

A HISTORY OF DISTRICT TWENTY-ONE,
UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA

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PREFACE

The purpose of this work is to discuss the rise and decline of District Twenty-one of the United Mine Workers of America. The district became a major force in Oklahoma after successfully gaining recognition by the mine owners of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas in 1903. Its greatest moment came in the Oklahoma constitutional convention of 1907 where Pete Hanraty of the miners served as vice-president. For two decades, the union was a major factor in the Oklahoma Federation of Labor and helped to gain significant benefits for the working men and women of the state. In the 1920s, the miners' organization began the long period of decline in which the lessening demand for coal and internal and external problems resulted in the loss of the district's autonomy in 1929. After that year, the district became dependent for its survival on the strength of the national organization. The history of District Twenty-one is important because the union was so influential in the early development of the state and because it reflects national trends in the United Mine Workers of America. This work will illustrate how the miners, economically strong and supported by Oklahomans, created a state which reflected their interests, and how economic, political, and social changes promoted that union's collapse.

The officers of District Twenty-one have not aided in this work. Possibly their cooperation might have made this task easier.

Nevertheless, alternative sources of information have made this history feasible. Any errors are mine.

A number of people have assisted in this project. The staffs of the Oklahoma Historical Society's newspaper room, library, and archives have been consistently helpful as have those of the Western History Collection and the libraries of Oklahoma University and Oklahoma State University. Their kindnesses are gratefully if inadequately acknowledged.

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CHAPTER I

BIRTH OF A UNION

Men have buried themselves in the pursuit of coal for at least four hundred years. Traditionally, the work was hard and dangerous. In the nineteenth century, miners made periodic attempts to ameliorate their lot, but all efforts failed before the superior strength of the operators. It was not until the miners organized and provided a counterforce to management that conditions became tolerable, if not humane. Unionization of the miners in the Southwest Coal Field was attempted during a strike from 1899 to 1903 which made District Twenty-one of the United Mine Workers of America the dominant force in the southwestern field for two decades.

Miners worked in Indian Territory as early as the 1870s. The Knights of Labor made the first efforts to unionize the territory's coal miners. The Knights organized the territory quickly but failed because their national leaders hesitated to use the strike as a bargaining tool. By 1885, the Knights faced the competition of an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, the National Federation of Miners. The rivalry weakened the miners' cause; consequently, the two unions merged into the United Mine Workers of America (U.M.W.A.) in 1890.¹

The new union was willing to use the strike to secure its goals which included elimination of scrip,² prohibition of labor by persons

less than fourteen years of age, better safety laws, the eight hour day, and other demands which owners resisted. On July 4, 1897, union miners struck in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, and Illinois. Within a year, the miners of the Central Competitive Field--all the strike area except eastern Pennsylvania and West Virginia--won the eight hour day and wage increases of from 20 to 40 percent. This settlement provided the standard to be met in negotiations in other American coal fields.³

Conditions in the mines of Indian Territory and Arkansas made it probable that union men there would seek a comparable improvement. Indian Territory was a most dangerous area for miners, with a fatal accident rate during the period from 1894 to 1900 consistently higher than any other area and "two to three times more . . . than foreign countries."⁴ After 1894, territorial mines went deeper, and mining methods became more complicated. Explosive gas and unstable roof structures in the region's mines increased the danger.⁵ To the miners, risks required rewards.

In January of 1899, the miners and operators of District Twenty-one--Indian Territory, Arkansas, and part of Missouri--met at Pittsburg, Kansas, to negotiate the contract for the following year. The miners demanded increased wages and an eight-hour day. Owners countered that they had not recovered from the continuing depression of 1893 and that sales were hampered by a shortage of transport. Before a settlement occurred, a strike disrupted the proceedings.⁶

At Hartshorne, near McAlester, 300 men struck mines three and six to protest the firing of miners, allegedly for membership in the U.M.W.A. Within a few days, sixty men lost their jobs. Declaring his

willingness to rehire the men only if they were non-union, the mine superintendent gave the laborers a list of grievances. He stated that he would allow no pit committee, no wage increase, and no recognition of the U.M.W.A. He wanted to run his mine his way, and "if he could not do so he would shut the mines down."⁷

A U.M.W.A. organizer added to the tension when he listed the purposes of the U.M.W.A. as providing "closer relations" between the workers and the owners, preventing strikes, and establishing a wage scale--procedures designed to allow the owners to plan more wisely for the future. Opponents of the union perceived this as equal to removal of management from the owners into the hands of the miners. The organizer also noted the miners' grievances such as the lack of a check-weighman to verify the weight of coal actually mined and a prevailing wage well below union scale. Given ample reasons, the miners struck.⁸

Initially the stoppage was small and peaceful. Men at Alderson joined the strike on February 11 and those at Wilburton five days later. On February 26, the Oklahoma State Capital reported that a general strike of all miners in Indian Territory and Arkansas was set for March 1. The strikers asked a "small" wage increase of six cents a ton and recognition of the U.M.W.A. They proclaimed the stoppage to be the "effort of their lives for . . . if they fail[ed] this effort then [would] be lost all hope"⁹ of ever organizing the mines. Owners were equally firm, and, according to Frederick Lynne Ryan, the next four years were a time of "riots, bombing and burning of mine property, eviction and arrest of union members, the importation of strikebreakers, the use of armed guards and battles between them and the miners . . ."

as well as the discharge and blacklisting of unionists and injunctions for and against the unions.¹⁰

As early as March 5, 1899, seven black laborers went from Indian Territory to Arkansas to work in the mines, but these men decided, after talking with union members, to return home. In May, William F. Kelly, an agent of the Missouri and Kansas Coal Company, decided to use Negro laborers to break the strike. He offered blacks in Leavenworth, Kansas, sixty cents a ton or \$2.75 each day to work in the mines of his company. In July, four train coaches of blacks from West Virginia received an escort from a United States marshal and sixteen deputies on the train ride to Coalgate, Indian Territory. The South McAlester Capital reported in August that "all the mines are being rapidly filled up and [in a few weeks] will be running just as if no strike had taken place."¹¹

Sometimes the courts hampered the unionists. In sentencing ten unionists for conspiracy for the purposes of intimidating and terrorizing strikebreakers in violation of a court injunction, Judge J. H. Rogers of Arkansas characterized the actions of the men as "anarchy" as he levied prison terms varying from four to ten months. In another case, this same judge remarked, "It will be a very bad day for the country when it reaches that point that any man or set of men can with impunity defy regularly constituted authority."¹² For destroying mine property, the men earned terms of four months in jail, "to remain there until the costs [were] paid."¹³

But the courts aided the miners also. Although the Atoka Coal and Mining Company won an injunction restraining the miners of Coalgate from interfering with those who chose to work, the union won a case

against the Kali-Inla Coal Company when the company elected not to provide evidence. In Kansas, Judge A. H. Skedmore prevented the Kansas and Texas Coal Company from importing blacks. The jurist enjoined the company from bringing into its mines "convict labor, undesirable citizens or people with malignant or contagious diseases."¹⁴ Presumably, "scabs" qualified on one or more counts.

There was violence as well. At Huntington, Arkansas, in May of 1899, striking miners used dynamite and gunfire against strikebreakers and company guards. One striker died, and an unknown assailant shot a mine guard in the head. But mining was a dangerous occupation anyway. On January 4, 1900, a charge exploded prematurely at Jenny Lind mine number seventeen. One miner died and another received injuries.¹⁵ The cheapness of life in the coal mines was such that bombing and shooting were less an aberration than if they had taken place in a more peaceful environment. And peace was returning.

Less than a year after vowing "the struggle of their lives," the miners of District Twenty-one felt beaten. In November of 1899, 300 miners at Hartshorne, the original seat of the strike, voted to sever all ties with the union and to return to their jobs. Even the vice-president of the Bonanza local returned to the mines. Also, the owners remained firm in their refusal to recognize the union. By early 1900, the union--with only 300 members--was dying.¹⁶

At this critical juncture in the fight for recognition, a new man became president of District Twenty-one, U.M.W.A.--Pete Hanraty. On assuming the presidency of a failing district, he acted quickly to revitalize the miners and eventually brought their cause to a successful conclusion. Hanraty wasted no time in seeking to divide the owners.

He organized strikebreakers, entered into contracts with small operators, and, in his words, "established guerrilla [sic] warfare against the larg [sic] operators that refused to sign . . . [with the union.]"¹⁷

From August 1, 1901, to May 31, 1902, strike relief cost District Twenty-one \$1,276.80, of which \$500.00 came from the international headquarters. In a letter of June 1, 1902, John Mitchell, President of the United Mine Workers of America, stated, "A continuation of the present policy of conducting the strike cannot, under any circumstances, result in its success."¹⁸ But Hanraty declined to surrender. He suggested that the men return to work and continue to organize their non-union co-workers. He also refused to call off the strike because, as he noted, that action "would fill this District full of men and prevent any concessions that we may be able to secure through the scarcity of men."¹⁹ In his report to the annual convention of District Twenty-one in 1902, Hanraty noted that the union had organized 1,764 miners in Arkansas and Indian Territory.²⁰

Throughout the strike, Hanraty worked to secure a meeting with the operators. On June 5, 1902, the smaller operators listed seven demands to be met by the union before a meeting could occur. Hanraty agreed. Meeting at Fort Smith, Arkansas, the two sides agreed to a contract which gave the miners wage increases and eliminated the lowered winter rate in Arkansas. More important, the smaller operators conceded recognition. Four companies held out--the Central Coke and Coal Company, the Missouri Pacific Railroad, the Rock Island Line, and the Kansas and Texas Railroad--the "Big Four." But they yielded in 1903.²¹

From July 13 to July 25, 1903, the union forces, headed by John Mitchell, and the operators, including the Big Four, met at Pittsburg, Kansas. The first meetings dealt with comparatively minor matters, but on July 25 the strike was won. The Big Four agreed with the other operators and the union that as of September 1, 1903, the 50,000 miners of Kansas, Missouri, Indian Territory, Arkansas, and Texas would receive 72 cents a ton, a 7 cent increase, and a 25 percent increase in day wages as well as the eight hour day. Most important, the operators, large and small, recognized the U.M.W.A.²² For the next twenty-two years the U.M.W.A. was the dominant force in the coal mines of the Southwest.

The strike in the Southwest was not typical of the struggles of the time. Other coal strikes were shorter, more violent, and generally more intense, reaching a conclusion within a matter of months in most cases. The situation in Indian Territory dragged on for four years. The strike was lost in 1900, but one man refused to quit. Pete Hanraty was the decisive factor in the successful outcome of the U.M.W.A. organizing effort. When the Big Four recognized the miners' union in 1903, they ensured the future of that union for two decades. But during the twenty years of U.M.W.A. strength, circumstances beyond the control of the union eroded its success.

During the period of its power, District Twenty-one played a major role in the formation of Oklahoma. The major activity of Pete Hanraty in the meetings leading to the constitutional convention and in the convention itself was one of the highlights of the district's history. After statehood, peace in the coalfields enabled the industry to

flourish and to remain a major asset for the new state. But the district had problems.

Before World War I, the union endured a major lawsuit--the Coronado Coal case. It also endured an internal disorganization--first the investigation of the socialist, Fred Holt, then the expulsion of Pete Hanraty. The union stabilized during the war, but the strike of 1919 eroded popular support, and the "Red Scare" enhanced anti-union feeling in the United States. Oklahomans shared that mood, and when the open shop movement arose, the union had too little standing to ward off the threat. The decreasing role of coal in the American economy further weakened the union. By 1930, the national organization controlled the district by means of a trusteeship.

By transferring the responsibility for major decisions to the national office, the trusteeship gave the district the strength of the international rather than the weakness of the disorganized and fragmented autonomous organization. The trusteeship kept the district afloat in stormy seas. By 1933, the national organization was in danger. But Franklin D. Roosevelt determined to restore the American economy, and one sector in need of repair was organized labor. The New Deal saved the U.M.W.A., and the U.M.W.A. saved District Twenty-one.

Prosperity returned to the coal mines of Arkansas and Oklahoma during World War II, but the wartime demand disappeared when the need for marginal mines' production ended. After the war, the decline continued. The bright spot in Oklahoma was the ability of the U.M.W.A. to improve conditions for coal miners throughout the United States. By 1967, few coal miners remained in Oklahoma. Recovery required a new

demand for marginally valuable coal resources. That became possible when middle eastern nations halted shipments of petroleum to the United States in 1973. The coal mines of Oklahoma and Arkansas had the opportunity to be productive once again.

The history of District Twenty-one, as that of coal in Oklahoma, was one of continuous deterioration with only occasional periods of promise. However, the district made contributions to American life. It helped to form one state. More important, District Twenty-one survived. The U.M.W.A. once had fifty districts. Twenty disappeared. This, then, is the story not of victory but of survival.

FOOTNOTES

¹McAlister Coleman, Men and Coal (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1943), pp. 49, 51, 53.

²Scrip was paper issued by the mining companies in lieu of money. It was redeemable only at company stores.

³Coleman, Men and Coal, pp. 54-55, 63; Frederick Lynne Ryan, "The Development of Coal Operators' Associations in the Southwest," Southwest Social Science Quarterly, XIV (Spring 1933), p. 134.

⁴Frederick Lynne Ryan, A History of Labor Legislation in Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p. 15.

⁵Frederick Lynne Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), p. 31; Ryan, Labor Legislation, p. 15.

⁶Oklahoma City (OK) Daily Oklahoman, January 18, 1899.

⁷Ibid., February 12, 1899; South McAlester Capital, February 16, 1899.

⁸South McAlester Capital, February 16, 1899.

⁹Guthrie (OK) Oklahoma State Capital, February 26, March 1, 1899; South McAlester Capital, March 2, 16, 1899.

¹⁰Ryan, "Coal Operators' Associations," p. 134.

¹¹Oklahoma State Capital, March 5, 1899; South McAlester Capital, May 25, July 6, August 10, 1899.

¹²Oklahoma State Capital, July 15, 1899; South McAlester Capital, June 1, July 27, 1899.

¹³South McAlester Capital, June 1, 1899.

¹⁴Ibid., March 16, 23, May 11, June 8, 1899.

¹⁵Daily Oklahoman, May 18, 1899; South McAlester Capital, January 4, 1900.

¹⁶South McAlester Capital, July 17, November 23, 1899; Daily Oklahoman, November 23, 1899; Ryan, "Coal Operators Associations," p. 134.

¹⁷William G. Snodgrass, "A History of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor to 1918" (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1960), p. 12; undated typescript, Pete Hanraty Papers, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Pete Hanraty, "Report of the President," Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of District Twenty-one, U.M.W.A., 1902, n.p. (typescript), Pete Hanraty Papers.

¹⁸Gene Aldrich, "A History of the Coal Industry in Oklahoma Prior to 1907" (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1952), pp. 109-110; Typescript "Report of the President," 1902.

¹⁹Typescript Proceedings, 1902, n.p.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹A. K. Craig, Joseph M. Spradling, James B. McDonough to District Twenty-one, U.M.W.A., June 5, 1902, Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of District Twenty-one, U.M.W.A., 1904, n.p. (typescript), Pete Hanraty Papers; South McAlester Capital, August 28, 1902; Ryan stated that the meeting occurred at St. Louis, Missouri, but contemporary sources indicated it happened at Fort Smith, Arkansas. Ryan "Coal Operators' Associations," p. 135.

²²Daily Oklahoman, July 18, 1903; South McAlester Capital, July 16, 1903.

CHAPTER II

THE GOOD YEARS

After the coal strike of 1903, miners in Oklahoma returned to tunneling and blasting the state's 12,000 miles of coal land. They continued a life whose principal characteristic was its isolation, a life in a company town where, according to Frederick Lynne Ryan, "the desirability of locating the houses near to the miners has frequently been secured at the sacrifice of the conditions of health and comfort."¹ The miners returned to a job where even during the best years, 1916 to 1921, the average number of days worked reached only 193, and in the years from 1925 to 1932, the average was 150. Oklahoma coal miners worked with little security. From 3,000 in the territorial period, the number of miners grew to between 8,000 and 9,000 during World War I but then declined with postwar demand to approximately 3,500 prior to the depression.² When they did work, miners faced the risk of not surviving to be laid off.

In the ten years prior to 1922, the fatality rate for each 1,000 miners averaged 4.30 nationally; Oklahoma had an average of 6.83 whereas Arkansas averaged 3.00. The highest state average was 12.24 and the lowest 1.16, both in comparatively minor coal producing regions, New Mexico and Texas. Between 1892 and 1931, nineteen explosions killed 510 men in Oklahoma; the four disasters in 1929 and 1930 killed 116. But the nation demanded coal, even the comparatively small

amount that District Twenty-one provided. Therefore, the men of the coalfields continued to dig but never ceased to fight for a reasonable life for themselves and for others whose conditions of life mocked the American dream. At Shawnee, at the Oklahoma constitutional convention, in the councils of the Twin Territories Federation of Labor, in the legislature--miners fought wherever possible to gain reforms. The heyday of miners' influence could not last forever, but the union dominated the coalfields until the 1920s. While its influence lasted, District Twenty-one was involved in some of the most important events of Oklahoma history.

The miners of District Twenty-one, especially President Pete Hanraty, had a mission. As Hanraty said:

Our cause demands that there is no working man so deep down in the abyss of misery and despair that we dare refuse to extend a helping hand in his uplifting, and there is no pinnacle [sic] of grandeur so high that the toiling masses should not aspire to attain it.⁴

One way to help the "toiling masses" was to organize the unorganized.

After the miners showed their ability to deal with the owners, the first step was to combine with the other working people of the territory. On December 28, 1903, delegates from fifteen miners' locals, two bartenders' locals, two printers' locals, one plasterers' local, and one or two other locals met at Lawton for the purpose of forming the Twin Territories Federation of Labor. The organization, presided over by President Hanraty of District Twenty-one, received a charter from the American Federation of Labor on February 10, 1904.

Within two years, the Twin Territories Federation met at the most significant convention in the history of Oklahoma labor. Previously, President Theodore Roosevelt had signed the statehood enabling act on

June 16, 1906. Consequently, the progressive forces in the territory sought to create a state in which the people would be sheltered from the trusts, the railroads, and the Republican administrations of territorial days. At the third annual convention of the Twin Territories Federation of Labor, miners drafted a list of twenty-four demands for submission to the expected constitutional convention. On August 20, 1906, representatives of labor and of the Farmers' Union met at Shawnee, Indian Territory, to draft their program. In September, they were joined by representatives of the Railroad Brotherhoods and on September 10, as the Shawnee Joint Labor Board, issued a list of sixteen legislative demands and eight prohibitive demands.⁶

Legislative demands were those that labor wanted included in the constitution. Among others, they included the initiative, referendum, and recall; employer liability in cases of accident due to negligence of a fellow servant; compulsory education and free textbooks; and health and safety legislation. Matters which the constitution was to prohibit included employment of children less than sixteen years of age in mines, mills, and factories; contracting of convict labor; and speculation in farm products, among others.⁷

The Democratic Party was sympathetic to the demands of the Joint Labor Board, drafting a platform agreeing to all but equal suffrage. Commenting on the sweeping demands of labor and the platform of the Democrats, Kate Barnard remarked, "Everything was advocated but the rights of men."⁸ The program was sweeping.

When the convention met, the farmers preferred "Alfalfa Bill" Murray for president while labor backed Pete Hanraty. To avoid giving conservatives control of the convention, the progressives compromised,

selecting Murray as the presidential and Hanraty as the vice-presidential candidate. Both won.⁹ The program drafted at the Twin Territories Federation of Labor Convention and at Shawnee had one of labor's strongest leaders in a position to enact it.

Although Hanraty was the sole labor representative at the constitutional convention, his positions as vice-president and as a member of the committees on municipal corporations, mines and mining, oil and gas, public debt and public works, and counties and county boundaries allowed him to exert a great amount of influence on the document to be drafted. He spoke little in the convention. He kept his vote pledges in line by means of private conversations wherein he implied the possible loss of labor support in the future campaigns of those who failed to cooperate with labor's desires. According to Milton E. Asfahl, Hanraty was "instrumental in having many provisions for the protection of labor introduced into the Constitution of Oklahoma."¹⁰ But Hanraty had opponents.

One individual, S. W. Murphy, wrote the president of the constitutional convention, asking how the farmer could find labor if the eight-hour day were law? How could he afford higher priced coal? Was Pete Hanraty an American citizen? Murphy further charged the following:

You up hold a gang that will not allow an American Citizen to work or maintain a livelihood unless they pay twenty-five dollars into the union . . . The U.M. of A. Deprives citizens of the right of life, liberty and persuit [sic] of happiness without due process of law.¹¹

Hanraty countered with his major speech of the convention. He had no apologies for being a reformer, for, as he said, when "people don't advocate reforms they will die . . . To call me an anarchist or a socialist--I don't know whether it is a discredit or an honor."¹²

Labor received support in the document sent to the people of the new state. At the convention of 1907 of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, the proud labor leader, Pete Hanraty, itemized each demand and the place in the constitution where it had been met. The initiative, referendum, and recall appeared in article five; the primary and the plurality vote occurred in article three; denial of martial law dominated article two--each demand gained recognition.¹³ The labor movement of Oklahoma and President Pete Hanraty were justly proud of their efforts. But there was yet work to be done.

The constitution authorized many things needed by labor; the first legislature of the new state had the task of transferring theory into practice. Labor had sought mine safety legislation in 1902. That task proved difficult because the United States Congress wrote territorial laws. Despite the fact that the year 1901 was one of the most fatal for Indian Territory miners, Senator Boise Penrose of Pennsylvania had the short-firing controls deleted from the desired safety legislation. Then the bill died in committee.¹⁴ The federal Congress was not concerned sufficiently for the men of District Twenty-one. In 1907, legislation was enacted closer to home.

Completed by the first legislature of Oklahoma were many acts desired by the miners: the establishment of a state mining board, the requirement of weighing before screening which allowed a more accurate determination of the wages due a man, a factory inspector, a board of conciliation and arbitration, a mandatory statement of strike conditions when advertising for workers if relevant, the eight hour day for all state, county, and city employees, and other useful laws. But some of the statutes were less than what the miners desired. The owners

managed to eliminate from the mining board bill the article which required an examination board composed of miners to determine who was qualified to mine. The farmers weakened the arbitration board in gaining two seats on the six man board rather than the three miners and three owners originally desired.¹⁵ But miners believed that much of the legislation was adequate at least.

Another statute established the office of chief mine inspector, an office whose first occupant was the miner, Pete Hanraty. The law provided also for three districts, each supervised by an assistant mine inspector, and set minimum requirements for ventilation and safety. Senate Bill Number 74 of the same year established the State Mining Board, created the district examining board, prohibited screening before weighing, prohibited convict labor in the state's mines, authorized a weighman at each mine, and allowed the workers to hire their own checkweighman to verify the weighman's tally. There was also legislation requiring owners to have the permission of the governor before hiring armed guards during labor disputes. However, this law was circumvented by governors who were liberal in giving permission and by sheriffs who deputized with abandon.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the first Oklahoma legislature provided generously for the mineworkers of the state. Probably this attitude was a mixture of respect for the miners' power as shown by their dominant role in the constitutional convention although having but one representative, as well as the populist-progressive spirit of the state during the years before World War I.

The tendency to favor labor continued in the ensuing years. In 1908, the senate defeated an amendment to delete the constitutional prohibition of convict labor in the mines. The same year, Governor

Charles N. Haskell signed legislation which tightened mining regulations and established four mining districts to replace the three created the previous year. In 1909, another major law required payment to miners to be in legal tender, and another statute of the same year authorized miners and manufacturing workers to receive their wages twice monthly if they so requested. This law was largely futile because many workers feared they would be fired if they asked for the payment.¹⁷ The laws were on the books; but they needed enforcement.

Moved from the union to the mine inspectorate, in December of 1909 Pete Hanraty decried lax observance of the rules.

The cause of the many fatal and serious accidents in the mines of this state is through the carelessness, incompetency and the inexcusable ignorance of the mining law, by some superintendents, pit bosses, fire bosses and miners, who, for the sake of personal gain deliberately violate all laws and destroy not only their own lives, but the lives of their fellow workers.¹⁸

Hanraty was correct. The year 1907 was the worst for fatal and non-fatal mining accidents in the United States to that date. Nationally, accidents killed 3,125 men and injured 5,316 more. From November 1908 through June 1909, there were twenty-three fatal and seventy-two non-fatal accidents among the 8,419 men employed at Oklahoma's mines. From the latter date through June 1910, fifty-one more men died. Of the fifty-one, fourteen fired their own shots in violation of the law, eleven died in unnecessary gas explosions, and five were careless in handling powder.¹⁹ The problem was not due to poor laws, at least not in this case.

Machine regulations were a different matter. As early as 1902, Hanraty reported to the miners' convention that the union was not opposed to the introduction of machinery into the mines. What they

wanted was their share of the money to be made from the work. By 1910, the machines were in Oklahoma to stay but not in great numbers. The miners were not willing to accept the law of 1913 which assumed every mine had a cutting machine. Oklahoma's miners used the method of "shooting off the solid," doing a minimum of undercutting prior to blasting. This method resulted in large amounts of fine matter, but the miners received payment for the run of the mine, including the worthless powder. The law of 1913 required that the seam be undercut to the full depth to be blasted. Union miners argued that without machines the process of undercutting was too slow and resulted in too great a loss of wages. A living wage was impossible. The miners asked for a referendum on the proposed law. In the hard fought campaign the operators spent \$50,000 and the miners \$25,000. The miners won. Oklahomans rejected the law three to one.²⁰ Thus, a decade after the owners recognized District Twenty-one the union maintained the ability to defeat the owners on important matters.

In 1913, the miners of District Twenty-one in Oklahoma gained wash houses and telephones at each mine. A year later, the miners of Arkansas at last got a mine inspector.²¹ The older state was less amenable to the influence of labor.

Legislative success continued to be the rule for the miners in Oklahoma. In 1916, the senate passed a bill authorizing the mining of coal in state institutions by state prisoners. Although the bill had the support of Governor Robert L. Williams, the house defeated the measure.²² On the legislative front, the coal miners continued victorious in the years prior to the "red scare." In other areas, they were equally successful, especially in strikes for economic gains.

In August of 1904, the South McAlester district voted by a large majority to accept a pay cut rather than to strike. That decision proved the exception, as miners frequently struck. The strike in 1908 of 10,000 miners prompted the Shawnee Daily Herald to report that a strike every two years was becoming a habit. On schedule the miners walked out in 1910. Oklahoma and Kansas mines closed on April 1, and on August 26 the Farmers Federation advertised a "Coal Famine Approaching" due to the three-month delay in shipments of coal from Colorado.²³ The strikes ended victoriously. In 1910, the miners received support from a 25 cent a week assessment on all members of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor. The workers' movement had the funds to provide assistance. In 1913, the disbursements of organized labor totalled almost \$3,000,000 according to E. E. Anderson, the president of the Fort Smith Central Trades and Labor Council.²⁴

Organized labor enjoyed its greatest successes in the years prior to World War I. And it continued to do well during the war years, especially in the organizing of non-union miners. In May of 1914, organizer W. James Moran and a committee of union men went to Johnson County, Arkansas, to resolve differences between the miners and the operators. District Twenty-one President Peter R. Stewart was in Coalgate, Oklahoma, resolving the dispute in the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad's mines which idled 800 miners for five months. Then Stewart joined Moran and George Baker, an organizer from Kentucky, in Johnson County. Organizers enrolled many men into the union but failed occasionally. The Fernwood Coal Mining Company of Johnson County remained unorganized until May of 1917. After it was added to the list

of successes, there was not a single non-union mine in Districts Fourteen, Twenty-one, or Twenty-four.²⁵ The union appeared to have total control.

Strikes were numerous in District Twenty-one during the years in which the United States tried to avoid the European war. Some stoppages followed national orders, but others were local, as that against the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas. In 1914, a strike at Russellville, Arkansas, resulted from the miners' demand for both an entrance and an exit in the mine. In winning their cause the miners received aid both from the state mine inspector who threatened to close the mines and from the courts which upheld the law.²⁶

A strike in 1915 at McCurtain, Oklahoma, involved miners who refused to work in a shaft which had been closed since an explosion in 1912. Doubtful that the mine was safe, the miners wanted safety measures and higher pay for their risks. The operators rejected these requests, preferring to run an open shop. Judge Ralph E. Campbell of the United States District Court at Muskogee, Oklahoma, aided the miners by denying an injunction to prohibit union interference with the activities of strikebreakers. The operators came to terms in April of 1915 after the new president of the district, Pete Hanraty, on taking office declared that strikes in the Southwest were a thing of the past.²⁷

Also, Hanraty gained a union contract with the Samples Coal and Mining Company near McAlester. Despite opposition from the men, who felt that their labor was contributing to a suit against their union (see Chapter III), Hanraty averted a strike at the Bache-Denman Company's Kali-Inla mines. He failed at Jimtown, Arkansas, and Henryetta,

Oklahoma, and his successors failed to control the miners who struck at Dewar and at Hartford number four in 1916.²⁸

By 1916, small strikes were unimportant to the leaders of the union. Once again the time came to negotiate contracts nationally. In December of 1915, the U.M.W.A. and operators from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana met to reestablish the joint conference, defunct since 1914. Traditionally this area usually set precedents for contracts in the Southwest. By April of 1916, the miners ratified the contract by a vote of 84,000 to 42,000. But District Twenty-one and the rest of the Southwest declined to confirm the agreement.

Officials of District Twenty-one threatened a strike unless the Southwest Interstate Coal Operators Association (S.W.I.C.O.A.) agreed to meet with district representatives at McAlester. The operators objected because District President John Wilkinson, negotiating in Kansas City, sent William Dalrymple in his stead. Moreover, the union and the owners were on bad terms because the union had declined joint arbitration of a walkout the previous December. Wilkinson, Dalrymple, and U.M.W.A. President John P. White met with three representatives of the S.W.I.C.O.A. at Kansas City and resolved the matter.²⁹

After the trouble in Oklahoma, the negotiations in Kansas City seemed to succeed. Reportedly the contract won agreement on July 19, except for the question of whether to annul or to keep earlier joint board decisions. That issue resolved, there was another small problem concerning working conditions. In September, the miners prepared to strike; those in Kansas did. The owners yielded to the combined pressures of the Kansas strike and the formation in Oklahoma of the Oklahoma Coal Operators Association (O.K.C.O.A.) The O.K.C.O.A. sought a

separate peace. But the negotiations shattered on the shoals of a minor detail. This time miners wanted to be hired in the order that they applied. Owners preferred to hire as they chose. Unable to win agreement, the miners struck.³⁰

On November 1, 1916, 7,000 miners in Oklahoma left their jobs. The 1,000 miners working for members of the S.W.I.C.O.A. remained at work as did the non-union miners and engineers and pumpers who were exempt from strike calls. Within two months, the O.K.C.O.A. and District Twenty-one agreed to their first contract, basically that determined at Kansas City. District miners ratified the contract on January 17, 1917. Despite coal shortages due to the strike, by the middle of 1917, according to one source, 3,000 of 8,000 miners had departed the mines for jobs in other regions.³¹ Unsettled conditions in the coalfields and better opportunities elsewhere caused the decrease of membership which encouraged the disintegration of the district.

But the union still had housekeeping to do, as in the convention of 1916 of District Twenty-one at Fort Smith. Aside from dealing with the terms to be requested at Kansas City, the union tried to organize itself. It requested that the international assume the burden of lawsuits against the district, defeated an attempt to eliminate the 35 cents a month defense fund assessment, defeated the effort to reduce the punishment for embezzlement from prohibition of holding office for life to a banishment of five years, established a five year requirement for eligibility for pension and aid benefits, and defeated the attempt to keep the sons of mine officials from membership in the union. The convention resolved that each local should use only union-made powder in the mines. Its major effort was the attempt to provide hospital

care for accident victims. The committee found no better system than that already in use by twenty-seven unions in the Fort Smith area.³²

Although the strike intervened and later the war, union affairs continued despite outside problems.

The union involved itself in broader issues. In a Labor Day speech in Oklahoma City in 1908, President Pete Hanraty drew an analogy between Christ, Socrates, and Columbus and Samuel Gompers, John Mitchell, and Frank Morrison as martyrs in the "self-sacrificing struggle for the welfare of humanity . . . the greatest moral force of the age."³³ Hanraty presided also in 1907 when the district convention passed unanimously a resolution of thanks to the jury which cleared Bill Haywood of charges of murder. This was done despite Hanraty's opposition to "I.W.W.ism, riot and insurrection" which threatened to destroy the hope of the working class.³⁴

Hanraty was not the only miner to concern himself with others. Edgar Fenton, miner and president of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, in 1913 admitted favoring the socialists although the official labor newspaper, the Labor Unit, opposed socialists and the Industrial Workers of the World. The miners' convention of 1914 supported its brothers in Colorado as well.

The Colorado mines became a battleground with Ludlow being the most famous bloodletting. After that disaster United States troops guarded the mines and kept "scabs" from the area until President Woodrow Wilson decided to remove the military. The miners' president, John P. White, was determined that the U.M.W.A. would never surrender in Colorado. After Hanraty, who was working as an organizer in Colorado, spoke to the District Twenty-one convention, the group acted. Secretary

Fred W. Holt, one time Socialist candidate for governor of Oklahoma, sent telegrams to the congressmen from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas requesting their support against Wilson's plans. The miners feared the possibility of another Ludlow if the state militia used its \$1,000,000 legislative appropriation.³⁵

The district also had antipathies toward certain politicians; Charles N. Haskell and William H. Murray were early targets. Labor regarded Haskell as less than a hero. In 1907, he was a leader of the Citizens' Alliance, an organization considered by Oklahoma Federation of Labor secretary J. Harvey Lynch as a pro-business, anti-labor coalition trying to lower wages and destroy the union. In addition, critics charged, Haskell was involved in railroad schemes and had non-union labor paint his headquarters sign. And he was also a tax and debt dodger according to vice-president Thomas Leach.³⁶

As early as 1908, the miner-dominated Oklahoma Federation of Labor decided to oppose Murray for any office he sought. Labor accused Murray of duplicity in matters affecting the working man; it considered him a tool of business as well. Labor critics labelled Murray as disrespectful of ladies and "desitute of honor and void of principle."³⁷ Yet both Haskell and Murray served as governor despite labor's opposition, thus proving that the unions were not all powerful.

When war came in 1917, the miners did their part. Sam Boydston, secretary of the district, received a letter from Secretary of Labor W. B. Wilson asking that the secretary investigate enemy aliens. Wilson told Boydston to encourage friendly aliens and to report those in the pay of an enemy government.³⁸ Boydston failed to record whether he captured any spies.

Even during the good years in District Twenty-one, problems developed. In 1906, Arkansas miners, dissatisfied with the district agreement which retained the scale of 1903, requested a separate district. Claiming no authority to grant the division, Hanraty wrote President John Mitchell who informed the miners through Hanraty that their proper course of action was to have defeated the terms at the time, when they had voted on them. Before the war, Texas also attempted to acquire its own district as did Oklahoma. In the summer of 1917, the miners of Arkansas tried again to separate, claiming that their mining laws differed from those of Texas or Oklahoma. All attempts failed at the national convention.³⁹ Thus District Twenty-one remained intact.

Despite its problems, District Twenty-one prospered in the years prior to World War I. Wages rose; mines became safer--at least according to law--and employed more men; and the union governed the employees of all the mines of the area. The years between the strike of 1903 and the postwar strike of 1919 were the days of greatest glory for the miners of Oklahoma and Arkansas. But the miners had assistance.

In the constitutional convention the demands of labor were basically the same as those of the Democratic Party. And the Democrats had almost total control of the delegates. Only one independent and a handful of Republicans opposed the progressive provisions of the constitution. Democratic assistance also helped the miners gain desired legislation.

The first legislature of the state of Oklahoma was dominated by democratic-progressives whose views agreed with those of labor. As

this first legislature passed the laws which remained in effect until the mining code was revised in the 1920s, their actions protected the miners even after the mood of the state had drifted to the right. That the miners were unable to control the government was at least indicated by their futile crusades against Murray and Haskell in the years before strikes began to alienate some of the people.

Strikes provided the best indication of union strength in prewar Oklahoma and Arkansas. From 1903 through 1916, there were at least seven major strikes which closed the fields almost entirely. In each instance, the union won its demands. Of course at this time the national union was strong and consistently gained improved conditions for its men. Help from the national union as well as aid from other laboring men in the district increased the strength of the district in its biennial struggles with the owners. The presence of effective leadership led to a number of successful strikes.

District Twenty-one was fortunate in its leadership in its first dozen years as the recognized agent for the miners of the region. Pete Hanraty was clearly the greatest of those who shaped the labor history of Oklahoma. His efforts in the struggles of 1899 to 1903, his work at the constitutional convention, and his leadership of both the district and the Oklahoma Federation of Labor caused the movement to flourish. Even as mine inspector in 1908-1909, Hanraty's sympathies with the miners led him to attempt rigid enforcement of the mining code. His replacement as district president, Pete Stewart, benefitted from Hanraty's strength.

From 1908 to 1914, Stewart continued the work of strengthening the union. He was fortunate that there were no major crises in his

administration. He retired before the first problems appeared, and he died before the developments which led to the collapse of District Twenty-one.

Even before the war, problems arose which eventually caused the district virtually to disappear. Litigation, ineffective leadership, economic and social changes—all contributed to reduce the miners' union in 1927 to its lowest point since Pete Hanraty built a viable organization on the ruins of the Knights of Labor and of U.M.W.A. District Twenty-one in 1903.

FOOTNOTES

¹Frederick Lynne Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), p. 15; Hugh Archbald, The Four Hour Day in Coal (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1923), pp. 132-133.

²Frederick Lynne Ryan, A History of Labor Legislation in Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p. 61.

³Ibid., pp. 72-73.

⁴Pete Hanraty, "President's Address," Official Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor (1907), Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, p. 3.

⁵William G. Snodgrass, "A History of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor to 1918" (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1960), p. 22; Victor Purdy, The Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, What It Is and What It Has Accomplished (Oklahoma City: n.p., 1930).

⁶Julia A Short, "Kate Barnard: Liberated Women," (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1972), pp. 15, 18-19; Snodgrass, "Federation of Labor," p. 26; Ryan, Labor Legislation, pp. 24-28; Labor's Demands," Official Proceedings, OK F. of L., 1907, p. 4.

⁷Official Proceedings, OK F. of L., 1907, pp. 4-5.

⁸Short, "Kate Barnard," pp. 15, 21.

⁹Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰Milton E. Asfahl, "Oklahoma and Organized Labor," (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1930), pp. 26, 34-35; Ryan, Rehabilitation, p. 48.

¹¹S. W. Murphy to President, Constitutional Convention, Guthrie, I.T., n.d., Pete Hanraty Papers, Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹²Pete Hanraty address to the constitutional convention, n.d., Pete Hanraty Papers, Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹³Official Proceedings, OK F. of L., 1907, p. 6.

- ¹⁴Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Convention of District Twenty-one, U.M.W.A., 1902, n.p. (typescript), Pete Hanraty Papers.
- ¹⁵Ryan, Labor Legislation, pp. 29-30.
- ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 65-66, 122-123.
- ¹⁷Guymon Herald, May 7, 1908; Shawnee Daily Herald, March 7, 1908; Ryan, Labor Legislation, pp. 41-43.
- ¹⁸Fuel, XIV, Number 6 (December 7, 1909), n.p.
- ¹⁹According to the mining code of 1907, all men who worked with explosives to loosen the coal, shot firers, were required to have special training. Men who fired their own shots without knowing how to do it endangered others as well as themselves. Pete Hanraty to William Dalrymple, November 20, 1908, Pete Hanraty Papers; Pete Hanraty, State of Oklahoma, Second and Third Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of Mines From November 1, 1908 to June 30, 1909 and July 1, 1909 to June 30, 1910 (Oklahoma City: Warden Printing Co., n.d.), pp. 5, 69.
- ²⁰Proceedings, District Twenty-one, 1902, n.p.; Ryan, Labor Legislation, pp. 74-75.
- ²¹Ryan, Labor Legislation, p. 66; Little Rock (AK) Arkansas Gazette, June 14, 1914; Little Rock (AK) Arkansas Democrat, May 1, 1914; Fort Smith (AK) Southwest American, May 27, 1914.
- ²²Fort Smith Times-Record, February 9, 1916; Daily Oklahoman, February 17, 1916.
- ²³Perkins (OK) Journal, August 19, 1914; Shawnee Daily Herald, June 2, 1908; Cherokee Republican, August 26, 1910.
- ²⁴Snodgrass "Federation of Labor," p. 49; Fort Smith Times-Record, May 25, 1914.
- ²⁵Fort Smith Times-Record, May 25, 1914, n.d.; Southwest American, June 5, 1914, May 10, 1917.
- ²⁶Southwest American, May 27, 1914.
- ²⁷Ibid., February 27, 1915, two undated clippings from circa April 11, 1915; Fort Smith Times-Record, February 28, April 11, 1915.
- ²⁸Fort Smith Times-Record, April 15, 1915, February 11, 1916; Southwest American, July 4, 1915, January 9, February 11, 12, 13, 1916.
- ²⁹Fort Smith Times-Record, December 30, 1915, April 12, 1916; Southwest American, May 14, 1916.

³⁰Fort Smith Times-Record, September 12, November 1, 1916; Southwest American, July 20, August 10, 20, 22, September 9, 23, 1916.

³¹Southwest American, December 21, 1916; Snodgrass, "Federation of Labor," p. 57.

³²Fort Smith Times-Record, April 20, 22, 1916; Southwest American, April 21, 1916.

³³Pete Hanraty speech, n.d., Pete Hanraty Papers.

³⁴Official Proceedings, OK F. of L., 1907, p. 8; Pete Hanraty, To the UMWA an address (typescript) n.d., Hanraty Papers, pp. 2-3.

³⁵Southwest American, May 16, 1914; Fort Smith Times-Record, May 19, 21, 1914.

³⁶Daily Oklahoman, April 19, 1907.

³⁷Alva (OK) Review-Courier, August 6, 1908.

³⁸W. B. Wilson to Sam M. Boydston, August 15, 1917, Sam M. Boydston Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

³⁹Pete Hanraty to John Mitchell, July 26, 1906, Pete Hanraty Papers; Pete Hanraty to Arthur Rice, n.d., Pete Hanraty Papers; Southwest American, February 18, 1916, July 24, 1917.

CHAPTER III

THE BAD YEARS

As early as 1915, the national headquarters had reason to be dissatisfied with the operations of District Twenty-one. The political scandal of the trial of Pete Hanraty, coming as it did at the time when the union was fighting a suit against the Coronado Coal Company, caused President White to be offended by the district. The collapse of the union came in the 1920s, but its problems stemmed from the years prior to the war. Though the lawsuit came earlier, the two issues can be better understood if separated. The Hanraty case was symptomatic. The suit was terminal.

In 1914, the district had a major scandal on its hands. Secretary Fred Holt was charged with accepting \$9,000 from a S.W.I.C.O. slush fund during contract negotiations in 1910 and 1912. Coming at the time of contract proceedings, these charges caused the negotiations to be broken off, but the slush fund members of the S.W.I.C.O. board resigned, and Holt defended himself ably. After a trial of more than two weeks, Holt gained exoneration by a vote of 116 to 18.¹ The case was important because it increased factional differences which came into the open in the trial of Hanraty in 1915.

Hanraty was president of the district from 1900 to 1908. On leaving office, he served as the state's first mine inspector, then as mayor of McAlester, before being removed from that office.² After

serving as an organizer in the coal fields of Colorado and Wyoming from 1912 to 1914, Hanraty once again sought and attained the presidency of the district in April of 1915. By August, Hanraty was in deep trouble.

In late July, the executive board of District Twenty-one met to hear three charges against their president. Hanraty allegedly made a contract at less than union scale at McCurtain, Oklahoma. This was done without consulting either the local union or the executive board. Also, Hanraty allegedly settled a \$3,750 claim at Spadra, Arkansas, for \$375 without consulting the men involved and in violation of the U.M.W.A. constitution. Finally, the board accused Hanraty of settling claims at Hartford, Arkansas, in contravention of the constitution and the contract with the coal company.³ The board, however, was unable to reach a determination.

The board consisted of three men who wanted to submit the charges to the membership at a convention. They were opponents of Hanraty. There were three supporters of Hanraty who preferred to keep the issue in executive session. The seventh member had his own problems, being engaged in fighting a petition for his recall. The board asked President White to intervene, but he declined to act until the board completed its action. After an eighteen-day deadlock in which the normal affairs of the union ceased, the board called a convention for September 21, 1915.⁴

Immediately on learning that he was to be tried, Hanraty issued a form letter to encourage his supporters. According to Hanraty, "The salvation of our organization is at stake."⁵ He continued his attack at the convention. He alleged that the convention was packed against him with a clique of at least twenty non-members seated in order to

applaud his detractors and harass his supporters. Also, he attacked the district's attorney for abuse of funds, forcing that individual to use twenty-eight pages of the report of proceedings to answer the charges. In addition, Hanraty cited the accomplishments of his first administration--establishing the organization, gaining the eight-hour day, eliminating the company store, and others. As well as alleging a "well organized scheme to make my administration a failure," Hanraty stated, "I have suffered more for [District Twenty-one] perhaps than any man in this Southwestern country."⁶

The climate of the proceedings was tense, with the delegates being searched for firearms. Although searchers found none, they confiscated approximately 100 knives from 150 delegates. In this environment, the board expected the delegates to settle factional disputes which dated back several years and which White had already warned could be but detrimental to the district's future.⁷ The decision boded ill for such hopes.

The convention was unable to reach a decision on the Hartford issue. Delegates voted to censure Hanraty for the McCurtain matter, and they judged their president guilty of the charges concerning Spadra. The vote was eighty-five to sixty-nine. The penalty was removal, although, as an expert on the bylaws of the union, Hanraty felt that a resolution of removal was in order. The convention ignored Hanraty, establishing a committee to determine how to deal with the business of the district when the presidency was empty or in doubt. The convention decided to have the vice-president, the secretary, and four board members resign and to place the union in the hands of White until an

election was held. On October 7, the convention adjourned.⁸ But the problems remained.

The district sued Hanraty for \$1,393.16 which he allegedly had drawn for two nonexistent organizers. Because of the suit, Hanraty lost his place on the ballot in the upcoming election. The suit was used to deny Hanraty a seat at the 1916 convention as well. On January 1, 1916, the members of Local Union 2830 wrote President White asking a hearing for Hanraty, claiming that the denial of Hanraty's place on the ballot was irregular and asserting that Hanraty would have been re-elected overwhelmingly.⁹ The split remained, and the union drifted.

The election which caused the controversy was futile. It decided minor offices, but no candidate received a majority in the important races. In February, J. G. Murry reportedly won the presidency, but a report from McAlester in March indicated that because none of the thirty-two candidates received a majority, a new election was scheduled in early April. Whether elected in February or April, by the time of the convention, Murry was president of District Twenty-one, the third president within the year.¹⁰ Before the year ended, there was a fourth. This instability of leadership plagued the union until David Fowler became president of the provisional district in 1930.

Immediately after the war, prosperity and good times appeared to return for the miners as well as the rest of the nation. But superficial successes failed to conceal deeply rooted problems which eventually led to the collapse of District Twenty-one in the postwar decade. The successful strike of 1919 was the last victory which the union enjoyed for almost twenty years.

In 1918, the U.M.W.A. signed an agreement to maintain production by yielding their right to strike for the duration of the war or for two years, whichever came first. When the war ended in 1919, the miners wanted a share of the benefits of the wartime prosperity--high prices and higher profits--which their patriotism had allowed the owners. Acting President John L. Lewis determined to prove himself by calling a strike for November 1, 1919.

The miners' demands were stiff. They asked for a 60 percent increase in wages. Also they wanted a thirty-hour week with time and one-half pay for overtime and double time for Sundays and holidays. Lewis's men also required an end to the penalty clause which allowed an operator automatically to collect a \$1.00 a day fine from each miner involved in an illegal strike. Finally, the miners declared that the contract of 1918 ended effective November 1, 1919. The owners had the choice--sign a new contract or suffer a strike.¹¹ No new agreements were signed. Rather, the owners' reactions were vigorously negative.

Unions suffered in 1919 when the "Red Scare" began. Americans feared that anarchists, socialists, or unionists might overwhelm the sense of democracy that they had just fought a war to preserve. Americans preferred that government officials use whatever means were necessary to prevent unamerican activities such as strikes. Consequently, the government sought an injunction to prevent John L. Lewis from striking.

In Indianapolis on October 31, 1919, Judge A. B. Anderson ruled favorably on Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's contention that the United States continued in a state of war. Thus the legislation which prohibited strikes for the duration of the war was still valid. The

U.M.W.A. had no right to endanger the military effort by stopping the production of coal.¹² Lewis chose to defy the courts and the administration. The miners of District Twenty-one supported his stand.

On October 30, 1919, the Fuel Administration reinstated wartime price ceilings. The first division of troops departed for the coal-fields of Huntington, West Virginia, and the federal government seized all coal in transit. U.M.W.A. headquarters issued a statement calling President Woodrow Wilson a "usurper."¹³ Even before the strike, the opposition of government and the antipathy of many citizens became evident.

Oklahoma Adjutant General Charles F. Barrett ordered all national guard units in the state to prepare for an immediate call to active duty. Barrett conferred with Governor James Brooks Ayres Robertson about the situation, and the governor asked Attorney General Palmer to deport all aliens who struck. Dorset Carter, president of the Oklahoma Coal Operators' Association, told the governor that the members of the association were willing to try to keep the mines open with the aid of promised militia.¹⁴

F. W. Lukins of the S.W.I.C.O.A. suggested a compromise on October 30. He asked that the miners remain at work while negotiators determined a wage scale. Also, he informed the governors of Missouri, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas that the operators were willing to arbitrate if state laws allowed. But most people wanted more vigorous action. District Twenty-one Vice-President Jack Britton scored Governor Robertson's threat to keep the mines open. District President John Wilkinson cited figures on inflation to justify the increases asked. Since the preceding contract the price of bacon had increased

by 114 percent and that of ham had doubled. Other price increases were similar. Thus a 60 percent increase was not unreasonable.¹⁵

The governor and people of the state chose not to talk of prices. The strike was called a "lawless conspiracy" which must not be allowed to disturb millions of people. The commercial club of Wetumka, Oklahoma, endorsed the governor as did the Chamber of Commerce of Miami, Oklahoma. Rather than yield to union power, they said, "let the show down come."¹⁶

Despite the injunction, the mines emptied on November 1. Nationally almost 400,000 miners quit work while from 12,500 to 15,500 men struck in District Twenty-one. Only one mine in all the district remained in operation--that at Pittsburg, Oklahoma, which had a daily maximum capacity of 500 tons.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the rhetoric continued.

The injunction caused the railroad unions to offer their good offices in the settlement of the strike. Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor protested to Palmer, threatening a general strike to support the miners. District Twenty-one Secretary Eugene Ross told his men to ignore the injunction, and he criticized the governor for calling for troops. Ross ordered peaceful striking and the maintenance of the idled mines by engineers, firemen, and general maintenance men. President Carter of the OK.C.O.A. issued the standard statement that the mines would remain open; the miners of the district countered with the normal rebuttal. They were confident that not enough strikebreakers could be found to keep the mines in operation. The state mine inspector, Ed Boyle, stated that he would not allow the mines to be run by unskilled labor, troops for example. But Boyle denied taking sides.¹⁸

Despite all the rhetoric the facts were that the miners were out, the people were angry, and troops were on their way to the coal areas. Adjutant General Barrett wasted no time in ordering the national guard to the fields although no trouble had occurred and although the only potential trouble spot was McAlester. The people wanted troops to prevent rioting.¹⁹ The situation was typified by events in Henryetta.

Reportedly, in Henryetta approximately 60 percent of the miners were "foreigners," 40 percent of them were not naturalized, and "most" were unable to speak English. Most of the "troublemakers" were English-speaking individuals who indoctrinated their companions in the tenets of bolshevism. Of course American miners were not radicals. The situation was summed up in the following from the Daily Oklahoman:

While much talking was being done here tonight by the radical striking miners, the presence of Company I, 3rd Infantry, Oklahoma National Guard, had a quieting influence on any who might be inclined to advocate violence.²⁰

With the "Red Scare" flourishing, the people of Oklahoma refused to allow alien radicals to destroy their state.

On November 3, with troops in the field, the adjutant general stated that he would declare martial law if necessary. Coal supplies were critical already; the supplies of Lawton, Oklahoma, were gone. Under pressure and afraid of being associated with Communists, President Wilkinson of District Twenty-one declared that the strike was merely a business proposition. His organization tolerated no "reds" and was watching agitators.²¹

Radical groups appeared at Hartshorne and Gowen, Oklahoma. Specifically mentioned were the Industrial Workers of the World. State investigators had these individuals under surveillance. Reportedly,

there were 168 known radicals in the area, but the state had no evidence to prosecute.²² However, state agents continued to investigate.

Of more immediate concern than radicals was the dire shortage of coal. On November 4, Governor Robertson reportedly prepared to call for 8,000 men to mine the state's coal. Prepared to offer \$5.00 in wages each day, the governor believed that even unskilled labor could mine a sufficient quantity. But the coal could not be transported because of the ban on movement. The governor informed the citizens that federal authority permitted them to take coal from the railroads if needed. The warden at McAlester planned to open the state mines with convict and non-union labor. On November 10, Robertson ordered Adjutant General Barrett to open the penitentiary and strip mines of the McAlester region. The miners felt that everyone was against them.²³ They had reason.

The Daily Oklahoman of November 11, 1919, reported that district mine inspector William T. Williams spent two days in the McAlester penitentiary on suspicion of interfering with the operators of the prison mines. It was alleged that Williams prepared to post notices that convict labor was against state law. Williams received authorization to do so from State Mine Inspector Boyle. Williams gained release when the adjutant general found that the inspector had done no wrong.²⁴

Although Woodrow Wilson reportedly mediated a settlement on November 13, the mines remained closed. The banner headline of the Daily Oklahoman proclaimed "Coal Miners in Insurrection, Governor Says."²⁵ Robertson threatened to seize the mines if the miners did not return.²⁶ But the strike continued, and the situation continued to deteriorate.

By early December, trains which had been allowed previously to move once again halted operations. Stores in the Southwest received notification to be open only from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M. and to be heated to no more than 68 degrees. The nation returned to wartime restrictions. Oklahoma City volunteers started for the mines of McAlester protected by two companies of the Twenty-fourth (black) Infantry and one company of cavalry, all from Columbus, New Mexico. In Arkansas, Governor Charles H. Brough asked for volunteers to mine coal and to load the coal which was already above ground.²⁷

Efforts in Oklahoma showed the effectiveness of volunteers. While other governors, as in Missouri, were seizing mines, Governor Robertson of Oklahoma went to McAlester, donned hip boots, and began mining coal. He had 300 volunteers, the number of which quickly grew to 500 to help him, among them thirty Oklahoma A and M students who mined four carloads of the twenty-one reportedly dug. There were a dozen women using picks and shovels at Poteau. At this time, the governor declared martial law in the coal counties--Pittsburg, Latimer, LeFlore, Haskell, Coal, and Okmulgee--and national guardsmen joined federal troops in protecting the volunteers.²⁸

According to the adjutant general, under martial law private meetings in the area needed his authorization. He ordered the seizure of all agitators and all coal not already in government hands. Agents arrested two radicals at Alderson for trying to keep union men from returning to work. Before matters became worse, a compromise between Wilson and Lewis ended the strike. The agreement called for a 14 percent increase in wages and an investigation to determine if further

raises were justified. On December 12, 1919, the troops and volunteers began leaving the coal regions.²⁹

The strike of 1919 was short, less than six weeks, and successful to a degree. Nationally, John L. Lewis showed his ability to confront the government, and he escaped with only a fine for contempt. But in District Twenty-one the victorious miners might have seen the sign of the future, and the future looked bleak. District unionists numbered more than at any time in their history. They used the strike as an economic weapon as they had done successfully in the past. But the miners were isolated. In previous strikes, the government remained neutral if not aiding the strikers. This time the governor entered with all his powers on the side of the owners. He had the support of the people for his actions. Oklahomans perceived miners as radical agitators who might destroy the Oklahoma way of life, although some were good Americans. The strike removed the sympathies which were essential for a strong but not overwhelming political force. Whereas the miners had gained all they wanted prior to the war, after 1919 they were reduced to asking and being granted only what was considered best for them and for the rest of the state.

The lack of leadership illustrated by the Hanraty case was compounded by the major event of the history of District Twenty-one--the only episode occurring in the area which was important enough to appear in the history of the U.M.W.A. published as a golden anniversary edition. This event was the Coronado lawsuit.

Franklin Bache of the Bache-Denman Coal Company which owned the Coronado Coal Company was not sympathetic to unions. In 1913, he lost a major contract to the president of the S.W.I.C.O.A. Bache believed

that the unions and the rival operator were in collusion because a strike at the same period cost Bache \$3,000 in fines by the association. In March of 1914, Bache sued the president for bribing officials of the district. This incident was but one of the fifty-nine differences between Bache-Denman and District Twenty-one in the years from 1912 to 1914.³⁰ Bache was tired of unions.

On April 4, 1914, Franklin Bache declared his mines to be open shop. His men received the choice of leaving the union or leaving the mines. On April 6, there was a riot at Prairie Creek mine number four. Apparently, a local constable went to the mine to arrest guards for profanity but left without taking action. On his departure, a crowd of union supporters estimated at 2,000 gathered at the mine where drinking and rhetoric were vigorous. The crowd rioted, beating four guards and nailing flags to the tipples, one American and the other reading, "This is Union Man's Country."³¹

Franklin Bache declined to attend a hearing before Arkansas Labor Commissioner J. J. Clary. District Twenty-one President Pete Stewart attended and testified that the open shop violated a contract due to expire in July of 1914. He noted also that the Bache-Denman properties were the best in the state. Their problem was mismanagement. On May 1, the hearing moved from Fort Smith to Hartford, Arkansas.³²

But a more important hearing was taking place--that to determine whether the union should be barred from Bache-Denman property. Shortly after the riot, a judge in Little Rock issued a temporary restraining order. In May, a Bache-Denman subsidiary, the Mammoth Vein Coal Company, sought to make the injunction permanent. Claiming they feared violence, seventeen mine guards fled to Fort Smith to avoid testifying.

Those persons who testified had differing views of the riot. According to some, the miners were lawabiding family men of good reputation who went unarmed to the mine merely because they were opposed to the open shop. There, they listened to speeches which were definitely not inflammatory, and they dispersed when asked. Their leaders met with the mine superintendent and, for some unexplained reason, the riot started. No damage occurred. Other witnesses clearly identified eight men as rioters, and one miner was identified as the person who beat up a witness. On May 10, 1914, Judge Frank A. Youmans made the injunction permanent.³³

In the meantime, attempts at arbitration failed due to Bache's recalcitrance. He did not trust the miners or the operators. Commissioner Clary continued the futile proceedings at Hartford, but he had no power to fine recalcitrant witnesses for contempt if they chose not to attend hearings. He had no authority to require attendance.³⁴

The troubles continued at Prairie Creek throughout 1914. Bache used armed guards to protect the fifty men who worked in the mine. Once, the mine closed completely. Open shop men and unionists fought several times, and federal troops guarded the mine from May of 1914 to February of 1915. Finally, Bache sued the U.M.W.A.³⁵

On May 23, 1915, Judge Youmans ruled in United States District Court that the service of a summons on the family of a union official was invalid. To be legitimate, the summons must be served on the official himself. This decision meant that union officials, who had considered themselves exempt from the liabilities of their organization, were valid subjects of the suit. Bache served U.M.W.A. president White and approximately 100 other union men. Twenty-three miners'

locals demurred, questioning the jurisdiction of the federal court in the matter. Bache argued that the destroyed coal had a bill of lading; thus it was an interstate shipment. But Youmans decided in favor of the defendants' contention that the court had no jurisdiction in the intrastate matter of coal mining and also that the Sherman Antitrust Act was not applicable. Bache had to alter his suit or drop the case. He changed his petition, and the arguments continued.³⁶

In October of 1917, the Bache-Denman Company sued again in the case of Coronado Coal Company et al vs United Mine Workers of America et al. The plaintiff charged that there was a conspiracy between the U.M.W.A. and all union operators which dated back to 1898. The union's counsel read the proceedings of its conventions into the court record to show that no conspiracy existed. On November 22, 1917, a jury of eleven farmers and one housepainter found for the plaintiff. The award to Franklin Bache's company was \$600,000. Bache asked interest of \$120,600 for the three years, four months, and six days that his money had been kept by the U.M.W.A. Bache's attorneys asked of the U.M.W.A. \$200,000 in legal fees. The union appealed, supported by the American Federation of Labor. In February of 1918, Bache-Denman won \$120,600 interest and \$25,000 in attorneys' fees at Sioux Falls, Iowa.³⁷ However, the case did not end there.

While fighting a lawsuit brought by the Pennsylvania Mining Company which was a miniature Coronado case, the U.M.W.A. fought all the way to the Supreme Court before the courts decided the Bache case against the owner in 1922. Even then the suit continued. In 1923, Bache brought a conspiracy suit against District Twenty-one, the national organization, and assorted members. Bache lost on a directed

verdict for the defendants by Judge John C. Pollock in Kansas City. As this suit was for \$2.2 million, Bache appealed, but the circuit court of appeals upheld Pollock. So Bache went before the Supreme Court where the decision was mixed. Chief Justice William Howard Taft ruled that the decision in favor of the U.M.W.A. was valid. However, the justice also suggested new trials for the district and individuals in certain locals. There seemed to be clear evidence that District Twenty-one and the locals had planned two attacks on Kali-Inla properties. The question was whether those raids constituted conspiracy to interfere with interstate commerce.³⁸

Finally, in October of 1927, the case ended. After requesting and receiving a court date for late November of that year, the Coronado Coal Company settled out of court. After thirteen years and four trials, the U.M.W.A. agreed to pay Coronado \$27,500, the estimated cost of the fifth trial. Both the coal company and the union agreed to pay their own expenses, variously estimated at between \$100,000 and \$200,000 each.³⁹ Thirteen years of increasing indebtedness for Bache and Coronado and thirteen years of Democlean existence for the union--this was the case of the Coronado Coal Company against the United Mine Workers of America.

During the thirteen years of the suit, District Twenty-one changed from a major force in Oklahoma into a minor force almost unable to manage its own affairs. This weakness was recognized later when the international placed the district under a trusteeship, but the signs of weakness appeared much earlier. The strike of 1919 had seemed successful, but the gains came only at the cost of alienation of public support. A strong union might afford that price but not District

Twenty-one. The internal weaknesses evidenced by the political struggles of the mid 1910s were of such magnitude that they destroyed any hope that a union removed from the protection of public and governmental support might withstand the severe pressures of the 1920s. The lawsuit was not of sufficient magnitude to destroy the district. As with the other two problems, it was important in combination. Three strikes there were against the union. It was in no condition to survive the developments of the 1920s--the decrease in use of coal at a time of increased production and the rise of the open shop movement.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Fort Smith Times-Record, May 8, 15, 20, 22, 24, 1914; Little Rock (AK) Arkansas Gazette, May 9, 19, 1914; Charlotte A. Cummings, "The Bache-Denman Company and Labor" (unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 1970), p. 27.

² The reasons for Hanraty's recall are unclear. On a number of occasions he charged that he was removed for enforcing the laws against prostitution and the sale of alcohol and for opposing anti-union forces in McAlester. For whatever reason, the majority of those voting opposed Hanraty. He was removed. "Hanraty Issues Open Challenge," newspaper clipping, n.d., Pete Hanraty Vertical File, Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; "Hanraty Describes Recall As Used In McAlester," clipping, Pete Hanraty Papers, Archives, Oklahoma Historical Society; undated speech (typescript), Archives, Pete Hanraty Papers.

³ Fort Smith (AK) Southwest American, August 1, 1915; McAlester News-Capital, September 21, 1915.

⁴ Southwest American, August 1, 1915.

⁵ Pete Hanraty to _____, August 13, 1915, Pete Hanraty Papers.

⁶ Proceedings of the Special Session of District Twenty-one (1915), (typescript), pp. 10-39, 62, Kali-Inla Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; McAlester News-Capital, September 21, 1915; Southwest American, September 21, 1915; Fort Smith Times-Record, September 22, 1915.

⁷ Fort Smith Times-Record, September 20, 1915; Southwest American, September 23, 1915; Arkansas Gazette, September 23, 1915.

⁸ Southwest American, September 30, 1915; Fort Smith Times-Record, October 1, 3, 7, 1915.

⁹ Southwest American, December 15, 19, 1915, April 19, 1916; Fort Smith Times-Record, January 3, April 19, 1916; Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of District Twenty-one, United Mine Workers of America (1916), p. 34.

¹⁰ Southwest American, January 13, 1916; Fort Smith Times-Record, February 4, March 23, 1916; "Report of the President," Proceedings, U.M.W.A. District Twenty-one, 1916, p. 94.

¹¹David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, Coal and Unionism (Silver Springs, Maryland: Cornelius Printing Company, 1939), pp. 130, 144.

¹²James A. Wechsler, Labor Baron, A Portrait of John L. Lewis (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1944; reprint ed., Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 24; McDonald and Lynch, Coal and Unionism, p. 145.

¹³Oklahoma City (OK) Daily Oklahoman, October 31, 1919.

¹⁴Ibid.; New York Times, October 31, 1919.

¹⁵Daily Oklahoman, October 30, 31, 1919.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., October 31, November 1, 1919.

¹⁸Ibid., November 1, 1919.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., November 3, 1919.

²²Ibid., November 5, 1919.

²³Ibid., November 4, 5, 7, 12, 1919.

²⁴Ibid., November 11, 1919.

²⁵Ibid., November 13, 15, 16, 1919.

²⁶Ibid., November 16, 1919.

²⁷Ibid., December 3, 4, 1919; New York Times, December 4, 1919.

²⁸Daily Oklahoman, December 5, 9, 1919; New York Times, December 6, 1919.

²⁹New York Times, December 8, 1919; Daily Oklahoman, December 11, 12, 1919.

³⁰Cummings, "Kali-Inla," pp. 12-13; Fort Smith Times-Record, April 29, 1914.

³¹Fort Smith Times-Record, May 3, 5, 7, 10, 1914; Southwest American, May 2, 1914.

³²Fort Smith Times-Record, May 10, 1914; Southwest American, May 10, 1914.

³³Fort Smith Times-Record, May 14, 1914; Arkansas Gazette, May 13, 1914; Southwest American, June 10, 1914, February 14, 1915.

³⁴Fort Smith Times-Record, May 23, June 14, July 6, 1915; Southwest American, June 17, July 7, 1915.

³⁵Coronado Coal Co et al v. United Mine Workers of America et al, 553 U.S. Dist, w. Ark Div., November 22, 1917; Southwest American, October 24, November 23, 24, 25, December 2, 1917, February 28, 1918; Fort Smith Times-Record, October 23, November 22, 23, 1917, February 27, 1918.

³⁶New York Times, September 12, October 28, 1923, July 12, 1924, May 26, 1925; Fort Smith (AK) Southwest Times-Record, October 28, 1923; James B. McDonough to E. E. Koch, November 2, 1923, Kali-Inla Collection.

³⁷Daily Oklahoman, October 14, 1927; New York Times, October 14, 14, 1927.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH OF A UNION

In the decade following 1910, the union had many problems. Fred Holt defended himself on charges of bribery. Pete Hanraty failed to clear himself of more diverse charges. The union leadership suffered. The public tired of District Twenty-one after the strike of 1919. Franklin Bache further complicated the existence of the miners' organization by involving the U.M.W.A. in a decade of litigation. But internal disputes, strikes, and lawsuits were all matters in which the union exercised some control. Although limited, this control meant that the problems arising from conflicts might have been minimized if not avoided. Other factors were totally removed from effective influence by the union. Owner hostility and economic changes were of sufficient magnitude to ensure that the weaknesses revealed or encouraged by the previously discussed problems were to prove fatal to District Twenty-one--in fact most of the U.M.W.A. found itself in a similar situation by 1930.

District Twenty-one was earlier to fall than some, but it was not alone. The U.M.W.A. became trustee for District Twenty-one in 1929. But the Coronado case which ended in 1927, though showing the district's frailty, was not the decisive factor, nor was the futile strike of 1924 through 1927. When combined with economic changes and opposition by the owners, the weakness of the union resulted in the

unsuccessful strike, a failure which combined with near bankruptcy to require the national union to assume control of the district through the trusteeship.

In 1935, Frederick Lynne Ryan wrote The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities, the major work dealing with the coal industry of Oklahoma. Ryan discussed the rise of the business and indicated that the years from 1903 to 1922 were prosperous. After 1922 the coal industry entered a period of decline which continued. Though better, the situation remains today closer to the bad years than to the good years of the first two decades.

Prior to 1903, there were few problems in the coal fields of Oklahoma. Beginning in 1903, there was increasing competition between the large and the small operators. Railroads such as the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, the Rock Island Line, and other supplied their own trains and other markets away from the area. Other large operators such as the Bache-Denman, Milby-Dow, and Central Coal and Coke companies prospered by exploiting large veins and shipping the coal to major markets in industrial cities. These firms ignored the smaller outlets.

Small operators did well. They were able to hire five men for as little as \$12.00 a day; they were able to sell coal locally for high prices of \$7.00 to \$9.00 a ton. This level of operation was possible on an investment of only a few hundred dollars and was sufficient to produce ten to fifty tons a day. Ignored by the large companies, a town near to the small operation normally purchased the small operator's output. Even unemployed miners often combined their resources to form a cooperative mine which might be located on the supposedly closed, unleased, segregated lands. Cooperatives and dog holes--small diggings

on leased land and worked by the leasing miner and his family--were the smallest operations, but even they provided a living.¹

There was sufficient income for all. However, the large operators disliked the small employers. The small operators produced coal more cheaply, partially, according to many large producers, because the U.M.W.A. was conniving with small companies to permit below-contract wages. From 1903 through 1922, the issue continued to be a major topic at the conventions of District Twenty-one. The district lost its ability to deal with the problem as early as 1916.

From 1916, the internal problems previously discussed kept organizing efforts below the level desired by the large operators. The difficulty and expense of sending agents to every small digging meant that the union spent most of its effort organizing the large companies, further causing the large operators to feel that they were the target of a conspiracy between small companies and the union. This increasing hostility became apparent when the union weakened. Other pressures encouraged the rise of the open shop.

But the first decades of the century were good. The number of days worked by a miner continued to decline except during the war years. Faced with increasing mechanization and a move to petroleum as fuel for the new machines of American industry, operators controlled production to keep prices high. There was prosperity until 1922.

Ryan listed the reasons for the collapse of the coal industry as follows: a strike from 1924 to 1927; bank failures which hurt investment and savings; union strife; the demise of the union; loose enforcement of the mining code; exhaustion of cheaply acquired coal; increased mechanization and more economical fuel consumption by customers; and

alternative employment opportunities for those once destined almost by birth to labor in the mines.

From 1921 to 1929, the medium operators faded from the market. The various factors which increased competition from other sources of fuel meant that the margin of profits declined. The medium-sized mine operators tried to get the union to reduce wages, but the union refused. The owners tried to operate with an open shop, but non-union men were inefficient, and guards were expensive. Better able to absorb the costs, large mines took the markets.

But by 1929 even the large operators found themselves squeezed out. By that time, the railroads were using fuel other than coal for many of their trains. The major market of the large operators thus disappeared. The local market belonged to the small operators whose costs were minimal. The large operations tried to cut wages and economize in other ways, but the effort was futile. By the time of the depression, coal mining was a critically ill enterprise. At McAlester, the operations were wagon mines--so-called because their production could be hauled in wagon rather than in coal cars--or mines employing between ten and twenty-five men. The large companies that remained at Henryetta produced coal only four months in the year.²

Combined with the decrease in the amount of coal to be mined, the strike of 1924 through 1927 completely destroyed the critically wounded union. In 1922, contract negotiations stalled nationally. On April 1, 1922, 600,000 miners struck--a number which included 100,000 non-union men. President John Wilkinson of District Twenty-one reported that 15,000 men were out in his district. Pumpers and other maintenance men remained in the mines as did the men of the non-union Gunter City,

Oklahoma, strip mines. Wilkinson declined to hold out for a regional settlement, preferring to deal with each individual owner on the basis of the agreement reached in the Central Competitive Field.

Wilkinson decided to deal on an individual basis for a number of reasons. According to him the district had already a large number of miners who had been idle for months. His district was also unable to compete with gas and oil which were the important fuels in the Southwest. Further, the warm weather of summertime reduced the demand for coal, decreasing the impact of the stoppage. Even before the strike, the mines of District Twenty-one were closing earlier in the year than in other regions of the coal-glutted United States. Even the railroads--the main buyer of Southwestern coal--had supplies to last at least through July.³ Thus the miners of District Twenty-one struck at a time of weakness.

The strike was short. By late August it ended. The miners agreed to return to work on the basis of the Cleveland Agreement. This settlement was in effect a defeat for the union. The miners gained only the maintenance of the old rate of \$7.50 a day. In return they yielded their right to seek compensation through arbitration for the company men who operated some mine equipment during the strike. Their one "victory" was the agreement for a joint conference between owners and miners to determine the wage increase for the next April 1.⁴

It has been noted that "arbitrations are only temporary expedients to enable industry to emerge from a chronic state of war . . ."⁵ One of the owners considered a friend of District Twenty-one, Thomas W. Wheatley, signed an agreement in 1923 which included no wage increase, though it did allow payment for dead time such as moving machines,

breakdowns, and other occasions when coal was not produced.⁶ The same system prevailed the next year when John L. Lewis gained what was considered a great victory for the U.M.W.A.

For a number of years the national organization was unable to organize certain areas of the mining industry. The captive mines owned by the steel interests were one area of union failure. Equally important were the southern mines in such states as Kentucky and West Virginia, areas which traditionally provided strikebreakers and non-union coal during major strikes by the U.M.W.A. In 1924, the union won from southern owners the right to negotiate national contracts which covered the southern fields as well as the rest of the country. This settlement, the Jacksonville Agreement of February 18, 1924, determined that wages were to be maintained at \$7.50 each day, and it gave the union the right to organize the non-union fields. But it merely allowed; it did not require. The operators retained the right to resist. According to one source, the agreement collapsed due to operator opposition and the inability of the union to organize open-shop mines.⁷ That was the situation in the Southwest, an area of strong operator opposition and weak union organizing efforts.

At the time of the Southwest Agreement of 1924, fewer than one in four miners and mines in Oklahoma were parties to the contract. The rest were non-union. In Arkansas, the situation was not as bad, but one in three was non-union. In 1925, all mines in Texas were non-union. That situation led the miners in Oklahoma to fight the open-shop movement.⁸

The idea that owners had the right to hire whom they chose was not new. In the late nineteenth century, American employers had been

successful in enforcing the open shop, a system whereby each employee negotiated on a theoretically equal basis with his employer. Combinations of working men to bargain more effectively were discredited. The closed or union shop came under attack as did national unions. By the turn of the century, unions gained protection of the laws, and the closed shop became the normal situation, as in District Twenty-one. But the employers regained their strength in 1919.

Initially, the "Red Scare" was directed against communists, syndicalists, and other "threats" to American life. Quickly, the orthodox American labor movement came to be linked in the statements of some owners with the radical movements. Organized labor was discredited, and the owners and the American public began to advocate the "American Plan" and other open shop movements. Economic depression after the war further enhanced the owners' position by weakening the union.

As their economic situation declined in the 1920s, working men struck to keep earlier gains. Strikes further injured the weakened economy, alienating those citizens who were already afraid of radicals and who were suffering economically. Public support waned. At the same time the courts reversed earlier pro-labor interpretations of laws dealing with workmen's rights.

The conservative Supreme Court of the 1920s ruled in the Tri-Cities Trades Case of 1921 that all picketing was illegal. In the Coronado Case, it ruled that a union was liable for damages occurring in any strike affecting interstate commerce. The courts severely restricted organized labor. Between 1920 and 1924, organized labor decreased from 5.1 million to 3.6 million men. Those who left the

unions normally joined the open-shop.⁹ Those who remained in the unions fought for survival.

In the spring of 1924, a Kali-Inla Coal Company mine at Cambria, Oklahoma, was one of four to reopen as an open-shop mine at the 1917 scale, \$5.00 a day. Though a minority, union miners refused to allow the situation to pass unnoticed. It was reported on July 19, 1924, that 100 union men marched on the Kali-Inla property and removed the men working there--non-union miners recruited from the ranks of former unionists who rejected the union. The next day, the unionists threatened to do the same at the Degman and McConnell mine but failed to appear. The county sheriff was prepared just in case.¹⁰ The men were able to close the Cambria mine.

The mine reopened at the end of August, again with non-union employees. On the night of August 30, someone shot at the guards at the mine. The governor ordered the national guard--eight men and one officer--to provide protection.¹¹ The troubles ended.

But the union miners' plight continued. A typical contract of 1925 provided wages at the 1917 scale. But the payment for machine-mined coal fell from 91 cents to 71 cents a ton. Fire bosses and shot firers received \$5.55 a day; most skilled workers gained \$5.00 a day; and the least skilled employees earned as little as \$2.00 for eight hours or more.¹² Not surprisingly, the unionists struck in the summer of 1925.

The strike was unspectacular but was the occasion for a new departure in picketing techniques. In early August at Greenwood, Arkansas, District Twenty-one vice-president Gomer Jones addressed 350 women at the entrance to an open-shop mine. After Jones's pep talk,

the women began to pray for the non-union men. Their request was that God show the open-shop men the truth and that He bring the strayed sheep back into the fold of District Twenty-one. A week later at Henryetta, Oklahoma, wives were joined by their husbands in praying for the safety of the non-unionists and the awakening of "scabs" to the virtues of unionism.¹³ But the open-shop miners reacted strongly in this case.

At Henryetta, sixty-two national guardsmen and county deputies protected the miners from praying unionists. The workers considered this protection insufficient. Perceiving the prayers as veiled threats, the non-unionists sought an injunction prohibiting any mass meetings or prayers in the mine area. The injunction granted, the 2,500 unemployed unionists of the Henryetta coal region took their case to court. They sued the chief enforcer of the order, the sheriff of Okmulgee County. Backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, four miners prayed in front of the mine entrance. They were arrested by national guardsmen under the command of the sheriff. The American Civil Liberties Union protested, but the secretary of the Henryetta Coal Association responded that the action had the approval of the people of Oklahoma. The Union's spokesman countered with a statement that even if popular the action was nevertheless illegal. In mid-August, the unionists of Henryetta asked that their comrades be released through a writ of habeas corpus. Though the district court of appeals denied the writ because of lack of jurisdiction and though the governor offered the facilities of the state attorney general's office to the prosecutor, on August 18, Judge Thomas Doyle ruled that the right to pray was legitimate. He ordered the men freed.¹⁴

At the end of August, the president of District Twenty-one, William Dalrymple, called an official strike for the pay scale of 1924. This strike affected only the approximately 3,000 union men in Henryetta. Almost immediately there was a demand for troops in the area. But Governor M. E. Trapp declared that the situation was not yet critical. The Rock Island coal company tried to intimidate the residents by threatening to close its mines due to the difficulty of getting labor. In mid-September, seven miners at Henryetta suffered arrest on charges of rioting.¹⁵

Hauled before a justice of the peace, the seven won freedom. But officials rearrested them after the justice of the peace disqualified himself. Major General Baird H. Markham went to Henryetta to investigate the situation. The area remained quiet, and the union declared itself confident of victory.¹⁶ But in October an old nemesis again plagued the district.

On September 28, 1925, shooting occurred near a Kali-Inla mine. According to one night watchman, for approximately thirty minutes, shots and dynamite blasts--600 of the former and maybe a dozen of the latter--raked the mine. All shots came from the weapons of others than the watchmen. The owner, Franklin Bache, sought an injunction to keep violent unionists from his property.¹⁷

In this suit, one of Bache's employees, Elton Eubanks, gave a non-union assessment of the union men. According to Eubanks, union members were willing to die for their cause and often referred to "damned scabs," causing Eubanks to feel afraid.¹⁸ At this time, Bache expressed his reasons for going to an open-shop business.

According to Bache, rejection of the union had little to do with principle. He changed because he wanted to be free of the restrictions on working conditions imposed by the U.M.W.A. Also, he desired to reduce wages to \$5.00 a day.¹⁹ It was a practical matter of running his business as he chose.

The combination of forces arrayed against the union miners resulted in a situation in 1926 in which a confidential operative of the owners with access to the files of the U.M.W.A. was able to report that the miners' union was undecided as to what to do. Union officials were unsure whether they should try to regain the ground lost in the Southwest. Their inclination was to concentrate on efforts to organize West Virginia.²⁰ That the traditionally hostile owners of West Virginia seemed more amenable to unionizing efforts than the formerly pro-union mine owners of the Southwest was an indication of the critical condition which the district endured.

Conditions continued to worsen. In May of 1926, the executive board of District Twenty-one removed Dalrymple from the presidency. The board suspended Secretary-Treasurer George Patterson as well. The new president was Gomer Jones, and Lawrence Sante replaced Patterson. Dalrymple chose not to abide by the decision. He took the keys to his office and disappeared. Jones established the headquarters of the district in his hotel room in Muskogee; the Dalrymple faction seated itself in Patterson's hotel room in the same town. Jones then characterized Dalrymple as a fugitive from justice. On May 20, 1926, a committee from the international went to Muskogee to investigate the problem. Apparently Dalrymple acquiesced in the decision of the investigators

that Jones was president.²¹ That matter settled, the unionists returned to the intermittent strike of 1924 through 1927.

The main events of 1927 were attempted arson and defeat. In July, someone attempted to burn a tippie at Clarksville, Arkansas. It was the second attempt in the slightly more than a month since the mine opened as an open-shop operation. Alert individuals doused the fire before any harm occurred. The once strong union was unable even to practice a small scale attempt at arson successfully.²² The strike failed.

The results of the strike were clear. The custom of maintenance or occasional increase of wages which had prevailed since 1903 was gone. Owners were hostile and began cutting wages. The U.M.W.A. practically disappeared, unable to compete with hostile owners and non-union miners who were happy to be earning \$5.00 a day. The futile strike completed the destruction of union leadership which had been ineffective and disorganized from the period of Hanraty's expulsion and the Holt affair.²³ After 1927, District Twenty-one was gone. Its demise became official in 1929 when the international assumed control of the bankrupt district.

As late as 1919, District Twenty-one was a major force in the mineral economy of Oklahoma. Political power was fading prior to that time, and the strike eliminated the chance that the union might be a legislative force. Even as a merely economic entity, the district might have continued for decades. The coal seams were becoming exhausted, but production continued to measure millions of tons even in the 1950s. But the union failed to continue.

The reasons for the collapse of District Twenty-one were diverse.

Internal weaknesses appeared as early as 1915, but those weaknesses were not necessarily sufficient to kill the union. The national organization endured similar problems as on the various occasions when Alex Howat of Kansas tried to unseat John L. Lewis. The national organization dealt also with the issue of socialism in the repeated efforts of the radical element to push for strong nationalization legislation. Even the formation of the rival Progressive Miners of America was not sufficient to disrupt the U.M.W.A.

Public hostility was another problem common to most areas of the union realm. During the "Red Scare," the U.M.W.A. suffered as much as any of its component parts. Public opinion continued to be hostile to the organization during the 1920s, but the miners remained moderately successful despite this opposition.

The U.M.W.A. shared also the burden of legal action taken by various groups. The international officers suffered through the contempt proceedings against them by the United States government; District Twenty-one faced only instances in which the state government used its military force--instances in which the military served also to restrain the owners. Even the Coronado case was as much a problem for the national organization as for the district. The international bore the burden of defense and assumed the expense. Legal action failed to cause the demise of the district, though it helped the process.

The most important factor in the collapse of the miners' organization in the Southwest was economic change. Throughout the history of District Twenty-one prior to the depression, economic changes were occurring which even a strong organization backed by an understanding public might find difficult to counter. When coal was in great demand,

owners were willing to give their miners almost anything to keep the fuel coming from the ground. Profits were sufficient to allow owners to be generous. But the nation moved from coal, and marginal areas became increasingly unnecessary. Profits diminished as larger veins in other parts of the country were found. Owners tried to cut costs, but the union refused to cooperate by cutting wage demands. The leadership failed to realize that the union must help to preserve itself by aiding the owners in their struggle.

The inept officials of District Twenty-one seemed to be unable to recognize that the days of great demand and huge deposits of easily obtained coal were gone. Men such as Wilkinson and Dalrymple continued to encourage their men to strike--first for increased pay, then for maintenance of the scale, finally for a return to the higher level of the past. As the union continued blindly on its road to destruction, owners became increasingly hostile to the organization they had embraced in 1903.

Dissatisfied with the union system, the operators sought an alternative. They had no need to look far. Even in the prewar years, there was a system of operation enjoying success in the western fields. Ludlow was the most spectacular clash between unionism and the other system. The open-shop became recognized widely as a practical alternative, especially for the owners of Oklahoma who felt competitive economic pressure from non-union coal from the west. Even in Oklahoma, western coal sold for a price which the union shops, hamstrung by union wage levels and working conditions, were unable to meet.

Operators began to reject the union. The union reacted in the only way it understood--the strike. Strikes further increased owner

hostility and raised the costs of production in the Southwest. Miners, whose livelihood was becoming more and more difficult to obtain as competition from other fields reduced the number of days worked in Oklahoma and Arkansas mines, deserted their increasingly disorganized and misguided union. They received encouragement in this process from the owners who were increasingly able to deny employment to union miners. There were too many miners to produce the amount of coal which operators were able to sell in a situation where demand declined while production maintained the levels of the war years. The market was glutted.

No one factor caused District Twenty-one to fall from the high level of the years when it was one of the most important organizations in Oklahoma. None of the factors which contributed to the collapse was sufficient to make the fall as great as it was. Even in combination, the problems of the district were controllable if any one might have been missing. The sheer weight of so many problems over such a long period eventuated in the collapse of District Twenty-one. It sank so low that its own actions were insufficient to revive it. The revival of District Twenty-one came about through the efforts of the national organization. Even more important than the international were the policies of the New Deal which gave the national U.M.W.A. sufficient strength to rebuild itself and, in the process, to rebuild District Twenty-one.

FOOTNOTES

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⁵Arthur E. Suffern, The Coal Miners' Struggle for Industrial Status (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 251.

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⁷James A. Wechsler, Labor Baron, A Portrait of John L. Lewis (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1944, reprint ed. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1972), p. 38.

⁸Anna Rochester, Labor and Coal (New York: International Publishers, 1931), pp. 204-205.

⁹Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 290-296.

¹⁰New York Times, July 19, 20, 1924.

¹¹Ibid., September 1, 1924.

¹²"Contract, Samples Coal and Mining Co.," January 1, 1925, Thomas W. Wheatley Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

¹³New York Times, August 2, 9, 1925.

¹⁴Ibid., August 9, 12, 15, 16, 1925; Henryetta (OK) Daily Free Lance, August 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 1925. The Daily Free Lance reported that the miners later offered their services to the sheriff as

protectors of mine property. Daily Free Lance, October 20, 1925; In late October the miners were enjoined from interfering in any way with the workers. The prayers ended. Coalgate Courier, October 29, 1925.

¹⁵New York Times, September 14, 1925.

¹⁶Daily Oklahoman, September 14, 16, 1925.

¹⁷"Affidavit," William Phebus(?), (typescript), October 15, 1925, Kali-Inla Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

¹⁸"Affidavit," Elton Eubanks, (typescript), Kali-Inla Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

¹⁹Franklin Bache to James H. Gordon, Esq., Attorney at Law, October 14, 1925, Kali-Inla Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

²⁰Franklin Bache to _____ (typescript), April 22, 1926, Kali-Inla Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

²¹Blackwell (OK) Morning Tribune, May 20, 1926.

²²New York Times, July 2, 1927.

²³Ryan, Rehabilitation, p. 64.

CHAPTER V

REBIRTH AND SURVIVAL

Well before the world economy crumbled in 1929, the coal industry was in critical condition. Whether the provision of the Dawes Plan allowing German reparations in Ruhr coal was a major factor or not, in the 1920s the world's miners produced more coal than was needed. The depression in coal encouraged owner animosity toward unions which owners perceived as forcing operators into a non-competitive position. The U.M.W.A. failed in its fight to enforce the Jacksonville Agreement; within a few years it had dwindled to a membership of approximately 200,000. District Twenty-one was weak already due to the numerous problems of the postwar period. Without the support of the national organization, the district was unable to maintain itself. With the aid of even a weak international, the union in Oklahoma and Arkansas survived the gloomiest period of its history. Paradoxically, the depression which was so painful for so many was the occasion of the revival of the U.M.W.A. and, therefore, of District Twenty-one, the provisional district.

The district never conceded defeat. Even in the dark days, it made gains. In 1927, Senator Guy L. Andrews of McAlester sponsored a resolution to codify all the coal mining laws of Oklahoma. He also suggested a board to be composed of the chief mine inspector, two operators, and two practical miners. Nothing came of the measure, but

in 1929 revision of the mining code came once again to the legislature.¹

In 1927, the Eleventh Legislature established a committee to revise the mining code. Two members of the group drafted the Foster-Hay bill, but the other three members felt the proposed legislation was unsatisfactory. Pete Hanraty, by this time a mine owner, and Mat McElroy, president of District Twenty-one, examined the proposed code and recommended that it be rejected. When combined with opposition from other sectors, this opinion resulted in the death of the bill without introduction in the house. William J. Holloway, governor of Oklahoma, called a special session of the legislature in which mining laws were one topic.

The coal operators asked the union to cooperate in the creation of a new mining code. It was hoped that this action might revive the industry. Sympathetic to labor, the governor informed the Oklahoma Federation of Labor that he wanted cooperation from both the federation and the operators; otherwise he opposed the submission of mining legislation. The federation had attempted previously to get assistance from John Saxton who replaced McElroy when the autonomy of the district was suspended in 1929. Saxton did nothing; McElroy received the call to aid the labor organization.

Second Vice President of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor Mat McElroy and the other miners in the organization agreed that new legislation was possible. In fact they felt it necessary as there was reason to fear that after the election of 1931 the new governor and legislature might be less supportive of labor. The federation agreed that new mining laws were necessary. A former miner, Walter Jacobs of Coalgate,

introduced a modified version of the Hay-Foster bill. The federation asked twenty-one modifications which it gained without difficulty. By the time the bill passed--which was accomplished without problems--nearly thirty changes asked by the federation became part of the bill.

The bill created a new mining code, a new electrical code, and more stringent safety provisions. According to the unions, the major aspect of the bill was that it covered strip pits and dog holes, the small, family-worked diggings. The fact that these operations were subject to safety laws meant that possibly they were more available to the organizing efforts of the labor movement. A report to the federation's convention of 1929 ended with the caution that if enforcement of this code were to be the same as in earlier years, the only protection for the miners would be a strong organization and a united refusal to work in hazardous areas.²

The miners no longer had the strong organization needed. The same convention which suggested the need for a strong organization to ensure the enforcement of the new mining code also provided several indicators of the decline of District Twenty-one. Of more than 4,000 members who voted for president of the federation, only seventy-eight were miners. Representation at the convention was better. The second vice-president was a miner, Mat McElroy. And of ninety-eight delegates, ten were miners. President Joe C. Campbell of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor called for the "reorganization of this loyal group of trades unionists," the miners.³ Secretary-Treasurer Victor Purdy noted that the Arkansas Federation of Labor was small but "permeated with the spirit of true unionism," despite enduring difficult times.⁴

Thus, the union was not in position to enforce the new safety laws, and no one else would.

The first major disaster in Oklahoma mines occurred at Krebs, Indian Territory, in 1892. There, one hundred died. By December of 1929, 300 had died. On December 17, 1929, fifty-nine miners lost their lives at McAlester; three survived. By early 1931, the figures were worse: 510 had been killed and more than 1,000 had been injured seriously in the nineteen major explosions which had occurred in approximately forty years. In the two years following the new mining legislation with more stringent safety rules, more than two hundred men died. Forty percent of all the fatalities occurred in that short period. One source, Frederick Lynne Ryan, attributed this new trend to the tendency of owners to be negligent, to the fact that scab labor was unskilled normally, and to the habit of the state department of mines restricting its activities to inspections and the collection of statistics rather than seeking improvements or prosecutions.⁵

The miners' union continued to decline. At the convention of 1931 of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, the miners' voice was virtually still. In the balloting for president, only seventeen miners voted. The total vote count was 2,899. Even worse, not one miner attended the convention, and the secretary-treasurer reported that one miners' local at Wilburton, Oklahoma, had disbanded.⁶ But organizing efforts continued.

In 1931, Provisional President David Fowler and Provisional Secretary George Michaels of Provisional District Twenty-one were successful in reorganizing Henryetta, Oklahoma, and some parts of Arkansas.⁷

But their efforts were short lived. In 1931 and 1932, strikes at Henryetta and at McAlester proved ineffective.

The strike at Henryetta ended in January of 1932, with the freeing of eight Henryetta miners of charges of dynamiting. The prosecution was unable to find evidence to prove its case. One reason for this strike was the reductions in wages common throughout the region. In August of 1931, the Samples Coal Company reduced wages to \$3.60 a day. This rate was the best in the state. Henryetta and other parts of the coal region paid as little as \$2.00 for eight hours.⁸ So the defeat at Henryetta stopped nothing. In August, the miners struck again.

As well as wanting higher wages, the miners fought for recognition of their union. Oklahoma Labor Commissioner W. A. Pat Murphy charged late in the strike that the problem was that some owners attempted to deny collective bargaining to their men while enjoying it themselves.⁹ The governor, William H. Murray, alleged other abuses of the law.

Murray wrote an owner, J. C. Puterbaugh, a week after the onset of the strike. The governor alleged that the operator worked men as long as sixteen hours a day despite the clear legal provision that the maximum work day was eight hours. At the same time, Murray rebuked the miners for their excesses. He claimed that union miners from Arkansas crossed the state line and beat a non-union miner. That man was made to join the union, and the strikers made other threats.¹⁰ Murray steered a neutral course between the opposing forces.

While telling the owners to obey the law and the strikers to do the same, Murray expressed the opinion of his constituents. Murray declared himself neutral in the fight. He stated also that every man had the right not to join an organization of any sort. He promised to

enforce the right of peaceful picketing, but above all he vowed that peace must be maintained. As to the disputants, he said, "Both must obey the law."¹¹

Though both sides used the courts, the law was not the only tactic employed. On September 1, 1932, the Blackwell Morning Tribune reported that approximately 2,000 miners gathered at McAlester to hear Judge Hal Johnson's decision concerning the request of the operators for a permanent injunction. The owners intended that injunction to bar union interference with open shop operations in the strike region. Johnson postponed his ruling twelve days, but he allowed a continuance of the temporary restraining order brought by the union. Unionists picketed the two non-union mines which reopened on August 30 while other mines, including the Samples Coal Company's mine on penitentiary land, prepared to reopen. No disorder was reported.¹²

The next Sunday, September 4, a similar situation prevailed. The McAlester and Hartshorne mines remained closed. A few operators opened non-union mines; others attempted to negotiate. Most remained closed. The unionists continued to picket peacefully. The chief of the State Bureau of Criminal Identification, C. A. Burns, was on the scene preparing a report for Governor Murray. The governor was reported as considering martial law if the situation remained unresolved after the weekend.¹³ The problem continued, but Murray failed to act.

Four days later, apparently for less than peaceful picketing, twenty-nine men found themselves under arrest. Their wives threatened to picket in their places, but that action failed to materialize. At the same time at Alix, Arkansas, 300 union men stopped an attempt to open a non-union mine. They loaded four scabs into a truck and sent

the non-union men away. On September 12, Judge Johnson reconvened the hearing at McAlester.¹⁴

Free on bond, the twenty-nine prisoners attended the hearing. When they attempted to return to jail, they were refused entry. More important, the union's argument in its defense indicated its plight. The unionists argued that an injunction against District Twenty-one had no validity because the district no longer existed. The judge was more concerned with testimony dealing with union intimidation of open-shop employees at the Messina mine near Haileyville, Oklahoma. A week of testimony resulted in a permanent injunction against forty specific individuals and a temporary restraining order against the district. Five operators prepared to increase their work forces, several score miners endured arrest for using epithets and threats before the decision became known, and Provisional President David Fowler seemed confused.

First Fowler stated that the injunction allowed the union to station three men along each fifty foot stretch of highway near the mine. He believed also that two men were authorized to visit the open-shop mines once in an hour. The next day Fowler had no statement about any future action. The miners acted. They held a mass meeting after the decision. This meeting evolved quickly into a series of boxing matches and a fund-raising event for pioneer miners.¹⁶ That happy mood lasted only a short time.

A report in the New York Times of September 27, 1932, noted that work was available for 5,000 men in Arkansas and Oklahoma because of improved market conditions and completed negotiations between the operators and the union; it proved to be wrong. On the night of October 1, 1932, at Hartshorne four men fractured the skull of State

Bureau of Criminal Investigations operative John Deller. At the same time several bombings occurred, but fortunately there were no injuries; unfortunately, there were no suspects. Bureau agent O. P. Ray was ready to ask the governor to call out the national guard.¹⁷ Murray hesitated again.

In mid-October, the situation remained the same. Officials jailed twenty-three miners at McAlester, charging five with rioting and eighteen with intimidating non-union men while picketing. This was the result of disturbances at Pittsburg, Oklahoma. Murray continued to vacillate. He went to McAlester with Adjutant General Charles Barrett on October 12, 1932. There he declined to commit himself in the matter of using troops. He talked with the operators but refused to meet with Fowler. The next day Murray met with the miners. He still refused to commit himself because his investigation had just begun. Therefore, he made no decision.¹⁸ The next week matters deteriorated further.

On October 14, two women received injuries from a dynamite explosion. Someone threw a bomb onto the front porch of an open-shop miner, and his wife and daughter received injuries from the flying glass which resulted from the explosion. At that point reports began to circulate that some people were planning to move in with relatives elsewhere. This explosion was the third in the district; the fourth occurred on October 31 when someone tossed dynamite into the backyard of a non-union miner at Hartshorne. No one was hurt though the two children of the miner were nearby.¹⁹

By mid-November, the union cause had gained a marked degree of success. Labor Commissioner Murphy noted that 1,239 miners had the coverage of agreements between their employers and the U.M.W.A. Only

four companies remained open-shop. Two hundred and forty-nine open-shop employees were left unorganized. Before the strike, miners received a minimum of \$2.00 a day and pick miners earned 85 cents a ton while machine miners got 64.5 cents a ton. The contract, intended to be effective from October 1, 1932, to March 1, 1934, called for payment of 59 cents a ton for machine loaders, \$4.11 a day for shot firers, and \$3.60 a day for loaders. The lowest paid laborers received \$1.50 each day.²⁰ In the matter of money, the strike was futile.

The condition of the coal mining region was typified by Frederick Lynne Ryan in the following:

115 old shafts and slopes, with their piles of slack scattered over hundreds of acres of land, with worn out machinery thrown helter-skelter around the mines in the vicinity of McAlester . . .²¹

Deterioration and decay were prevalent in the coal fields of Oklahoma.

Recovery was not to be easy. The union made some progress in rebuilding its organization during 1932, but the pivotal events in its recovery came in 1933. The presidential election of 1932 brought Franklin D. Roosevelt to the White House. Roosevelt acted to lift the depression facing the nation. One of the beneficiaries of his actions was the U.M.W.A.

Roosevelt offered Americans a "New Deal." Among other things the legislation of the New Deal gave labor the right to organize. The first law was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. Designed to promote industrial revitalization, this act provided in Section 7(a) that all employees had the right to organize and to bargain collectively. Revived, the U.M.W.A. added 300,000 men to its 60,000 in a matter of months. In 1934, the Supreme Court declared Section 7(a)

unconstitutional. New Dealers continued to support labor, and in 1935 they passed the National Labor Relations Act, called the Wagner Act. This act reaffirmed the rights given by Section 7(a) and it was constitutional. The Supreme Court confirmed the validity of the law in 1937.²²

By 1937, Provisional District Twenty-one was well on its way to recovery. In that year, the international organization signed the second Appalachian Agreement. Since the first agreement in 1933, the Appalachian area provided the standard by which contracts were measured. On February 17, 1937, the new base field agreed to an increase of 15 cents a ton, 13 cents to the loader and 2 cents to the cutter. Payment for yardage and deadwork was increased 20 percent, and the miners gained a six-hour day and a five-day week. They won a guaranteed 200 days minimum employment a year and vacation time. Oklahoma Labor Commissioner Pete R. Stewart asked the operators of his state how they would be affected by those terms.²³ Their reaction was negative.

It was reported in May that efforts to renegotiate the contract of 1935 had failed. Therefore, the district signed forty individual contracts in an attempt to pressure the Arkansas-Oklahoma Coal Operators' Association to reopen negotiations. The union failed to get a district agreement, but it gained improved terms in the individual negotiations with most owners. The contracts provided for a seven-hour day, time-and-a-half pay for overtime, and a 9 cent a ton raise for pick miners and a 50 cent a day increase for others. The contracts provided as well for a checkweighman and for the automatic checkoff of union dues, initiation fees, and fines. The union appeared to have recovered. Fowler indicated his pleasure by thanking Thomas W. Wheatley for being

the first owner to sign a contract based on these terms.

But not everyone was happy. While negotiations were occurring, Fowler received a letter from the men of Local Union 6663. These miners said they preferred not to have the thirty-five hour week. Even with the wage increase, they stood to lose \$2.00 a week in comparison with their previous wages. They wished also to work six days a week to keep coal prices low enough to meet the competitive pressures from oil and gas.²⁴ Such sentiments, however, did not prevail.

Relations between the owners and the union improved markedly in the later 1930s. One factor was the presence of the former miner Pete Stewart as Commissioner of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Coal Operators' Association in 1937. That year Stewart reminded Wheatley that his action in working on Sunday was undesirable. The Joint Board of Miners and Operators prohibited such labor. Wheatley explained that there was only one instance. His miners had lost five days in the preceding month, so he ran a Sunday crew once to help the men make up lost pay. He indicated that operators and employees were working for the same ends.²⁵

The process continued. In 1938, the U.M.W.A. gained a contract with the Gillie Coal Company of Bokoshe, Oklahoma, ending a dispute which had lasted five years. David Fowler, Director of the Oklahoma-Arkansas Congress of Industrial Organizations, announced the agreement. In 1939, the Samples Coal Company contracted with the provisional district to recognize the U.M.W.A. as the exclusive bargaining agent for its employees.²⁶ The hard liners were falling into place.

The union reorganized the men. However, the economic changes which occurred in the coal industry prevented the union from regaining

the power that it once had. Except during World War II, coal miners in Arkansas and Oklahoma were part-time workers. Oklahoma miners averaged ninety-three days worked in both 1933 and 1934. In the other years between 1932 and 1948, the same men averaged between 102 and 145 days a year, excluding the war years of 1942 through 1944 when the number of work days exceeded the number of calendar days because of overtime and extra shifts. The number of miners fell from 4,100 in 1932 to a low of 1,900 in 1940, then stabilized at between 2,000 and 2,500 through the 1940s. Increased mechanization allowed fewer men to work less hours to produce more coal.²⁷

The pattern was similar in Arkansas. In the mid-1930s, 4,000 men produced approximately one and one-fourth million tons in a work year declining from 136 days in 1934-1936 to 111 days in 1939. Even during the war the best work year was 1943 when 3,252 men averaged 188 working days. After the war the number of miners and the number of days worked continued to decline. By 1951, 2,075 men worked 121 days a year on the average.²⁸

Gone were the days when 15,000 union miners walked off the job and caused economic hardship for the people of Oklahoma and Arkansas. The mines of District Twenty-one were no longer a major factor in the economy of the region. Coal declined as a fuel, and miners faded as a force.

The coal industry in Oklahoma endured hard times even during the prosperous days of the 1920s. The economic disaster of the 1930s came as no change for those who earned their livelihood from the digging of bituminous. The depression merely capped the already difficult existence of miners and mine owners. But the depression offered the industry a mode of salvation.

During the days when the open-shop movement was vying with unionism, the union continued to struggle. This fight was no more than a holding action. The U.M.W.A. managed to survive long enough. The miners regrouped during the 1930s because a sufficient number of people rejected the economic policies of the 1920s and sought any alternative. The man who symbolized change in 1932 was Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Roosevelt entered the White House committed to experimenting with the American economy. Some of his ideas failed, and some potential alternatives escaped his attention, but the president initiated the National Industry Recovery Act and allowed passage of the Wagner Act. These actions legitimized the claim of unions such as the U.M.W.A. to represent the workers of America. Granted that right and supported by powers in Washington, D. C., the union of John L. Lewis rebuilt itself into an organization of greater strength than at almost any time in its history. Rebuilding nationally, the U.M.W.A. caused the rebirth of District Twenty-one.

The causes of weakness which induced the decline of District Twenty-one were reduced when the international assumed control of district affairs. No longer were internal politics and lack of money to hamper the district. Led by the successful reunionization under the approving eye of the national government, District Twenty-one became again the voice of Arkansas and Oklahoma coal miners. But the union became the spokesman for a fading industry.

By the time of World War II, District Twenty-one was accepted by the operators of area mines. Cooperation rather than competition was the rule in the hard hit region. Conflicts occurred in the ensuing years, but the desperate violence of the 1930s ended. District

Twenty-one and the operators of the area were again working as they did in the two decades after 1903. The difference was that this time they were working, but no one else cared.

By the time of World War II, the U.M.W.A. had revived. Provisional District Twenty-one was just one of fifty districts that followed John L. Lewis almost blindly. When Lewis permitted federal control of the mines, District Twenty-one acquiesced. When John L. Lewis ordered a wartime strike, District Twenty-one obeyed. After the war, the pattern continued. When John L. Lewis ordered six days mourning for the dead of the mine disaster at Centralia, Illinois, on March 30, 1947, 400,000 miners left their jobs. Between 5,000 and 7,500 miners in Arkansas and Oklahoma remained absent from work from March 31 through April 5, 1947.²⁹

At the time of the walkout, District Twenty-one's mines were operating only one or two days a week. It was the slack season, and approximately 40 percent of the workers in the mines were unemployed. The loss in production resulting from the walkout required only one or two days to be corrected.³⁰ District Twenty-one was insignificant in the economy and in the union.

After the federal government returned the mines to their owners in July of 1947, John L. Lewis led his union in a series of strikes occurring from 1947 through 1950. District Twenty-one shared the benefits gained nationally. In 1948, an agreement authorized a pension of \$100.00 each month for a miner sixty-two years of age or older who had twenty years of service and who had been retired since May 19, 1946.³¹ The next year the miners of District Twenty-one improved their present rather than their future.

The contract which expired in 1950 provided for wages of \$13.43 a day for hand loaders and \$13.70 a day for machine operators. Miners received wages for one hour of travel time and a lunch break of thirty minutes. The actual workday was six and one-half hours. Wages were high, but the full-time working season extended only from September to April. Won after a strike, the contract of 1950 provided a wage increase to \$14.75 a day. Owners contributed 30 cents a ton toward the pension fund, a figure which approximated \$135 million a year nationally as the miners averaged seven tons of coal produced by each man in a day. Though the Taft-Hartley Act banned the requiring of a union shop, the owners agreed to accept one. Under Taft-Hartley, however, the calling of a strike became more difficult.³²

Postwar contracts included a provision that miners were to work when "able and willing," but the contract of 1950 altered that to read that work problems were a matter of "good faith and mutual understanding."³³ John L. Lewis had used the earlier provision to stop work almost at whim. Such was the case in the memorial stoppage of 1947. Lewis claimed that strikes were not his fault and that his miners had the right to stay home if unable or unwilling to work. That excuse served as his defense when miners ignored a court order which required that they reenter the mines. In accordance with the Taft-Hartley Act, the new contract had a provision which necessitated honest attempts to negotiate before resorting to a strike. Owners in Oklahoma wanted even tighter controls.

President Earl Wells of the Oklahoma-Arkansas Coal Operators Association described the ills of the region's coal industry in an interview on February 12, 1950. According to Wells, the business was

breaking, even before the strike of 1950. Oklahoma and Arkansas operators were accustomed to receiving special treatment from the U.M.W.A. The district's coal seams were thinner than those of most other areas. Higher costs of extraction and higher freight costs were disadvantages to the competitive position of the mines. The U.M.W.A. allowed District Twenty-one to accept lower wages than the national average. But the new increases made Oklahoma and Arkansas coal uncompetitive.³⁴ Wells also mentioned the problems caused to the owners by the strike-prone John L. Lewis.

Lewis believed in the strike, and he used it on all possible occasions. District Twenty-one followed his lead each time. According to Wells, the seven months' disturbance of 1949 forced him to close two of his three mines, resulting in the loss of 144 jobs in an already depressed industry. Wells cited other problems: fixed expenses, such as pumping, continued even during a stoppage; non-union production equalled union production in 1949; and the situation in which non-union mines were able to produce more coal at less cost was equivalent to hard competition. The result was shown in unemployment figures. After World War II, 8,000 miners worked at McAlester and Wilburton; in 1950, 500 remained. At Henryetta, the comparative numbers were 3,000 and 600.³⁵

In 1951, Oklahoma Commissioner of Labor Jim Hughes confirmed the decline. He noted that of 500,000 non-farm workers in Oklahoma, 45,000 worked in mining. However, only 1,600 were coal miners while 40,000 produced competitive fuels such as petroleum and natural gas.³⁶ Coal miners were an insignificant force. Their influence in the state legislature reflected that fact.

In 1929, the miners found that they needed support to enact desired legislation. In 1951, that situation was more evident. Only one company insured miners and that firm threatened to cease; consequently, the miners supported a senate bill which required the insurance fund to protect miners. The bill also called for an end to the power of the state insurance fund director to refuse protection to workers whose occupational risks were too great. Despite the miners' support, the bill died in the senate. The miners were more fortunate when House Joint Resolution 10 failed in committee. That resolution called for a constitutional amendment to prohibit the union shop in Oklahoma. Labor had sufficient backing to prevent an action which the miners alone could not.³⁷

By 1957, Provisional District Twenty-one was even less a force. In that year, the U.M.W.A. was comprised of thirty districts. Only two of those districts were so insignificant that they needed no district secretary-treasurer. One was located in Birmingham, Alabama; the other was District Twenty-one. Also, the positions of president and international executive board member belonged to one man, David Fowler.³⁸ Under the trusteeship, now nearly thirty years old, the district had few duties.

Fortunately for the miners of the district, the international organization continued to prosper. By 1956, the U.M.W.A. Welfare and Retirement Fund was a billion dollar operation. In the decade since 1946, the fund received \$1 billion and disbursed \$880 million to nearly one million miners and dependents. Oklahomans and Arkansans shared in the benefits. Besides retirement, the fund gave to widows, orphans, and other eligible survivors, benefits including \$350.00 for

burial and \$650.00 for the year following the death of the insured. The U.M.W.A. established as well a number of hospitals for miners and dependents. The area office at St. Louis, Missouri, supervised hospital and medical services for Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Arkansas.³⁹ Services continued to improve during the next decades, but District Twenty-one became less and less important.

Coal production declined from two million tons to 800,000 tons between 1956 and 1967. By the latter year, the number of mine employees was 234, and 99 percent of Oklahoma's production came from strip mines. But the coal industry was not finished. In 1973, the oil embargo renewed interest in coal as an alternative to petroleum and natural gas. In February of 1978, the Oklahoma Miner Training Institute opened near Krebs. The institute was a response to federal legislation requiring that miners learn safety procedures before entering underground workings. Though required for all miners, the institute was significant for coal workers because of reports that an underground mine was to open at Shady Point and that a mine near Stigler which had closed in 1972 was to reopen within the year.⁴⁰ The signs appeared positive for a recovery of the coal mining industry. But a return to the prosperity of the 1910s was not anticipated.

FOOTNOTES

¹Blackwell (OK) Morning Tribune, March 1, 1927.

²Frederick Lynne Ryan, A History of Labor Legislation in Oklahoma (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932), p. 66; Joe C. Campbell and Victor Purdy, "Report of Legislative Committee," Official Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, (1929), pp. 22-24.

³"Report of the Election Board, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, 1929," Official Proceedings, (1929), n.p.; Credentials Committee, "Delegates in Attendance," Official Proceedings, (1929), pp. 5-6; Joe C. Campbell, "Report of the President," Official Proceedings, (1929), p. 12.

⁴Victor Purdy, "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer," Official Proceedings, (1929), p. 15.

⁵Blackwell Morning Tribune, December 18, 1929; Frederick Lynne Ryan, The Rehabilitation of Oklahoma Coal Mining Communities (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1935), p. 70.

⁶"Report of the Election Board, Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, 1931," Official Proceedings of the Twenty-eighth Annual Convention of the Oklahoma Federation of Labor, (1931), n.p.; Victor Purdy, "Report of the Secretary-Treasurer," Official Proceedings, (1931), p. 12; Credentials Committee, "Delegates in Attendance," Official Proceedings, (1931), p. 4.

⁷Ryan, Rehabilitation, p. 99.

⁸Blackwell Daily Tribune, January 12, 1932; Samples Coal Mining Company, Notice, n.d., Thomas W. Wheatley Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

⁹W. A. Pat Murphy to Pittsburg-McAlester Coal Company, Craig Valley Coal Company, Delaokla Coal Company, and Milby Dow Coal Company, November 12, 1932, Wheatley Collection.

¹⁰William H. Murray to J. C. Puterbaugh, August 9, 1932, Wheatley Collection; William H. Murray, "To the Miners, Operators, and the People of the Coal Fields of Oklahoma," August 9, 1932 (typescript), Wheatley Collection.

¹¹Ibid.

- ¹²Blackwell Morning Tribune, September 1, 1932.
- ¹³Blackwell (OK) Sunday Tribune, September 4, 1932.
- ¹⁴Blackwell Morning Tribune, September 7, 13, 1932.
- ¹⁵Ibid., September 13, 19, 1932; Blackwell Sunday Tribune, September 18, 1932.
- ¹⁶Blackwell Sunday Tribune, September 18, 1932; Blackwell Morning Tribune, September 19, 1932.
- ¹⁷New York Times, September 27, 1932; Blackwell Morning Tribune, October 3, 1932.
- ¹⁸New York Times, October 13, 1932; Blackwell Morning Tribune, October 13, 14, 1932.
- ¹⁹Blackwell Morning Tribune, October 25, 1932; New York Times, November 1, 1932.
- ²⁰W. A. Pat Murphy to Pittsburg-McAlester Coal Company, Craig Valley Coal Company, Delaokla Coal Company, and Milby Dow Coal Company, November 12, 1932, Wheatley Collection; "Supplemental Contract by and Between Provisional District 21, United Mine Workers of America and Coal Operators of McAlester and Hartshorne, Oklahoma, Coal Fields," n.d., Wheatley Collection.
- ²¹Ryan, Rehabilitation, p. 103.
- ²²Joseph G. Rayback, A History of American Labor (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 327, 328, 331, 341-344.
- ²³"Wage Proposals of the United Mine Workers of America to the Bituminous Coal Operators of the Appalachian Region," February 17, 1937, Wheatley Collection; P. R. Stewart to Thomas W. Wheatley, et al., February 22, 1937, Wheatley Collection.
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- ²⁵Local Union 6663 to David Fowler, April 15, 1937, Whealey Collection.
- ²⁶P. R. Stewart to Thomas W. Wheatley, October 8, 1937, Wheatley Collection; Thomas W. Wheatley to P. R. Stewart, October 9, 1937, Wheatley Collection.
- ²⁷Oklahoma City (OK) Daily Oklahoman, January 13, 1938; "Contract (Independent)," Samples Coal Company and Provisional District Twenty-one, May 18, 1939, Wheatley Collection.

- ²⁸ Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman, April 7, 1947.
- ²⁹ Ibid. March 29, 30, April 13, 1947.
- ³⁰ Ibid., March 30, 1947.
- ³¹ Ibid., April 13, 1948.
- ³² Ibid., February 9, March 6, 1950.
- ³³ Ibid., February 12, March 6, 1950.
- ³⁴ Ibid., February 12, 1950.
- ³⁵ Ibid. Some miners had agreed to a 95 cent increase, but they accepted the standard of 70 cents. The union tried to help the owners. Oklahoma City Daily Oklahoman, March 7, 1950.
- ³⁶ Jim Hughes, "Address-Commissioner of Labor," Official Proceedings of the Forty-sixth Annual Convention of the Oklahoma State Federation of Labor, (1951), pp. 32-38.
- ³⁷ Dean Baugh, "Report of the Executive Secretary," Official Proceedings, Oklahoma Federation of Labor (1951), pp. 24, 26.
- ³⁸ United Mine Workers Journal, no. 18, September 15, 1957, p. 2.
- ³⁹ Ibid., n.p., p. 15; United Mine Workers of America, Welfare and Retirement Fund Report for the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 1956 (Washington, D.C.: U.M.W.A. Welfare and Retirement Fund, 1956).
- ⁴⁰ Philip Kalisch, "Ordeal of the Oklahoma Coal Miners: Coal Mine Disasters in the Sooner State, 1886-1945," The Daily Oklahoman, September 3, 1978.

CHAPTER VI

AS A PHOENIX

In retrospect it can be seen that District Twenty-one enjoyed two decades of prosperity and power after the successful strike of 1903. But in the 1920s that situation changed. Natural gas and petroleum replaced coal as a major fuel while the union destroyed itself with the assistance of outside problems. By 1929, the district came under the control of the national organization; there it remained for one-half a century. After 1929, the fortunes of District Twenty-one depended on the actions of John L. Lewis and his successor. Until the mid-1950s, the international made remarkable gains for America's miners. But the shift away from coal continued. Eventually the national leadership began to lose the influence that only a leader of the stature of Lewis could enjoy.

By the 1960s, the U.M.W.A. was in a period of decline and internal turmoil. It avoided the state of disarray which characterized the union in the late-1920s, but it was past its peak influence. The weak district in Oklahoma and Arkansas had no strong support to prevent it from declining more rapidly than the national U.M.W.A. By 1967, the coal industry in Oklahoma employed only 234 men. But when the national union faltered, the American economy provided the salvation of the district.

Oil and gas became scarce. Coal remained in America's soil in

vast quantities. When the embargo-induced search for alternative fuels occurred in the mid-1970s, the depleted resources of Oklahoma and Arkansas became once again profitable to extract. In a boom even marginal areas are subject to exploitation.

In one respect, the history of District Twenty-one was reflective of the story of Oklahoma. Born at the turn of the century when progressive thought was widespread, the two shared common goals until World War I caused the decline of progressivism. Pete Hanraty and Oklahoma's politicians worked together to create for Oklahoma one of the most up-to-date constitutions of the time. Reform was less successful in Arkansas because of the more difficult task needed there. Rather than developing something new, it was necessary to modify the old—an old which tradition and interest made immovable. Oklahoma was new territory, and the mine workers had a leader willing to exploit the opportunity.

By 1919, the miners and the people of Oklahoma were working for divergent ends. Normalcy and reform were not compatible. District Twenty-one's miners began to opt for the former, leaving the union for the open-shop. The union faded until it was almost non-existent by 1930.

As Oklahomans sought a way out of the depression, they turned to the national government. Government intervention became less repugnant. Individualism came to seem less valid than collective efforts in a collective disaster. The old open-shop employers, encouraged by national legislation, began to recognize that their salvation was tied to that of the U.M.W.A. Faced with competition from alternative fuels and outside sources of coal, the mine owners cooperated with the union to

resolve differences peacefully. By 1937, the coal fields were the scene of cooperation, not conflict. Strikes continued in the next forty years, but they were not violent. National acceptance of labor's right to bargain collectively and to strike meant that the owners and the workers disagreed but without animosity.

By the 1970s, Oklahoma was a typical state. Except for a number of archaic laws, it was little different from the other forty-nine states. District Twenty-one was in a similar condition. It continued to exist as one of many unions, being noticed only in cases where national actions--strikes and elections--called for local activity. The district was also somewhat of an anomaly, being one of the last to be freed from trusteeship, not regaining control of its own affairs until 1973.

District Twenty-one was never of national importance. Its influence on Arkansas was limited; that on Oklahoma temporary. The district provided, however, important influences on the state, and it was significant as a reflector of trends in American and Oklahoman history.

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