a principle in which White at least firmly believed. He opposed, for example, the later invasion of the field by the U.M.W.<sup>132</sup> The title of the group — the Northfield Central Provincial Miners' Union — was literally parochial. In early March, a delegation of six unionists trekked to Fredericton to meet the Premier, "in an effort to get his support for recognition of the union." As Hartt told Tilley, "several operators have told the men that if they joined the union they could take their tools and pull out."<sup>133</sup> Nothing however, came of the conference. Tilley was not about to become a Canadian Roosevelt.

In response to worsening conditions at the workplace and continuing intimidation of activists, possibly also in an effort to "force the hand of the legislature," the Northfield Union called a strike on 3 April 1934, demanding pay hikes and union recognition. On 20 April the men at the "Slope" were joined by Newcastle Bridge (Black Diamond Mine) and 400 men were idled in

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum for the information of Honorable L.P.D. Tilley, 5 January 1934, cited in Wade manuscript, 6.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>131</sup> *The Worker*, 12 May 1934. This rare report of a Minto happening in the Communist press indicates that, as already suggested, there were some Communist-sympathizers in the district at this time. What is sure is that these individuals did not succeed (if they tried) in organizing a party branch.

<sup>132</sup> For White's latter career as a critic of international unionism see the *Gleaner*, 29 November 1937; *Sydney Post-Record*, 20 January 1938. Had White been a Communist, as Henderson alleged, he would have 1) tried to set up a branch of the WUL in Minto in 1933-34, and 2) supported the United Mine Workers in 1937-38.

<sup>133</sup> Wade manuscript, 8.

the community's largest-ever turnout. Neither the Minto Coal Company nor Welton and Henderson's, of course, would treat with the rebels. By this time Tilley was in England. Officials of the federal Department of Labour urged the miners to go back to work pending investigation of their grievances. They refused, although there were "some elements" in the ranks who were in favour of the proposition.<sup>134</sup>

This strike was notable for the first documented case of class violence in Minto, a fight on 25 April between strikers at the "Slope," 15 outside scabs, and the local R.C.M.P. The surnames of the eight men arrested in the aftermath are suggestive of the same theme of cross-cultural consensus observable in the mid-1920s: these were British, French, and Flemish. The community as a whole seems to have disapproved of the jailing of the militants, for on 28 April, a protest parade of several hundred men, women and children marched through the streets of Minto. The Tweedie miners also staged a one-day walkout in sympathy.<sup>135</sup> By this time, however, many strikers were reported to have been "in a condition bordering on starvation." An independent union could not stand the gaff. The only strike relief was obtained by scrounging, "travelling about the countryside asking residents for food." On 7 May the picket lines dissolved and a large body of strikers surrendered, leaving the rest to an "uncertain fate" at the hands of their employers. A number of militants were blacklisted, including Vandendorre, who was not rehired by the Minto Coal Company until November.<sup>136</sup> Thus were dashed the brave hopes of the Northfield Central Provincial Miners' Union.

### III

THE PORTRAIT of New Brunswick's political quiescence during the 1930s Depression can be overdrawn. In 1935, the electorate threw out the Conservatives, installing a new Liberal government, headed, at least nominally, by A. Alison Dysart, a Roman Catholic from Saint John, and a man sympathetic to organized labour. This was a time, of course, of far-reaching reforms, such as the Wagner Act in the United States (1935), passed under the impetus of the New Deal. This gave legal sanction to collective bargaining and allowed John L. Lewis, for example, to enroll thousands of American coal miners in the U.M.W. with the slogan, "The President wants you to join the union." In one

<sup>134</sup> Worker report: *Gleaner*, 23-24 April 1934; *Moncton Daily Times*, 21 April 1934.

<sup>135</sup> Names of militants published in the *Moncton Daily Times*, 25 April 1934, and the *Gleaner*, 26 April 1934; and 4 May 1934.

<sup>136</sup> Not a particularly stiff sentence, and, according to C.B. Wade, Vandendorre was rehired by the Minto Coal Company "on the understanding that others would be taken back." (8) Interestingly, Vandendorre had, by this time, attained the position of an "overman" (foreman) underground. This episode shows the resiliency of the union tradition among immigrants like Vandendorre (foremen did not customarily strike with miners), also the fact that skilled workers had some limited, individualized, bargaining power in industry.

Canadian province, New Brunswick's neighbour to the east, Nova Scotia, similar legislation was passed in April 1937, by the Liberal government of Angus L. Macdonald.<sup>137</sup> In Ottawa the anti-labour Bennett regime had been ousted by the mildly progressive Mackenzie King. King had made no move to copy the Roosevelt legislation, but had repealed one anti-labour and anti-radical statute, Section 98 of the Criminal Code. In 1936-37, the legislature at Fredericton too had passed reforms, specifically the establishment of the New Brunswick Fair Wages Commission, giving to the state some control of wages and conditions of labour in the province.<sup>138</sup> Trade unionists were hopeful of more resolute action along the lines of the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act. Dysart did assure the New Brunswick Federation of Labour that the government was "considering a measure to give legal right to workers to join unions of their choice."<sup>139</sup>

In Minto, the Liberals had taken the seats of both A.D. Taylor and W. Benton Evans, although by very small margins. Only one of the new members for Queen's and Sunbury was a resident of the industrial community, Major Walter Lawson (Liberal, Sunbury). Lawson was not a mine owner, but he was head of the Minto branch of the Canadian Legion, an organization which, like the Orangemen, must have had a working-class constituency, drawn mainly from the ranks of the British and English-speaking workers. In 1936, District 26 of the U.M.W., then undergoing a distinct revival of its fortunes in Nova Scotia, returned to the New Brunswick coalfield. By virtue of its affiliations with the Lewis organization in the United States, District 26 lay on the cutting edge of the drive to organize the unorganized under the auspices of the C.I.O. movement, founded in 1935. The C.I.O. constituted one of the most significant upheavals in North American labour history; its unions were hated and feared by employers on both sides of the border.<sup>140</sup> Alton Taylor called it the "entering wedge" of "communism or fascism" in Minto.<sup>141</sup> To the local miners, however, the movement seems to have had the same, almost magnetic, appeal that it evoked in the mines, mills, and factories of the United States, and in other Canadian communities such as Oshawa or Sydney. Represented once more by Silby Barrett, the U.M.W. grew rapidly in Minto. In February 1937, Local 7409 was chartered, under the leadership of Mathias Wuhr and William

<sup>137</sup> MacEwan, *Miners*, 151-223.

<sup>138</sup> *Statutes of New Brunswick*, 'An Act Respecting the Fair Wages of Workmen,' 1 Edward VIII, ch. 51; 'Amended,' 1 George VI, ch. 36.

<sup>139</sup> *U.M.W. Journal*, 6 January 1938.

<sup>140</sup> Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973).

<sup>141</sup> *Gleaner*, 2 November 1937. This is the only reference in printed sources I have found to an anti-communist theme in anti-union propaganda, which suggests that businessmen did not regard radicalism *per se* as a threat. More typically, the C.I.O. was portrayed as simply lawless, or part of a well organized plot "by certain circles to drive New Brunswick coal from the market and increase the sale of Nova Scotia coal." (*Gleaner*, 14-15 October 1937).

Walker, and before long "enough men had joined or indicated support for the District to make the opening moves for recognition."<sup>142</sup>

During summer 1937, union officers Barrett and Walker met with members of the New Brunswick government to press their case. They failed to gain anything, primarily because the government's policy towards trade unionism was not directed by Dysart alone, but also by the number two man in the administration, J.B. McNair, Acting Minister of Labour. McNair was a hard-liner whose name was rightly linked during the events of 1937-38 in Minto with those of Hepburn in Ontario and Duplessis in Quebec, violent opponents of "communism" and industrial unionism. Although the issue was not decided definitively for several months, McNair ultimately gained the upper hand over Dysart in the debate over labour policy, and the problem of the Minto miners in particular. McNair's accession to the premiership in 1940 was to demonstrate the limitations of Liberal reform in New Brunswick.

The pot finally boiled over in autumn 1937. On 12 October, the District leaders called a negotiating session with the coal operators, but the latter group boycotted the proceedings to a man. Two days later, a mass meeting was called, which was attended by some 300 union supporters, to endorse a call by Barrett and D.W. Morrison, the president of District 26, for a general strike. The only demand put forward was for recognition of the U.M.W., as a "first step," of course, towards a better standard of life. On 15 October, close to 1,000 mine workers at 11 collieries failed to report to work. The "big strike," a remarkable demonstration of the power of the union ideal in Minto in the late 1930s had begun.

The solidarity of the Minto miners in mid-October was close to complete. The number of wage earners at the strike-bound plants who ignored the strike call were few: 18 at Newcastle Bridge, 10 at Mirimachi Lumber, 5 at the Tweedie mine, and a few others at some of the smaller collieries. Of the leading businessmen in the industry, only the old King family were immune to the strike disease.<sup>143</sup> Loyalism made a strong show of resistance to the trend towards rebellion at only one of the large mines: Benton Evans' Rothwell colliery. Twenty-nine workmen (of 120) "scabbed" on the first day of the strike. On the Saturday following, Evans had a public debate with the strike leaders, then took a secret ballot (a procedure which had been ignored by the U.M.W.) among the employees. The vote went 52-29 in Evans' favour, with one-quarter of the employees, having "gone to their homes at some distance" when the trouble began, not taking part. Before long, the Rothwell mine was

<sup>142</sup> Wade manuscript, 10.

<sup>143</sup> Figures on blacklegs from the *Gleaner*, 22 October 1937. On the numbers of collieries involved, the sources are government questionnaires sent to all employers in the area found in the PAC, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 393, 18. Aside from the "big five" (Minto Coal, Mirimachi Lumber, Welton and Henderson's, Rothwell Coal, and Avon Coal) Harvey Welton Ltd., McDougall Brothers, Clarence Yeaman's, Joseph Libby, Thomas Swift, and the Newcastle Coal Co., a small pit operated by A.D. Taylor of Mirimachi were struck.

back in production. P.G. (Paddy) Muise, a U.M.W. official from New Waterford, Nova Scotia, made the standard charge that Evans had imported strike-breakers. Evans invited Muise to "come to our office and I will show him the payroll," which put an end to the debate.<sup>144</sup>

The militants were frustrated by Evans' coup. Their initial response was individual acts of sabotage. Wires were cut and switches thrown in the colliery's power plant, and the mine was temporarily put out of action by flooding. Then, on 29 October, rocks were thrown and fights broke out at the colliery gates, "serious trouble" being avoided by the joint actions of Wuhr, who "urged the strikers to resume peaceful picketing," and Evans, who "ordered his employees back to the mine where they prepared to battle the pickets."<sup>145</sup> This marked an end to the violence. The strikers turned to more disciplined tactics of mass picketing, beginning on 2 November, when "four hundred strike pickets swung into line and paraded through the streets of Minto and adjoining villages... with others joining the ranks as they marched along."<sup>146</sup>

Minto's working-class community girded itself for collective struggle, drawing deeply on accumulated traditions of popular culture for sustenance. The daily ritual of the mass picket, for example, was impressive. It began at 5 a.m., with "two loud explosions which reverberate throughout the whole district... followed during the next hour or two by whooping and yelling that can be heard for a mile or two," after which "union men travel[ed] in bands in the early morning darkness" to one of the three big mines still operating (Rothwell, Mirimachi Lumber, and Black Diamond) in the district. It was theatre perhaps, but the deadly earnest theatre of class struggle. Up to 600 people participated in the daily event, which continued throughout the months of November, and the precise schedule was a closely guarded secret. Men like Evans were clearly unnerved by it.<sup>147</sup>

The strikers did not even tell their wives where the picket would be on any given morning, which angered the women, who began to organize and agitate for the right to participate in the demonstrations. Students from Fredericton were reported to have been particularly active in stirring up the "women-folk." As Alton Taylor remarked, "we didn't have the co-educational angle until after the U.N.B. students were here." The organization involved was the Fredericton branch of the Student Christian Movement, which propagandized for the union and raised money for miners' relief in the capital, as well as dispatching orators into the strike zone. Depression-era college activists in New Brunswick were

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, Evans to Dickson, 20 October 1937; *Halifax Herald*, 29 October 1937; *Gleaner*, 18 October 1937.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 October, 1 November 1937; *Montreal Gazette*, 1 November 1937; *Report of the Commissioner of the R.C.M.P.*, 1937, 19.

<sup>146</sup> *Gleaner*, 2 November 1937.

<sup>147</sup> The quotation is Evans' own description, *Gleaner*, 6 November 1937.



no different from their counterparts in southern Ontario in their enthusiasm for labour's cause.<sup>148</sup>

Conditions in Minto had reached a sad pass when, as Alton Taylor remarked, the local workers "listened to the stories of strangers who have nothing at stake in the community"<sup>149</sup> rather than the counsel of their traditional leadership and social betters. In November and December 1937, Minto was a bitterly divided town. The strikers received little support from the local middle class. Under pressure from wholesalers, businessmen cut off credit to the union and its members in the middle of December. Thomas Swift, Minto's leading merchant and also a small-time coal operator, organized a "Shopkeepers' Committee" to oppose the strike.<sup>150</sup> Although a few brave churchmen in New Brunswick, such as Reverend John Linton, head of a leading Baptist congregation in Fredericton, defended the "rights of the working man" and vigorously denounced the government's apparent support of the coal operators, there is no evidence of such activities in Minto itself. As the strikers' hardship increased, one local clergyman described the S.C.M.'s analysis of the situation as "exaggerated."<sup>151</sup>

Yet as Minto split into two opposing camps, the more far-sighted of the community's elite took a second look at the situation. The onset of the Christmas season provided an ideal opportunity for the salving of the strife-torn community's social wounds. Minto's clergymen were among the chief activists of the newly-formed "Citizens' Welfare Committee," chaired by a local magistrate, whose aim was defined as the distribution of charity "regardless of nationality, creed, or labour dispute." Shrewd politicians like Major Lawson and other area-M.L.A.'s made well-publicized contributions to the cause. Although these efforts did help to brighten an otherwise bleak holiday for the strikers' children, who were given candies and oranges by the Committee, their main impact was probably political in nature.<sup>152</sup>

The real philanthropists in all of this were the mine workers of Nova Scotia, who levied themselves for approximately \$1,000 per week for Minto strike relief from mid-October of 1937 to mid-January 1938. As was the case during the 1937 Oshawa auto-workers' strike, there were no American or C.I.O. funds

<sup>148</sup> *Gleaner*, 19 November, 2, 8 December, 1937: for youth in Ontario see Irving Abella, "Oshawa, 1937," in *On Strike* (Toronto 1975).

<sup>149</sup> *Halifax Herald*, 14 October 1937.

<sup>150</sup> *Gleaner*, 16, 18, 20 December 1937. Thomas Swift operated the strike-bound Lockowan mine. Some records from this company have survived in the PANB, Thomas Swift and Sons Papers.

<sup>151</sup> Linton's sermon on the strike "stirred up considerable talk" in Minto (*Gleaner*, 15 November 1937). Excerpts were later published in the C.C.F. journal, *New Commonwealth*, 11 December 1937. Father Fraser (Minto, N.B.) quoted in the *Gleaner*, 30 November 1937.

<sup>152</sup> *Gleaner*, 24, 27, 31 December 1937. For an analysis of "babbit" support of miners' strikes (in Cape Breton) from the view of hegemony see the *Left Wing* (Toronto), April 1925.

forthcoming to finance the strike.<sup>153</sup> As can be imagined this money did not go a long way in Minto. The union admitted "shortages of food and fuel;" according to the oral tradition, there was actual hunger.<sup>154</sup> In November, the union organized hunting parties to supplement food supplies, although local authorities attempted to stem the flow of moose meat into the community by revoking the hunting licenses of striking immigrants.<sup>155</sup> There was undoubtedly a considerable amount of poaching in the area during the winter of 1937-38.

The United Mine Workers charged the provincial government with conspiring with the coal operators and a "wealthy capitalism" to keep industrial unionism out of New Brunswick.<sup>156</sup> Certainly at no time in Minto's history were relations between the local state and the coal miners more strained. A few days after the walkout began, the administration had offered the strikers an investigation of their grievances by the Fair Wages Board, if they would return to work. Although this was not immediately ruled out by union officials, the *Minto Strike News*, distributed by Local 7409 on 25 October, argued against the idea on principle: "Two of the F.W.B. are friends of labour, says the government, two do not belong to either class. What class is that?"<sup>157</sup> As late as 15 November, D.W. Morrison and Premier Dysart were having an "informal chat," but at some point these talks broke down irrevocably. On 25 November, the government's offer was submitted to the membership, with a recommendation to reject. The vote was 762-15 against, with 69 union members reportedly out hunting. An additional 50-60 unionists were then working at the MacDougall Brothers mine, the MacDougalls having defied all canons of business ethics in Minto and recognized the U.M.W.<sup>158</sup> Following this rebuff, Dysart faded from the scene, and McNair took full charge of the government's policy. McNair set the tone of further debate with his declaration on the morning after the balloting that the only question remaining was "whether the C.I.O. or the government is going to run New Brunswick."<sup>159</sup> On 1 December, 30 day eviction notices were served on some 400 families in the strike zone by the companies: 50 at Mirimachi Lumber, 60 at Avon Coal, 8 at the Benton Evans mine, and most of the rest at the Minto Coal Company.

The U.M.W. appealed to higher authorities. They wrote to Norman MacLeod Rogers, federal Minister of Labour and a leading progressive in the King cabinet, asking him to use his "good offices to see that the miners of Minto be

<sup>153</sup> Funding of the strike was closely monitored by the *Gleaner* (the biggest story of the year, the strike made front-page news for over two months). For the illusion of CIO financing see Abella, *Nationalism*, 20.

<sup>154</sup> *UMW Journal*, 15 December 1937, Nason interview.

<sup>155</sup> *Gleaner*, 15 November 1937.

<sup>156</sup> *UMW Journal*, 15 December 1937.

<sup>157</sup> *Gleaner*, 5 November 1937.

<sup>158</sup> This on the second day of the strike. *Gleaner*, 15 October 1937. Analysis of the voting from the *Montreal Gazette*, 26 November 1937. Curiously, the *Gleaner* did not publish the results of the ballot (20 November 1937).

<sup>159</sup> *Gleaner*, 26 November 1937.

treated as free industrial citizens of Canada."<sup>160</sup> Rogers was sympathetic, and offered the miners a federal conciliation board. Alton Taylor, speaking for the operators, sharply rebuked Rogers for his alleged "recognition" of the U.M.W. McNair too was angry, and warned Ottawa to "stay out" of the dispute.<sup>161</sup> The King government, however, would not take no as an answer from either source. A board would be established, the non-co-operation of the employers notwithstanding. D.W. Morrison, the moderate president of District 26, saw these developments as a means by which the U.M.W. could extricate itself from the Minto imbroglio. On 11 December, he ordered the strike at an end.<sup>162</sup>

For the present, however, the mine owners were maintaining their dubious stand of opposition to federal intervention. The strike became a lock-out on 12-13 December, when the operators refused to take back any of the strikers, except on the "understanding" — this seems to have involved an individual, written commitment — "that they [the miners] were doing so with the willingness to accept the ruling of the N.B. Fair Wages Board rather than of a Conciliation Board." The number of men who accepted these conditions is unclear. There was a "rush" reported around Christmas, which had "dwindled to a trickle" by the New Year. On 22 December, for example, the "Slope" mine was re-opened for the first time, with seven union men. After the holidays were over there were reported back at work 28 men at the "Slope" (or 12.5 per cent of the payroll), 44 at Avon Coal (29 per cent), 70 at Mirimachi Lumber (33 per cent), 80 at the Rothwell colliery (66 per cent), and probably 30 (18.5 per cent) at the Black Diamond mine at Newcastle Bridge.<sup>163</sup>

The conciliation board arrived in Minto on 3 January. Chaired by Justice J.O. McNery, it included James A. Whitebone, president of the N.B. Federation of Labour, which strongly supported the U.M.W., and Harold Colwell, a Saint John merchant appointed in the absence of any nominee being forthcoming from the coal owners. The character of the board's reception once again suggests the interaction between the residual and the emergent, the habits of deference and the expectations of the crowd, which informed class expression in Minto:

Wild cheers greeted the arrival of the Board members last evening... an escort of strikers estimated to be about 500 strong... trudged through the snow following the Board members to their hotel. Cheers and shouts of welcome rang out repeatedly from the crowd.

Later a union meeting was held, after which 200 militants gathered "at the

<sup>160</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 1 December 1937.

<sup>161</sup> All of this in spite of the fact that Rogers had made his offer contingent upon the union stating its willingness to return to work. The fact that McNair at first welcomed Rogers' plan, then rejected it, is pretty clear proof that he was dancing to the tune of the coal operators, Tory though most of them were. See the *Ottawa Morning Citizen*, 3 December 1937; *Gleaner*, 11 December 1937; *Halifax Chronicle*, 15, 21 December 1937.

<sup>162</sup> *Gleaner*, 11 December 1937.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 21-30 December 1937; 8 January 1938.

home of Benton Evans . . . causing a din in front of the house, apparently with the idea of 'charivaring' him."<sup>164</sup> Would Minto ever be the same again?

The charivari party was the last public demonstration of the long strike and lock-out. The mine owners dropped their demands for "written commitments," and agreed to take back the men they needed without conditions. The local union leaders called a meeting on 8 or 9 January, to consider a recommendation to accept these terms, which were, with only three dissenting for the consensus. This move was variously described as "ordered by Mr. Morrison," and "taken independently of Nova Scotia organizers D.W. Morrison and Silby Barrett, who had fallen down from the very beginning in their promises of relief and assistance." In any event, "the time had come when the men could be asked to endure no more."<sup>165</sup> The Minto Coal Company took back, immediately, 150 men, Avon 77, Mitimachi 35, Rothwell 4, and Black Diamond 130. As it turned out, this move killed any slight chance which the union might have had for gaining recognition.

The board, in which both leaders and rank and file placed such hope, was a vast disappointment. Judge McNery was haughty and unsympathetic towards the plebeian cause. After one session he moved the hearings out of Minto, pointing out that "the court does not go to the people, the people come to the court." The board did hear the testimony of ordinary mine workers, 14 (including one foreman) on behalf of the company unions which had, in the interim, been set up at the Taylor and Benton Evans mines, 23 on behalf of the U.M.W. Of the latter, 15 had British surnames, four French, and four which were neither British nor French. Of the former, the "loyalists," 13 had British names, none French, one Italian.<sup>166</sup> No record seems to have been preserved of their views, mainly because, to the great chagrin of the trade unionists, the sessions were held *in camera*. The union press did, however, publish extracts from the testimony of their lawyer, Lauchlin D. Currie, a Liberal M.L.A. from Cape Breton. Currie's argument that co-operation with the workers, and the U.M.W. in particular, was the best way of securing a better deal for the industry from government and consumers must have been rejected by the operators, who had finally agreed to co-operate with the federal board.<sup>167</sup> Labour's representative on the body, Whitebone, was forced to resign as a result of a speech he made to the New Brunswick Federation of Labour in February 1938, on the Minto situation.<sup>168</sup> The main point of the bland *Report* of the board, which appeared in mid-summer, was that under existing legislation, no such body

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 January 1938; *Umw Journal*, 15 January 1938.

<sup>165</sup> *Gleaner*, 8, 10 January 1938.

<sup>166</sup> List of participants published in the *Sydney Post-Record*, 12, 20 January 1938. McNery quoted in the *Gleaner*, 4 January 1938.

<sup>167</sup> *Umw Journal*, 15 February 1938.

<sup>168</sup> *Halifax Chronicle*, 21 February 1938. Whitebone refused to be "neutral in opinion" on the subject of Minto, and, as far as the author's knowledge of this topic goes, there was nothing in the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (jurisdiction under which was ceded by the province of New Brunswick in 1926) which compelled him to be. He

could force employers to recognize a trade union not of their liking.<sup>168</sup> This was an obvious point: perhaps Morrison had been hoping against hope that Dysart would be able to deliver on his promises of legislative reform, perhaps not. The U.M.W.-C.I.O. in New Brunswick turned out to be the proverbial giant with the feet of clay. By mid-1938, 47 union militants (about 6 per cent of the whole), including Mathias Wuhr, could be identified as having been blacklisted.<sup>170</sup>

The United Mine Workers, as representative of the militant tradition in Minto, led a shadowy existence from 1938 until the war. It conducted but two strikes in the interim. The first (4 March 1939) was a protest by 350 U.M.W. supporters against the firing of two alleged trouble-makers at the Minto Coal Company, Albert Govang and Clarence Gughro. The second (31 August 1939) was an equally short-lived and unsuccessful protest led by the U.M.W. at New-castle Bridge against reported maltreatment of a number of "boy" labourers. Minto Coal and Welton and Henderson's seem to have been the only major operations at which the U.M.W. managed to survive.<sup>171</sup>

The period 1938-40 is more notable for the emergence of non-militant trade unionism, which represented, in essence, an adaptation of the older traditions of deference and loyalism to the conditions of the late 1930s. Sensing the need for concession to the form, if not the substance, of trade unionism, Taylor and Evans had encouraged the development of "company," "satellite," or "yellow dog" unionism amongst their employees, beginning with the core of strike breakers: up to two-thirds in the case of Evans' operation. These groups were known as the Mirimachi and Rothwell Mine Workers' Unions. By mid-1938, they had signed on the majority of the employees at these two companies.<sup>172</sup> Membership was compulsory at the Rothwell Coal Company. The movement at Mirimachi attracted the support of some genuine militants such as Thomas White, who had led the strike of 1934 but found all forms of international unionism distasteful.

Well aware of the accusations being hurled at them from the militants, the loyalists sought to establish a distance of sorts between them and their bosses. J.J. Tait (no relation to Sir Thomas), head of the Mirimachi group, took the initiative by writing to the All Canadian Congress of Labour (a central of

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seems to have been sacked as part of an effort by the state authorities (Rogers and McNery) to mollify the truculent coal operators.

<sup>168</sup> Report of the board, *Labour Gazette*, 1938, 727.

<sup>170</sup> *New Glasgow News*, 30 July 1938. The same report alleged that, due to short time and discrimination, "There is actually starvation among families in Minto" — by this time, Minto had passed out of the headlines and little outside relief, if any, would have been forthcoming.

<sup>171</sup> PAC, Department of Labour Papers, Strikes and Lockouts File, Box 400, 20; Box 402, 98.

<sup>172</sup> *Labour Gazette*, 1938, 728. Silby Barrett seems to have coined the phrase "yellow dog union," a reference to the written pledges of loyalty which the original members had given to Taylor and Evans.

national unions which had opposed the entry of the C.I.O. in Canada) to apply for membership. The conditions laid down by Tait — "if we can carry on our own bargaining directly without any outside interference" — were significant. Loyalists believed their interests were intertwined with those of their immediate employers, not with mine workers in the United States or Nova Scotia, far less with an abstraction known as the working class.<sup>173</sup> Taylor seems to have been ambivalent about this new development, but Evans was positively enthused. He believed that Aaron Mosher, president of A.C.C.L. and also leader of the railroad brotherhood (C.B.R.E.), would be able to use his influence with the Canadian National Railways to secure more business for himself and more work for his miners.<sup>174</sup>

A.C.C.L. organizer R.J. Gould visited Minto and satisfied himself that "this is not a Company Union or a bunch of Strike Breakers."<sup>175</sup> The *Canadian Unionist*, official organ of the A.C.C.L., extended a "heartly welcome" to the Mirimachi Mine Workers' Union in June 1938, and to the Rothwell Mine Workers' Union in July. Groups were established at the Avon and Black Diamond mines, but these seem to have been ephemeral. The workers at the "Slope" were periodically "invited" to join, but no attempt was made to actually "organize" this plant. A fairly obvious inverse correlation, then, can be drawn between support of the loyalist trade-union movement and labour militancy in 1937-38. The movement is best regarded perhaps as representative of a kind of intermediary level of class relations in the New Brunswick coal-field, mid-way between the pre-strike paternalism and obsequiousness at the Taylor and Evans mines, and the militancy of the Minto Coal Company workers, 1916-40. The occasion of the funeral of J.J. Tait, the movement's founder, provides some insights. The grieving mine workers "marched in a body" through the streets in Tait's honour in December 1938, but were proud to report that "many floral tributes" had been received from "mine operators as well as the union." The new unions did not agitate or strike, but they did raise money for a union hall which became a centre of working-class community life. As the One Big Union had raised funds for strikers across the sea, the proceeds from the loyalists' dances were forwarded to the Canadian Red Cross.<sup>176</sup> The outlines of class culture are observable in both contexts. The crucial variable was the degree of autonomy evinced by each.

The emergence, and relative vitality of institutionalized loyalism in the late 1930s demonstrates quite clearly that in Minto, class relations did not evolve in a linear fashion during the period between the wars. There was of course, a

<sup>173</sup> PAC, CLC Papers, v. 91 "Defunct Unions" MMWU File, Tait to Mosher, 17 May 1938.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, RMWU File, Evans to Mosher, 28 June 1938. The labour leader promised to do his best, *ibid.*, Mosher to Stanley Gee, 4 July 1938.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, Gould to Norman Dowd (exec. sec'ty ACCL) 11 June 1938.

<sup>176</sup> This portrait of the loyalist unions is drawn primarily from their leaders' reports to headquarters, published in the "What the Unions are Doing" column of the ACCL's monthly magazine, the *Canadian Unionist*.

tendency in the direction of rebellion. Each strike movement, from 1916 onwards, was larger than the one before. The general tendency, however, was by no means indicative of some inevitable law. Events, shaped by real people in historical context, could intervene in odd and angular ways.



*Sports and social activities helped brighten working-class life. In 1935, the team from the Black Diamond colliery, where a strike was crushed in 1934, won the Football trophies in Minto. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

Had the much larger context of World War II not intervened it is difficult (in fact, impossible) to say what might have transpired in Minto. The A.C.C.L. movement was undercut and destroyed by a series of events. In early 1940, Mosher and the heads of the C.I.O. unions in Canada negotiated an agreement by which their respective organizations were merged into the Canadian Congress of Labour. Exclusive jurisdiction in the coalfields was given to the U.M.W. Taylor and Evans were faced with the irony of their own creatures becoming the vehicle by which the U.M.W. could re-take the field. Taylor abandoned the union. In early 1941, the secretary of the Mirimachi Mine Workers' Union, A.J. Oulette (apparently an Acadian) reported that "our union is busted. . . . We have no support from the Manager and us alone we cannot do any better."<sup>177</sup> The Rothwell Mine Workers' Union disaffiliated rather than be

<sup>177</sup> "Defunct Union" MMWU File, A.J. Oulette to Dowd, 10 March 1941. Oulette's prominent position in the union raises the problem of the Acadian workers and loyalism. There was one other individual with a francophone surname (along with 16 Anglo-Saxons and one Italian) who served on the leadership level of the ACCL in Minto, 1938-40. On the other hand, another Acadian (J. Guislain of the Black Diamond mine) served on the executive of Local 7409 during this period. Apparently this group does not seem to have exhibited any particular type of trade union response during the period under discussion, but was divided on the burning issues of the day.

a Trojan Horse for the United Mine Workers. By this time Congress headquarters was advising its supporters to sign up with District 26. The peculiar political and economic context of the war altered the balance of class forces in Minto. Local 7409 was aggressive and militant in pressing its case, miners were in short supply after 1943, and under 1944 federal Order-in-Council P.C. 1003, recognition of *bona fide* trade unions became compulsory. The state intervened directly in setting the price and wage structure of the industry and New Brunswick operators received, for the first time, large state subsidies. By 1945, Minto was virtually a closed shop. Only one major producer lay outside the jurisdiction of the U.M.W.'s collective agreement: W. Benton Evans.<sup>178</sup>

It was in this context that Frank Vandenborre (who had once been told that, as an immigrant, he had "no right" to do anything but dig Sir Thomas Tait's coal) won 439 votes as the C.C.F.'s candidate in Sunbury County during the provincial elections. After the war, state control over the coal industry was relinquished, and the miners' fortunes began to decline. In 1947, the Minto miners took part in the first, and last, general strike of coal miners in the Maritime provinces. The following year, Albert Goodwin (who had been among the delegation of mine workers who waited on Premier Tilley in 1934, and testified on behalf of the U.M.W. at the 1938 conciliation board as representative of the employees of the Minto Coal Company) won 544 votes in Sunbury.<sup>179</sup> Labour's old nemesis, J.B. McNair, remained as premier throughout this period, but Goodwin was the last C.C.F.-er to run in Sunbury. By mid-century industrial capitalism had begun to disperse the working-class community which it had called into existence decades before. After 1940 strip mining technology gradually supplanted the old labour-intensive methods of work, and in the 1950s, the railroads dealt a blow to the industry by their conversion to diesel fuel.

#### IV

THE YEARS between the wars were a period of severe dislocation, agitation, and conflict in Canadian class relations, and possibly the decisive period in the history of the Canadian labour movement. During this era the Minto miners lived and created their own unique and special history. Class conflict and accommodation co-existed within this body of experience. A large proportion of Minto's workers were slow to grasp the trade-union ideal, but in the late 1930s, in common with millions of other North American workers caught up in the C.I.O. movement, most of them did. Trade unionism suffered a severe

<sup>178</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (1946), 287.

<sup>179</sup> *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, 1945, 468; 1951, 475; representing 12% and 13% of the popular vote (i.e., one half of the total vote cast) respectively in the County. It should be noted that the election of a mine worker by mine workers in New Brunswick was a mathematical impossibility, due to the fact that the County line runs straight through the centre of the industrial district, and that the proletarian vote was further diluted by double-member constituencies.





*Technological change, embodied in this giant Ohio dragger, installed at the Avon Coal Company in the 1940s, eventually undermined the economic basis of the industrial community. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Doris Nason.*

check, both organizationally and ideologically, after the failure of the big strike, but eventually re-asserted itself.

Did the emergence of mass unionism signal a break in the over-all structure of class accommodation in the industrial community? The evidence suggests that ultimately, it did not, for even militant workmen continued to view the *state* in non-class terms. While rejecting the intervention of the "Fair Wages Board" in 1937 for tactical reasons, local leaders nevertheless felt constrained to admit that its members were "doing everything in their power to better the conditions of the labour class."<sup>180</sup> Despite the critique of the *Minto Strike News*, the *UMW Journal*, and Reverend John Linton, most workers seem to have been reluctant to believe that the government was really lined up against them. The most genuine expression of working-class culture in Minto was not the union propaganda, but the ordinary people who stood in the snow to bid welcome to Judge McInery at the Minto station.

Was the "loyalist" conception of the state a complete illusion? It is important, indeed crucial, to remember that, although rooted in the pre-industrial cultural matrix of the bulk of the working-class community, assumptions about the benevolence of the state and the responsiveness of the political authorities towards popular grievances did have a real basis in historical experience. Neither the federal authorities nor Premiers Baxter, Tilley, and Dysart can be fairly characterized as mere "tools" of the coal interests. Because of the nearly complete intransigence of the coal operators, the political authorities were

<sup>180</sup> *Gleaner*, 5 November 1937. Local leaders seemed somewhat embarrassed by the *Strike News*, which may have been written by a Nova Scotia militant in the area, David Ryan, who penned most of the purple prose about Minto which appeared in the *UMW Journal*.

often placed in a position of wresting concessions from them on behalf of the workmen. Always, this process took place within a context of class struggle, but not necessarily of an ideal type of troops and police arrayed against militant workers (Minto's coal interests never had sufficient clout to call out the army). The scene in Cady's Theatre, when the haughty Alan King was brought down into the dust by Premier Tilley, must have been a treasured memory for many humble colliers. I have suggested that "reform" probably did more to stimulate union activities than to dampen them: on the other hand, it helped ensure that the miners' movement would not seek to assert the "integral autonomy" of the working class.

In 1937, with the community bitterly divided on class lines, with student activists and outside union officials usurping traditional authority, with the anti-labour politician, J.B. McNair, at the helm of the ship of state, the structure of accommodation nearly broke. Yet into the breach stepped Major Lawson and Norman MacLeod Rogers. After smashing the strike, the provincial authorities stepped back from the brink. In 1939, the Dysart-McNair regime made a conciliatory gesture towards Local 7409 by offering its new president, Joseph Vandebroek, a Belgian immigrant, the post of mines inspector. The union called a meeting, and decided that Vandebroek should accept.<sup>181</sup> There were people in Minto, like William Walker, the Englishman, who could look back over the course of events and state that "you can see that the government was against us as well as the employers."<sup>182</sup> These were the people who organized the C.C.F. movement in Minto, a political formation which, though moderate and relatively weak, did assert the autonomy of labour. The dispassionate observer, however, cannot but conclude that the dialogue between the state and the "labour class" in Minto never broke down completely. This undoubtedly helps explain at least partly, the absence of a "red phase" in Minto's history, even though class, and class conflict, was central to the experience of the community during the period between the wars, and after. In this context, it seems unlikely that Minto represents a discrete fragment of the national experience of industrial capitalism in the twentieth century. Hopefully, this study will have done something to stimulate an effort by Canadian labour historians to rescue New Brunswick's workers — miners, loggers, labourers, and craftsmen — from their undeserved fate of scholarly neglect.

<sup>181</sup> PANB, Chiasson/Vandebroek interview, 32. The giving of patronage of this type to union leaders was a time-honoured technique of "social control" in other mining districts. Previous holders of the job had been merely political appointees of the Conservative party.

<sup>182</sup> Report of Wm. Walker to the UMW District Convention, August 1938, cited in the Wade manuscript, 9.

## Appendix I

## New Brunswick: Coal Output, Employment, and Markets, 1900-1939

	Recorded Output	Employment	% Railroad Use
1900	10,000		
1901	17,630		
1902	18,795		
1903	16,000		
1904	9,112		
1905	29,400		
1906	34,076		
1907	34,584		
1908	60,000		
1909	49,029		
1910	55,455		
1911	55,781	75(?)	
1912	44,780		
1913	70,311		
1914	98,049		
1915	127,391	325(?)	
1916	143,540		
1917	189,095		
1918	268,212		
1919	166,377	450	
1920	171,610		
1921	187,192	449	
1922	287,513	611	
1923	276,617	612	
1924	217,121	608	
1925	208,012	614	
1926	173,111	544	
1927	203,950	556	
1928	207,738	585	67 %
1929	218,706	588	68 %
1930	209,349	584	69 %
1931	182,181	608	66.5%
1932	212,695	709	65 %
1933	312,303	1,025	54 %
1934	314,750	1,035	50 %
1935	346,021	1,136	52.5%
1936	368,618	1,158	48 %
1937	364,714	1,050	45 %
1938	342,238	1,120	41.5%
1939	468,421	1,284	39 %

SOURCES: New Brunswick, Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Crown Lands Department, *Annual Reports*; Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Coal Statistics of Canada* (Annual, since 1921).

## Appendix II

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**Residents of Foreign Nationality, Parishes of Northfield (Sunbury Co.)  
and Canning (Queen's Co.) New Brunswick, 1921-41**

Nationality	1921	1931	1941
"Austrian"	16	10	2
Belgian	124	126	170
Czech/Slovak	—	—	10
Finnish	2	8	9
German	55	64	72
Hungarian	—	46	49
Italian	74	51	72
Hebrew	—	3	4
Netherlands	8	41	34
Polish	2	50	96
Russian	10	3	3
Scandinavian	21	7	29
Other	24	21	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>430</b>	<b>701</b>

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## Appendix III

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**Ethnic and Religious Breakdown,  
Parishes of Northfield and Canning,**

Population (N = 2,451)

'British Races'	2,365	68.5%
British-born	251	7 %
Foreign Nationality	430	12 %
Foreign-born	337	9.5%
French or French-Canadian	656	19 %

**Religious Affiliations:**

Roman Catholic	1,204	35 %
Anglican	464	13.5%
Baptist	988	28.5%
Pentecostal	195	5.5%
Presbyterian	26	.5%
United Church	455	13 %
Others	119	4 %

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## Appendix IV

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Birth Places of New Brunswick Mine Workers 1911-1941				
Census Year	1911	1921	1931	1941
Native-born	83%	62%	64%	83%
British-born	n.a.	10%	13%	5%
Other	n.a.	27%	23%	12%
N =	66	439	616	1245

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SOURCES: Appendices II-IV; *Reports of the Dominion Census, 1911-41.*

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