

THE WESTERN FEDERATION OF MINERS AND THE ROYAL
COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES IN 1903 WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE VANCOUVER ISLAND COAL
MINERS' STRIKE

by

Allan Donald Orr

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1958

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Arts

in the Department
of
History

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard.

The University of British Columbia

April, 1968

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of

History

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver 8, Canada

Date

April 29, 1968

The Western Federation of Miners and The Royal
Commission on Industrial Disputes in 1903

Abstract

The Dominion government appointed a Royal Commission in April 1903 to investigate the causes of strikes that began in February between the Canadian Pacific Railway Company and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees at Vancouver and the Wellington Colliery Company and the Western Federation of Miners at Extension and Cumberland on Vancouver Island. The Royal Commissioners were instructed to report whether in their opinion these and other American unions should have their activities in Canada curtailed. After a month of hearings the Commissioners reported that the United Brotherhood and the Western Federation were undesirable unions for Canadian workingmen to join. The Commissioners concluded that both unions had conspired to bring about strikes in the Wellington Colliery mines. The Nanaimo Miners' Union, Local 177 of the Western Federation, was accused by the Commissioners of assisting in the conspiracy to tie up the coal mines in the adjacent towns. As the Canadian Pacific Railway Company depended in part on the Wellington mines for steam coal for its trains at Vancouver, it was apparent

that the unions concerned tried to break the strike for recognition between the railway company and the union in favour of the union.

The Commissioners also reported that these American unions were spreading revolutionary socialism in British Columbia. The main result of this political action, concluded the Commissioners, was to instil in workingmen a belief in the inevitability of class conflict between themselves and their employers. The transportation and mining industries of the province were in danger of having their businesses seriously disrupted if these foreign unions remained in Canada. The Commissioners stated that a few socialists in Vancouver, Nanaimo, Extension and Cumberland were responsible for encouraging these radical unions to organize the workers.

The question as to whether the Western Federation actually caused the strikes on the island has never been seriously explored. Historians have been divided on the question and on their assessment of the validity of the Commissioners' Report. The official hearings disclosed that James Dunsmuir, the president and owner of Wellington Collieries, locked out his miners once they had formed unions. The Commissioners argued that the conspiracy plan depended on the predictable reaction of Dunsmuir to the formation of unions in his mines. In the past he had never permitted unions to exist for long in his mines before he dismissed the union leaders. It has never been satisfactorily demonstrated

whether the miners joined the Western Federation for reasons of their own and then struck for union recognition or whether they were, as the Commissioners alleged, tricked into the Federation only to find themselves locked out.

The Commissioners admitted in the Report that Wellington Collieries and other large employers of labour bore some responsibility for the fact that working men organized unions in order to protect themselves from the arbitrary and unjust treatment they often received from managers and foremen. Although the Commissioners stated that shorter hours and higher wages would make workingmen more content, they did not report that grievances over working conditions and wages were the real reasons why the miners joined the Western Federation. Yet the official hearings of 1903 contained ample evidence that the strikes at Extension and Cumberland occurred for reasons that lay primarily within and not outside the coalfield.

The Commissioners misinterpreted the reasons why the miners joined the Western Federation because their attention was directed solely to the issue of the advance of American unions into Canada. An analysis of the official evidence of the Commission reveals that the miners formed unions at Wellington Collieries in 1903 in order to resolve problems that had become traditional sources of dispute on the coalfield.

The traditional problems that embittered relations

between miners and companies were geological, social and economic in character. The faulted condition of the coal seams made mining both difficult and dangerous. Since 1871 Wellington miners had organized unions to fight for improvements in safety and working conditions underground. However, the increased employment of illiterate and inexperienced Oriental workers increased the dangers of mining to all concerned. Miners demanded the exclusion of Oriental workers from the mines for another important reason than the question of safety. Oriental workers competed for the jobs of mine labourers and were often used in place of white miners during strikes. During strikes in 1877, in 1883 and in 1903 Chinese workers kept the mines running while white miners were locked out.

In contrast to the Wellington mines, unions emerged at the Nanaimo mines and working conditions steadily improved after 1883. A miners' union grievance committee was established in the mines by 1883. An eight hour day, oriental exclusion and union recognition were in effect in the Nanaimo mines by 1891. Attempts by union leaders from Nanaimo in the years 1890 to 1901 failed in their purpose of organizing the Dunsmuir mines. When the Nanaimo miners joined the Western Federation of Miners in 1902 in order to improve their weak bargaining power, miners in the adjacent Dunsmuir mines saw their opportunity to join the Federation. With the financial and moral support of a large union behind them the Dunsmuir miners demanded union recognition as the first step in their plan to negotiate improvements in wages and working conditions.

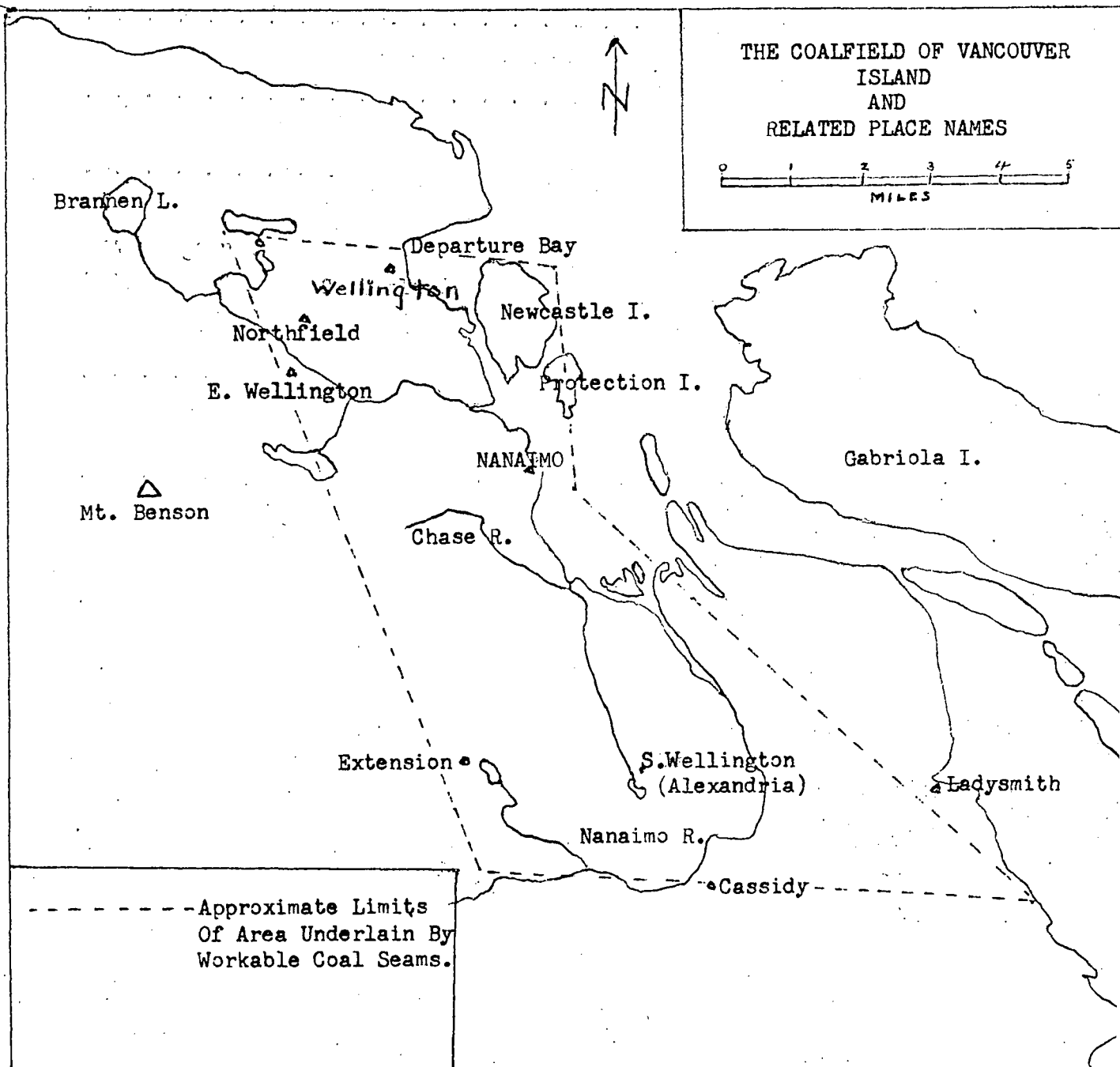
-iva-

CONTENTS

	Page
Map of the Vancouver Island Coalfield.	vii
Introduction	1
Chapter	
I The Rise of Miners' Trade Unions on the Coalfield: 1871-1883	33
II The Knights of Labour and the Emergence of the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association: 1884-1891.	52
III The Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association and the Dunsmuir Mines: 1892-1901. .	79
IV The Royal Commission of 1903 and the Conspiracy of the Western Federation of Miners at Extension Mines.	113
V The Royal Commission of 1903 and the Conspiracy of the Western Federation at Cumberland.	144
VI The Royal Commission Hearings at Extension and Cumberland and the Termination of the Strikes. .	167
VII The Recommendations and Conclusions of the <u>Report</u> of the Royal Commission	183
Bibliography	195
Appendices	208

Acknowledgement

Throughout the period from the inception of this thesis to its final preparation, Dr. Ormsby gave the writer many hours of indispensable criticism. Whatever historical value the thesis may have is due in large measure to the kind advice the writer received from Dr. Ormsby.



ADAPTED FROM A. F. BUCHAM, "THE NANAIMO COALFIELD OF B. C.,"
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CANADA, PAPER 47-22 (MAP), 1947.

Introduction

In historical studies of the British Columbia labour movement two themes have persisted. One emphasizes the economic influences that have been exerted by the American labour movement on organized labour in British Columbia.¹

The second theme is that immigrant labour from the United Kingdom has exerted a formative influence on the economic and political ambitions of British Columbia labour, first in the seeking of higher wages and in relying generally on union organization to attain them, and secondly, in fostering the

¹ W.J. Trimble deals with the period before 1890 in The Mining Advance into the Inland Empire (New York, 1914). Rodman Paul's study of the mining frontier deals almost exclusively with events to the south of the 49th parallel and indicates the antecedents of the Western Federation: Mining Frontiers of the Far West: 1848-1880 (New York, 1963). The standard work on the Western Federation and the Mine, Mill and Smelter workers south of the 49th parallel is Vernon H. Jensen's Heritage of Conflict (New York, 1950). A number of studies bear directly or in part on the 1890-1914 period. Bescoby, Isobel, M., "Some Aspects of the American Mining Advance into the Cariboo and Kootenay," M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1935. Ware, N.J., et.al., Labour in Canadian American Relations (Toronto, 1937). Innis, H.A., Settlement and the Mining Frontier (Toronto, 1936). Hansen, Marcus, L., and Brebner, John, B., The Mingling of Canadian and American Peoples (New Haven, 1940). Howay, F.W., and Sage, W.N., and Angus, H.F., British Columbia and the United States (Toronto, 1942). Church, J.S., "Mining Companies in the West Kootenay and Boundary Regions of B.C.: 1890-1900," M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1961.

growth of independent labour and socialist movements in the province.²

There is no question that American miners and capital entered British Columbia in substantial quantities in the 19th century. Many historians have documented this fact.³ In the colonial period thousands of American prospectors entered and took part in the gold rush on the Fraser River in 1858. Later, about 1890, in the East and West Kootenay regions and boundary country, a new wave of American miners, technicians and capitalists entered the province. The first American unionists to appear in the Kootenays were almost certainly "refugees" blacklisted in 1892 in the mines of Bunker Hill and Sullivan in the Coeur d'Alene region of Idaho.⁴ Three years later the Kootenay miners requested the agents of the Western Federation of Miners, formed at Butte, Montana in 1893, to give them a

² British influences have been discussed in a number of studies of the province but no special study has been made. L.G. Reynolds' study deals mainly with eastern Canada: The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment to Canada (Oxford, 1935). Grantham, Ronald, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in B.C.," M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1942. Saywell, John T., "Labour and Socialism in British Columbia: An Historical Survey to 1903," British Columbia Historical Quarterly, July-October, 1951. Loosemore, T.R., "B.C. Labor and Political Action: 1879-1906," M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1954. Steeves, D.G., The Compassionate Rebel (Vancouver, 1960). Fox, Paul, "Early Socialism in Canada," in J.H. Aitchison, ed., The Political Process in Canada (Toronto, 1963), pp. 79-99.

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ Jensen, op.cit., p. 21.

charter of affiliation. The first local of the Western Federation in British Columbia received its charter at Rossland in 1895.⁵ By 1899 a sufficient number of local unions existed in the Kootenay region to permit the organization of a semi-autonomous District Association.

Up to 1899 no strikes were reported in the Kootenays and boundary region. From 1899 to 1903, however, the Federation became involved in long and costly strikes in the metal and coal mining towns of the province. There were many causes of these disputes but the demand by the miners for at least de facto recognition of the union lay close to the heart of most of them. In 1899 the Slocan Valley miners struck for an eight hour day without reduction in pay. The mine owners responded by locking out the miners and importing strike breakers from the United States.⁶ One result of this strike was that the provincial government enacted an eight hour law for the metal mines of the province.

The introduction of the eight hour day was not criticized by the Rossland companies in 1899 as it was by those in the Slocan. But the Slocan miners' demand for a reduction in hours without a reduction in pay and the expectation that the Rossland miners would make the same demand seem

⁵ See Appendix, pp. 208-9, The Constitution and By-Laws of the Rossland Miners' Union, Adopted, 1896.

⁶ Woodside, Frank, Letter Concerning Industrial Disputes in the Kootenays, August, 20, 1901. Special Collections Library, UBC. Testimony of Chris Foley, formerly an executive officer of the Western Federation in Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia in 1903, Ottawa, 1904, pp. 669-80. Bennett, William, Builders of British Columbia (Vancouver, 1937), p. 136.

to have been the reasons the British America Corporation took action. The company was the largest in Rossland and the owner of the Le Roi mines. In January 1900 the company changed managers and then replaced the staff from assistant manager down to shift boss. In February the company announced it was closing down temporarily for repairs. According to the secretary of the Rossland Miners' Union the shutdown was in preparation for an assault on the wage system; when the mines re-opened in April the company stipulated that miners would receive payment by the ton. In this way the company escaped the costly effects of the eight hour law. As the company knew the miners were completely opposed to the contract system of payment by the ton, the company introduced labour spies into the mines to disrupt the union. Union men were gradually blacklisted in the company's mines. To further weaken the union the company imported immigrant European miners from Minnesota in such numbers that the Western Federation of Miners at Rossland was about ready to collapse because of the decline in its membership. Then in July 1901 the union called a strike. Immediately new members rallied to the union's cause. The union received moral support when six of the smaller mines around Rossland granted the union demands for hourly work and company recognition of the Western Federation as the legitimate bargaining agents for the miners. But this moral support was ineffective; British America carried on its new policy despite the strike

which lasted for eight months.⁷

The importation of non-union poorly skilled workers from the eastern United States was a tremendous source of grievance and concern to the union miners. As the Western Federation in the United States had to deal with the same problem in their relations with their employers, the Rossland miners depended on the permanent officers of the union to find ways of stopping the flow of strike breakers coming west. Writing of this aspect of company policy in the west in 1901, the secretary of the Rossland Miner's Union commented bitterly: "There is no 49th parallel of latitude in Unionism. The Canadian and American workingmen have joined hands across the Boundary line for a common cause against a common enemy."⁸

Though the importation of strike breakers violated the Canadian Alien Contract Labour Act, the union in Rossland did not have any success in having the Act enforced. One of the executive officers of the Rossland union went to Spokane in 1901 to inform incoming strike breakers that a strike was in progress in Rossland. In Vancouver in 1903 he had an opportunity to find out how effective the Act was intended to be in protecting

⁷ Woodside, Ibid. The Labour Gazette gave as the cause of the strike the refusal of the Company to recognize the Western Federation of Miners as the miners' union. The contract issue was also discussed. Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette, Ottawa, vol.I, 1901, pp.362-364. See also Phillips, Paul, No Power Greater (Vancouver, 1967) pp.33-34.

⁸ Woodside, loc.cit.

Canadian labour. He questioned the Deputy Minister of Labour, W.L.M. King, whose department was in part responsible for implementing the Act.

Question (by Chris Foley). Take the case of Rossland. Many of these men came from Missouri and Michigan. In order that you shall discover the exact facts of the case it is necessary that a man should be sent down to find out where these men come from. Why was not some arrangement made by the government to appoint some official?--Answer. Mr.Foley, I have not the making of the laws.

Question. Can you tell me why I was told by the Minister of Justice and Mr.Sifton that a man would go down to Missouri?--Answer. That is beyond my province.

Question. Is there no law either in the Dominion or provincial governments that forces an official to enforce this law? Was there any understanding arrived at between the Dominion and provincial government as to how this law should be enforced by officials?--

Answer. Absolutely none that I know of. The law was simply passed by the Dominion government and certain machinery provided....

Question. I may say that the union at Rossland appealed to the Attorney General and he refused to take the matter up. They took the matter up and secured a conviction, and before the conviction was returned the gentleman was on the other side. He came in under a contract to operate the company for the Le Roi.⁹

To Foley's complaint that the company was free to break the law, Mr. King replied that "the law was worth all it was intended to be worth."

In April 1902 at a labour political convention in Kamloops, to which twenty locals of the Federation had sent representatives, the importation of American workers under contract to Canadian corporations was discussed. The convention "viewed with indignation the refusal of the Attorney General

⁹ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.671-672.

General of this Province and the Minister of Justice to enforce the Alien Contract Law,"¹⁰ and recommended the enactment of a law making it compulsory for the government to enforce the law against those who broke it.

The coal miners of British Columbia had watched the struggle of the Federation in the interior in 1901 and 1902 with mounting interest. Isolated in the Far West from the eastern United Mine Workers of America, the coal miners of the province entered the Federation of 50,000 metaliferous miners mainly because the Federation could give bargaining strength to those who worked for large and powerful coal companies. The Federation organized the coal miners of the Crow's Nest Pass region in April 1901. Crossing the Straits of Georgia to the coal mines on Vancouver Island, the provincial organizer, James Baker, formed locals at Nanaimo in December 1902, at Extension mines near Ladysmith and at Union mines at Cumberland in March and April 1903. The affiliation with the Federation ended the regional isolation of the coal miners on Vancouver Island who had blamed their failure to wring concessions from their employers on the fact that they had weak local unions.¹¹

In 1903 the coal, metal mining and transportation industries of the province experienced disruption as a result of labour disputes involving the Western Federation. In August

¹⁰ Loosemore, op.cit., Platform of the Provincial Progressive Party, Appendix.

¹¹ Nanaimo Herald, August 20, 1902.^{p6} Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.59, p.326, p.352, p.391, p.443.

1902 the Crow's Nest Pass miners had struck for improvements in inspection of the mines, an eight hour day and an increase in wages. The dispute took place after a mine explosion at Fernie killed 124 miners whose places were filled with imported labourers from the eastern United States. The strike ended quickly after the company promised to satisfy the miners' demands. The subsequent failure of the company to implement the terms of the agreement and its refusal to deal with the representatives of the union led to another strike which lasted from February to the end of March 1903.¹² For two months the coke supplies used by the large Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company in Rossland were in short supply. To settle the strike, the provincial government sent a three man mining commission which was finally successful in mediating the dispute.

Then in Vancouver on February 27, 1903, the employees of the Canadian Pacific Railway struck over the company's dismissal of members of the new union, the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees. Although the company imported non-union workers from Seattle to replace striking employees and was never short of coal for its trains and ships, the strike became serious when it extended to the freight handlers. When on March 8 and May 2 the coal miners employed by Wellington Collieries Ltd. at Extension and Cumberland mines struck for

¹² Labour Gazette, vol.III, 1903, pp.673-678.

increased wages and recognition of the Western Federation of Miners, it appeared that the Canadian Pacific Railway might soon be short of coal. There was no suggestion that the strike in the interior was linked to the strikes on the coast, but there was evidence that the United Brotherhood had intrigued with the Western Federation to persuade the island coal miners to strike in sympathy with the railway employees.¹³ The question of intrigue soon opened up into a significant controversy.

Neither James Dunsmuir, President of Wellington Collieries Ltd., nor R. Marpole, Superintendent of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company in Vancouver, would recognize the right of their employees to join either of the international unions or accept the recommendations of conciliation committees from either government or business as long as their employees insisted on remaining members of the new unions.¹⁴ As March ended with the companies refusing to talk with representatives of the unions, long strikes seemed possible. Reports appeared in the press that the Western Federation and the United Brotherhood were in a conspiracy to impose their "foreign"

¹³ Canada, Department of Labour, Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia in 1903, Ottawa, 1903, pp.37-48.

¹⁴ Testimony of James Dunsmuir, Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.247. Statements of Mr.Marpole in Vancouver Province, March 7-9, 1903, p.1.

and "socialistic" unions on the industries of the province.¹⁵ Both companies agreed with this interpretation. A more damaging rumour mentioned in the press was that the two unions had been used by American companies to raise the prices of their products and services in the United States.¹⁶ Marpole stated that one of his objections to the United Brotherhood was that the union might be used by American transportation companies to disrupt the Canadian Pacific Railway and gain business in Canada.¹⁷ Wellington Collieries used the same argument with reference to American coal companies in its official statement of objections to the Western Federation.¹⁸ Although no evidence was ever produced to verify these rumours, the statements by the companies had their effect on a Royal Commission sent to investigate the strikes. The Commission's Report to the federal government condemned any strike in Canada which was caused by the "foreign interference" of American union leaders who were in the pay of American

¹⁵ Nanaimo Free Press, March 3, March 13, 1903, p.1. The Press described Mr. Dunsmuir's allegations "rubbish." It claimed that he chose the issue of foreign interference because it was the only one the public might be prepared to believe. March 16, p.8. See also the Victoria Daily Colonist, March 15, 1903, p.1, interview with James Dunsmuir.

¹⁶ Rossland Miner, March 14, 1903, p.1. Victoria Daily Colonist, March 18, 1903, p.8. Cumberland News, March 24, 1903, p.8. The News reported that Mr. Dunsmuir did not believe the Federation was involved with the copper trust in the United States.

¹⁷ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.769.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 747.

capitalists. Without evidence to prove that such misdeeds ever took place, the condemnation merely justified the arbitrary refusal of the companies to deal with the unions in question.

While the breach between the unions and the companies widened, a debate on increasing industrial unrest in British Columbia took place on April 3 in the Canadian House of Commons. The strike at Wellington Collieries prompted Ralph Smith, Liberal-Labour M.P. for Nanaimo, to ask the Minister of Labour, Sir William Mulock, for a Royal Commission to investigate the strike and "lay the facts before the public." In asking for a Royal Commission Smith indicated what he thought "the facts" would reveal:

...the men employed in these mines made up their minds that they would have a trade union, that they would affiliate that trade union with the international on the other side of the line. For this reason the owners of the company discharged the officers of the union, closed down the mines, and they have disorganized a happy community of nearly 4,000 people, who depended absolutely for their livelihood on the operation of these mines.¹⁹

Ralph Smith's interpretation of the strike was significant because he personally disapproved of the Nanaimo miners joining the Western Federation in December 1902. Sir William Mulock stated in the House of Commons that he was hesitant about sending a Royal Commission to British Columbia as "public opinion might not be ready for it"²⁰ and that he was

¹⁹ Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Official Report of Debates, April 3, 1903, p. 946.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 954.

opposed to Conservative demands that compulsory measures should be introduced to end strikes in important industries such as coal and transportation. But while Sir William appeared hesitant about intervening in the strikes on the coast, he was in fact moving towards intervention. He was under pressure from certain corporations in Canada to control the spread of international unionism which many employers blamed for the growing militancy of Canadian labour in general and British Columbia labour in particular. A Royal Commission was taking shape behind the scenes.

The strikes at Rossland in 1901 and in the Crow's Nest Pass in 1902 and 1903 had proven costly to the mine owners. On April 4, 1903, Mulock wrote to Sir Wilfrid Laurier to advise him that he was convinced after holding conversations with the manager of Le Roi mine at Rossland and with other Canadian businessmen, that industrial disputes were in the main caused by interference from American unions.

The working people of Canada have to a large extent come under the domination of the A.F.L. [American Federation of Labour] whom they recognize as their friends. Perhaps it would assist to disillusion them if an intelligent Commission, one in which the working people had confidence, were to point out the injuries that have come to them because of the interference of American unions. Such a pronouncement would have an educational effect.²¹

He added further that Canadian businessmen found it distasteful

²¹ Sir William Mulock to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, April 4, 1903, Laurier Papers, Microfilm. Reel 328A. 44692-78022A. Letters relating to British Columbia, Provincial Archives, Victoria.

to receive "dictation from representatives of American unions." As the executive officers of unions based in the United States seldom if ever had occasion to meet Canadian businessmen or make demands on them, Mulock may have meant by "dictation" that Canadian locals made greater demands on their employers once they had the financial support of a large international union behind them.²² In any case after conversations with Senator Templeman of British Columbia who agreed with him about the attitude of employers, Sir William concluded his letter with the suggestion that a Royal Commission be set up to hear evidence in the cities of Nanaimo, Victoria, Vancouver and Rossland concerning the causes of strikes in British Columbia. In actuality the Commission was never to reach Rossland and the metaliferous mining district of the Kootenays as its terms of reference promised. When later questioned in the House of Commons concerning the omission of Rossland, Sir William replied that King had advised him that the Commission had better not visit Rossland as too many unresolved grievances remained from previous strikes. The Commissioners preferred not to stir up further antagonism between company and miners.²³

Two commissioners were chosen to investigate the strikes in progress in British Columbia. Neither had any

²² See Address of Secretary to the Employers' Association of Canada, May 1903, in Labour Gazette, 1903, p. 913.

²³ House of Commons, Debates, July 20, 1903, p. 6992.

experience in labour affairs. Chief Justice Gordon Hunter of the Supreme Court of the province gave an aura of impartiality to the proceedings. Reverend Elliott S. Rowe was a prominent Methodist minister in Victoria. In some of his past statements he had been critical of the way certain large corporations treated their workmen, but he was not specific.²⁴ No record exists which explains why the government chose these particular men. W.L.M. King was a logical choice as secretary to the Commission. King had investigated disputes in British Columbia in the past and Sir William Mulock evidently considered him the person to instruct the Commissioners about what the Department of Labour expected to learn about the activities of the Western Federation. King accepted Sir William's view that the purpose of the Commission was to "educate" Canadian workmen to understand the harm they did themselves in associating with the Western Federation. On the other hand, King told the Commissioners at one point during the hearings that if they continued to display too much bias in favour of the employers, the Commission would fail in its purpose.²⁵

On May 5, the second day of the hearings, Chief Justice Hunter revealed the purpose of the inquiry to the public. He explained that only one of two "issues" would come out of the inquiry; either the miners had a right to

²⁴ See editorial on Elliott S. Rowe's Address to the British Columbia Methodist Conference, Western Methodist Recorder, vol.III, No. 1, July 1901, p.2.

²⁵ W.L.M.King, Diary, May 13, 1903, cited in Dawson, R. MacGregor, William Lyon Mackenzie King: A Political Biography(Toronto, 1958), vol.I, p. 138.

join the Western Federation or they had not. If the Commissioners concluded that the miners did not have the right to join the Federation, then the federal government could introduce legislation to restrain the international's operations in Canada. In the meantime, Mr. Justice Hunter advised the miners to sever their affiliation with the Federation and return to work. If the federal government approved of the Federation, the miners could always re-apply for membership. The miners held a meeting on the evening of the 5th and voted to reject Mr. Hunter's suggestion. They reasoned that Dunsmuir would never grant them a wage increase unless they were organized into a union, and that once they had severed their affiliation with the union the executive would be discharged before a new one had been formed. The Nanaimo Free Press reported that the miners were very dissatisfied with Mr. Hunter's view that the miners were bound by the results of the tribunal but the company was not. They had everything to lose if they gave up their affiliation.²⁶

The method of inquiry adopted by the Commissioners was the one advocated by the counsel for Wellington Collieries, E.V. Bodwell. The Commissioners had apparently no idea how they were to conduct the hearings until they actually began. The miners had to adopt the position of plaintiffs or accusers as in a civil dispute; the company became the defendant. Counsel for the miners, Charles H. Wilson, K.C., objected to

²⁶ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.3. Nanaimo Free Press May 9, 1903, p. 1.

the procedure because as he explained the miners were in no sense accusers.²⁷ The miners had met on March 8 for the purpose of deciding on a wage increase. Instead, they voted to form a union first and seek affiliation with the Western Federation. On March 11 the company discharged four members of the executive and posted a notice which stated the mines would close on April 1. No reason was given for the notice but the miners struck on March 12 over the dismissals and the notice of closure. Wilson contended that the company "altered the status quo" by discharging miners for union activity alone and threatening the camp with unemployment. The hearings bore out Wilson's statements; the crown and the company became the accusers and the miners the defendants. The prosecution sought a "conviction" against the Western Federation of conspiracy to bring about a sympathetic strike.²⁸

There was no evidence that either James Dunsmuir or E.V. Bodwell learned from the Department of Labour or the Commissioners that the Commission was originally intended to convince Canadian workmen that they should not join the Western Federation. But in arguing that the Federation was a foreign union which caused disruption in the industrial affairs of Wellington Collieries Ltd., Bodwell chose the exact issue that Sir William Mulock wished to see brought to public attention. Wellington Collieries' written statement

²⁷ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.3.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.330-331; p.440, and passim. Report, op.cit.p.76.

concluded in almost the same words as those used in Mulock's letter to Sir Wilfrid Laurier and in the final Report of the Royal Commission. The company's statement said:

It is admitted that strikes are disastrous from a commercial point of view, and therefore, in the broad ground of the general welfare and prosperity of the country, the company consider it unpatriotic to accentuate the evil caused by labour disputes by recognizing the right of a foreign authority to assume the position of dictator in the industrial affairs of British Columbia.²⁹

During the hearings Mr. Justice Hunter tried to discover from certain miners whether they would be satisfied with affiliation with a Canadian miners' union and without affiliation with the Federation. He was invariably told that strike breakers or "scabs" might enter British Columbia without restraint and that Canadian miners did not have enough members in order to build up strike funds.³⁰

The Commissioners concluded from the hearings that foreign agitators - James Baker of the Federation and George Estes of the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees - had conspired with the secretaries of the miners' unions at Nanaimo and Extension to trick miners at Extension and Cumberland into forming unions.³¹ Once unions had been formed a strike would probably occur because Dunsmuir had always

²⁹ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.747. Report, op.cit. p.76.

³⁰ Minutes of Evidence, p.4, 19, 53, 59, 74, 352, 368, 444, 674.

³¹ Report, p.67.

refused to recognize unions in his mines. With coal production at a halt on the island, the railway employees in Vancouver would have a better opportunity to win their strike. The circumstantial evidence which the Commissioners used to prove this conspiracy had taken place was convincing unless subjected to close scrutiny.

The evidence lay in certain telegrams and statements written by George Estes and telegrams wired from the Denver headquarters of the Federation to Nanaimo. Estes, an American who had never been to Vancouver Island, was under the impression that all of the coalfield had been organized by the Federation. But on February 27, when the strike of the railway employees began, only the Nanaimo miners were in the Federation. Both Estes and the Federation headquarters seem to have assumed that the Western Fuel Company at Nanaimo supplied the Canadian Pacific Railway with coal. In fact only the Cumberland mines supplied the Canadian Pacific Railway with coal from Vancouver Island. Thus George Estes was under serious misapprehension when he wired Denver on March 4 to request the Nanaimo miners not to handle coal which was shipped to the Canadian Pacific. The following day he received a reply from the secretary of the Federation: "Have complied with your request. Notified union at Nanaimo."³² On March 6, T.J. Shenton, the secretary

³² Report, op.cit. p. 39.

of the Nanaimo miners' union, received the wire from Denver asking the union to use their best efforts to prevent the Canadian Pacific Railway from getting coal. Shenton replied immediately that the union "would render all assistance possible."³³ He asked Western Fuel whether the company supplied coal to the Canadian Pacific Railway and was told that the company had not done so for five years. According to Shenton neither he nor his union were involved any further in the strike at Vancouver. No evidence produced by the Commissioners proved that he was lying.

The "foreign dictation" and interference in the affairs of Wellington Collieries had not proved too evident by March 6. But Shenton was accused of conspiring with the secretary of the Extension miners to bring on a strike at Extension. His only proven involvement in the affairs of Extension began when the secretary of the Extension miners' union, Samuel Mottishaw, came to Nanaimo after a general meeting of the Extension miners on March 8 had decided to join the Federation. Mottishaw asked Shenton on March 9 to wire James Baker to come to Vancouver Island and organize the new union.³⁴ The Commissioners assumed without proof that between March 6 and 7 the two secretaries secretly conspired to bring about the meeting that led to the resolution to affiliate with the Federation. The Commissioners further assumed that the two men predicted the outcome of the demand for affiliation would

³³ Loc.cit.

³⁴ Ibid., p.41.

be a strike. Although the Commissioners learned that the miners had discussed the possibility of seeking a wage increase and/or forming a union in the weeks before the first meeting, they chose to deny the validity of the statements made to them; instead, they only admitted as evidence those statements by miners who were contented with conditions at Extension. Thus the Commissioner's Report read that there was no "general" demand for changes in wages and working conditions at the mines. This contradiction of evidence given by the miners to the Commissioners was perhaps the most blatant in the Report.³⁵

The Commissioners questioned Shenton on three occasions in order to discover whether he had taken part in a conspiracy. The second time he spoke he satisfied the Commissioners on all points regarding his part in the strike but was reluctant to divulge all of the business of the Nanaimo union unless he was forced by the Commissioners to do so.³⁶ The Constitution of the union compelled the executive not to reveal the private business affairs of the organization. However, once he had cleared himself with his union he spoke freely. The Report stated that Shenton's initial reluctance to tell everything he knew regarding the strike indicated he tried to hide incriminating evidence. Once the Report was published in the Nanaimo Free Press, Shenton realized how the Commissioners

³⁵ Report, p.41. Minutes of Evidence, p.3, 37, 42, 57-59, 241, 261, 281.

³⁶ Minutes of Evidence, p. 530.

had interpreted his hesitancy to reveal union business. To the editor of the Free Press he wrote angrily:

I regret having to go into public over these matters, but the unfairness of these charges is past endurance, and I am impressed from what I have experienced in connection with the recent Commission, that so far as I am concerned, future Commissions will get their witnesses elsewhere and some I hope, will tell the truth instead of wilful misstatements and contradictory evidence.³⁷

He was particularly incensed by the way the Commissioners selected his statements to the Commission and turned them against him. Shenton had admitted under examination to Bodwell that he thought it was possible that a dispute could occur after the Extension miners formed a union. He emphasized the point to the Commissioners that although he thought at the time the union organized that a strike could happen, he was not motivated by this consideration when he wired Baker on behalf of Mottishaw. The Report twisted Shenton's statements to mean that Shenton knew a strike would occur and that he had joined Mottishaw in the plan to "render all assistance possible" to the railway employees.³⁸

The interpretation of foreign dictation in the industrial affairs of British Columbia owed much to the statement of George Estes. His circular notice to "all union men"

³⁷ Report, p.46; Nanaimo Free Press, September 1, 1903, p.8.

³⁸ Minutes of Evidence, p. 530; Report, p.46.

on February 27 promised that the Federation would be asked "to stop the mining of coal on Vancouver Island."³⁹ On March 17 he told a reporter in Victoria that "I am going to tie up the Dunsmuir mines at Union."⁴⁰ Up until April 29, when Extension miners asked Cumberland (Union Colliery) miners to strike in sympathy with them, neither Estes nor any other unionist asked the Cumberland miners to strike. As Baker organized a branch of the Federation at Cumberland on April 5, the Commissioners assumed Baker must have acted in collusion with Estes. But the evidence from the official hearings proves that Cumberland miners organized a union because they believed the Federation was a strong union which would support the miners in their demands on Wellington Collieries' subsidiary company at Cumberland.

George Estes undoubtedly appeared to have the power to call sympathetic strikes. The Vancouver Independent⁴¹ and the Nanaimo Free Press⁴² saw the significance of Estes' statements when they commented after the Report was published that Estes had "self-glorified" his position and his powers in the statements he had made. Both newspapers had argued from the beginning that Dunsmuir's refusal to permit a union to

³⁹ Report, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Vancouver Independent, March 21, 1903, p.3; April 18, p.3.

⁴² Nanaimo Free Press, August 27, 1903, p.4.

exist in his mines was the cause of the strikes; but Estes gave the Commissioners the kind of evidence they needed to convince the public that the strikes were caused by foreign agitators.

The Commissioners' second most important indictment of the Federation and the United Brotherhood was a political one. According to the Report these organizations were not "legitimate" trade unions. They were

a class of so-called union developing rapidly in Western America, which is really not a trade union at all, but a secret political organization whose members are bound by an oath so strong as to be considered a shield against giving any but forced testimony before the Commission. The primary object and common end of this class of organization is to seize the political power of the state for the purpose of confiscating all franchises and natural resources without compensation, and to this class belong [the above unions].⁴³

There was no secret about the fact that many of the executive members of the American branches of these unions were socialists who openly advocated support for the Socialist Party of America at public gatherings. The "oath so strong as to be considered a shield" was simply the oath taken by members of the executive of any union upon taking office; the incumbent swore never to divulge union business or defraud the union and promised to serve his fellow unionists. Although Canadian miners and railway employees did not have to be

⁴³ Report, p. 67.

Socialists to remain in the unions or in executive positions, there was a strong current running in favour of socialism in the unions of British Columbia. At the June 1903 convention of the Federation in Denver a resolution which passed 125 to 20 read in part:

Whereas, the natural resources of the earth upon which humanity depends are being swiftly concentrated into the hands of the privileged few; and ...
Whereas, capitalism can never be dethroned and wage slavery abolished until the natural resources of the earth and the machinery of production and distribution shall be taken from the hands of the few by the political power of the many, to become the collective property of all mankind, to be utilized for the use and benefit of all humanity; and
Whereas, the socialist party is the only political party in any nation of the world that demands that the land and the machinery of production and distribution shall become the common property of all, and that labour shall receive the full product of its toil; ...
be it resolved, that the ...Western Federation of Miners ...reaffirm the political policy of the tenth annual convention....⁴⁴

The Report clearly implied that the growth of socialism in British Columbia was due entirely to the influence of the American unions. The Report quoted at length from the Miners' Magazine, the journal of the Federation. The Commissioners appear to have selected the most violent statements made by different correspondents to the journal without commenting on the unusual circumstances giving rise to those statements. The Report, furthermore, did not explain that the radical sentiments of the American miners were a product of the violent

⁴⁴ Quoted in Report, p.67. See also Testimony of James Baker, Provincial organizer of the Western Federation, Minutes of Evidence, p. 33.

methods used by American mining companies in Idaho, Utah, Montana and Colorado to resist unions and union demands. The "heritage of conflict" that developed in the mountain states between companies and miners never took root in British Columbia because more moderate behaviour was induced by more effective maintenance of law and order.⁴⁵

By arguing that the leaders of the two unions in the strikes of 1903 first brought revolutionary socialism to British Columbia and caused strikes because of their intense antipathy to large corporations, the Commissioners tremendously exaggerated the extent of the influence of the American unions. The Commissioners learned from the hearings that Welsh, Scottish and English born miners predominated over every other nationality in the mines of Vancouver Island, the Crow's Nest Pass and the Kootenays. Miners and other spokesmen for labour told the Commissioners that although they had learned trade unionism in the United Kingdom or in Eastern Canada, they had become increasingly interested in labour and socialist political activity in British Columbia because of their opposition to economic and political injustices which existed in the province.⁴⁶ In fact socialist ideas had

⁴⁵ Minutes of Evidence, p.29. Jensen, op.cit., p.87, pp.118-119. Haywood, William D., Autobiography (New York, 1929), Chapter IX. Paul, Rodman, Mining Frontiers..., p.168. Bescoby, Isabel, "Some Aspects of the Mining Advance...", p.120.

⁴⁶ Minutes of Evidence, p.37, 303, 411, 643, 645, 647, 679, 680, See also Loosemore, op.cit., pp.15-16. Grantham, R. "Some Aspects of Socialism...", p.18. Raines, J.A., "The Men and the Mines of Vancouver Island, "B.C. Magazine", vol.9, September 13, 1913, p.1.

entered British Columbia as early as 1884 when the first branch of the Knights of Labor formed in Nanaimo.⁴⁷ When a new wave of British and Eastern Canadian immigrants entered the province in the late 1890's, urban socialism began to penetrate the labour and socialist political platforms in the years 1900 to 1903 in the coastal cities of Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo.⁴⁸ The Western Federation did not form a branch at Nanaimo until December 1902 and according to socialist and non-socialist miners who joined the union, its political philosophy was of little consequence compared with considerations as to its size, its effectiveness as an international union, and its support of locals which became involved in strikes.⁴⁹ The Commissioners learned from David Halliday, a union miner from Scotland, that in refusing to permit a union in his mines, Dunsmuir had advanced the cause of the socialists on the coalfield. If the mine owner was not prepared to discuss improvements in wages or working conditions in his mines with a representative body of miners, then the miners had better vote for a party that would force

⁴⁷ Nanaimo Free Press, January 26, 1884, p.1. Cited in "Origins of Labour Unions in British Columbia," A Chronological List to About 1900, Typewritten file, North West History Library, Provincial Archives, Victoria. The Knights' union in Nanaimo antedates the earliest recorded appearance of the union by two years as recorded by Loosemore, op.cit., p.29.

⁴⁸ Loosemore, op.cit., Appendices, pp. XV-XXVII.

⁴⁹ Minutes of Evidence, p.33, 53, 57-59, 283, 291, 318-319, 327, 348, 391, 432, 443.

the mine owner to recognize the union. He believed the mines should be run as a public corporation. David Halliday indicated in his testimony to the Commissioners that political radicalism was a result rather than a cause of the strikes on the coalfield in 1903.⁵⁰

The Report of the Royal Commission has had a significant effect on historical studies which have discussed the strikes of 1903. There were two aspects to the interpretation. The Commissioners concluded that the ideological radicalism of the Federation had influenced the miners and had caused them to develop a new determined hostility in their relations with their employers. Studies of the period which have supported this interpretation began with Norman J. Ware's Labor in Canadian American Relations⁵¹ in 1937 and extended through such works as H.A. Logan's Trade Unions in Canada,⁵² J.T. Saywell's "Labour and Socialism in British Columbia to 1903,"⁵³ and Ferns and Ostry's The Age of Mackenzie King.⁵⁴ As the Commissioners tended to exaggerate and even distort the evidence they had gathered, a revision of their

⁵⁰ Minutes of Evidence, p.427, 481. For a similar view of the strike at Extension mines see Nanaimo Free Press, editorial, June 29, 1903, p.2.

⁵¹ Ware, Norman J., op.cit., p.23.

⁵² Logan H.A., Trade Unions in Canada(Toronto,1948),pp.297-298.

⁵³ Saywell John T., op.cit.,p.137. See his criticism of the Report on p. 140.

⁵⁴ Ferns, H.S.and Ostry, B., The Age of Mackenzie King(London, 1953), pp.59-60.

interpretation seemed overdue.

The second aspect of the Commissioner's interpretation concerned the actual events connected with the strikes on Vancouver Island. The Commissioners argued that foreign agitators caused the sympathetic strikes in collusion with local unionists. Studies of the period have generally used this interpretation. William Bennett argued in Builders of British Columbia⁵⁵ that the miners had accumulated grievances against Wellington Collieries but he followed the interpretation of the Report for the strikes of 1903. Ferns and Ostry, too, used the interpretation of the Report.⁵⁶ Two studies of the Vancouver Island coalfield by I.F.Davis⁵⁷ and A.J.Wargo⁵⁸ similarly found the interpretation of the strikes found in the Report convincing.

Of the seven government investigations into labour and other problems in the coalfield between 1885 and 1914, the Commission of 1903 was probably among the least useful in providing the government with information concerning the problems faced by coal companies and mining labour in working

⁵⁵ Bennett, op.cit., p.61.

⁵⁶ Ferns and Ostry, op.cit., p.60.

⁵⁷ Davis, Isabelle, F., "49th Parallel City: An Economic History of Ladysmith," Graduating Essay, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1953, pp.11-21.

⁵⁸ Wargo, Alan J., "The Great Coal Strike: The Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike, 1912-1914," Graduating Essay, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1962, pp.57-58.

the coalfield. The real causes of industrial disputes in the history of the field up to 1914, when the longest strike in the history of the field occurred, lay within the field itself. By 1903 it was evident that geological irregularities in the coalfield were a source of constant grievance and concern to miners and companies.⁵⁹ The number of injuries and deaths due to gas explosions in these mines was among the highest in the world. The miners tried to work out some formula with the companies concerning how much the miners were to be paid for digging the large amounts of dirt found in the coal seams and they fought long and hard for improvements in safety conditions. Miners testified in 1903 as they did before earlier and later commissions that they lost time and money because they were not paid fairly for digging out the dirt that clung to the coal they handled.⁶⁰ For this reason and for at least one

⁵⁹ Graham, Charles, "The Problems of the Vancouver Island Coal Industry," Transactions, Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, vol.27, 1924, p.471. Clapp, C.H., "Geology of the Nanaimo Map Area," Memoir 51, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa, 1914, p.105. British Columbia, Department of Mines, "Report of the Minister of Mines," Sessional Papers, 1880, pp.251-254 and passim, 1881-1901. The following study presents a good survey of the geological problems on the field but the original studies had to be consulted on this question. Matheson, Marion, H., "Some Aspects of Coal Mining Upon the Development of the Nanaimo Area," MA. Thesis, U.B.C., 1958, p.42.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Evidence, p.57, 265, 271. British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, S.P., "Report of Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike," 1891, pp.242-356. Evidence on pp.257-258; p.285. Report of the Royal Commission on Coal Mining Disputes on Vancouver Island, Ottawa, 1913, p.20. The Commission reported, p.23, that Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd., inherited many unresolved grievances from the previous owners, Wellington Collieries Ltd. The Commission made recommendations about conditions that should have been obvious to investigators in 1903 had they been looking for all the causes of disputes. See also B.C., Legislative Assembly, "Royal Commission on Labour," S.P., 1914, pp.15-16.

other - the company had recently benefitted from a new rebate (c) granted by the American government to Canadian coal companies exporting to California - the miners at Extension and Cumberland organized unions with the hope of obtaining a wage increase.

Another traditional source of dissatisfaction in the coalfield was the employment of Asiatic labour in the mines (d) at rates ranging from 30% to 50% lower than those paid to (i) white miners. Chinese and Japanese workers were held (ii) responsible by white miners for many mine explosions and for (iii) driving away white immigrant miners who would not compete for jobs at low wages.⁶¹ As late as 1902, a Royal Commission (iii) found that Asiatic workers were a safety hazard underground, particularly when they could not read notices.⁶² Ever since (iv) the great mine disaster of 1887, in which 150 miners died at the Vancouver Coal Company mine near Nanaimo, the Nanaimo company kept the promise made that year to the island miners never again to employ Asiatic labour underground.⁶³ In 1900 one of James Dunsmuir's election promises to the miners was that he would replace his Asiatic miners, numbering over 500 Chinese with a few Japanese, with white miners.⁶⁴ The promise was partially implemented and then abandoned. All of

⁶¹ Canada, House of Commons, Session Papers, Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration, No. 54, Ottawa, 1902, pp. 85-86.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 276-277.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 71 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p. 298.

⁶⁴ Cumberland News, May 22, 1903, p. 5.

Wellington Collieries' Asiatic miners resided near Cumberland. When the (white) Cumberland miners organized a union in April (v) 1903, there was speculation that they might try to organize the Asiatic miners into a separate union. As the strike was to prove, without the Chinese any strike by the whites alone was bound to fail because the company could carry on almost at full capacity without them. As it was against (e) company policy to permit any kind of union at Cumberland, whether local or international, the Company began dismissing officials of the new union soon after its formation. After repeated dismissals the miners voted to strike over the issue of discrimination against union members. The company's action was in part at least a defense against the possibility of having to contend with an organized Asiatic union.

Industrial disputes on the coalfield followed very (p) closely the economic cycles of the period to 1914.⁶⁵ The issues of payment for mining dirt, of wage demands, and of the (i) employment of Asiatic labour, generally reached the point where local or regional unions were formed and strikes occurred during a period of expansion in the industry. The years of highest production and employment in the industry were 1884, (ii) 1891, 1901 and 1910. The miners on the field tried to form

⁶⁵ The idea that strikes in the coal industry might follow the pattern of the economic cycles was suggested to the writer by Professor Jamieson's study of the same phenomenon in the construction industry in the 1950's. Jamieson, Stuart, "Regional Factors in Industrial Conflict: The Case of B.C." Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, vol.28 (August, 1962), pp.405-416.

regional or district-wide miners' associations in 1883, 1890, 1901, 1903 and 1910. In each case the resistance of the Dunsmuir coal empire to the formation of local unions in its mines broke the regional miners' organization. The complex background of events on the coalfield escaped the Commission of 1903 mainly because its attention was fixed on the entrance of the Western Federation of Miners into the economic life of the region. The entrance of the Federation into the region (9) was not the cause of industrial disputes in 1903, but the end result of previous attempts by the miners to find a solution to their habitual inability to realize their demands from the companies in the coalfield.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ For a theoretical discussion of the reasons for the development of trade unions in British Columbia see Phillips, Paul, No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia (Vancouver, 1967), pp.160-165. Dr. Phillips' interpretation of the strikes on Vancouver Island in 1903 (p.41) does not vary from the interpretation in this thesis. Dr. Phillips' book came to the writer's attention just as the thesis was being prepared for final typing.

CHAPTER I

The Rise of Miners' Trade Unions on the Coalfield: 1871 - 1883

The Royal Commissioners in 1903 were aware that miners at Wellington Collieries on Vancouver Island had made many previous attempts to organize unions.¹ But the Commissioners did not attempt a survey or an analysis to discover why miners had organized unions at Wellington Collieries in the past. Had the Commissioners seriously considered the history of unions at Wellington, they would have found that for over three decades miners' unions fought to achieve some measure of control over working conditions in the mines.

In the years 1871-1883 immigrant miners from the United Kingdom formed unions at Wellington Collieries for three main reasons: they desired a provincial Coal Mines Regulations Act⁽¹⁾ to make the mines safer; they organized to combat wage reductions and to protest the increasing employment of Chinese workers in the mines. The unions formed in these years were similar in form to Old Country miners' unions; they were protective associations to which only skilled miners could belong. The aim of the unions was the traditional one of attempting to improve the working life of the skilled miner⁸

1 The Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia in 1903, Minutes of Evidence, p.265,390-391,434 and passim.

by taking some of the control over working conditions and wages away from the mineowner and placing the control in the hands of the miner. From 1871 on, Robert Dunsmuir and his son James fought the miners every step of the way when the miners attempted to change company practices at Wellington.²

The first coal miners to enter British Columbia were employees of the Hudson's Bay Company. From 1835 to 1852 these few Scots miners laboured at the site of an outcrop of coal at Fort Rupert on the north coast of British Columbia. In 1852 the company abandoned its Fort Rupert coal operations when more profitable mines were found at Nanaimo on the east coast of Vancouver Island.³ The Nanaimo mines supplied coal to an American mailship company which provided service between San Francisco and Oregon. As Pacific commerce broadened after 1850, the Hudson's Bay Company imported more miners from England. The mines produced a steadily increasing flow of coal to provide energy for steamships and industries which came to the coastal cities of San Francisco and Victoria during and after the gold rushes of 1849 and 1858.⁴ In 1862

2 Dunsmuir Papers (Graham Folder); Dunsmuir Files in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia (in future citations PABC). Audaine, James, Coal Mine to Castle (New York, 1956). Gosnell, R.E., "The Dunsmuirs," in Sixty Years of Progress (Vancouver, 1914), pp. 115-126.

3 McKelvie, B.A., "The Founding of Nanaimo," British Columbia Historical Quarterly, vol. 8, 1944, pp. 169-188.

4 Innis, H.A., "Liquidity Preference as a Factor in Industrial Development," in Essays in Canadian Economic History (Toronto, 1956), pp. 334-335.

the Hudson's Bay Company sold its properties at Nanaimo to the British-owned Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company. The new company expanded the immigration policy of the Hudson's Bay Company when Vancouver Coal began in the 1870's to encourage miners from the north of England to emigrate and settle on the company's lands in the vicinity of the mines at Nanaimo.⁵

More coal miners from the United Kingdom entered the coalfield after Robert Dunsmuir, formerly a manager at Nanaimo, opened a new mine at Wellington in 1869. The mine lay six miles north-east of Nanaimo. The new firm of Dunsmuir, Diggle & Company contracted to supply the Pacific Station of the Royal Navy at Esquimalt with steam coal. Like its Nanaimo competitor, the Vancouver Coal Mining Company, Dunsmuir, Diggle & Company exported over half its coal to the growing city of San Francisco.⁶ From the beginning of operations at Wellington, Robert Dunsmuir's labour policy differed from that of the Nanaimo company. Whereas Vancouver Coal attracted experienced miners by hiring them in the United Kingdom and assisting them in settling on the company's lands, Robert Dunsmuir hired

5 Smith, B.R.D., "A Social History of Early Nanaimo," B.A.Honours Thesis, U.B.C., 1956, p.117. The percentages of different racial and linguistic groups which settled in the region as calculated by M.H. Matheson, *op.cit.*, p.212 were for Nanaimo and district: United Kingdom-80%; Central and Southern Europe-7%; Asiatic-6%; Western European-5%; Northern Europe-2%. Census of Canada, 1881, 1891, 1901. Statistics of employment in the mines as given in the "Report of the Minister of Mines," were categorized as "white," Chinese, Japanese or Indian and gave a good analysis of the influence of immigration into the region.

6 "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1874- passim.

miners from those who sought work on the coalfield. A number x
of Wellington miners may have drifted into the coalfield after
wages had declined in the 1860's in the gold camps on the upper
reaches of the Fraser River. The result of these company
policies was that a more stable population of miners settled
around Nanaimo than at Wellington.⁷

The difficulties and dangers involved in working the
coal seams at deep levels became terribly apparent in October
1870 when a mine explosion killed 68 miners. The faults or ^{Wellington?} x
breaks which had occurred in the coal seams when the plain
underwent uplifting in an early geological era
were the main source of danger. Underground gas seeped from
pressure pockets when digging suddenly released their deadly
contents. An open lamp or carelessly made spark easily ignited
gas with disastrous consequences. The Stephenson safety lamp
could detect gas pockets when it was used - it seldom was - but
without constant vigilance and daily inspection the danger
remained. Too little vigilance and no official inspection
existed in the mines in 1870.⁸

In January 1871 the Wellington miners met to protest
against inadequate safety regulations in the Wellington mines. x
They organized the first union on the coal field and demanded x

7 Smith, B.R.D., op.cit., p.117. Matheson, M.H., op.cit., p.248.

8 Underhill, F.H., "Labour Legislation in British Columbia,"
Ph.D. Thesis, University of California, 1935, p.28. "Origins of
Labour Unions in British Columbia," A Chronological List to
about 1900, Typewritten file, North West History Library,
PABC, n.p.n.d.

that the company improve safety conditions. The miners resolved, too, that the provincial government should be asked to introduce compulsory inspection of mines on the coalfield. ^x Robert Dunsmuir refused to implement any of the immediate demands of the miners' union and a strike followed. The ^x strike failed to achieve any important reforms in 1871 and the company dismissed union leaders from its employ.⁹

Old Country miners at Wellington must have been disillusioned to find that the struggle for trade union working conditions in the mines had to begin all over again. Parliament in the United Kingdom enacted a Coal Mines Regulations Act in 1872. The legislation was a considerable advance for the miners' unions because it included penalties if mineowners interfered with miners' agents who were permitted to inspect mines and report on the accuracy of the company's weighing machines.¹⁰ The miners' check-weighman verified the accuracy of weighing machines which measured the tonnage produced by miners. As new miners from the United Kingdom entered the Vancouver Island coalfield after the strike of 1871, they may have brought word of the recent victory of the miners' unions. The union struggles on the island would become more intense in the next six years.

9 Underhill, op.cit., pp.26-28. "Origins of Unions in British Columbia." Nanaimo Free Press, January 24, 1871, p.1.

10 Cole, G.D.H. and Postgate, R., The Common People: 1746-1946 (London, 1956), p.353, pp.356-357. Pelling, Henry, A History of British Trade Unionism (London, 1963), p.77.

By 1877 the Wellington miners had accumulated new grievances over working conditions. The conditions at Wellington which made mining dangerous also made wages difficult to make. Miners from the United Kingdom were not used to working seams which had serious faults and in which the roofs were composed of sandy shale. Particularly in the Wellington seam the rising and dipping sandy shale roof too often piled down on the miner below when the roof was unsupported near the coal face where the miner worked.¹¹ Since they were paid by the ton, miners took risks rather than use up valuable time in bratticing close to the face in preparation for the gunpowder shot which would loosen the coal. Once the coal had loosened, the miner had to dispose of the shale and for disposing of the shale and dirt, he usually received some compensation. Consequently, the miner made an agreement with the pit boss before he entered the place he was to work concerning the price he was to receive for digging out the refuse dirt. If the miner expected that there would be much dirt to dig out he became exasperated if the price for digging it out was in his estimation too low.

Vancouver Coal at Nanaimo followed the United Kingdom practice by which a miner was not forced to accept the decision of the pit boss as final.¹² Appeal could be made to a pit committee of miners to help adjudicate any dispute over the

11 For the extensive documentation on this question of the geological condition of the Wellington seam see Footnote 59, Introduction.

12. The Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes, Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p. 295.

price. Recognition of a pit committee was tantamount to the recognition by the company of the miners' union or association elected pit committee. However at Wellington, Robert Dunsmuir^x refused to deal with pit committees or union representatives perhaps because the practice had not grown up in Fyfeshire before he left sometime in the late 1840's. He reacted strongly to any suggestion that miners were interfering in the running of his mines by dismissing them as agitators. For this reason his miners charged in February 1877 that he carried a policy of "autocratic tyranny" in his mines.¹³ At the same time the Wellington miners complained that they were required "to do many things not customary in other mines"; by this they doubtlessly referred to the company's insistence that they take valuable time to dig out the often large quantities of dirt found in the seam. ✓

In early February 1877 the Wellington miners met to discuss the many unresolved disputes that existed between the miners and the company over working conditions and wages. In 1876 the companies on the coalfield reduced the price per ton paid to miners from \$1.00 to \$.81 because the price of coal on the San Francisco market had declined when the market became over-supplied. At Wellington the reduction aggravated existing grievances over digging dirt for little or no pay and over alleged defects in the company's weighing machines. To fight these issues the miners struck on February 26 and organized a

13 "Origins of Labour Unions," op.cit. Nanaimo Free Press, February 26, 1877, p.1.

Mutual Protection Society.¹⁴ Their union aims were liberal and idealistic; they declared that the general purpose of the Society was to enable "labour and capital to work harmoniously" together. The name and philosophy of the new organization suggest that its leaders included British immigrant miners who had entered the coalfield since 1871.¹⁵

Robert Dunsmuir refused to deal with the miners' Society and the strike continued until the end of April 1877. Robert Dunsmuir was determined not to give way to the demands of the miners. He ordered that all miners who occupied rented bunkhouses on company property had to leave the premises; when the miners refused to leave, even the Sheriff was unsuccessful in his first attempts to evict them. Then the company tried to break the strike when it imported labour from San Francisco but the miners met the incoming Americans at Departure Bay and forced them to return to Nanaimo. To weaken the company's position further the miners attempted to intimidate Chinese workers who continued to work while the strike was on, but this effort was largely unsuccessful. The strike finally ended soon after April 23 when the British Columbia militia arrived at Wellington to re-enforce the civil

¹⁴ Loc.cit.

¹⁵ Cole, G.D.H., and Postgate, R., op.cit., pp.399-400.

authority of the sheriff and evict the miners from the bunk-houses.¹⁶

The strike of the Miners' Mutual Protection Society over working conditions and a wage reduction had failed but the organization lived on, kept alive by miners who remained at Wellington or who migrated to Nanaimo. Wellington miners at their meeting on February 26 had decided to form branch unions of the Protective Society at other mines in the field but the Nanaimo miners did not apparently see the need as yet for an official union.

Two reasons may have accounted for the apparent lack of militancy on the part of the Nanaimo miners in 1877. The British Columbia legislature passed a Coal Mines Regulations Act in 1877.¹⁷ The Act was similar to the United Kingdom Act of 1872¹⁸ and the many north of England miners at Nanaimo almost certainly took advantage of the 1877 Act which permitted them to establish inspection committees and a check-weighman. The hostility of Robert Dunsmuir to miners' agents interfering in the running of his mines prevented these committees from

16 Return of the 14th of March, 1878, of all Correspondence, Orders in Council, and Other Documents, Relating to the Miners' Strike at Nanaimo, and to the Disposition of a Body of Armed Volunteers of Militia to the District of Nanaimo in the Spring of 1877, Victoria, Government Printing Office, 1878. See also Roy, R.H., "...in Aid of Civil Power," 1877, Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1953. Silverman, P.G., "A History of the Militia and Defenses of British Columbia," M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, U.B.C., 1956, pp. 162-192.

17 See Appendix, p. 211, "Petition Against Coal Mining Bill". The coal companies on the field unsuccessfully petitioned for the bill's withdrawal.

18 Underhill, F.H., op.cit., pp. 25-28.

forming at Wellington. The second reason for the more moderate behavior of the Nanaimo miners was that Nanaimo miners were socially more conservative than Wellington miners. Whereas Wellington miners were generally single men who resided in bunkhouses, a large proportion of Nanaimo miners were property owners and family men. The grievances and frustrations of Nanaimo miners were channelled more often into vigorous outdoor sports and heavy drinking in the numerous pubs in the town than into labour disputes.¹⁹

In the years after 1877 the Wellington managers assiduously rooted out leading members of the Miners' Society who tried to bring union demands to the company's attention.²⁰ But with the tremendous expansion in the industry from 1877 to 1883 new miners immigrated into the coalfield from the United Kingdom and re-invigorated the union movement. There was another strike at Wellington in 1881 over the same issues

19 Smith, B.R.D., op.cit., pp.114-117. Matheson, M.H., op.cit., p.223. Most of the factors that caused strikes which Clark Kerr found in his comprehensive study of strike-prone industries of which mining was first were present on the coalfields of Vancouver Island. The one constant factor was "the worker's isolation from society." Kerr, Clark, Labor and Management in Industrial Society, "The Inter-industry Propensity to Strike," (New York, 1964), pp.129-133. For the region west of the Rockies the following studies are germane to this question: Bradwin, Edwin, W., The Bunkhouse Man: 1903-1914 (New York, 1928), p.271. Parker, Carleton, The Casual Laborer and Other Essays (New York, 1920), p.10. Jensen, V.H., op.cit., pp.1-3.

20 "Origins of Labour Unions in British Columbia," op.cit. According to this source, the Nanaimo Free Press carried notices of union meetings at Wellington and Nanaimo from 1877 to 1883. In practically every notice the names of the officers had changed. This lack of continuity was undoubtedly a result of the officers being dismissed.

that had caused the previous strike. By 1883 it had become obvious from experiences that Wellington was no longer a suitable headquarters for the Miners' Society.

On August 4, 1883 the Wellington miners met in the Nanaimo Institute Hall and drew up a resolution to be presented to the company. The company had reduced the price of coal paid to miners down to \$.75 per ton and this was the first issue on the agenda. As the company could not justify the reduction by any reported decline in the market price of coal, the miners voted to strike for an increase to \$.90 per ton. The second main resolution for which the miners were prepared to strike demanded the re-instatement of officers of the Miners' Protection Society who had been recently dismissed for union activity in the mines. With the aim of establishing a common wage scale and working conditions throughout the coalfield and strengthening the weak Protection Society, the Wellington miners also considered forming branch unions at Nanaimo and East Wellington mines.²¹

At the August 4th meeting miners argued that they needed a trade union for economic, political and moral reasons.

Mr. James Young, a stranger, said the object of trade unions was to settle disputes between employer and employee, and both had equal rights to settle wages. In this province, he said, the price of coal is going up, and yet wages stand the same, and sometimes go down, and unions are

21 Loc.cit.

absolutely necessary; he urged the men to stand by each other.

Mr. C.O.Locke said capital is always ready to keep the workmen down, and workingmen should be elected to the Legislature forthwith, by workingmen. They had power and should use it rationally and keep within the bounds of the law.²²

A miner, Thomas R. Jones expressed concern over statements Robert Dunsmuir had made to the effect that miners had little need of higher wages since they would spend the difference in the pubs. Jones advocated that the miners temper their drinking habits and prove by their behavior they deserved higher wages. But it was doubtful if Robert Dunsmuir or his son James, who became manager of the mine about this time, would have recognized even a union of abstainers. The union of which Thomas R.Jones became president the next year never received official approval by the company.

The company would not meet the demands of the Wellington miners and shortly after August 4, 1883 a strike began which lasted for about three months. After six weeks the company was prepared to meet the miners' original wage demands but the miners were apparently confident of the strength of their case for they revised their original demand upward to an increase to \$1.00 from \$.75 per ton. It was possible that this new demand occurred because the company would not promise to refrain from dismissing members of the union. The company

22 Quoted in James K.Nesbitt's article, "Nanaimo Coal Miners were most Rebellious," The Victoria Daily Colonist, November 13, 1966, p.10.

refused the revised wage demand and in October Robert Dunsmuir filled the places of the striking miners with Chinese labour and imported more workers from San Francisco. The miners failed to achieve their revised or their original wage demands and instead proposed to the company that they would accept \$.75 per ton if the company would remove the Chinese workers from underground operations. This proposal was turned down and the miners either drifted back on the company's terms or left Wellington.²³

Before 1883 the employment of Chinese workers in the mines had not been a significant issue to the miners. In 1874 there had only been 60 Chinese workers employed out of a total of 349 miners on the coalfield. By 1883 over one third of the 973 miners reported on the field were Chinese and most of these were employed at Wellington.²⁴ This large increase in the employment of Chinese workers at wages one third to one half of those paid to whites in the mines was a result of increased immigration of Chinese workers into the province as a whole. When R. Dunsmuir and Sons used Chinese workers to break the strike of 1883, the company challenged the union miners' basic conviction that they had a right to strike without being replaced. The hated "blackleg"

23 "Origins of Unions," op.cit. Nanaimo Free Press, October 9, 1883, p.

24 "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1874-1883, passim. From 1871 to 1881 the Chinese population in British Columbia increased from 1,548 to 4,350. Census of Canada, 1881, vol.1, pp.298-299; 1891, p.366.

in the United Kingdom had become the equally despised "scab" in North America.

Once in the mines Chinese workers could not comprehend the many dangers that awaited the inexperienced. Part of the reason for their apparent carelessness was the obvious difficulty of communicating instructions to them in English. Miners believed, and the evidence in certain notable cases confirmed their belief, that Chinese workmen caused many unnecessary accidents.²⁵ Official reports of mines accidents indicate that Chinese workmen paid dearly for their willingness to take employment in the mines. But the dangers experienced by skilled miners as a result of working with inexperienced Chinese miners was not the most important aspect of the question of their employment in the mines. When miners came forth to express their views on Chinese immigration, economic arguments usually dominated their statements.

James Young, secretary of the miners' union, argued that the employment of Chinese workmen lowered the general wage level and made a few wealthy employers even more economically powerful because of the threat they held over white miners. According to Young, the Chinese were the

...all too dangerous competitors in the labor market, while their docile servility, the natural

25 See particularly the "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1879, pp.251-254.

outcome of centuries of grinding poverty and humble submissiveness to a most oppressive form of government, rendered them doubly dangerous as the willing tools whereby grasping and tyrannical employers grind down all labor to the lowest living point.²⁶

James Young blamed the federal and provincial governments for "aiding the grasping ambition of individuals" and encouraging Chinese immigration.²⁷ As Robert Dunsmuir was elected M.P.P. for the District of Nanaimo in 1882, he was probably the political representative Young had in mind.

A further criticism of the employment of Chinese workers in and around the mines concerned the employment of young men and the growth of a skilled labour force. James Young contended:

At present there is practically no opening for boys in the mines of the district..., Chinamen being almost exclusively employed (at unskilled work). Under such conditions a race of practical miners, trained from their childhood to the difficulties and dangers of mining, can hardly even arise, and there is a danger of the calling dropping into the hands of the most ignorant class. Intelligent men finding themselves blocked at every turn, will eventually leave mining for some other pursuit.²⁸

The idea that mining was a "calling" to which a miner dedicated himself and became by stages a skilled worker seemed appropriate

26 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, Ottawa, 1885, p.156.

27 Ibid., p.157.

28 Ibid., p.88.

to a stable mining community in which most young men entered the mines as their fathers had done. But there was little opportunity for such a community to grow at Wellington. Besides the problem of the employment of Chinese labour in the mines, the basis for a stable community, regular employment, was too frequently interrupted by strikes. The "intelligent men" such as James Young were deprived of employment for their trade union activity and left for Nanaimo where unionism was not proscribed.

Between the miners and the mine-owners at Wellington there was total disagreement on the Chinese question. John Bryden, the general manager of R. Dunsmuir and Sons, found the Chinese "industrious, sober, economical and law-abiding, more so than the same class of white laborers".²⁹ He and Robert Dunsmuir strenuously opposed Chinese exclusion as the effect "would be serious, as many industries would be unable to continue, for want of a suitable class of labor" to do unskilled work.³⁰ Robert Dunsmuir stated that Chinese labourers had replaced many whites in his mines because the latter were too expensive. He opposed James Young's idea that white immigrants would take unskilled jobs and he may have hinted at some of his own early ambition when he said:

29 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, op.cit. p.110.

30 Ibid., p.111.

The (Chinese) have, moreover, pitched into that kind of work which, from its arduous nature and humble character, has deterred the proportion of incoming white men from accepting willingly in a new country where they immediately expected to better their position, or step into a better place than the one they just left.³¹

The Chinese performed labour which others refused to perform "at wages which made such mining pay". Thus Robert Dunsmuir believed that if his miners asked for too large an increase he was justified in replacing them with Chinese labour.

S.M. Robins, the Superintendent of Vancouver Coal at Nanaimo, disagreed to some extent with his competitors on the island. He believed that Chinese labour had been useful in doing manual work such as clearing land for the company that whites had not been willing to do for low wages. While he continued to employ Chinese in the mines in unskilled jobs, he stated that their usefulness in unskilled work was over and that they should be gradually expelled from the province.³² He advocated the encouragement of white immigration by making transportation to Canada free. S.M. Robins agreed with James Young concerning one of the effects of Chinese immigration. Robins said that young men were not willing to take up unskilled labour because manual work was

31 Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, op.cit. p. 118.

32 Ibid., p. XVI.

looked upon as fit only for "an inferior race".³³ The presence of Chinese, therefore, did discourage white immigration to some extent.

The employment of nearly 300 Chinese workers at Wellington by 1883 and their use as strike breakers placed a tremendous obstacle in the way of the miners achieving wage increases and the recognition of miners' committees in the mines. However, the existence of the Chinese in the mines merely complicated further what was the most fundamental issue in all the miners' strikes. Since 1871 the miners had demanded that Robert Dunsmuir recognize their right to determine, at least in part, the conditions under which they worked. In their struggles to achieve this right the miners evolved a philosophy of unionism which derived from the United Kingdom and which for them justified their demands. James Young had said on August 4, 1883 that the object of trade unions "was to settle disputes between employer and employee, and both had equal rights to settle wages."³⁴ Robert Dunsmuir unequivocally rejected this equal rights theory. In his opinion the mineowner had absolute property rights over conditions of employment and miners had no right to change those conditions unless the mineowner approved.

33 Loc.cit.

34 Cited in Nesbitt, James, K., op.cit., p.10.

As the law regarding property and civil rights favoured the mineowner who wished to discriminate against union miners or replace them with other workers,³⁵ Robert Dunsmuir took whatever measures he believed necessary to break the miners' unions.

The years 1871 to 1883 saw the evolution of mining unions on the Vancouver Island coalfield. Miners formed unions at Wellington as a result of the failure of individual miners to settle disputes over wages and working conditions with R. Dunsmuir and Sons. The organization of unions at Wellington for the purpose of making collective demands on the company was not, therefore, the cause of strikes but the result of the inability of individual miners to negotiate what they believed were tolerable working conditions and reasonable wages.

35 Logan, H.A., Trade Unions in Canada (Toronto, 1948), p. 414.
Anton, F.R., The Role of Government in the Settlement of Industrial Disputes in Canada (Montreal, 1962), pp. 51-52.

CHAPTER II

The Knights of Labour and the Emergence of the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association: 1884-1891

The failure of the 1883 strike of the Protective Society raised the question in the minds of the Wellington miners whether the Society was an effective enough organization to combat the anti-union policy of R. Dunsmuir and Sons. As there were significant grievances which remained unresolved at Wellington following the 1883 strike, the question of the future of unionism was an urgent one for the miners to consider. As a consequence they turned to a new form of union organization.

By 1884 the specific grievances and issues which miners found could only be resolved by collective action, had become permanent features of the miner's working life. Miners experienced great difficulty in convincing pit bosses and superintendents to pay miners for digging dirt and rock along with coal and this source of dispute was aggravated by the company's practice of docking miners for any excess dirt which appeared in their boxes at the weighing machines. As the general wage level at Wellington dropped from \$1.20 in 1871 to \$.75 per ton in 1883, disputes over the handling of dirt and rock became more serious because miners could no longer afford to ignore adjustments which favoured the company.

The failure of the 1883 strike at Wellington also left for the future the problem of the employment of increasing numbers of Chinese workers. Chinese workers posed a serious threat to white miners because they were willing to work for much lower wages and because they were careless of the many dangers involved in working in the mines. The faulted condition of the island coal seams and the large number of inexperienced Chinese and white miners who mined these seams were the main reasons why these mines were the most dangerous in the world for miners to work in.¹ In the years after 1884 all these unresolved problems increased in scope and intensity as the mining population multiplied.

In 1883 the Nanaimo Institute Hall became the new headquarters of the Miners' Mutual Protective Society.² The failure of successive Wellington strikes coupled with the growth of a stable union climate at Nanaimo induced the leading

1 "Report of the Minister of Mines," passim., 1877-1887. In these years there were 321 fatalities on the coalfield or approximately 170 fatalities per million tons of coal produced. During the years 1892-1901 the fatality rate dropped to 17 fatalities per million yet an official report in 1902 concluded that the Vancouver Island mines were the most dangerous in the world. See British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, "Report of the Special Commission to Inquire into the Causes of Explosions in Coal Mines," Sessional Papers, 1902, p.J16.

2 "Origins of Labour Unions in British Columbia," op.cit., p.2.

trade unionists to settle in Nanaimo.³ Coincidental with the union's move to Nanaimo, the first international union to reach the island, the Knights of Labour, established Local 3017 Trade Assembly in Nanaimo in January 1884.⁴ The Knights of Labour was in organization and structure one big union. Originally formed in Philadelphia in 1869, the union attracted as many as 1,200,000 members to its assemblies by 1888. When the Knights spread to the mountain states and the west coast in the 1880's, many different trade unions joined their trade assemblies.⁵

The basic assumption of the Knights was that the introduction of machines in industry had gradually reduced the number of skilled workmen in the labour force.⁶ This process caused employers to treat labour as merely adjuncts of machines and was accompanied by a gradual reduction in wages. To restore humanity to labour and to fight economic deprivation the Knights proselytized everywhere in North America on the need for all workmen to unite together in trade assemblies. Specifically, the programme of the Knights

3 "Origins of Unions" op.cit., see also Smith, B.R.D., op.cit., p.119. S.M. Robins recalled the state of unionism in Nanaimo when he arrived to become superintendent in 1884 in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.295.

4 Nanaimo Free Press, January 26, 1884, p.3, in "Origins of Unions," loc.cit.

5 For discussions of the Knights of Labour and their influence see Brissenden, Paul F., The I.W.W.: A Study in American Syndicalism (New York, 1920), p.31. Ware, Norman J., The Labor Movement in the United States: 1860-1895 (New York, 1929), pp.109-110. Loosemore, T.R., op.cit. p.27.

6 Brissenden, Paul F., op.cit., p.33.

included the substitution of arbitration in place of long disputes as a method of settling strikes; the achievement of an eight-hour day; government ownership of telephones, telegraphs and railroads; and active discussion of political affairs in union meetings with the aim of securing legislation in favour of workingmen.

The organization and ideals of the Knights had some influence on the coal miners who joined the Knights' assembly in 1884. In the two to five years that miners belonged to the assembly the miners were the largest and foremost union in the body.⁷ In 1884 Thomas R. Jones was elected president and James Young became secretary of the Knights. These miners had been leaders in the Wellington strike of 1883. The influence of the Knights on the miners was twofold: the Knights encouraged the miners to consider political action as a means of improving working conditions in the mines; secondly, the Knights brought the skilled miners and the labourers together in the same assembly where the two groups had more opportunity to discuss closer unity in their efforts to improve conditions in the mines. However, it remained to be seen whether the Knights of Labour could adapt their ideals to the practical needs of the miners.⁸

7 Nanaimo miners left the assembly apparently in 1886. Wellington miners left the assembly in 1889.

8 Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., pp.40-45. Brissenden states that the Knights in North America declined for three main reasons. Of these one seems applicable to the miners, namely their desire for complete independence from a centralized trades assembly. The organization to which miners belonged had to concern itself with the day to day problems of the miners. See pp.33-34.

Two years after the Knights organized a trade assembly the miners and mine labourers at Nanaimo left the assembly and formed the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association.⁹ In forming a union with the labourers the skilled miners must have been convinced that they could not gain important concessions from the Vancouver Coal Company unless they had the support of the mine labourers who made up about half the working force employed in the mines. The skilled miners who worked for contract wages made higher wages than the labourers who worked for a daily wage. The old Protective Society had attempted to establish minimum standards of safety in the mines to enable the individual miner to earn the best possible contract wages without risking his life each time he entered the mine. However, the miners could never be certain when they struck for improvements that the labourers might not take their place in the mine and keep working during the strike. The new alliance between miners and labourers strengthened the bargaining power of the miners and the alliance was influenced by the Knights who had urged that the skilled and the unskilled unite in one union.

After the formation of the Miners' Association the Nanaimo miners gained some significant improvements in working conditions. As Vancouver Coal consented to the

9 Nanaimo Free Press, February 13, 1886, p.1 in "Origins of Unions," op.cit.

changes directly after a mine disaster killed 150 miners at Nanaimo in 1887,¹⁰ the changes were not solely attributable to the new bargaining power of the union. As a result of the explosion in 1887, the miners convinced superintendent S.M. Robins that he should never again employ Chinese workers underground. The miners blamed the carelessness of Chinese workers for the explosion and the company submitted to the miners' demand for the removal of Chinese workers.¹¹ After the explosion the union made permanent the practice of regularly sending an inspection committee through the mines to check for gas and other working hazards. The Mines Regulations Act of 1877 provided for inspection committees but the Protective Association was the first union on the coalfield to elect miners to the positions on a regular basis. But when miners began petitioning the provincial legislature in 1888 to remove Chinese workers from the mines,¹² the influence of coal mining, fish packing, and railway industrialists and other employers of Chinese labour prevented the passage of the legislation.¹³

10 For details of this disaster see "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1887, p.324.

11 S.M. Robins, Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.298.

12 British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, "Petition Regarding Exclusion of Chinese from Coal Mines," S.P., 1888, p.404.

13 Legislative Assembly, Journals, 1888, p.74.

In fact political action as a means of gaining improvements in working conditions in the mines was on the whole less effective than direct action. In 1889 the Miners' Association gained an eight hour day in the mines of the Vancouver Coal Company.¹⁴ The miners were in a strong position to obtain the reduction because the company was prospering from one of the periodic booms in the San Francisco coal market and could not afford a long strike.¹⁵ Miners from the North of England, who pioneered trade unionism at Nanaimo, had already won a seven hour day in Northumberland and these miners likely led the way in the demand for an eight hour day at Nanaimo. It would take fifteen years before the legislature finally enacted an eight hour day for all coal mines in the province.

Wellington miners watched with concern the gradual improvement of working conditions at Nanaimo from 1887 to 1889. Compared to Nanaimo miners in 1889 Wellington miners had poorer working conditions and wages. A branch of the Miners' Association was not formed at Wellington in 1886 and Wellington miners had to walk to Nanaimo when they attended union meetings. Robert Dunsmuir's well-established policy of dismissing union officers made impractical the

14 Legislative Assembly, "Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike," S.P., 1891, p.284.

15 For details of the company's history from 1862 to 1903 see Currie, A.W., "The Vancouver Coal Mining Company," Queen's Quarterly, vol. 70(Spring, 1963):No.1, pp.50-63. The "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1874- passim., also contains much information on company developments.

formation of a union at Wellington. But a mine explosion which killed 78 miners at Wellington in 1888 angered the miners and united them once again. The miners blamed the company for the deaths because it employed careless Chinese workers who caused the accident and because the company would not pay miners to remove dangerous coal dust which collected around underground digging operations.¹⁶ With Nanaimo and Wellington miners united against continued employment of Chinese workers Robert Dunsmuir consented to remove Chinese workers from underground operations at Wellington. As Robert Dunsmuir's competitor at Nanaimo also had consented to remove Chinese workers, neither company suffered a competitive disadvantage.¹⁷

The Wellington explosion of 1888 immediately sparked renewed attempts to obtain union working conditions in the mines. As the Wellington miners did not form a branch of the Miners' Association at Wellington, they continued to meet occasionally around Wellington under the auspices of the Knights of Labour. The Knights may have appeared a rather innocuous organization to Robert Dunsmuir for between the years 1884-1888 there was no reported conflict between the company and the Knights. However, after the 1888 explosion the miners demanded some control over working conditions in

16 "Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike," op.cit., p. 262.

17 S.M. Robins, the superintendent at Nanaimo in 1888, told how the two companies and the Chinese cooperated with the miners' demand for the removal of the Chinese workers. Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.298.

the mines. They met John Bryden, one of the company's managers, and demanded recognition of a grievance committee in the mines. John Bryden related what happened at the interview:

Q. When difficulties arose, what method did you employ? A. The method usually was individually, but sometimes they would send a committee. Q. The men could go and see you personally if they wanted to? A. Yes... On one occasion they did ask if we would recognize a body, that is the Knights of Labour, and their grievance committee. I asked them the nature of the Knights of Labour and the grievance committee. They told me the nature which is virtually to run the mines. I told them if Mr. Dunsmuir has engaged you to run the mines you can do so but if I am to run the mines I want to run them. As to your Knights of Labour and grievance committee running the mines, I will dig clams for a living first. I had no more trouble about the Knights of Labour.¹⁸

The company's refusal to permit a grievance or pit committee to function in the mines was a tactical error. Had it permitted this common practice the company might have saved itself the loss due to strikes which occurred almost continuously from January 1889 to November 1891. According to Wellington miners, grievance committees would have solved disputes in the mines before they grew to strike proportions.¹⁹

Having failed to achieve recognition of union committees in the mines in 1888, the Wellington miners in January 1889 demanded a \$.15 per ton wage increase over the \$.75 per ton rate that had been paid since the strike of 1883.²⁰

18 S.M. Robins, Minutes of Evidence op.cit., p.265.

19 "Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike," op.cit., p.285.

20 A very useful history of wage changes on the coalfield was given by the editor of the Cumberland News, March 18, 1899, p.6.

The miners had at least two reasons for making the demand for a wage increase in January 1889. First, there was the traditional grievance over digging dirt. Many miners were dissatisfied because pit bosses and superintendents at Wellington would not agree to pay them enough for digging out the excess dirt that accumulated in the process of mining coal. As the decision of the bosses was final over how much miners received for this extra work, miners resented the fact that pit committees were not permitted to help them adjudicate disputes with the bosses. Secondly, since the year 1883 at least, Wellington miners had received \$.7½ per ton less than Nanaimo miners and the inequality over wages was aggravated by the miners' knowledge that the Vancouver Coal Company permitted union pit committees to function in its mines.²¹ Robert Dunsmuir told Sir Joseph Trutch how he dealt with the miners after they struck in January over the \$.15 wage increase:

I had a strike on in my works at Wellington the first of the year, which I conquered at the end of three weeks, and the men are very sorry now, more so, the ring leaders, who I would not employ again on any account.²²

Without a large union organization to support them the miners were unable to stand a long strike and the strike terminated before the end of January.

21 Loc.cit.

22 "Robert Dunsmuir to Sir Joseph Trutch," February, n.d., 1889. Cited in an article by James K. Nesbitt, Vancouver Sun, July 22, 1965, p.12. Mr. Nesbitt said that the letter had been recently discovered. Joseph William Trutch was the first lieutenant-governor of the province from 1871 to 1876.

Mounting opposition to Robert Dunsmuir's labour policy soon led to another strike in May 1889 at the year-old mine at Cumberland which lay between Wellington and Nanaimo.²³ The cause of the dispute as explained by Robert Dunsmuir to Sir Joseph Trutch concerned the employment of Chinese workers as pushers in the mines.

...it seems I have not got rid of one strike, but another takes place at Comox Mines....Chinese had been sent underground to run out boxes.... Everything is at a standstill, and will be until I get other men, as not one of the old hands²⁴ will earn another dollar at any of my works.

Judging from Robert Dunsmuir's description of the strikers as "old hands", many of them must have worked for him at Wellington and the miners assumed that Dunsmuir would not send Chinese workers underground in his mines again after he had given his assurance of this in 1888. Although Cumberland mines were the safest mines on the coalfield for miners to work in, and Chinese workers caused fewer accidents there than in other mines,²⁵ the miners were opposed to their

23 Some details concerning the founding of the mine and its early history are found in Bucham, A.F. "The Company Office," A Typescript history of the company office from 1889 to 1895, PABC, 5 pp., n.d.

24 "Robert Dunsmuir to Sir Joseph Trutch," op.cit., p.12. Robert Dunsmuir died in late 1889 and his son James became head of the firm. Robert had been elected M.P.P. for Nanaimo in 1882 and 1886 and was President of the Council at the time of his death. James became M.P.P. for Comox in 1898, for Newcastle in 1900, Premier from 1900 to 1902 and lieutenant-governor from 1906 to 1909. Dunsmuir Files, PABC. By 1889 the company of R.Dunsmuir and Sons controlled the mines, the Esquimalt & Nanaimo railway and land grant which was reported to be worth \$20,000,000.00, a growing steamship line, tug boats, extensive real estate in Victoria and real estate and wharves in San Francisco.

25 Bucham, A.F., "The Nanaimo Coalfield of British Columbia," Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, vol. 50, 1947, p.472.

employment underground and the strike lasted until August 1889. The fact that the strike lasted from May to August suggests that other issues may have been present in the strike; it is probable that the miners demanded a wage increase from \$.75 to \$.90 per ton as had occurred at Wellington in January. The failure of the miners to win the strike was the main reason why in February 1890 the Cumberland miners were conspicuously absent from the new movement to establish a district-wide organization of the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association.

The failure of the Wellington and Cumberland strikes in the years 1888 and 1889 convinced the miners that a new strategy was necessary if they were to gain improvements in wages and working conditions. The Knights of Labour had practically disappeared from the coalfield by 1889 and the Wellington miners logically turned to the Nanaimo Miners' Association for strength and support. In February 1890 the Wellington miners called a mass meeting to consider the question of demanding official recognition of the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association in the Wellington mines. At the meeting to which about 1,000 miners came, each mine on the field except Cumberland sent delegates.²⁶ There was a new spirit of militancy in the air as miners

26 Cumberland miners held one union meeting in Cumberland in early 1890 but the company dismissed the officers the next day. Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, pp.390-391.

gathered in an open field around a raised platform to hear speeches.²⁷ Two meetings occurred in Nanaimo which approved a resolution to run union supported candidates in the forthcoming provincial election. Further meetings took place which culminated in another mass rally in the fields between Wellington and Nanaimo.²⁸ At the last meeting in May the Wellington miners reported that the company had refused to recognize a union committee of miners. The committee was composed of representatives of all nationalities on the field: two miners from the United Kingdom, one German, one Italian, one Belgian and one Russian Finn. United as never before, the Wellington miners with the support of the Nanaimo miners called a strike on May 17, 1890. The miners demanded recognition of the Miners' Association.

The demand for the recognition of the Miners' Association was the most radical demand the Wellington miners had yet made. The demand meant in effect that the miners wanted the equivalent of property rights over their

666

27 Nanaimo Free Press, February 1, 1890, p.3, in "Origins of Unions," op.cit. The Free Press said the miners were agitated over a wage reduction at Wellington mines but the evidence from the "Select Committee," op.cit., p.262, indicates this reduction occurred in one or two tunnels out of the six that were operating. The standard wage was \$.75 per ton and \$.90 in the one or two where dirt and rock were particularly onerous to dig out.

28 The meeting was called for political and economic reasons. See Loosemore, T.R. op.cit., p.49. "Select Committee," op.cit., p.284.

conditions of work.²⁹ There was of course no basis in law as yet for such a demand; the legal system recognized only that companies could hire and fire at will or lock strikers out of their works if a dispute occurred. When Wellington miners in 1888 asked manager John Bryden if he would recognize a grievance committee of the Knights of Labour, he refused their request because he believed the miners were really asking to "run the mines." But the miners were not asking to take over the mines; they wanted a kind of extra-legal control over how their wages and working conditions were determined. A Select Committee of the legislature which investigated the strike which began on May 17, 1890 uncovered evidence which explained how grievances which were not ameliorated could lead to a social and political protest movement on the coalfield.³⁰

Nanaimo miners had already achieved an eight hour day "bank to bank" in 1889 and this was one of the issues which prompted the Wellington miners to call a mass meeting in February 1890 to consider their grievances. Wellington miners

29 This interpretation of the miners' basic aims was suggested by a number of studies in Mark Perlman, Labor Union Theories in America (New York, 1958), p.162. William (Bill) Haywood, former miner and secretary of the Western Federation of Miners, wrote in 1911: "the fight is first of all a shop fight." Autobiography (New York, 1929), p.162.

30 The platform included measures to control land monopolies; to insert a clause in all charters granted by the provincial government prohibiting the employment of Chinese workers; to shorten hours of work; to improve health and safety regulations in all industries. See "Workingmen's Platform" in Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., Appendix p. vi.

assembled at the pithead at 7:00 a.m. and emerged at 3:30 p.m. James Dunsmuir reportedly told a committee of miners that they could come up from the pit at 3:00 p.m. if they wished as the half-hour was given as a meal break.³¹ One of the members on the committee, John Suggett, told the Select Committee of the legislature that he had not heard James Dunsmuir make the statement.³² Suggett said, too, that another grievance was brought to manager John Bryden's attention by the union committee after they had seen James Dunsmuir. The grievance concerned miners who arrived after the 7:00 a.m. lift had gone down but who were not permitted to enter the mine that day. John Bryden told the union committee he was not authorized to reach any settlement with the union³³ and the committee reported his statements to the mass meeting which voted to strike for union recognition on May 17, 1890.

Tully Boyce, a former Wellington miner and the new president of the Protective Association, generally confirmed statements made by John Suggett and Joseph Carter who were present on the union committee. Boyce explained how the issue of hours was one factor which led to the demand for union recognition. However, he added:

As a matter of fact, from the office I hold, a great many of these matters came under my notice

31 "Select Committee," op.cit., p.282.

32 Loc.cit.

33 Ibid., p.283.

and, as far as I know, the cause of the strike is that the Company refuses to recognize their workmen as an organized body. The question of hours, if I understand it properly, is entirely out of the question....The question of hours was the direct cause in other words, hastened the conflict; but that, as an outsider, I didn't think there would be any trouble about, for it was a matter about which there was very little at stake. As to the necessity of the men having an organization, I must come back to my own personal experience--I worked for this company over two years ago....There was a partial organization existing here then and, through the efforts of that organization some of the grievances which existed amongst the men were removed. ³⁴

Another cause of the demand for union recognition was that the miners deeply resented the company "docking" the men for the amount of shale or dirt which appeared in their boxes at the tipple. Under the "court-house" system of deducting for dirt, miners were not only fined but also were dismissed. John Anderson gave the Select Committee an interesting and revealing testimony on this question:

I wish to state what I think was the cause of the Wellington strike. At the time that the explosion was in No.5 shaft the company agreed with the men to do away with riddles, and to do away with the slack out of the mine, for it was supposed to have been the cause of the explosion in No.5. Directly after that the mines commenced to get filled up with men, and they commenced docking pretty hard--docking cars for slack coal and dirt mixed. (Mr. Bodwell asked "When was this?") Before the strike; between the accident and the strike. Well, it went pretty hard. I was not docked very often but I was sometimes, along with the balance of them; and different ones were discharged for it, and some of them were reinstated, but I was told plump and plain that the first time I was docked again they would make an example of me. It was not the boss

34 "Select Committee," op.cit. p. 242.

of the shaft, it was the assistant superintendent, and he said to me that it was dirt that I was docked for, and I said "I will take you to the top man and if he says it is dirt I will give you that day's work." He wouldn't do it. He backed out. I was hot enough to quit, but I wasn't in a position to do so. I said "I am sorry to see that times have altered from what they were a very short time ago," and I picked up a lot of slack coal, the same as what caused the explosion in No. 5....The underboss was standing there and never questioned me at all.... I went round and got work at No.6....And I said what is for coal, and he said 75 cents. I said, "You used to pay 90 cents." Well, he said they might do it in No. 3, but he wouldn't do it in No.6. Well, I sat down and tried it until dinner time, and found I could not make wages at it, and so I went and asked the boss for pushing. (Question.-What, in your opinion, caused the strike?) A. A man coming into your place and telling you this and that, and directing you how to fix the place. The way those men were trying to use me I had to get into an organization to support myself, so that I would have a body of men to back me up in my own occupation. (Question.-How did you expect it to help you?) I gave him the reasons. If there had been an association here when he told me I would be discharged if I was docked again, I would have reported it to my association, and they would have taken the matter up and supported me, and if I was discharged I would not have to leave the camp.³⁵

The significance of the pit committee as explained by John Anderson and other miners was that the committee functioned when there was a need for it and did not "run the mines." The pit committee was elected by the union. Asked for a definition of the committee, John Anderson stated:

I thought that if I had grievances and couldn't settle them that a pit committee would be more

35 "Select Committee," op.cit. p.262.

intelligent than what I was, as they are generally selected from among very intelligent men, and that they would look into all the deficiencies (in the coal), and if any question did arise they could arbitrate for me.³⁶

Much of the Select Committee's discussion and questioning revolved around this unrealized demand of the miners for a committee which would arbitrate disputes underground. Robert Jarvies and David Jones from Wales, John Greenwell and Charles McGarrigle from Northumberland, and Joseph Carter from England each told the Select Committee that the pit committee was in effect the basis of unionism in the mines.³⁷ The policy of the company appeared as reactionary to the Old Country miners.

Q. How long have you been working in the mines?
A. Thirty years. Q. Where did you commence? A. In England. Q. Belong to any organization in England? A. Always. Q. Were those organizations generally recognized by the employers? A. Always; I have never known one but was. In fact, I have known places where the master would have the men organized, because they said they got on with the men better as an organized body than without organization. Q. Did the miners present their grievances to the masters through committees? A. Yes, always by committees. If a single individual had a grievance with a pit boss, and they couldn't settle it, he would always call in the committee, and the committee would always go to the boss and investigate the thing, and try to bring about a peaceable settlement.³⁸

36 "Select Committee," op.cit. p.258.

37 Ibid., pp.264-265; p.275; p.273; p.280. Joseph Carter was probably from Northumberland, too, but the evidence did not say. See p.265.

38 Ibid., p.285

The temperamental differences in pit bosses and assistant superintendents made necessary in the opinion of the miners < some form of third party intervention.

The Select Committee of the Legislature reported in 1891 that the cause of the Wellington strike was "the refusal of the company to recognize or treat with the union."³⁹ The Committee's questioning was so incisive and penetrating because the chairman and one of the committee members were former miners. Thomas Keith, the chairman, was a Belfast-born miner and Thomas Forster was from Northumberland, one of the strongest union districts in the United Kingdom. Both men had been elected to the British Columbia Legislature in 1890 with the active support of the Protective Association. In the years 1891-1894 Thomas Keith introduced four amendments x to the Coal Mines Regulation Act. The amendments would have improved safety regulations in the mines had they passed x but on each occasion the amendments were defeated.⁴⁰

The Wellington strike united the Nanaimo and Wellington miners in a social protest movement against the autocratic labour policies of the Dunsmuir. For the first time the Nanaimo miners gave their full support to the Wellington y branch of the union and James Dunsmuir saw the hand of outside intervention reaching into the Wellington mines. E.V. Bodwell, Dunsmuir's counsellor, tried to demonstrate that Tully Boyce,

39 "Select Committee," op.cit., p.241.

40 Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., p.56.

the Protective Association, and Thomas Keith and Thomas Forster of the Select Committee, were a part of a Nanaimo < inspired plot to impose new conditions on the Wellington miners and their company. E.V. Bodwell cross-examined John Suggett and tried to bring out the influence of Nanaimo in the strike:

Q. Who spoke first in favour of the 8-hour business? A. I can't just exactly tell who spoke first. Q. Was it a Nanaimo man? A.... I can hardly call it to memory. Q. Wasn't it the Nanaimo men who were urging the 8-hour business? A. There were some of the Nanaimo men spoke on it. Chairman: Do you remember at whose request that meeting was called? A. I can say as far as Wellington is concerned that I, myself, was the mover of the motion in favour of calling the meeting on the Bluffs. Mr. Bodwell: Do you know who the officers of the association were? A. District officers. Q. Was Mr. Forster an officer? A. No, Sir. Q. Is he a member of the union? A. I don't think so. Q. Was Mr. Keith? A. I believe Mr. Keith is a member of the Association. Q. Wasn't he an officer? A. No. Sir.⁴¹

When E.V. Bodwell cross-examined Joseph Carter his line of questioning brought inconclusive answers:

Q. Have you any idea of the number of men that came out from Nanaimo to that meeting? A. 370 were in the procession. Q. You counted them? A. I counted them myself, and there 450 Wellington miners. I went through the ranks and counted all the men there. Q. Did the Nanaimo men attempt to coerce you into doing anything contrary to your will? A. They couldn't.⁴²

Although E.V. Bodwell could not prove a conspiracy had taken ^

⁴¹ "Select Committee," op.cit., p.282.

⁴² Ibid., p. 284.

place, he could see that the Nanaimo branch of the union had an interest in the outcome of the Wellington strike.

The Nanaimo miners' interest in organizing Wellington in part stemmed from their concern lest poorer conditions at Wellington endanger the bargaining position of the Nanaimo branch of the Miners' Association. Nanaimo miners assisted Wellington miners in a number of ways. They contributed strike funds to help maintain skilled miners during long months of unemployment.⁴³ Although no violence was reported, a group of Northfield miners marched out and broke up a meeting of Wellington mine labourers who threatened to, and did, return to work.⁴⁴ The Miners' Association even tried to interfere with James Dunsmuir's shipping trade.⁴⁵ Tully Boyce, the president of the union, unsuccessfully attempted to induce seamen on James Dunsmuir's ships to strike in sympathy with the miners. Boyce then travelled to San Francisco and appealed to dock workers not to handle company coal. While in San Francisco he advised potential strike breakers to keep away from the island and his efforts in this regard were rewarded by the fact that no strike breakers entered the coalfield from the south. Boyce's efforts must have improved the morale of the striking miners. He was not able to stop company coal from landing in San Francisco but

⁴³ "Select Committee," op.cit., p.265, p.377.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.377.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.260-261.

he did show that the new organization was determined to win the strike.

James Dunsmuir recognized after the strike began on May 17 that the Wellington miners had the active support of the Nanaimo branch of the union. With most of the miners on the coalfield united with his miners James Dunsmuir perceived that he could not just lock out the strikers and win the strike quickly as he had done in January 1889. In June 1890 the union picketed the mine and broke up a meeting of mine labourers. Although no cases of actual physical violence were reported, James Dunsmuir could have legally requested the sheriff to restrain miners from picketing the mines and interfering with those who continued to work.⁴⁶ But there is no record of James Dunsmuir either requesting the sheriff to restrain picketers or requesting the sheriff to expel miners from company bunkhouses. Instead James Dunsmuir obtained in late June a requisition from three magistrates who resided outside the district of Nanaimo and with this legal power at his disposal he asked the Attorney-General to send a force of British Columbia militia to Wellington.⁴⁷

The Attorney-General complied with James Dunsmuir's request and shortly after August 5 a force of fifty-one soldiers commanded by Lt.Col. Holmes entered Wellington.

⁴⁶ For an analysis of this question of labour law see Anton, F.R., op.cit., pp.51-52.

⁴⁷ A full account of the incident is found in Silverman, P.G., op.cit., pp.167-172. Silverman used the Reports of the Minister of Militia, PAC and the correspondence associated with the sending of the militia to Wellington.

1890

Lt. Colonel Holmes was the Deputy Adjutant-General of the British Columbia Militia stationed at Victoria. Upon arriving at Wellington, Holmes discovered that no actual disturbances had occurred, that the civil power of the sheriff had not been requested or challenged and that a magistrate was not present to direct the militia.⁴⁸ As Holmes received no direction as to what he was supposed to do in Wellington, he requested permission to evacuate his force; but as this request was refused by the magistrates Holmes left a token force of five men and returned on or about Sept. 15 to Victoria. It must have been apparent to Holmes that James Dunsmuir had used the militia not to restore law and order but to break the strike. Notwithstanding Holmes' view, in the opinion of 73 miners who petitioned the provincial government in August, the militia served a valuable function at Wellington. The petitioners implored the government not to recall the militia which they said protected them from acts of intimidation by striking miners.⁴⁹ Holmes may have assumed that men who worked during a strike placed themselves in a position in which verbal abuse was inevitable.

James Dunsmuir's use of the militia may have provided

⁴⁸ Silverman, P.G., op.cit. p.170.

⁴⁹ "Miners' Petition Against Withdrawal of the Militia," S.P., 1890, p.312. It was opposed by a petition from M.P.P.'s Thomas Keith, Thomas Forster and C.C. Mackenzie in August 1890. See "Correspondence Re Sending Militia to Wellington," S.P., 1891, pp.311-312.

some security for the mine labourers and the few miners who continued to work during the strike. In any case by the end of August 1890 the loose merger between the miners and the labourers proved that it could not stand the test of a long strike. Strike funds were paid out to miners only. The choice between giving funds to miners or labourers may have been obvious to the Association; it could not, apparently, afford to give ^{to} both. According to one labourer, the mine labourers had become disillusioned with the Protective Association after its inception in 1886. John Rooney explained the labourers' lack of enthusiasm for the miners when he re-called the 1889 strike at Wellington:

I thought it was nonsense to help a man to get \$2.00 to our \$1.00. If it had been a general thing, and for the men to get a general advance of wages, I would have voted for it. I could see that there was lots of the men that didn't want to strike; lots of them that didn't attend the meetings; and when men don't attend meetings it is as much as to say they don't want to strike.⁵⁰

Then he went on to speak of the recent strike in 1890:

Then for several weeks after that (the May 17th 1890 meeting) the mines were idle and the strike went on. We called a meeting amongst ourselves, that is those men who were idle and were not getting support from the union, and there came about 300 or 400 miners from Northfield and outside camps and broke up that meeting. They wouldn't allow us to have a word to say as to whether we were going to join the union or go back to work.⁵¹

50 "Select Committee," op.cit., p.381.

51 Ibid., p. 382.

The Association formed at Wellington in May 1890 had, then, been little more than friendly alliance. The lack of unity within the Association was not the only cause of its failure to win recognition but it did reveal that the spirit of labour unity among the miners had not gone far enough for it to be described as class unity.⁵² The essentially conservative character of the Association in 1890-1891 was in marked contrast to the radical idea of industrial unity held by the Knights of Labour. x 23

The Wellington miners were unable to interrupt seriously coal production during the strike for one other important reason. In Wellington and Cumberland mines over one third of the employees were Chinese and Japanese labourers who worked above and below ground.⁵³ With this large group of employees at work during the strike the white miners were faced with another obstacle in the way of bringing mining operations to a halt. Although agitation by workmen and other members of the white community against continued Asiatic immigration was constantly before the public in these years, the miners' strike seems to have caused even more reaction in 1890 and 1891. In 1891, 2788 people, most of whom were miners, signed the largest

52 In the metal mining camps of the far west in the 1890's there was much greater unity between the miners and labourers. The distinction between skilled miner and unskilled labourer broke down when power machinery was introduced into metal mining in the 1890's. See Paul F. Brissenden, op.cit., p.140; William Haywood, op.cit., p.63.

53 The actual numbers were 1250 whites and 482 Chinese and Japanese. "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1891, p.277.

petition ever to be sent to the provincial government.⁵⁴

The signators to the ~~petition~~ demanded the exclusion of Chinese and Japanese from the coal mines of Vancouver Island; however, legislation on the question of Asiatic employment in the mines did not come forth from the provincial assembly until 1898.⁵⁵

The Wellington strike was a turning point in the rise of unionism on the coalfield. The struggle between × James Dunsmuir and the Miners' Association decided the fate of unionism at the Dunsmuir mines for the next ten years. Had James Dunsmuir recognized the Miners' Association in 1890, Wellington miners would have regained some of the influence on the development of union organization that they × had prior to 1884. Instead the Miners' Association lodge in Nanaimo became the centre on the coalfield from which < emanated most of the ideas and men who shaped the development of unionism.⁵⁶ Although Nanaimo miners did not strike in 1890, by 1891 superintendent S.M. Robins at Nanaimo saw that it was in his interest to recognize the Miners' Association.⁵⁷

54 "Petition Regarding Chinese and Japanese in Coal Mines," S.P. 1892, pp.464-470.

55 B.C. Legislative Assembly, Journals, 1898, Bill #43. John Bryden, the vice-president of R.Dunsmuir and Sons tested the validity of the law in 1898 and a B.C. court declared the law intra vires the legislature. See Wellington Enterprise, May 2, 1898, p.3.

56 James Young and Tully Boyce were notable examples of leaders who had left Wellington for Nanaimo after being dismissed for union activity.

57 Robins explained his labour policy in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p. 295.

In July 1891 he signed with the Association the first written agreement on the coalfield. The company agreed ^x not to discriminate against the union and the miners promised never to call a strike until after a thirty day notice period ^x had expired and then only after all means had been exhausted in an effort to avert a strike.⁵⁸ Ironically, then, the Nanaimo miners were the ones who benefitted from the clash ^x over union recognition at Wellington. After the strike the Wellington miners had to begin all over again the struggle to achieve union wages and working conditions in the mines.

58 See Appendix p.213, "Agreement of Vancouver Coal With Its Employees," July 24, 1891.

CHAPTER III

The Miner^s and Mine Labourers' Protective Association and the Dunsmuir Mines: 1892-1901

Despite the united efforts of the Wellington and Nanaimo miners in the 1890-1891 strike, the miners were unable to force James Dunsmuir to recognize the Miners' Association. The close association of the miners in the two communities of Nanaimo and Wellington did not end with the failure of the strike. In the decade after 1891 renewed attempts were made to revive the regional organization.

The year-long strike by the Association caused James Dunsmuir and his company to see unions in a new light. The strike led to the formation of a garrison outlook on the part of James Dunsmuir, some of his managers and many of the citizens of Cumberland and Wellington. Neither Robert Dunsmuir nor James, his son, ever intimated that miners might have legitimate reasons for forming unions. In 1891 James Dunsmuir argued before the Select Committee of the legislature that his miners were really content with their wages and working conditions; the dissatisfaction in the mines came from "agitators" who conspired with the Nanaimo miners to organize Wellington.¹ In Dunsmuir's interpretation his miners

1 "Select Committee to Investigate the Wellington Strike," op.cit., pp.261, 282, 284.

did not really want to organize unions; instead he blamed union leaders and agitators such as Tully Boyce for trying to force a union on his miners. This interpretation of why unions were organized in the Dunsmuir mines was expressed again and again in the next decade; it reached its fullest expression in the Report of the Royal Commission which investigated the strikes in the Dunsmuir mines in 1903.²

Although short week-long strikes occurred at Wellington in 1893 and 1894 over the kind of grievances that caused earlier strikes,³ the Nanaimo Miners' Association did not apparently send an organizer to the Dunsmuir mines until 1895. In that year Ralph Smith, a union secretary from the Association, visited Cumberland. Smith was an ambitious and articulate former Northumberland miner who became union secretary in the Association within two years of his arrival in Nanaimo in 1893.⁴ With his background of trade union training and his oratorical skills, Smith rose to a position of leadership in the Nanaimo community in the coming years. Like James Young and Tully Boyce, Smith believed that unions were necessary in the mines if mining regulations governing safety and inspection rules were going

2 Report, op.cit., p.76. E.V.Bodwell represented James Dunsmuir before both the 1891 and 1903 Commissions. In both cases he tried to prove that a conspiracy had occurred in which outside agitators had intimidated Dunsmuir's miners and forced them into unions.

3 "Origins of Labour Unions in British Columbia," op.cit.

4 Ralph Smith became one of the most prominent labour politicians in the history of the coalfield. On his political career see Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., pp.64-192, passim. For a long discussion by Ralph Smith on British mining practices and the value of trade unions in the mines see B.C., Legislative Assembly, Evidence of the Commission to Inquire Into Coal Mine Explosions in British Columbia, 1903, Box #4, pp.1066-1073.

to be implemented. Smith also shared the view with Young and Boyce that disputes over working conditions and wages could be usually settled peaceably if employers dealt fairly with unions. The liberal trade unionism of Ralph Smith and the Association in 1895 was about to clash with the conservative management of James Dunsmuir.

Ralph Smith concentrated his efforts on organizing Cumberland because Chinese and Japanese labourers composed ^x in some years as much as 50 per cent of the work force. The Cumberland miners had lost the 1889 strike over Chinese exclusion and had not participated in the strike of 1890-1891. The company dismissed officers of the union in February 1890 within a day after they had held their first meeting. Tully Boyce did not reach Cumberland because he was refused passage on the company train.⁵ In 1895 the Cumberland miners attempted once again to organize a branch of the Protective Association. Representatives of the miners first asked ^x James Dunsmuir if he would approve of the miners forming a branch union.⁶ After being refused permission, they acted on their own initiative and invited Ralph Smith to swear in the officers. William Anthony became secretary of the new union. He related the events that occurred once the union had been formed.

5 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.391. Orim Barber was in Cumberland at the time Tully Boyce made his unsuccessful attempt.

6 Cumberland News, March 18, 1899, p.6.

We organized a union here seven years ago. I was selected secretary of the union, and the first notice - I was instructed to put up a notice to call a special meeting to appoint committees for this union. This notice called for a meeting Saturday night. On the following Monday, when I was at my work, the boss came and told me to take out my tools. I asked him what was wrong. He said he did not know....I went to the office and saw Mr. Little and told him that the boss had told me to take out my tools, and asked him what was the trouble. Mr. Little said he understood I had joined the union. Well, he said, so long as you have joined the union you can't get any employment with this company.....So I had to go out of the camp and leave my family here. I could get no work anywhere. I tried Nanaimo. I had to leave this side to go to the American side against my will. I happened to get work on the other side, and as soon as they learned I was victimized under this company they forced me out of that. They put me where I made \$1.00, where I was making \$3.75 previous to this trouble.⁷

The attempt to establish a union failed in 1895 but no strike occurred over the dismissals. James Dunsmuir blamed Ralph Smith and the Miners' Association for stirring up trouble in his mines.⁸

For two years after the 1895 mission of Ralph Smith to Cumberland no attempts were made to organize unions in the Dunsmuir mines. An economic recession occurred in the coal industry and employment on the field declined by half in the years between 1891 and 1896.⁹ Miners must have been

7 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p. 434.

8 Cumberland News, op.cit., p.6.

9 "Report of the Minister of Mines," 1891, 1896. 3232 men were employed in 1891; 1770 in 1896.

very reluctant to risk their jobs attempting to form unions. But in 1898 after reports reached James Dunsmuir from Wellington that union agents from Nanaimo had talked with his miners, Dunsmuir took the initiative against the Miners' Association. Ralph Smith's name was not mentioned explicitly in published reports of the developing incident but it is likely that Smith visited Wellington. In January 1898, without prior notice or consultation with the miners, James Dunsmuir gave the Wellington miners a 10 per cent increase in the price of coal dug from \$.75 a ton to \$.82½ a ton. The mine labourers did not receive the increase. Neither did miners at the Alexandria mines at South Wellington.¹⁰ The Wellington Enterprise advised in an editorial on February 4 that the miners should not question the company's motives for giving the advance and then suggested four possible motives.¹¹

The most important reason for the advance, said the Enterprise, was that it was intended as "a blow" to the Miners' Association. James Dunsmuir assumed the miners would not form a branch union if the company was willing to increase their wages. Secondly, the advance was an attempt to hold "good men" who were beginning to leave for the Klondike gold rush. Thirdly, as John Bryden, the vice-president

10 Davis, Isobel, "An Economic History of Ladysmith," op.cit. pp.3-10.

11 Wellington Enterprise, February 4, 1898, p.6.

of R. Dunsmuir and Sons, was about to seek the North Nanaimo seat in the forthcoming provincial election in July, the Enterprise observed that there might be political reasons for the advance. The final reason offered by the Enterprise was that the new period of growth which the company was experiencing had merited the miners a raise.

The 10 per cent raise was given obviously for tactical reasons. On June 1, 1898, again without any notice, the raise was withdrawn. On June 16 a mass meeting of 800 miners met to consider the withdrawal of the 10 per cent raise the company had given in January.¹² The Enterprise had been correct in predicting that the miners would not form a branch union after the raise was given. At the June 16 meeting the miners voted to demand the restoration of their 10 per cent increase and resolved to form a branch of the Miners' Association. The report of the meeting did not make clear whether the miners intended to form a branch union only if they did not receive back the raise. A further demand involved the miners' accident fund to which the miners wanted 25 per cent of the \$100.00 a year check-off

12. Enterprise, June 17, 1898. p.1.

applied. David Moffat,¹³ who was chairman of the meeting, reported that John Bryden told his committee that if the miners received the 10 percent increase back, then the company would have to give the mine labourers (pushers and drivers) at Wellington the 25 per cent increase which they had demanded from the company. The report of the meeting did not indicate that the reason for the withdrawal of miners' increase might have been the agitation of the labourers. But since the labourers at Alexandria mines had struck since January for a 25 per cent raise over the \$2.00 per day amount, it was likely the company had decided to fight wage increases throughout the mines by sacrificing the miners. David Moffat's report led to a new resolution. The miners voted to bring the labourers into their committee for negotiating purposes. In forming a temporary alliance with them the miners pacified the mine labourers who were irate over the raise given to the miners. The meeting adjourned and a new committee was sent to see the company.

The Wellington Enterprise, believing a strike to be imminent, warned the miners:

The movement on foot among the mining community of Wellington is probably the most important

13 David Moffat was originally from Scotland and was also a lay preacher in the Methodist Church. The Enterprise, February 11, 1898, p.2, linked David Moffat and Ralph Smith as Methodist lay churchmen. For further references to David Moffat see Commission on Coal Mines Explosions in British Columbia, op.cit., p.1148. For further references on the link between Methodism and Unionism on the coalfield see Rev.L.W. Hall in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, pp.450-461. Nanaimo Herald, 1900-1903, passim, (church notices).

that has arisen since the strike of eight years ago. The older hands should exercise a restraining influence on the headstrong impetuosity of the younger members of the mining fraternity.¹⁴

The committee which met James Dunsmuir and John Bryden on June 25 did not represent a union committee for Dunsmuir had never recognized a union committee in his mines. At the meeting the miners achieved practically none of their demands and the labourers were equally thwarted.¹⁵ The miners did not form a branch of the Miners' Association in protest against the company's arbitrary withdrawal of the wage increase. Neither did the labourers strike over the issue. Undoubtedly the older hands led by David Moffat would not let their homes and families suffer while they fought a losing battle over a just cause. The one concession given by the company caused only a change in record keeping. The company increased the proportion of the check-off which entered the miners' accident fund. Considering the accident record of the mines, this was not an unusual change. x

Some of the resentment over the failure to regain the wage increase in June may have been expressed at the ballot box in July in the provincial election. John Bryden was favoured by the Enterprise as the "grand old man" of the mines.¹⁶ His nomination as M.P.P. for Nanaimo north

¹⁴ Enterprise, June 17, 1898, p.6.

¹⁵ Loc.cit.

¹⁶ Ibid., July 8, p.1.

was supported by the assistant-superintendent, James Sharp, foremen Thomas Haggart and Dave Wilson, and John Bryden's son Andrew, who was superintendent of the Wellington mines. Notices of Bryden's meetings left no doubt that a vote for the vice-president was a vote for company policy.¹⁷ Bryden's opponent in the campaign was Joseph Hellier, a farmer who had never previously stood for a provincial election in the district. Joseph Hellier told one meeting that he was fighting the cause of labour in opposition to the "powerful corporation which John Bryden represented," and described himself as a common man "whom the people of Wellington had asked to run."¹⁸ In the election Joseph Hellier received around half the votes.¹⁹ As the miners received the wage reduction in June, and were angry at the way the company deceived them, they probably voted heavily for Joseph Hellier in the July election. *

James Dunsmuir's "blow" aimed at the Miners' Association in January 1898 caused S.M. Robins and the union considerable difficulty. Vancouver Coal depended on the San Francisco market for 75 per cent of its business.²⁰ The recession in

17 Enterprise, July 1-8, passim.

18 There is no mention of this election in Loosemore, T.R., "B.C. Labor and Political Action," and therefore it is mentioned here in connection with the reduction in June, Enterprise, July 1, p.2.

19 Ibid., July 15, p.1.

20 "Report of the Royal Commission On Chinese and Japanese Immigration," Sessional Papers, 1902, No. 54a, p.89. Wellington Collieries exported 58% of its coal by 1901.

the years 1892-1896 forced the company to seek an agreed ✓ wage decrease with the union. Miners at Nanaimo suffered a price per ton reduction of over 20 per cent in 1892 from \$.82½ to \$.61. Part of the reduction was returned to the miners in 1893 and the price remained at \$.68 per ton.²¹ When James Dunsmuir gave the unexpected wage increase in January, which brought the Wellington miners up to \$.82½ < per ton, the Nanaimo miners were dismayed. On February 11 they met with S.M. Robins and asked for a 10 per cent increase "as had occurred at Wellington." S.M. Robins and the union executive reached a temporary agreement in which the wage < demand was postponed until business improved. Perhaps the executive convinced the union that the raise at Wellington was a manoeuvre designed to cause disruption at the Nanaimo mines; in any case on February 25 the Wellington Enterprise reported that the Miners' Association had decided "to stand by their employer in this or any other time of trial."²² The Enterprise saw in the announcement an act of defiance against R. Dunsmuir and Sons. For the first time James Dunsmuir had placed the Miners' Association at Nanaimo on < the defensive by temporarily improving the wage scale at

21 For the details of the wage changes see Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.298, p.368. The Enterprise, February 4, 1898, p.6 gave a useful review of some wage changes since the reduction from \$.81 to \$.75 in 1880 at Wellington.

22 Ibid., February 25, p.6. Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.296. For the view that Ralph Smith and a clique of his supporters pressured the union to support S.M. Robins see Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., p.165 and p.176.

Wellington significantly above Nanaimo.

In an atmosphere of official suspicion and hostility to his aims and motives, Ralph Smith visited Cumberland again in March 1899. Since his first attempt to organize a branch of the Miners' Association in 1895, he had promised on a number of occasions to work for the exclusion of Chinese from the mines of Cumberland. In 1898 he was elected labour representative for South Nanaimo. His election that year coincided with the passage of an amendment to the Coal Mines Regulations Act which required miners to be competent in the mines and which specifically excluded Chinese and Japanese from underground operations.²³ In March 1899 Ralph Smith held conversations with John Combs, the Cumberland miners' check-weighman.²⁴ Combs had written the new Inspector of Mines, Thomas Morgan, on a question of safety conditions at Cumberland and Ralph Smith surmised that Combs had complained of the employment of Chinese underground. Smith had not actually seen the contents of the letter. After discussions with John Combs, and with certain unnamed miners who wanted to form a union at Cumberland, Ralph Smith learned two things. First, John Combs was not a union leader or a union spokesman as his function as check-weighman implied; secondly, as Combs refused to disclose the contents

23 B.C., Legislative Assembly, Statutes, Coal Mines Regulations Act, Rule 34, Section 82, Ch. 138, 1898. The amendment was passed practically intact in the following years. Passed in the January-April Session, the amendment was disallowed by the federal government usually by June.

24 Cumberland News, March 18, 1899, p.6.

of the letter to Smith, Combs was either afraid of losing his job or was stubborn in defense of his position. Ralph Smith then publicly charged that Combs had revealed the contents of the letter to James Dunsmuir, who had supposedly given Combs' observations careful censoring. There was no denial or confirmation of this charge from the president of the company. Combs denied the charge and the Cumberland miners voted to accept his explanation that he had not revealed the contents of the letter to James Dunsmuir. The circumstances in which the letter was written and the fact that John Combs resigned his position as check-weighman the following month seems to suggest that the letter had included mention of the dangers involved in the continued use of Chinese and Japanese workmen in the mines.

Besides trying to gather evidence that R. Dunsmuir and Sons had violated the new mine regulation, Ralph Smith was on the look out for grievances which would have given him and the unionists among Cumberland miners a reason for organizing. The Cumberland News stated that "some miners" had considered the formation of a branch of the Miners' Association but the News never made clear how many were involved. On April 22 an unsigned letter appeared in the Nanaimo Islander by "A. Miner."²⁵ The miners said that there was a "demand" for a union at Cumberland and implied that the News made the charge in the letter credible; the company's practice of dismissing

25 Cumberland News, April 24, 1899, p.3.

union officers in the past was a logical reason for a miner x
to disguise his identity. But a union was not formed by
Ralph Smith and he never again attempted to organize one in
Cumberland.

The Cumberland News interpreted Ralph Smith's attempt
to discover violations of the Coal Mines Act in Cumberland as
part of the Vancouver Coal Company's efforts to influence x
legislators to force R. Dunsmuir and Sons to remove Chinese
and Japanese from its mines. Both the News and the Enterprise
characterized Ralph Smith as the "tool" of S.M. Robins, who
supported Smith in return for action on the company's behalf
in the legislature. The News argued that S.M. Robins and x
the executive of the union were in fact involved in a plan to
organize the Dunsmuir mines. The economics of the alleged
plan made a sound argument:

The union at Nanaimo had an agreement with the
New Vancouver Coal Company, in regard to wages;
if the Union Colliery Company could get cheaper
labour, they could afford to undersell the New
Vancouver Coal Company, consequently injuring 26
that company, and indirectly, their employees.

There was no question that the interests of the Nanaimo
company and the union coincided on the issue of the removal of
low paid Asiatic labour from the mines of R. Dunsmuir and Sons.
But as long as James Dunsmuir was not paying his miners
significantly more than was paid the miners of his competitor

26 Cumberland News, March 18, p.6.

there was no reason why the employees of R. Dunsmuir and Sons should not also want to see Asiatics removed from the mines. James Dunsmuir paid his miners just a fraction of a cent more per ton than his competitor did but the miners at Nanaimo - and Wellington - did not have to worry about explosions caused by inexperienced Asiatic workmen.

Judging from many social, economic and political reports and notices in the News, it appears that two factions had formed among the miners in Cumberland. A minority of miners who had entered the camp before or soon after the 1889 strike stood aside when more radical miners had tried to form unions in 1890, 1895 and 1899. The conservative miners formed non-union lodges and associations in Cumberland. They were satisfied not to have a union if they could have a check-weighman.²⁷ They had formed a mutual benefit society for which the company checked off a portion of their earnings. Benefit funds administered by the miners also existed in the other camps.²⁸ The miners used the funds to pay for doctors' fees, hospitalization costs and payments in case of disablement. The miners depended on the companies to provide the book-

27 Cumberland News, September 15, 1899, p.6; October 10, 1900, p.2; January 16, 1901. The names of Fred Parks, Thomas Ripley, Richard Collishaw, James Reid and Thomas Bickes were prominent in the executive of local lodges and boards from 1899 to 1903 but none of these men were mentioned in connection with union organization. Richard Collishaw and Thomas Bickle opposed the formation of a branch of the Western Federation of Miners in May 1903 but the majority supported the new organization. See Minutes of Evidence op.cit., 1903 pp.463-464.

28 Wellington Enterprise, July 24, 1899, p.6; The Nanaimo fund is outlined in Labour Gazette, vol.1, 1901, p.483; Ladysmith Ledger, December 31, 1902. p.2.

keeping service and to this extent they were indebted to the companies. Unlike Nanaimo where union miners and other union tradesmen took responsible positions in the local government of the community,²⁹ not one miner at Cumberland involved in union agitation was listed as a member of the town council or an executive member of the fraternal lodges. The few miners who tried to organize unions at Cumberland were recent arrivals from the United Kingdom who could not understand why a mining camp should be a non-union one.³⁰ Thus Cumberland became a company dominated camp; a conservative employer, his manager and foremen, the town merchants and their newspaper, established with the cooperation of the most settled and conservative miners, a measure of labour peace.³¹

The attempt to organize Cumberland, where Asiatics were employed underground, had failed. However, the amendment

29 Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., pp.47-52; 68-72; 88-92. Smith, B.R.D., op.cit., Chapter 6, "The Development of Social Consciousness." Coincidental with urban development Nanaimo changed from being politically conservative in the 1880's to Liberal-Labour in the 1890's to Labour-Socialist in the early 1900's. The rural areas throughout this period remained politically, in the main, supporters of the Dunsmuir or one of the individuals who supported the Dunsmuir. This development in civic life was influenced in Nanaimo by the Miners' Association, the Nanaimo Reform Club and received frequent stimulation by the new immigrants from the United Kingdom.

30 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, pp.442-443; 430, 431-432; Cumberland News, June 22, 1903, p.8, discusses two generations of the Richardson family in Cumberland in which both father and son were dismissed for union activity in 1890 and 1903.

31 Reverend L.W.Hall, Minutes of Evidence, p.453. Rev.Hall was a missionary to the Chinese in Cumberland for over nine years.

to the Coal Mines Act, which excluded Asiatics from under-
ground work, was on the statute books. In 1898 John Bryden
tested the consitutional validity of the amendment and it
was declared intra vires the legislature. It remained for
the Inspector of Mines to enforce the new rule. When
Archibald Dick, the mines inspector, did not lay a charge
against R. Dunsmuir and Sons, Ralph Smith accused Dick of
showing favouritism.³² Soon after Smith made his charge,
the government dismissed the mines inspector from his post.
The News and the Enterprise saw the hand of S.M. Robins in
the dismissal of the inspector. James Dunsmuir hired
Archibald Dick within a year of his dismissal and let the
critics say what they liked.³³ After the new inspector laid
charges, Union Collieries Ltd. at Cumberland was fined \$25.00
and \$50.00 in separate cases for employing Asiatics in
underground operations.³⁴ But the inspector's thoroughness
in implementing the Act was regularly frustrated. The
federal government disallowed the amendment year after year
after the provincial legislature re-enacted it. The federal
government believed that discrimination against Asiatic
people in Canada would harm both Imperial and Canadian trade
with China and Japan.³⁵

32 Wellington Enterprise, October 28, 1898, p.6

33 Cumberland News, December 7, 1899, p.2.

34 Ibid., March 21, 1899, p.2.

35 "Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese
Immigration," S.P., No.54a, 1902, p.10.

After a British Columbia court in September 1898 found the controversial amendment to the Mines Act constitutionally valid, James Dunsmuir announced his intention to remove Chinese workers from his mines. But soon after Dunsmuir's announcement, John Bryden appealed the court's decision. In 1899 the Appeal Court declared the amendment ultra vires the legislature. Notwithstanding the Appeal Court's decision, the next year the legislature again re-enacted the amendment to the Mines Act. In 1900 James Dunsmuir decided to make a gesture towards meeting the miners' demand for Chinese exclusion. Speaking at South Wellington in May during the 1900 provincial election campaign, James Dunsmuir told a gathering of miners that he had always fought against Chinese exclusion but was ready at last to accede to the miners' will that Chinese be replaced with white miners.³⁶ His public announcement may have been the reason he narrowly defeated John Radcliffe, a miner and labour candidate who opposed him in the Comox riding. In July Wellington Collieries Ltd.- the old company was re-organized the same year- advertised for 500 white miners to supersede Chinese miners in Wellington, Extension and Cumberland mines.

The company found part of its new work force in the United Kingdom but trouble arose when the miners reached Cumberland. Wellington Collieries arranged to bring out 200 miners on a contract basis direct from Hamilton and

36 News, May 22, 1900, p.5.

Lanarkshire, Scotland. One hundred and twenty miners were destined for Cumberland. In October 1900 the first 53 miners arrived in Cumberland. A dispute immediately arose. The miners charged that the terms of the contract were not carried out as promised and that they would refuse to work with Chinese labour in the mines.³⁷ The actual breach of contract was never explained. Not satisfied with the arrangement at Cumberland; the miners left almost the day after they arrived and walked to Nanaimo where Ralph Smith took over their case. A provincial conciliation officer was asked by Ralph Smith to try and work out a solution with Wellington Collieries. The result was that twenty miners returned to Cumberland, others went to Extension and the remainder dispersed to Washington and other places within the Pacific Northwest. The Scottish miners who followed the first group either found conditions satisfactory on the Island or dispersed to other regions.

Francis D. Little, general manager of the Cumberland mines at the time the immigrant miners were employed, believed the company would have been better served if the Chinese had been retained in the mines. He said the company spent \$15,000.00 to bring the miners out from Scotland and had only received \$3,000.00 back in payment for the passage costs.³⁸ Manager Little believed the Chinese were cheaper -

37 Labour Gazette, vol.1, 1900,p.97. News, October 3,1900, p.2.

38 Report, op.cit., 1902, p.77.

and therefore better-workers than the Scots. He complained: "I paid \$3.00 a day for a \$1.00 day's work to some of them. I was longing for the Chinamen."³⁹ He said there was no profit for the company if it paid \$2.50 a day to whites instead of \$1.00 a day to Chinese labourers because the coal market was so competitive in the United States. He blamed the Nanaimo miners' union for continuing to agitate in the mines of Wellington Collieries for the exclusion of Chinese labourers and miners. He said that as long as the company could get Chinese labourers from across the seas he would continue to employ them.

There was little sign that James Dunsmuir's promise to the miners to exclude Chinese workers from his mines would be honoured after the disagreement with the Scottish miners. In fact Asiatic employment rapidly increased in the early years of the new century. In 1900 new petitions which protested recent increases in Asiatic immigration reached the federal government.⁴⁰ As the federal government had disallowed previous restrictive legislation, the miners and other labour groups had an opportunity to express their opinions to the federal government when it sent the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration to the province in 1901.

The evidence given to the Commissioners revealed

39 Report, op.cit., 1902, p.77

40 Ibid., p.9

that miners and other tradesmen still had, since giving evidence to the Commission of 1885, three basic criticisms of Asiatic immigration and employment. First, the employment of Asiatics prevented many young men from obtaining unskilled work and kept many from learning trades;⁴¹ secondly, mining accidents increased in proportion to the employment of illiterate and careless persons including Asiatics;⁴² thirdly, the wages of white labour were depressed due to Asiatic employment and this fact tended to discourage the immigration of English speaking people to the province.⁴³ Formal petitions embodying these three general criticisms were submitted by the Protective Association in Nanaimo and a recently formed Miners' Protective Union which had headquarters in South Wellington.⁴⁴

In 1901 union organizers from Nanaimo and from within the camps of Wellington Collieries attempted once again to form a regional miners' union. Efforts to unite the miners on the field continued throughout the whole year. As wages were still very low in the mines since the reductions which had occurred in the 1890's at Nanaimo and Wellington,

⁴¹ Report, op.cit., p.82. See also, the evidence of Richard Henry Hodson of Cumberland, p.88.

⁴² Ibid., p.83.

⁴³ Ibid., p.82.

⁴⁴ See Appendix, pp.215-19, for petitions from the Protective Association and the Miners' Protective Union.

the companies' policy of continuing to employ large numbers of Asiatic workmen above and below ground was bitterly opposed by the miners in 1901. In addition to the presence of Asiatic labour who kept wages down, the miners were conscious that the cost of living in the region was rising.⁴⁵ William Stocker, the president of the Miners' Association, bitterly reported the miners' discontent:

....but for Chinese competition we would have got the ten per cent advance we asked for recently. The strong competition of other companies employing Chinese prevented us getting that advance....The presence of Chinese here has a tendency to bring other miners and myself down, so that we are not able to enjoy the privileges that white people should enjoy.⁴⁶

Nanaimo miners knew that as long as large numbers of low paid labourers worked near them in the mines of Wellington Collieries the standard of living of white miners on the coalfield was reduced by at least 10 per cent. x

Attempts by the miners of Wellington Collieries to form branches of the Miners' Association in 1901 first emanated from Extension mines where over one thousand miners <

⁴⁵ Labour Gazette, vol.1, 1900, p.127. No other reports of increases in the cost of living came to light in reports on the coalfield. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council undertook a study from 1903 to 1906 and concluded that a 30 per cent increase had occurred in Vancouver. The Council thereupon condemned the policy of the federal government which permitted Asiatic and European contract labour to compete with British Columbia workers. V.T. & L.C., Minutes, October 18, 1906.

⁴⁶ Report, op.cit., p.87.

were at work. The union at Extension experienced many difficulties in perfecting a strong organization. The miners were geographically divided as part of the work force lived near the mines and the rest lived in Ladysmith, seven miles away. The union was never officially recognized by the company but committees did meet with the management on different occasions to discuss grievances.⁴⁷ As pit committees did not function in the mines at Extension, the most common complaints brought to the attention of the company concerned payment for digging out dirt. The coal seam at Extension contained a soft sandstone roof which tended to fall down with the coal after gunpowder shots had loosened the coal. Miners at Extension often had difficulty getting what they considered a just price from pit bosses for digging out the dirt and James Dunsmuir complained that he was constantly bothered by miners' committees coming to see him over problems that should have been solved at the mine.⁴⁸

Another source of grievance at Extension involved the hiring of a check-weighman. One miner said that a check-weighman had been employed by the miners for a short time after 1899 but a dispute arose over whether the agent was to receive payment directly from the miners' receipts or whether he was to receive payment from the company and indirectly from the miners. The problem did not appear very

⁴⁷ Information concerning the years 1899-1901 at Extension was scarce. See Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.53; pp.60-61; 238. Nanaimo Herald, June 21, 1903, p.1.

⁴⁸ Minutes of Evidence, 1903, p.238.

difficult to resolve but the issue was clouded by two factors. The company did not want the miners to employ an agent to check the machines and secondly, some miners apparently did not wish to pay an agent out of their salaries.⁴⁹ The weak organization of miners could not resolve the dispute and the miners' agent was dropped by 1901. Without the check-weighman to examine the weighing of each miner's carload, miners had no way of knowing whether they were docked too much for dirt and shale.

In 1901 the miners who lived around Extension mines heard indirectly, in some cases by rumour, and in other cases not at all, that James Dunsmuir had ordered that he intended to employ only miners who lived at the new townsite which he founded at Ladysmith. Over 200 miners had built houses at Extension before the order actually reached the mines.⁵⁰ The company promised to transport the miners' houses without charge to Ladysmith. Until miners were actually dismissed for not obeying the order, there was considerable confusion as to whether James Dunsmuir had said that living at Ladysmith was a condition of employment at Extension. No printed explanation was posted. The union at Extension sent a committee of three to discuss the order with the president of the company. During their interview the miners received an ambiguous answer to their question whether the miners had

⁴⁹ Minutes of Evidence, 1903, pp.60-61.

⁵⁰ Report, 1903, p.48.

to live at Ladysmith.

Q. Who was on the committee? A. I don't remember. Q. It was said to be composed of George Johnston, McCloskey and Spence? A. I remember Johnston. Q. They say (the men still considered the forced move a grievance in 1903) they went down to meet you, had a conversation with you, and that you said you did not care where the men lived, giving the inference that they would be hired just the same, whether they lived at Extension or Ladysmith? A. I told them they could live where they liked, but I would hire them where I liked. Q. You told them they could live where they liked? A. Yes, but that the town-site was to be at Ladysmith. Q. Then they said they wanted to stay at Extension? A. I don't remember....Q. How do you account for the men coming back and reporting to these other men to the contrary? A. The same as they have reported lots of things that I have said. They said I would recognize the union; I said the reverse. Q. Either they must be very deficient in understanding, or you cannot convey your ideas in a way that they may be understood? A. Probably I cannot convey my ideas.⁵¹

James Dunsmuir gave four reasons for not wanting the men to live at Extension:

My standpoint was: in the first place, we were too near to Nanaimo; that was the reason of a lot of trouble between our workmen. In the next place, it was no place in which to live. I thought it would be far better for them to live down here. If there was no work they could go boating, step on the train and go to Nanaimo or Victoria. Another thing, there was no water at Extension. There is a lake, and in the summer time it is filled with a sediment and people cannot drink it. In the next place, all the works will be coming towards Ladysmith, as the field extends this way.⁵²

51 Minutes of Evidence, 1903, p.479.

52 Ibid., p. 243.

The notice of removal was never printed and of course was not part of the miners' contract. Nanaimo merchants brought supplies over land to Extension and communication between Extension and Nanaimo was fairly easy. As his testimony revealed, James Dunsmuir did not want Extension to remain within the commercial or the trade union orbit of Nanaimo. In 1901 some miners lost their places in the mines for disobeying the order and others were given places to dig in which rock predominated over coal: the miners were in effect forced to find work elsewhere. About 200 miners dismantled their houses and transported them to Ladysmith on the company railway and the miners had to pay the cost of rebuilding their dwellings. The grievances over the forced removal was a strong motive for miners to enter the union and protest the action.⁵³

In January 1901 the Extension miners with the assistance of the Miners' Association in Nanaimo began a movement to organize the Cumberland mines. At the same time a related movement was under way at Alexandria. Two accounts remain of the Cumberland expedition. John Mathews managed the mines and enforced company policy at the mines with respect to union organizations. He related some of the events surrounding the brief activity of the union in 1901.

There was a steady unrest at Extension mine at the time they formed a local union there, and

53 Report, 1903, p.48. Minutes of Evidence, 1903, pp.65-66;78-87.

there was a man named Maley (Henry Maille) who was postmaster at Extension, and a man named Macklin, a Nanaimo man. They came up and stayed here about a couple of weeks. I did not know they were doing anything. As a matter of fact they were getting men to become members of that union here. They came back a few weeks afterwards and called a meeting at the school house. I lived next to the school house, and I saw who came out. I told a few of the men that I would not have a union in connection with Nanaimo and Extension mines, and when Monday morning came I made a point to see most of these men myself. I said they could take their choice, but I would not have a branch of that union here. I said they were preparing for a strike at Extension, and they would call on this place in sympathy. I met Mr. Maley, and said, if you organize these men we will dismiss them. Most of the men told me they would tear up the cards and give it up. With the exception of Martin (no relation to James) Dunsmuir I told them, all right. He was the leader and I let him go.⁵⁴

Henry Maille may have been a miner in the past and consented to organize the Cumberland miners. He did not have to fear dismissal from the company. He gave an explanation of the purpose of his mission to the miners of Cumberland and defended himself against those who he said had called him an "agitator."⁵⁵ He tried to convince readers of the News that unions were necessary for miners because "there were times" when bosses made them so. He mentioned conditions in the Alexandria mines where a strike had occurred in January. One of the reasons miners wanted a union in

⁵⁴ Minutes of Evidence, 1903, p.79

⁵⁵ Cumberland News, February 6, 1901, p.4.

Cumberland was that the Cumberland miners expected that an unpopular manager named "Falls" at Alexandria was to take over at Cumberland in the near future. The miners thought, said Maille, that they would need a union if he arrived. With the dismissal of Martin Dunsmuir, the union in Cumberland collapsed. Two weeks after Henry Maille wrote his letter to the News an explosion killed sixty-five miners at Cumberland. The mine was immediately flooded to seal off the fire and the mine did not resume full operations until April 1902.

The failure to form a union at Cumberland did not end the movement for a company-wide union. Arthur Spencer, a miner and Nanaimo correspondent for the Labour Gazette in the region, reported that "discussions" occurred in February concerning the formation of a union in the Wellington Colliery mines.⁵⁶ The Miners' Association sent at least one organizer into the Dunsmuir camps. A branch of the Miners' Association existed in Extension in March and officers of a new branch of the Association were sworn in in Alexandria mines the same month.⁵⁷ Extension mines were about two miles from Alexandria mines and the unions in these two camps seem to have kept in touch with each other throughout the following months.

Working conditions were unusually difficult at these

56 Labour Gazette, vol.1, 1901, p. 281.

57 Ibid., p. 281.

mines. Grievances were bitter at the two mines over digging ✓
dirt for insufficient payment. After many committees came
to see him particularly from Alexandria, James Dunsmuir
finally refused to see any more.⁵⁸ They had come, he said,
with complaints he considered "trifling." The existence of
an allegedly unjust manager at Alexandria named "Falls" was
an important reason the Alexandria miners tried to settle
their grievances with the president in person. As pit
committees could not function at Wellington Collieries,
miners who had grievances to argue had no recourse but to
form a committee from the camp and argue the case with
whomever would listen.

In January 1901 the Alexandria miners refused to X
accept a 20 per cent wage reduction and were locked out.⁵⁹
The company offered work only on the new terms. In February
the miners were still in dispute when they took a leading part
in forming the Miners' Protective Union in the company camps. X
The Protective Union was the instrument through which the
miners of Wellington Collieries expressed their collective
opposition to the continued employment of Asiatics in the
mines. The Protective Union, so far as can be ascertained
from the information about it, was a temporary organization ✓
formed to protest the employment of Asiatics to the Royal
Commission of Chinese and Japanese Immigration.⁶⁰ In March

58 Minutes of Evidence, 1903, pp.238-240; p.379.

59 Labour Gazette, vol. 1, 1901, p.217

60 See Appendix, p.217, "Petition of the Miners' Protective
Union."

the company dismissed the officers of the Extension and Alexandria miners' unions and the unions were broken up.

Not until August were new agreements made between the company and the miners of the two camps. The Extension miners entered into a one year contract with the company to mine coal at \$.75 per long ton of 2100 pounds.⁶¹ In addition the miners obtained \$2.00 a yard for digging out rock and dirt. As the standard ton on the coalfield was 2240 pounds, the miners had made one of the best agreements that had occurred since the price was reduced from \$.81 to \$.75 per ton in 1880. At Alexandria the conventional method of payment of the individual for the coal he dug came to an end. As the coal seam had become more and more uneconomic to mine a temporary arrangement was made. The miners formed themselves into groups of six and entered into contracts to mine coal at agreed upon rates. Included in the contract was the miners' work in putting up timbers in the mines.⁶²

From August to November 1901 no reports were published concerning the movement to form a union at all the mines. Then in November a dispute occurred at Alexandria over the price the company paid to the miners for putting up timbers in the mines. The company since August paid less than "the customary price" for putting up timbers. The

61 Labour Gazette, 1901, p.218.

62 Ibid., p.344.

miners formed a new local union and sent a committee representing the union to settle the dispute with the manager. The manager refused to deal with the union committee and on November 25, 260 Alexandria miners struck work.

A day or two after the beginning of the walk-out, the Deputy Minister of Labour, W.L.M. King, tried to settle the dispute.⁶³ Mr. King must have entered the dispute on his own initiative as Wellington Collieries would not have invited him. He had recently been in Rossland trying to resolve a strike at Le Roi mines and he may have been contacted by Ralph Smith, who was elected M.P. for Nanaimo in 1900. By November 29 King succeeded in working out a compromise solution and the men returned to work. The company agreed to satisfy the wage demand if the men did not insist on the recognition of the union. One hundred miners returned to work and the rest left the camp. The mines did not open in 1902.

According to King, his timely entrance as mediator in the dispute saved the situation from becoming serious. The officers of the Alexandria union told him that if a settlement had not been reached early in the dispute, the Extension miners would have struck in sympathy.⁶⁴ The Extension miners certainly had accumulated grievances; but unless the company had violated the terms or the spirit of the August 1901

⁶³ Labour Gazette, 1901, p.218.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 345.

contract, a sympathy strike by the Extension miners would not likely have met with unanimous approval. There were not any published reports of new grievances at Extension. On the other hand, the camp was disorganized to some extent because an explosion occurred in October, killed seventeen miners, and displaced 500 miners from work for the next six months. If the explosion was a new source of grievance because Chinese were present-there was no evidence published that this was the case-the Extension miners might well have considered strike action to protest the effects of the explosion. Safety conditions were so very poor in some parts of Extension mines that Alexander Bryden, the manager of #1 Slope, made numerous recommendations for improvements in his submission to a provincial commission on coal mine explosions in 1902.⁶⁵ Taking the various facts into account, including the forced removal of miners to Ladysmith, King's report concerning the sympathy strike may have had substantial basis in fact.

The Alexandria strike in November and the reported readiness of the Extension miners to strike in sympathy, started new discussions among miners in these camps over the project for a regional miners' union. On December 7 the Alexandria miners declared a "one day holiday" and walked to Nanaimo to attend a mass meeting of miners from "all camps

65 Evidence of Commission to Inquire Into the Causes of Coal Mine Explosions in British Columbia, 1903, PABC, Box #4, p.998.

on the coalfield." The Labour Gazette correspondent, Arthur Spencer, reported that the meeting was a culmination of a movement for the affiliation of all camps on the field with the Miners' Association in Nanaimo.⁶⁶ A committee had been formed previous to the December 7 meeting to work on the rules and organization of the new association. At the meeting a "large majority" of those present voted to affiliate their local unions with the Miners' and Mine Labourers' Protective Association. The meeting was not reported in the press so there was no way of knowing how many miners had attended from Cumberland and Extension mines.

The new regional miners' union formed in December 1901 did not and could not succeed against the opposition of James Dunsmuir and his managers. According to Arthur Spencer, Wellington Collieries' opposition to the new union was the reason it did not survive into 1902.⁶⁷ James Dunsmuir made known his opposition to the union the day the Alexandria miners declared a holiday and marched to Nanaimo. Partly in retaliation for their action Dunsmuir ordered the mine closed and it never re-opened. While the mine-site had been increasingly uneconomic to operate in the last few months of 1901, Dunsmuir's action served notice to the miners that he intended to lock them out of the mines rather than recognize the miners' regional union.

⁶⁶ Labour Gazette, 1901, p.399.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.399.

The mass meeting of December 7 was the culmination of a year of protest on the coalfield. Denied their requests for a ten per cent advance in wages, the Nanaimo Miners' Association had a strong motive for trying to assist in the formation of unions in the Dunsmuir mines where the employment of Asiatic labour reduced, in the opinion of miners on the field, the general level of wages. During 1901 the new grievance occurred at Extension mines, where the miners were forced to leave the village and remove their homes to Ladysmith. Together with the dangerous working conditions at Extension the forced removal became a permanent source of bitterness in the mines for the next two years.

The inability of the Nanaimo and Wellington miners to revive the Miners' Association in the Dunsmuir camps in 1901 ended a decade of such attempts. As a result of these continued efforts at union organization, James Dunsmuir and his supporters developed a garrison outlook towards unions. As the formation of unions in the mines could lead to strikes and lockouts, Dunsmuir's supporters condemned union organizers for the disruption they threatened to bring when miners chose to defy Dunsmuir's union policy. According to this interpretation of union activity in the Dunsmuir mines, union organizers were in a conspiracy with the Miners' Association and S.M. Robins of Vancouver Coal. The purpose

of the conspiracy was to rid the Dunsmuir mines of Asiatic labour and generally bring working conditions in the mines up to the standard of the Nanaimo mines.

There was some truth to the conservative view of unions up to 1901; but after 1901 the Nanaimo Miners' union changed its policy. After successive failures to organize the Dunsmuir mines the Nanaimo miners decided not to continue the effort. Notwithstanding this change in policy on the part of the Nanaimo miners, James Dunsmuir and his conservative supporters continued to see the influence of Nanaimo in further attempts by Dunsmuir miners to form unions. The decade from 1891 to 1901 laid the foundation in the minds of Dunsmuir and his supporters for their later belief that "foreign agitators" from Nanaimo and outside the island were mainly responsible for attempts to organize the mines.

CHAPTER IV

The Royal Commission of 1903 and the Conspiracy of the Western Federation of Miners at Extension Mines

From 1901 to 1903 the British Columbia metal and coal mining industries in the East and West Kootenay and boundary regions experienced long strikes between the companies and the Western Federation of Miners. Then in September 1902 the Nanaimo Miners' Association voted to join the Federation and in March 1903 the Dunsmuir miners followed Nanaimo's lead in joining the Federation. Strikes soon broke out at the Dunsmuir mines over recognition of the Federation. As the C.P.R. was fighting a strike in Vancouver in February 1903 against an American union affiliated with the Federation, the federal government decided in April to send a Royal Commission to investigate the reasons for the rising incidence of strikes throughout British Columbia. Although the Commissioners placed the Western Federation "on trial" for causing industrial disorder, the Commissioners made little attempt to report the reasons that led the Vancouver Island miners to join the Federation and strike for recognition of the union. The interpretation of the Commissioners was that the Federation was guilty of conspiring to instigate strikes on Vancouver Island; the island miners unanimously rejected this verdict. They blamed

James Dunsmuir's anti-union policies for the strikes.¹

The decision of the Nanaimo miners in September 1902 to affiliate with the Western Federation changed the course of unionism on the coalfield.² The decision was clearly related to the past failure of the Nanaimo miners to form a strong regional union. Beginning in 1901 a sense of failure pervaded the Miners' Association.³ Ralph Smith recognized that his failure to organize the Dunsmuir miners and that the failure of other attempts to organize them in 1901 seriously weakened the Miners' Association. In its weakened position, said Smith, the Miners' Association was unable to gain the 10 per cent increase that had been demanded since 1898.⁴ In 1902 the possibility of a new union movement beginning at Wellington Collieries was remote. Unemployment had been high throughout the region since the explosions which had partially shut down Cumberland mines in February and Extension mines in October 1901.⁵ Alexandria mines closed in January 1902. A further cause for concern at Nanaimo occurred in July 1902 when the

1 See two recent analyses of the strikes which reach the same conclusion. Phillips, Paul, op.cit., p.41. Lipton, Charles, The Trade Union Movement in Canada (Montreal, 1967), p.103.

2 "Report of the Executive Committee," Nanaimo Union, September 20, 1902, in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.784.

3 Nanaimo Daily Herald, December 22, 1902, p.3.

4 Loc.cit.

5 Labour Gazette, Vol.1, 1902 p.399, p.590.

miners received word that the Vancouver Coal Company would be sold later in the year to the Western Fuel Company of San Francisco and that S.M. Robins would not continue as superintendent.⁶

As secretary of the Miners' Association since 1895 and now M.P. for Nanaimo city, Ralph Smith had dominated the Association for many years. But in 1902 Smith and his supporters came under increasing criticism.⁷ There was a growing demand in the union for a new policy which would give the union the strength to gain wage improvements from the company. The militants in the union demanded that the Association affiliate with a large American union.⁸ They argued that with the financial and numerical power of a large international organization behind them the miners could take a strong stand with the company. Ralph Smith opposed any other policy than one of continuing to work for the organization of the Dunsmuir miners. Smith believed that if the Nanaimo miners struck for a wage increase without the organized support of the Dunsmuir miners, non-union unemployed miners from the Dunsmuir camps would take the vacant places of striking Nanaimo miners.⁹

6 Nanaimo Daily Herald, August 20, 1902, p.2.

7 The Canadian Socialist, July 12, 1902, p.1. No mention was made of the movement in Nanaimo papers until August 18.

8 Evidence of Thomas Shenton, secretary of the union in December 1902 in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, pp.326-343.

9 Daily Herald, December 22, 1902, p.3.

While the Miners' Association declined in numbers in 1902 because of the failure of the union to solve its internal conflicts, the movement to strengthen the union started around July. The militants included in their number Parker Williams and Thomas Shenton.¹⁰ Both men had migrated from strong union regions in the United Kingdom in the previous five years. Neither man was a member of the executive. In July the militants led a revolt against Ralph Smith's union policies while Smith was absent visiting his old home in Northumberland. The revolt began when the union voted to table Ralph Smith's request for permission to attend the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada annual meeting as the representative of the Nanaimo union.¹¹ The union then debated its affiliation with the Trades and Labour Congress. The Congress, of which Ralph Smith was president, was a legislative body which brought before the federal government once a year the main resolutions of delegates who represented the majority of trade unions in Canada. The Congress could discuss labour problems but the rules of the organization prevented it from taking an active part in strikes and lock-outs.

Parker Williams derisively called the executive of the Congress a "Grit machine."¹² The Liberal government had

10 Parker Williams' background is mentioned in Loosemore, T.R. op.cit., p.180. See Thomas Shenton, Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. pp.326-343.

11 Nanaimo Daily Herald, August 20, 1902, p.2.

12 Loc.cit.

become very unpopular among British Columbia miners' unions for disallowing the Asiatic exclusion bills passed by the British Columbia legislature since 1898. The federal government had permitted the importation of thousands of European immigrants despite the fact, said the miners, that there was already an over-supply of labour in British Columbia.¹³ The federal government was responsible, too, they said, for permitting the British America Corporation in Rossland in 1901 to freely import labour from the United States in violation of Canada's Alien Contract Labour Law. In August 1902 the Nanaimo miners protested to the federal government when the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company brought in 128 Eastern European labourers from the United States to fill the places of miners killed that month in an explosion. Miners and others in labour unions had become critical of the support which Ralph Smith and Congress gave the federal government.¹⁴

The Nanaimo Herald, which had given its support to Ralph Smith in the past, charged that the militants in the Association had acted treacherously towards him.¹⁵ Parker Williams replied that the miners' actions were a result of the new circumstances in which they found themselves.¹⁶

13 Chris Foley, Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, pp. 672-683, Passim.

14 Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, March 20, 1902; July 8, 1903. The Western Clarion, January 24, 1903. See also Nanaimo Free Press, January 17, 1903, p.1.

15 Nanaimo Daily Herald, August 19, 1902, p.3.

16 Ibid., August 20, 1902, p.2.

S.M. Robins had given the miners concessions where possible but he would soon be gone. The miners had been informed, said Williams, that "for the future a different policy will be insisted upon by those who own the property; labor must be considered a commodity."¹⁷ The miners anticipated a wage struggle with Western Fuel in Nanaimo. Williams pointed to the general economic problem faced by the miners. The Liberal government had brought in European and Oriental labour year after year and depressed the labour market. "There was a minimum," he said, "below which wages cannot remain."¹⁸ When the Herald again referred to the "stab in the back" the union gave Ralph Smith, Parker Williams replied that the editor had become steeped in idolatry. The miners were not concerned with personalities, said Williams, but only with the "hard principles of supply and demand in the labor market."¹⁹

Having withdrawn from the Trades and Labour Congress, the Association began to consider the question of affiliating with a union that would give it new strength to face the trials ahead. In September the executive nominated a committee to study the various international unions and discover which one would give the miners the strength in numbers they required. In light of later statements that the

17 Nanaimo Daily Herald, August 19, 1902, p.2.

18 Loc.cit.

19 Ibid., August 22, p.2.

miners had been motivated primarily by political considerations when they chose to affiliate with the Western Federation of Miners, the report of the committee was a revealing one. Thomas Shenton, who was on the committee and who became the financial secretary after Ralph Smith resigned in December, stated that the Association had left the Trades and Labour Congress because the miners considered it a "political rather than a labour organization."²⁰ But the Western Federation had endorsed the principles of the Socialist Party of America in 1902. Thomas Shenton was asked whether the union had not joined another political organization. He said that James Baker, the provincial organizer of the Federation, told Shenton's committee that local unions were not in any way bound by the decision of the 1902 convention which endorsed the principles of the Socialist Party. As to the political convictions of his own committee, Shenton said that "we were in no way, so far as I know, decided by the views of those members who were socialists, to affiliate with this body."²¹

The committee examined the constitutions and organization of the American Federation of Labour, the United Mine Workers of America and the Western Federation.²² The committee rejected affiliation with the American Federa-

20 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.326.

21 Ibid., p.327.

22 "Report of the Executive Committee," Nanaimo Union, September 20, 1902, in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit.p.784.

tion because it was a legislative body similar to the Trades and Labour Congress and was composed of many different craft and industrial unions. As the American Federation did not provide strike funds during a dispute in which one of its members was involved, the Federation was of little value to the Miners' Association. The Mine Workers of America was rejected by the Committee. At that time the Mine Workers did not have any locals west of the Rocky Mountains. Another reason the committee rejected affiliation with this union was that the Mine Workers were fighting a strike in Pennsylvania. The executive of the Mine Workers had assessed all its members ten per cent of their gross earnings and the committee did not wish to bind the miners to this levy. The Western Federation was not affiliated with the Mine Workers. As the Western Federation had approximately 24 locals in British Columbia, the committee recommended in its report that the Federation was "the securest and most convenient body to join."²³ Asked why the Nanaimo Miners joined the Western Federation, Thomas Shenton replied, "as a local union we considered ourselves somewhat a small power, in dealing with any other company than the company we have been dealing with up to a recent date."²⁴

23. Loc. cit.

24. Ibid., p.326.

On December 21, 1902 the Nanaimo Miners' Union became a local of the Western Federation.²⁵ At the meeting Ralph Smith spoke for the last time as secretary of the union and explained his reasons for resigning. He said his work as Member of Parliament did not permit him time to perform his duties as check-weighman and miners' agent. Then he analyzed the miners' decision to join the Western Federation. He did not think the new affiliation would give the union the financial security and power the miners believed it would. He had advised the union, he said, to wait until Wellington Collieries were organized before changing their affiliation. He expressed regret that the Dunsmuir miners had not been organized years before. Smith said he believed that only when Wellington Collieries were organized would the Nanaimo miners stand a chance of winning a strike. If the Nanaimo miners struck, their jobs would be in jeopardy because of the number of unemployed miners waiting for work at Wellington Collieries. Then he pointed to the Washington mines. Even if the Nanaimo miners joined the Federation, they were unprotected against strike breakers who might come over from the unorganized mines in Washington State. The most that Ralph Smith would concede about the decision to join the Federation was that the miners had cause for concern about the future. The Western Fuel Company had warned that "economizing" would occur after it took over the mines in December. James Baker then came forward and

25 Nanaimo Daily Herald, December 22, 1902, p.3.

organized local 177 of the Western Federation.

In January 1903 the island coal community received hopeful news.²⁶ The United States had begun to experience a serious coal shortage as a result of the long strike in Pennsylvania and the Senate had passed a bill providing for a 67 cent rebate for American importers of Canadian coal. The new Western Fuel Company in Nanaimo, and to a lesser extent Wellington Collieries, would benefit considerably from the new demand for island coal. Arthur Spencer, a miner and Nanaimo correspondent for the Labour Gazette, reported that miners on the field generally believed that unemployment in the region would soon be at an end.²⁷ President Howard of Western Fuel tried to restrain the miners' expectations for immediate wage increases. He said that as fuel oil was beginning to compete with coal in San Francisco and as electricity was beginning to generate energy for lighting plants, the miners should not be over optimistic about the effects of the rebate.²⁸

Despite President Howard's warning the Nanaimo miners on February 19 struck for a 20 per cent wage increase. The strike lasted only five days. The miners did not receive the increase but they did gain wage concessions which may have been worth a 10 per cent raise.²⁹ James Baker, the

26 Nanaimo Daily Herald, January 14, 1903, p.765.

27 Labour Gazette, vol. III, 1903, p.765.

28 Nanaimo Daily Herald, February 24, 1903, pp.1-2.

29 Daily Herald, February 27, 1903, p.1.

provincial organizer of the Western Federation, returned to Nanaimo from the interior. According to the Nanaimo Free Press, Baker acted as a mediator between the company and the union.³⁰ The Free Press believed Baker's efforts contributed to bringing the two sides to an early settlement of the dispute. One significant result of the strike was the signing of a new written contract between the company and the union. 2

The new written agreement signed early in March contained some important clauses which expanded the former contract.³¹ The company recognized local 177 of the Western Federation at Nanaimo as the only bargaining agent to represent the miners. The miners consented not to strike in future unless "all other means of conciliation had been exhausted" and promised to give thirty days' notice. The most valuable parts of the contract other than union recognition concerned the long disputed question of digging coal which contained amounts of rock and dirt. The company agreed to pay \$3.00 if a miner could not make better wages where "deficiencies" in the coal existed. x

The company agree that in all deficient work, made deficient by the following causes, low coal, bodies of rock, or dirt, whether measurable or not, or for any other such cause, to pay not less than three dollars per day per

30 Nanaimo Free Press, March 3, 1903, p.2.

31 "Proposed Agreement....," February 27, 1903, in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.753. See Appendix, p.220.

man, so long as such deficiency exists. The company agree to allow some consideration of pay for dirt in contract places, and where the digger is by such cause hindered making what he otherwise could make, or an average wage under average conditions.³²

Pit bosses, miners and pit committees, henceforth, had a written contract from which to judge the merits of disputes which arose over the question of how much the miner was to receive in cases where deficiencies in the coal reduced wages to less than the minimum considered necessary by miners for subsistence.³³ The contract did not give a price the company was willing to pay to miners who were forced to remove dirt along with the coal in contract places. The question of how much the miner would be docked for the dirt which appeared in his box cars was left to negotiation.

Miners at Wellington Collieries had followed the events which transpired at Nanaimo from December to February with considerable interest. Thomas Shenton, secretary of the new union at Nanaimo, said that Extension miners had started to inquire about the new union at Nanaimo in December.

Q. How long ago were you first informed that they (Extension miners) desired to organize there? A. Possibly this thing took place most of all after our affiliation with the Western Federation of Miners (December 1902). Q. At the first of the year? A. Yes. Q. And you were informed by Mottishaw and others that there was such a disposition? A. Representation from

32 "Proposed Agreement....," February 27, 1903 in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.753. See Appendix, pp. 220-221.

33 Ibid., pp.57-58.

Ladysmith were made through the person of Mr. Mottishaw and other parties coming, constantly stating to me, (after) talking among themselves down there that the men would like to organize, and we have always said - the Nanaimo union has always said,....that whatever Ladysmith or Mr. Dunsmuir's men might do, they must do it voluntarily. We could not have any official connection with them in any decision to organize, for this reason - that it has been thrown in the face of Nanaimo heretofore that Nanaimo wanted to.... reach Dunsmuir's men, and to create trouble amongst them, and that is the reason why (we did not)....take any notice, officially or otherwise, until they had initiated steps themselves in this matter....³⁴

Thomas Shenton's statements are significant because they contradict statements made in the Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes which investigated the causes of the strikes which began in March at Extension and in May at Cumberland. The Report said that Extension miners had had few discussions on the subject of union organization prior to March 8, the day they voted to join the Western Federation.³⁵ Secondly, counsel for Wellington Collieries, E.V. Bodwell, argued during the Commission hearings the same case as he had argued before the Commission which investigated the Wellington strike of 1890-1891; he said that the Dunsmuir miners had no desire for a union to force an organization upon the Dunsmuir men.³⁶ There was evidence that Nanaimo

³⁴ "Proposed Agreement....," February 27, 1903 in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.337. See Appendix p.220.

³⁵ Report, op.cit., pp.40-41.

³⁶ Ibid., p.43.

took an important part in the Wellington strike of 1890; according to Thomas Shenton the Nanaimo miners did not attempt to extend their organization into Wellington ^x Collieries in 1903. The Commission in 1903 adopted E.V. Bodwell's view of the strike.³⁷

Another disputable argument in the Report regarding the origins of the Extension strike which began on March 12 concerns the question of dissatisfaction over wages. ^x The Report states:

Up to the time of the meeting on March 8, there appears to have been less general discussion among the mass of the miners on the subject of the formation of a labour organization than there had been on the subject of demanding an increase in the rate of wages. ^x It was well known that Mr. Dunsmuir was strongly opposed to the formation of unions among his employees; that attempts at organization had, practically without exception, been followed by the immediate dismissal of those employees who had been prominent in the work of organization; and it was tolerably certain that like efforts at this time would be followed by like results. No question of wages or conditions being urgent at the time, the motive for effecting an immediate organization did not exist.³⁸ ^x

Contrary to the unsupported statement in the Report, miners at Extension did have grievances over wages and working ^x conditions. Dissatisfaction extended back at least to August 1902. In August the one-year contract, which had

37 Report, op.cit., p.41.

38 Loc.cit.

resolved disputes over wages the previous year, came to an end.³⁹ The company notified the miners that effective September 1, there would be a ten per cent reduction in < the price paid to miners. The company increased the tonnage each miner had to dig from 2100 pounds to 2352 and continued to pay \$.75 per ton. The company terminated the agreement whereby miners received \$2.00 a yard for digging out dirt from the coal face. The one year contract was one of the best agreements made by the miners on the field since 1880 and they were reluctant to see it end. A short strike occurred, but as unemployment was high on the coalfield the Extension miners had little x option but to accept the company's new terms. The miners returned to work in September with the option that they might mine at the contract price or receive \$3.00 per day for mining.

Extension miners responded with considerable optimism to the news that the American government had granted coal importers in the United States a 67 cent rebate.⁴⁰ The news had reached the coalfield in late January⁴¹ and by early February Extension miners had started

39 Labour Gazette, vol. II, 1902, p.265.

40 Ibid., vol. III, 1903, p.392.

41 Nanaimo Daily Herald, January 14, 1903, p.3.

to consider the idea of asking the company for a ten or fifteen per cent raise.⁴² Extension miners seemed to have a reasonable case. In early February the two mining towns of Nanaimo and Extension were alive with talk of better wages to come.

Samuel Mottishaw (Sr.) became the leader at Extension around whom discussions over wages began to take place.⁴³ Mottishaw had worked at Nanaimo in the 1890's and saved enough money in 1898 to buy a small farm outside the city. Afterwards he worked sporadically in the mines when he wished to augment his income. His son Samuel worked at Extension and had been vice-president of a miners' union at Extension which met infrequently in 1900.⁴⁴ Samuel Mottishaw (Sr.) explained in May 1903 why the miners at Extension began to talk with him in particular about joining together and demanding a wage increase.

Q. The subject of your conversation was organization? A. Yes, before the meeting was called. About a month, more or less before the meeting (on March 8) was called. Q. And you had conversations from that time up to the date of the meeting with different men? A. Yes. There were several spoke with me. Q. And the subject of this conversation was organization, or an advance? A. The advance was the first question talked about among the men. Q. Have you any idea of what number of men you talked to before the meeting? A. Twenty or thirty. Q. And then, after you had conversa-

⁴² Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.55.

⁴³ Ibid., p.52, pp.55-56.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.64.

tions with these 20 or 30 men, you had reason to believe that they were talking to other men besides yourself? A. That might have been done. Q. Have you any idea why all these men came to you to talk about organization? A. Because I was in a more independent position than the balance of them. Q. In what way? A. That I am not obliged to be tyrannized by any boss. I am independent of any coal company. Q. And consequently they selected you as the man to talk to? A. Yes.⁴⁵

In one conversation that he reported, Samuel Mottishaw said he argued that he did~~not~~ think the miners should mention anything about a union when they asked the company for a raise.⁴⁶ In subsequent discussions with miners his idea, he said, was generally adopted, and there was a "consensus of opinion" among the miners that they were entitled to part of the 67 cent rebate from which the company had profited since February.

Samuel Mottishaw said that miners had repeatedly complained to him that the company made no allowances for digging dirt.⁴⁷ As a result many miners made less than \$3.00 a day. Three dollars had become the minimum amount miners considered was worth working for in the mines. Extension miners were aware of the new contract that was signed early in March at Western Fuel in Nanaimo. There was no guaranteed minimum wage at Extension mines if a miner found himself digging in a place which contained as much rock and dirt as

⁴⁵ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.55-56.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.57.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.57. See also Nanaimo Free Press, March 13, 1903, p.1.

coal. The establishment of a minimum wage for deficient places was a condition the Extension miners wanted to see in practice, but Wellington Collieries would not consider granting a guaranteed minimum wage for digging in deficient places.

Q. The rate of wages was as high here as at other places? A. They are not. I know a man who made only \$1.30 digging coal on contract by the ton. Q. Who is the man? A. They would discharge an employee at sight if I told you his name. I will produce the statement, his name is on the statement. Q. How many men do you know of that kind? A. I know there is quite a few under a \$3.00 a day contract. Q. Do you know the reason why they don't make it? A. There may be two reasons. Q. What are they? A. Digging dirt and getting nothing for it. Q. Do you know the conditions at all? A. Conditions vary considerably. Q. What is the second reason? A. The man may be a little deficient himself. Q. Which do you think is the real reason? A. Deficient place. Q. Are there any men working in the Vancouver Coal Co. who do not make over \$1.30? A. They have an agreement there, that no man shall work for less than \$3.00. Q. Whether he earns it or not? A. If he is not able to earn it they don't employ him. Q. And if he does not earn it the union would call a strike? A. I am not talking about strike at all. Q. But I am. You want to introduce a state of affairs by which a man who is not able to make over \$1.30 can make over \$3.00?⁴⁸

Samuel Mottishaw pointed to another source of grievance at Extension. He said there was a "consensus of opinion" that "a great injustice was done to the men" because they had no clear idea how many hundred pounds of coal they dug.⁴⁹ Since 1900 there had not been a check-weighman at Extension and the

48 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.57.

49 Ibid., p.61.

miners did not trust the accuracy with which the company weighed their coal. The miners who made below \$3.00 a day in deficient work were the ones most heavily docked for the dirt that appeared in their boxes at the weighing machines. Thus the grievance over digging dirt for little pay was further complicated by the miners' distrust of the accuracy of the company's weighing procedures. A union-appointed check-weighman was obviously needed. x

The miners who supported the establishment of a union at Extension mines previous to the first meeting on March 8 believed a union would end company favouritism in the mines. A minority of miners made good wages at Extension, said Aaron Barnes, because they were given the best places to mine.⁵⁰ x Aaron Barnes had mined on the field for at least fourteen years and had been dismissed along with William Anthony at Cumberland in 1895 for union activity.⁵¹ Barnes supported his charge by naming specific miners who made high wages at the expense of the majority because a few bosses favoured certain miners. The miners he named were in fact the miners who reported to the Royal Commission that they were satisfied with wages at Extension and did not personally believe they needed a union to protect them. Aaron Barnes was questioned as to how he thought a union would improve conditions by ending favouritism. x

50 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.353.

51 Ibid., p.351.

Q. Without a union how do you find that the working of these favourable places is regulated?

A. In some cases it is regulated by favouritism.

It is always in the interest- I am taking the operators' view of the matter now - it is always in their interests to have a number doing well, in order to keep the balance quiet. Q. You say it is the policy of the company to pay a few men well in order to keep the balance quiet? A. Yes.⁵² x

He said when he worked at Northfield mine in the 1890's places at the coal face were divided among the miners every three months by the executive of the Protective Association. x

In this way all miners had an equal opportunity to make high wages some of the time. Aaron Barnes said that the "cavil system" of drawing places came from the North of England and was adopted by the union with the consent of the Vancouver Coal Company.⁵³ x

Statements made by Samuel Mottishaw supported Aaron Barnes' criticism that too many miners at Extension were given poor places to mine. He accepted the fact that companies usually favoured certain miners but he particularly disapproved of the practice at Extension because the faulted condition of the seams and the large amounts of rock and dirt contained in them greatly reduced average wages below other mines on the field. He said that at Extension mines:

There is the greatest inequality in wages that I have ever known of. It consists in the measure of coal....The vein varies. In some x

52 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.353.

53 Ibid., p.353.

places there will be four feet of dirt, and they (the miners) pay for the powder where there is no money in it. It does not pay for the powder.⁵⁴

He recalled that one day he mined four tons of dirt and three tons of coal but did not receive any allowance for digging out the dirt. In his opinion favoured miners received good allowances for digging dirt but most miners did not. The one year contract from August 1901 to September 1902 had been a good one because all miners were paid \$2.00 a yard for digging out excess dirt, but since September, said Mottishaw, "it had lapsed into the old condition."⁵⁵ By "old condition," he meant that the decision as to how much, if anything, the miner was paid for digging out dirt was left by the company to the discretion of the pit boss. The dissatisfaction that had led Extension miners to join the Protective Association in March 1901 had arisen again in February 1903.

The Report of the Royal Commission stated that a few former Nanaimo miners conspired to force the Extension miners into the Western Federation at a meeting on March 8.⁵⁶ The Report accused Samuel Mottishaw of leading the conspiracy. The implication in the Report was that former Nanaimo miners favoured the formation of a local of the

⁵⁴ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., 1903, p.58. See also Daily Herald, June 21, 1903, p.1.

⁵⁵ Loc.cit.

⁵⁶ Report, op.cit., p.41.

Western Federation at Extension because they had been union miners at Nanaimo. But the Report did not explain that other former Nanaimo miners opposed the formation of a local of the Federation at Extension; these miners were the company favourites who made good wages and were the ones that Aaron Barnes had named.⁵⁷

Discussions for and against joining the Federation and asking for a wage increase occurred in February and early March during the thirteen mile train ride from Ladysmith to Extension each morning and afternoon. The train ride recalled for many miners what the Nanaimo Free Press⁵⁸ and the Cumberland News⁵⁹ considered the most important grievance of the Extension miners; namely, the forced removal of miners from Extension to Ladysmith. x

Contrary to the opinion of miners who had been forced to leave Extension in 1901 and 1902 and remove their homes to Ladysmith if they wished to remain working at the mines, the Report of the Royal Commission stated that the forced removal was not a source of grievance in March 1903.⁶⁰ The memory of the "arbitrary" and "inconsiderate" manner⁶¹ in which the removal had been carried out was fresh in the

57 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.248-258; pp.258-262; pp.269-273; pp.273-279; pp1 287-289.

58 Nanaimo Free Press, March 16, 1903, p.1; March 28, p.2.

59 Cumberland News, May 12, 1903, p.1; March 28, p.2.

60 Report, op.cit., p.48.

61 Ibid., p.48.

minds of many miners.⁶² The issue even caused Chief Justice Hunter of the Royal Commission of 1903 to question the fairness of James Dunsmuir's labour policies. During the questioning of John Mochar, who had lost his job at Extension because he refused to obey the order to move his house, an interesting exchange took place between Chief Justice Hunter and E.V. Bodwell.

His Lordship: Assuming that this is so, why have they not the right to live as they like? Mr. Bodwell: Why have we not the same right to employ whom we like? His Lordship: Would an employer have a right to say he would not employ a man who wore a top hat on Sunday? Mr. Bodwell: I suppose he would if he paid the man. His Lordship: On the ground of abstract right he might have but it remains to be shown that he would be right in exercising it. It seems to me, Mr. Bodwell, that there is a very heavy onus on you to show that these men have been fairly dealt with.⁶³

Considering the miners' statements to the Commissioners⁶⁴ and the report of the Nanaimo Free Press that James Dunsmuir's "oldest miners, men who had been friends with him for years,"⁶⁵ considered the removal a source of grievance in 1903, the statement in the Report that the miners no longer felt strongly about the injustice of the removal is difficult to interpret.

The Commissioners did not choose to admit in the

62 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.66, p.78, p.79, p.82, p.85.

63 Ibid., p.81.

64 Ibid., p.8.

65 Nanaimo Free Press, March 28, p.1.

Report what in fact they learned in the hearings; many Extension miners believed they had strong grievances against Wellington Collieries. The Commissioners did not understand that months of economic frustration and social protest, however quietly borne, preceded the sudden decision made at the first meeting of the miners on March 8 to make the demand for an increase in wages after the miners organized a local of the Western Federation. The Extension miners' decision to affiliate themselves with a reportedly financially powerful union was an indication they were preparing, in the best way they knew how, for a concerted effort to improve wages and conditions at Extension.

As interpreted by the Commissioners, the outbreak of the strike on March 12 was the result of a conspiracy between Samuel Mottishaw and Thomas Shenton. The facts surrounding the strike do not support this thesis. On March 7 Samuel Mottishaw posted a notice in the Ladysmith post office. The unsigned notice stated that a general meeting of the Extension miners would be held the following day, Sunday the 8th at the "Finns' Hall." Questioned by the Royal Commissioners as to why he left the notice unsigned and why the purpose of the meeting was not revealed, Mottishaw stated that his action would have resulted in his immediate dismissal.⁶⁶ The Report stated his action was part of the secret conspiracy which tricked the Extension miners into

66 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.37.

organizing a union so that a strike might occur.⁶⁷ Once the miners had struck, coal shipments to the C.P.R. in Vancouver would be halted and C.P.R. strikers in Vancouver would be in a stronger position to win their strike. The ingenious theory in the Report had no basis in fact.

The events surrounding the first meeting of the Extension miners do not provide any evidence that a conspiracy occurred. Samuel Mottishaw and James Pritchard were chosen respectively secretary and chairman of the meeting on March 8. James Pritchard had immigrated into the coal field in 1899 and had worked at Nanaimo for three years before he went over to Extension. He told the meeting the miners had been assembled to discuss the advisability of asking for a ten or fifteen per cent raise.⁶⁸ A discussion followed his introductory remarks. James Pritchard said that a consensus emerged that "it would be futile to ask for the advance without a strong organization behind them."⁶⁹ A motion passed unanimously that the miners organize a branch of the Western Federation before they met with the company. After the motion passed, the miners instructed James Pritchard to telegram James Baker to come and organize the new local. Before the meeting adjourned the miners elected six executive officers to run the business of the

67 Report, op.cit., p.37.

68 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.37.

69 Loc.cit.

new union.

Once the miners made their decision to organize a union James Dunsmuir acted as he had done on similar occasions in the past. His interpretation of why the miners organized the union was the garrison interpretation: enemies from outside his mines were attempting to force a union on his miners. On March 9 James Dunsmuir issued orders for the immediate dismissal of union officers.⁷⁰ He said that he would close down the mines rather than operate them with a union which was affiliated with "foreigners" across the border.⁷¹ He charged that "agitators" from Nanaimo had worked on the miners and forced them into the union. He was not specific about who the agitators were but presumably he meant Samuel Mottishaw and even James Pritchard. Neither were connected with the Nanaimo union any more than any other former Nanaimo miner. On March 10 the company laid off Samuel Mottishaw, James Pritchard and other officers and posted a notice that all miners had to take their tools out of the mine by April 1. The miners voted to strike on March 12 after they had received a report from the executive that all officers had been dismissed. The Nanaimo Daily Herald reported that miners at Extension generally regarded James Dunsmuir's statement that he would never recognize a committee

70 Report, op.cit., p.37.

71 Nanaimo Free Press, March 13, 1903, p.2 Victoria Daily Colonist, March 15, 1903, p.8.

of the new local union as a "bluff."⁷² The Herald reported that miners were confident that with the Federation behind them James Dunsmuir would give in; but the Herald predicted a long and bitter strike.

The "bitterness" predicted by the Herald did not erupt in the form of clashes between miners and strike breakers. No reported violence occurred during the strike. The union did not picket the mines and the company did not import strike breakers. During the first week of the strike Superintendent Hussey of the Provincial Police visited Extension and inspected the camp. The Free Press assumed that James Dunsmuir had requested the Superintendent to visit the mines, and charged that the action was "provocative."⁷³ The Free Press stated that the presence of the Superintendent intimidated the miners, but there was no other report of how the miners actually reacted to the visit. Without an official record of communication between James Dunsmuir and the government to support the newspaper's⁷⁴ charge, the accusation must be considered as speculation based on James Dunsmuir's usual authoritarian methods of dealing with labour unions in his mines.

72 Nanaimo Daily Herald, March 11, 1903, p.1.

73 Nanaimo Free Press, March 16, 1903, p.2.

74 No communication between James Dunsmuir and the government appeared in the Premiers Papers, PABC, or the Attorney-General's Correspondence.

James Baker, depicted as a "foreign agitator" by the Royal Commissioners, arrived in Ladysmith on March 15. He spoke to a large meeting and outlined the history and constitution of the Federation. The miners elected James Pritchard, president, and Samuel Mottishaw (Jr.), secretary, of the new union.⁷⁵ Samuel Mottishaw's (Sr.) work was over once the miners had made the decision to organize a union on March 8. He had taken the risks involved in bringing the miners together in order that they might make a collective demand on the company. He continued to be an influential member but declined to be an executive officer in the new union. The secretary recorded 600 names in the roll book x on Sunday, March 15, and another 200 miners joined soon after. James Pritchard and Samuel Mottishaw (Jr.) had not been militant leaders in the movement to unite the Extension miners. Both men said they did not have any grievances regarding their wages and working conditions.⁷⁶ As they were not "agitators" they must have been elected to office because miners respected their abilities as miners and believed they would give reasonably intelligent leadership. 2 x

Not until two weeks after local 151 of the Western Federation was organized did the miners try to see James Dunsmuir. At the March 15 meeting the union decided not to send representatives to meet with the company until after

75 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.37.

76 Ibid., p.33. p.55 and p.292.

the charter of affiliation had arrived from Denver.⁷⁸ In deciding to wait for this symbol of affiliation and power to arrive before they met with the company, the miners must have assumed that their bargaining power would be enhanced. On April 1 three representatives of the union travelled to Victoria to meet with James Dunsmuir. James Dunsmuir gave the only recorded verbatim account of the interview.

Q. You said there were three of them came? A. Yes, (Joseph) Jeffries, (Samuel) Mottishaw (Jr.) and Jones. Jones was a coloured man. They sent in their card and said they wanted to see me. I sent out to ask if they represented the Western Federation of Miners, and they said they did, and I sent word back that I could not see them. That was the end of that committee.⁷⁹

The committee returned to Ladysmith and reported back to the union. They had not been able to make a single request for improvements in wages or conditions.

On April 18 the union sent another committee to interview James Dunsmuir in Victoria. Joseph Jeffries, the recording secretary (Samuel Mottishaw was the financial secretary) of the union gave an account of the interview which varied little from James Dunsmuir's version.⁸⁰

When we arrived in Victoria we asked for an interview with Mr. Dunsmuir and got one. We

78 Report, op.cit., p.39.

79 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.239.

80 Loc.cit.

asked him would he open up the mine, reinstate the men who had been discharged, and let us go to work. Mr. Dunsmuir questioned us - did we belong to the Western Federation of Miners? We said we did, and he then said, "I can't talk business with you." Before he would talk business with any committee we would have to call an open meeting, purge ourselves from the Western Federation and appoint a committee, and then he would talk business, and then only....The next question was asked, "Supposing we broke with the Western Federation and formed a local union here, would that meet the requirement," and he said he would have nothing to do with any union at all, nor would he employ any member of the union. That, of course, ended our interview.⁸¹

The committee reported their failure to obtain any concessions to a mass meeting of the miners on April 20. Miners were disappointed with the lack of results achieved in the two meetings with the company. Some left Extension and Ladysmith for work in lumber camps; others turned to fishing and a few began to leave for coal mines in Washington State in search of work.

On April 18, the day the second committee reported its failure to begin negotiations with the company, the union sent a delegation to the Nanaimo union to ask for financial assistance.⁸² As the Cumberland miners had organized a branch of the Western Federation on April 5, the delegation to Nanaimo appealed for assistance from Cumberland miners through the office of the secretary in Nanaimo. From April 18 to the end of the month contact between

81 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.62.

82 Ibid., p.761.

Extension miners and the unions in Nanaimo and Cumberland turned into cooperation. X

The strike at Extension mines was not, then, a result of a conspiracy. In their attempt to prove that the Western Federation was a dangerous and disruptive force in the industrial affairs of Vancouver Island, the Royal Commissioners in their Report underestimated and overlooked the complex background of labour disputes on the coalfield. The entrance of the Western Federation into the region undoubtedly gave the island miners new reason to hope that they might establish union conditions in the mines. But the explanation as to why the miners wanted union conditions is to be found in the miners' experience of low wages and difficult working conditions. With a heritage of unionism on the coalfield extending back to 1871, it was to be expected that the Extension miners would embrace the opportunity to affiliate with a strong and reputedly wealthy international union when the Federation organized the Nanaimo miners.

CHAPTER V

The Royal Commission of 1903 and the Conspiracy of the Western Federation at Cumberland

With the majority of the miners on the coalfield already members of the Western Federation by March, it remained for the Cumberland miners to seize the opportunity presented by the entrance of the Federation into the coalfield. The Cumberland camp had always been a difficult one to organize and unions had never lasted for more than a week since the mine opened in 1889. Yet on April 5 1903 the Cumberland miners requested James Baker to come to Cumberland and organize a new union.

The Royal Commissioners reported that the organization of the Cumberland miners by the Federation was part of a general conspiracy by the Federation to close down the island mines in support of the C.P.R. strikers in Vancouver.¹ The evidence given by the Cumberland miners to the Commissioners completely contradicted the official Report.² To the majority of Cumberland miners - and Extension miners - the existence of the large and reputedly wealthy international Federation on the coalfield was reason enough to attempt to organize a new union and press for better wages; but the Cumberland miners had grievances which were not limited to

1 Report, op.cit., p.49.

2 See particularly the evidence of George Richards, the Cumberland Union Secretary in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.436-442, 469-471.

disputes over wages. The Royal Commissioners learned that the majority of miners believed that freedom of speech and the right of assembly were severely restricted in Cumberland by James Dunsmuir's refusal to permit a union organization to exist in his mines.³ James Dunsmuir was accused by miners and other visitors to Cumberland of encouraging the repression of political freedom and the intimidation of miners who tried to testify against certain company practices. Events associated with the course of the Cumberland strike were to prove that most miners were afraid to speak out freely against the company.⁴ Evidence given to the Commissioners by miners and other witnesses revealed grievances that were barely hinted at in the official Report.⁵ x

The Royal Commissioners in their official Report gave an analysis of why the Cumberland miners on April 5 formed a branch of the Western Federation.

The organization of the miners at Union at this time (a month after the union was formed at Extension), and the subsequent declaration of strike cannot, in our opinion, be accounted for except as part of the general scheme to tie up the coal supply on Vancouver Island, in aid of the U.B.R.E. strikers at Vancouver. The strike at Union was in reality a strike in sympathy with the men who were out at Ladysmith, and the manner in which this was procured cannot be too carefully considered, as illustrating....the comparatively simple x

3 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.382-504, passim.

4 See the report of Solicitor D.M.Rogers to the Attorney-General. Solicitor Rogers found that during the strike the miners were afraid to testify against the company when the company was charged with employing Chinese labour underground. Attorney-General, Correspondence, Letters Inward, Roll No.4, File No. 3400/03 - 3999/03, PABC.

5 Report, op.cit., p.55.

manner in which a body of men may, at the instance of a few persons of ordinary adroitness and cunning, be drawn into a deplorable situation, from which they are unable to extricate themselves without humiliation and loss....⁶ There was moreover, not a single reason of importance given by a witness which would satisfactorily account for the formation of an organization under the existing circumstances and at this particular time. A desire for "freedom of expression of opinion," for "individual liberty," for "the right to have an organization," were put forward....as reasons which prompted the formation of an organization.⁷

The Commissioners referred to James Dunsmuir's "well known attitude" towards unions as a reason the majority of miners would not have wanted to join a union.⁸ The Commissioners stated the miners "made little or no complaint" about the wages they earned at the time they joined the union.⁹ To strengthen the effect of their Report, the Commissioners could have shown that the coal seam at Cumberland, unlike the seam at Extension, was relatively free from serious faults; but the significance of this important condition of work was not apparent to them.¹⁰ Committed as they were

6 Report, op.cit., p.49.

7 Ibid., p.55.

8 Loc.cit.

9 Loc.cit.

10 Disputes over the payment for digging dirt and rock occurred at Cumberland but they were not as frequent or as bitter as at Extension. See Nanaimo Free Press, May 30, 1903, p.3. Compare George Richards comments on the wage question at Cumberland with statements made by Samuel Mottishaw on wage grievances in Extension mines in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.57-61 and pp.493-494.

to the interpretation that a conspiracy had taken place, the Commissioners did not explain in the Report the contradictory evidence that no witness either admitted or revealed that he believed that the Cumberland miners' strike which began on May 2 was a strike in sympathy with the Extension miners.¹¹

George Richards, the new leader of the Cumberland miners, told the Commissioners the miners had "talked quietly" in March of the Western Federation's new locals in Nanaimo and Extension but he did not say whether the miners had discussed the new rebate on coal which the company had gained.¹² Together with John Hutchinson,¹³ Orim Barber¹⁴ and William Anthony,¹⁵ who were officers in the new union, George Richards stated that the miners became interested in joining the Federation because it was a large, powerful international union which reportedly supported its locals during strikes.¹⁶ Richards said the miners joined the union in April because James Baker had made temporary headquarters in Nanaimo: "The Western Federation (was) a strong organization, and it (was) a good chance to join."¹⁷

George Richards stated that the principal demand of

11 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.406-407, p.419,432,441,447.

12 Ibid., p.438.

13 Ibid., p.442.

14 Ibid., p.391.

15 Ibid., p.432.

16 Ibid., p.439.

17 Ibid., p.437.

the Cumberland miners was for a collective union contract.¹⁸ He intimated that the miners in Cumberland had either seen or discussed the details of the new contract which had been negotiated at Nanaimo in early March.¹⁹ Cumberland miners wished to implement the practice whereby a miner who had a dispute with a pit boss over the price the miner was to receive for digging dirt and rock would be given a day wage of \$3.00. Richards argued that miners had complained of the "iron clad" system in which the company hired miners on an individual contract basis. Under this system miners had to dig dirt and rock at the price which the pit boss had set. He explained a common situation:

Suppose it is a case of yardage. He (the pit boss) says, I will give you \$2.75 and he (the miner) wants \$3.00, and he says you won't get it. You will have to leave. That is dealing with the individual. The union is formed so that they can deal collectively.²⁰

The miners thought that the only way the vexed question of digging dirt and rock could be fairly dealt with was for the company to recognize a union pit committee in the mines. When the Royal Commissioners referred to the fact that few miners complained of receiving low wages at Cumberland, Richards argued that the miners saw no point in discussing

18 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p. 493.

19 Ibid., p.493, 753. See Appendix p.220. Agreement between the Western Fuel Company and the Nanaimo Miners' Union.

20 Ibid., p.493.

grievances over wages "until they had a union."²¹ The Cumberland miners took the same course as the Extension miners; at the beginning of the strike they put aside making wage demands until they could convince the company ^x to make a collective agreement with the new union.

James Reed was among the few miners who opposed the formation of a branch of the Western Federation in Cumberland. Although he approved of local unions, he spoke against the miners forming a local of the Federation in April because he believed the time was inopportune.

I think the men here took the wrong time for forming this union, seeing that they had formed the Western Federation of Miners at Ladysmith and Mr. Dunsmuir would not recognize it. In my opinion it would have been much better to see how Ladysmith would get along before we ran into the same difficulty.²²

As James Reed was the only miner who gave evidence against the union, his statements were significant. He observed that grievances among miners were a common phenomenon in mining communities; the camp need not have been disrupted ^x because "some men" had grievances over wages.²³ But James Reed's statements agreed with those made by William Anthony²⁴ and David Halliday,²⁵ executives of the new union,

21 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.493.

22 Ibid., p.465.

23 Ibid., p.465.

24 Ibid., p.432.

25 Report, op.cit., p.55. Ibid., p.417.

on the question of the value of pit committees. James Dunsmuir believed such committees would seriously interfere with the management of his mines. James Reed stated:

It (the pit committee) would allay a certain amount of irritation and in cases where disputes occurred with the management such as deficient work, it would have a tendency to have these men remunerated according to a fair day's wage.²⁶

James Reed's evidence on the question of pit committees was in accord with that of miners, who like himself, had migrated into the region originally from the United Kingdom. Of this evidence the Report of the Royal Commission said nothing.

The Commissioners treated as insignificant statements by miners who said that a union organization would give them "freedom of expression of opinion" or "individual liberty."²⁷ The Commissioners did not seem to understand the economic and political functions of unions in British Columbia and throughout the western World.²⁸ The Commissioners assumed that if miners did not have specific and detailed wage grievances, they did not have a legitimate reason for forming a union.²⁹ Even after grievances over

26 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.469.

27 Report., op.cit., p.55.

28 However, the secretary to the Commissioners, W.L.M.King, gave a good analysis of the functions of unions and the reasons for their growth in an industrial society. He said that a union's demand for a collective contract was a "natural and logical" one in the circumstances of industrial society. Report, p.65.

29 Ibid., p.41, 55.

wages had been demonstrated to the Commissioners, as in the case of the Extension miners, the Commissioners discounted their significance in causing the miners to organize a union to achieve improvements. Wellington Collieries refused to grant the miners the right to have an organization. In doing so the company prevented miners' unions from becoming economic and political forces in the communities of Extension Ladysmith and Cumberland as were the miners in Nanaimo and unions elsewhere. At Cumberland and Extension the miners had no organization in which they could discuss mining legislation, social legislation such as workman's compensation, immigration Laws, tariffs or unemployment as was the case in union halls in Nanaimo, Vancouver or Rossland.³⁰

By joining the Western Federation the Cumberland miners saw an opportunity to end their social and political alienation^{N?} in the communities dominated by Wellington Collieries. The statements of the leaders of the union movement support this interpretation. George Richards said his reason for joining the union was that membership in the union would permit him the "chance to vent my thoughts and feelings and hear others on the same subjects."³¹ William Anthony, who had been dismissed for union activity in 1895 at Cumberland, said that recognition of the union would

30 The minute books of the Nanaimo Miners' Union of this period were destroyed by a fire. The Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, Minutes, 1902-1903, passim., indicated the wide range of issues which union councils discussed, studied and acted upon.

31. Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.438.

give him "freedom" from arbitrary dismissal.³² David Halliday had migrated from Lanarkshire, Scotland in 1901. He was critical of the effects of Wellington Collieries' anti-union policy.

Q. You say, Mr. Halliday, that there was no freedom of speech previous to the formation of the union here, that there was a curtailment in the liberty of speech in reference to political matters. What political doctrines were they the men could not mention without danger to themselves? A. I stated that trade union talk or political talk could not be discussed without forfeiting your employment. If you took opposition to the employers-that is the position. Q. In referring to politics you probably thought of the doctrines of Socialism particularly? A. Well, any politics.³³

E.V. Bodwell argued, and the Commissioners adopted the view that Western Federation unions were in reality Socialist clubs.³⁴ The Commissioners seemed to assume that miners were "socialistic" if they actively strove for legislation in the interests of workingmen and were critical of the power that large corporations wielded in the legislature. x

The miners could have told the Commissioners what Henry Maille had told the people of Cumberland in 1901 concerning the miners' interest in forming a union. Henry Maille has said that a union was a "fraternal society which gave benefits."³⁵ Besides operating benefit funds, x

32 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.432.

33 Ibid., p.416.

34 E.V.Bodwell,Ibid.,p.435; Chief Justice Hunter,Ibid.,p.408.

35 Cumberland News, February 6, 1901, p.2.

unions gave workmen a sense of comradeship, social identity and respect. George Richards came closest to explaining this social aspect of unions but his statements implied that he wanted an opportunity to discuss only political questions.³⁶

The Report of the Royal Commission interpreted the miners' demand for the right to form a trade union at Cumberland in the context of the increasing support that miners had given independent labour candidates in the region.³⁷ E.V. Bodwell's cross-examination of miners such as John Hutchinson and David Halliday, and other evidence drawn from the Federation's Miners' Magazine published in Denver, were the basis on which the Commissioners concluded that the organization at Cumberland was formed in the main by socialist agitators in league with the Western Federation and Nanaimo socialists.³⁸ Miners questioned by the Commission denied that a political conspiracy had occurred. As only David Halliday and John Hutchinson were members of the new Socialist Party in Nanaimo and had joined the party after the Cumberland strike began on May 2, the Commission's conclusions were founded on very weak evidence.

Evidence that the union movement at Cumberland was

36 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.438.

37 Loosemore, T.R., op.cit., pp.172-185, passim.

38 Report, op.cit., p.68.

a social protest movement came from Reverend L.W. Hall. The Reverend Mr. Hall had begun missionary work among the Chinese at Cumberland for the Methodist Church in 1892.³⁹ He believed that the existence of the company-dominated town side by side with the company-dominated Chinese were the sources of the miners' discontent and the reason they wanted a union.⁴⁰ He criticized both the company and the miners for their inhumane treatment of the Chinese in Cumberland.⁴¹ He stated that the company dominated the Cumberland miners by intimidation and repression of free speech.

I mean this: the conditions that have prevailed here in the last nine years with regard to the Chinese, and with regard to the effect-the far reaching effects on church, coroners' juries, the law and general treatment of the Chinese-the repressive atmosphere that has existed and even now exists in this town with regard to the present management of the mines.⁴²

He charged that the company made the Chinese into an exploited class of people by paying them low wages, and the miners treated them accordingly as a despised race.⁴³ He said that he would have been prepared to assist in the organization of the Chinese into a separate union if the miners had guaranteed the Chinese the opportunity to earn equal pay for the economic uplifting of the Chinese, said Reverend Hall.⁴⁴

39 Reverend L.H. Hall, Correspondence, op.cit., PABC.

40 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.452, 454, 459.

41 Ibid., p.455.

42 Ibid., p.453.

43 Ibid., p.452.

44 Ibid., p.452.

Mr. Hall contended that Cumberland miners wanted a union to have greater freedom of expression.

The grievance in the past seems to me to have been this: that the individual workman himself had no freedom of expression or thought even; that, once having done his day's work, his freedom of talk was always, to my mind, in a repressive state, on the subject of voting, for instance.⁴⁵

George Richards mentioned the names of three miners who had been dismissed for opposing James Dunsmuir in the election of 1900 when John Radcliffe had run as labour candidate against his employer in the provincial riding of South Nanaimo. George Richards and Mr. Hall said that the effect of these dismissals were still felt in Cumberland in 1903.

It was the general opinion of every man who entered into the matter actively that he had to go (if his political opinion was opposite to that of the company and its supporters), and this is the general opinion regarding anything in this camp to-day.⁴⁶

The Royal Commissioners did not indicate in their Report that this evidence concerning the repression of free speech was given to them. Nor did the Commissioners report the degree of importance which the miners placed on their right to organize a union.

Mr. Hall also charged that miners on coroner's juries

⁴⁵ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.460.

⁴⁶ Reverend Hall, Ibid., pp.499-500.

had been intimidated by the company manager and foremen who questioned witnesses at jury proceedings. On one occasion in 1902 a delegation of Chinese workers came to Hall and told him they were reasonably certain an engineer who worked the underground elevator system had deliberately caused the death of a Chinese miner.⁴⁷ The coroner's jury concluded that no one was to blame for the accident; but the evidence indicated that either the engineer had made a mistake or the Chinese miner was negligent.⁴⁸ Hall said that manager John Mathews' manner of questioning witnesses during the inquest was calculated to intimidate them.⁴⁹ Hall alleged that had the accident involved the death of a white miner, the decision of the jury would have been different and the company would not have tried to protect the engineer.

Hall asked a Vancouver barrister to attend the inquest with him and give his opinion as to whether the jury and the witnesses were intimidated by the company. The barrister, Mr. Bloomfield, was as convinced as Hall that the jury's decision was not a valid one.

He said, 'Mr. Hall, it is no use, these men are being - ' I had spoken nothing about the conditions of this town - he said, 'these men are afraid to do their duty, they seem to be so - ' I have forgotten the expression he used - he meant that they were afraid to do their duty as citizens, and that is

⁴⁷ Reverend Hall, op.cit. p.495.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.503.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.495.

my thought with regard to that same thing.
My line of thought was that the company -
I don't say they do it with malice or intent -
I say that the present system has a tendency
to make every man think - rightly or wrongly I
won't say - if he comes in conflict with any
of the company, that that means for him
discharge.⁵⁰

Chief Justice Hunter of the Royal Commission criticized Hall's lack of initiative in not taking the jury's disputable decision before a Justice of the Peace or the Attorney-General of the province. From the evidence of the inquest that he heard, Chief Justice Hunter concluded that the Chinese could have raised a small fund, secured the services of a good lawyer and had the decision reversed. George Richards asked Hall if the miners would have felt intimidated if they had a union behind them. Hall thought they would not have been.⁵¹

The Cumberland miners' past experience with dismissals for union activities made them extremely cautious on April 5 when they met to organize a new union. Two weeks previous to the 5th three Extension miners came to Cumberland and asked a number of miners whether they were interested in forming a branch of the Federation. Enough miners signified their willingness to join a union for James Higney of Extension to wire James Baker to come and organize the new local. An agreement was made between the Extension organizers and certain Cumberland miners who were prepared to

50 Reverend Hall, op.cit., p.496.

51 Ibid., p.497.

lead the new union that at the first meeting no Cumberland miners would appear on the platform with James Baker. George Richards explained that the purpose of the strategy was to protect Cumberland miners from dismissal.⁵² As no officers were elected on the 5th, the company could not begin to break up the union on Monday, the 6th. The Report of the Royal Commission stated that James Baker intimidated the miners and in effect forced them into the union against their will.⁵³ This view of James Baker's part in the first meeting would seem plausible if one assumed that the Cumberland miners did not have grievances and were uncommitted about whether they needed a union. As the Report did not explain the complex background of grievances in Cumberland, the interpretation that outsiders forced a union on the miners appeared plausible. There was, however, no evidence to prove that James Baker had intimidated the miners.⁵⁴

The Royal Commissioners adopted the company's view that outside agitators had forced the miners into the union. The events surrounding the first meeting prove that the company was misinformed. According to the information James Dunsmuir received from his manager John Mathews, "shifters" and "penniless never-do-wells" had swayed the meeting on April 5 and forced the miners into the union.⁵⁵ Relying on

52 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.467.

53 Report, op.cit., p.53.

54 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.467.

55 Nanaimo Free Press, April 13, 1903, p.1.

John Mathews' information which had come from one or two of the older company men who were at the meeting, James Dunsmuir made some angry threats concerning the new union. He said he was ready to close down Cumberland mines for "ten years" if necessary "before I submit to have my business run to suit the whims of an alien labour organization."⁵⁶ The Press Committee of the new union replied on April 18 to what it termed "many erroneous statements" made by James Dunsmuir.⁵⁷ The Committee reported that only a few "company men" raised objections to forming a union on April 5 and that the rest of the "old employees," who numbered about 150 men, had joined. The Committee corrected James Dunsmuir's statement that only about seventy miners joined on April 5; the recorded number was 157. The incorrect number gave some truth to James Dunsmuir's accusation that the old employees had not joined the union.

The Cumberland miners made no demands on the company throughout the month of April. They hoped that if they did not provoke the company they might gain recognition of the union.⁵⁸ Thus the union did not even protest when on April 5, one of the leading unionists, Orim Barber, was laid off for firing a gunpowder shot in the mine. He had reportedly ignored the mine rule which required a miner to receive

56 Nanaimo Free Press, op.cit., April 7, p.1.

57 Nanaimo Daily Herald, April 18, 1903, p.3.

58 Nanaimo Free Press, April 13, p.1.

permission from a shotlighter whose job it was to test for gas before he allowed a miner to fire a shot to loosen coal. Later in the month John Mathews laid off nine union officers as their places were finished. By the end of April the miners were faced with the choice of submitting to the dismissal of union members or striking for the right to belong to a union.

On April 26 at a joint executive board meeting of the Nanaimo, Cumberland and Extension miners, the miners agreed to seek an immediate settlement to the strike.⁵⁹ Three delegates, John Hutchinson, James Pritchard and Thomas Shenton, were sent to Victoria to interview W.W.B. McInnis and other members of the legislature. W.W.B. McInnis was M.P.P. for Nanaimo South and a government supporter. The board instructed the delegates to interview other members of the House as well and to ask them to do whatever was in their power to arrange a settlement of the strike. The delegation was to ask members of the House to try to persuade James Dunsmuir to negotiate a settlement with the miners. The miners placed one condition on a future settlement. It had to be "in harmony with the recognition of the Ladysmith union and the reinstatement of the men discharged, (and) also the reinstatement of the men who were discharged at Cumberland."⁶⁰ These conditions proved to be completely

59 "Minutes of joint board meeting of Miners' Unions at Nanaimo," April 26, 1903, in Minutes of Evidence, op. cit., pp.784-785.

60 Ibid., p.785.

unacceptable to James Dunsmuir.

In their first interview with Mr. McInnis on April 27 the miners told him that if the company would recognize the union, they were prepared to enter a contract in which they would agree not to strike in sympathy with any affiliated or non-affiliated union outside Wellington Collieries.⁶¹ McInnis thought that this was the only basis on which James Dunsmuir would consent to recognize the union and he was optimistic that a settlement might be reached. On April 28 McInnis brought the miners' offer before the cabinet and the cabinet agreed to write James Dunsmuir and ask him to permit the government to appoint a mediator in the strike. Dunsmuir refused the government's offer and on the 28th he refused to talk with the miners' delegates in his offices in Victoria.

Dunsmuir stated his opinion of the Western Federation and local affiliated unions in the legislature on April 29 during a debate on the second reading of a Trades Union Bill.⁶² The bill was directed against employers such as Dunsmuir who broke up unions by dismissing officers and union members. The bill would have made discrimination against union members an offense against the law. The author of the bill, James Hawthornwaite, M.P.P. for Nanaimo city, argued that once unions such as the Western Federation were recognized on the island there would be industrial

61 "Report of committee appointed by the joint board," April 29, 1903, in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.785-786.

62 Nanaimo Daily Herald, May 1, 1903, p.2.

peace in the region. Dunsmuir interjected with the remark that the Federation was composed of "agitators." Then Smith Curtis from Rossland replied that Dunsmuir's statement was untrue. He said that labour troubles were often caused by the "irrational obstinacy of employers" and mentioned strikes in which the Federation had intervened to bring about peaceful settlements. After more sharp exchanges across the floor of the House, Smith Curtis said to James Dunsmuir, "are you willing to agree not to discriminate against a man because he happens to belong to the Western Federation?" Dunsmuir replied, "I will attend to my own business." The Trade Union bill was defeated that day.⁶³

On April 29 at the weekly meeting of the Cumberland miners, Orim Barber, David Halliday and John Hutchinson reported the results of their discussions in Nanaimo and Victoria. At the meeting the miners heard, too, that all the officers of the Cumberland union had been dismissed from the mines. The miners elected a committee to interview John Mathews, the manager, to ask him for the reinstatement of the officers in the order in which their places in the mines would come again. On May 1 John Mathews told the committee he refused to re-employ the officers or recognize the union.⁶⁴ The next day on hearing the report of the committee, the miners voted by ballot on the question of

63 Nanaimo Daily Herald, May 1, 1903, p.2. See also Free Press, April 29, p.1.

64 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.481.

whether or not to strike for union recognition; the miners voted 208-12 to strike and left the mines the same day.⁶⁵

Although it was apparent to the miners that they struck over the right to belong to a union without fear of dismissal, the Royal Commissioners contrived the theory that James Baker had tricked the miners into the strike. The theory was based on Baker's alleged secrecy concerning a telegram. On April 20 the Extension miners had met to hear a report from delegates who had met with James Dunsmuir. Upon receiving the report, a motion came forward and passed that the union ask permission of the Denver executive to call out the Cumberland miners in a sympathetic strike. Baker approved the request and wired Denver. A reply followed on April 21.

We approve of calling out any or all men necessary to win at Ladysmith. Organize Japanese and Chinamen if possible.⁶⁶

Baker gave this reply to Orim Barber, the president of the Cumberland union when Baker met him in Nanaimo on April 25. According to the miners present, there was no discussion of the request at the meeting of the joint board. Barber took the telegram back to Cumberland when he returned three days later.

The Commissioners believed that Baker tricked the

65 Report, op.cit., p.49.

66 Ibid., p.57.

Cumberland miners by not telling Barber that the telegram was a reply to the Extension union's request that it receive permission to call out the Cumberland miners.

The use made by Baker of this reply, and the concealment by him from apparently all Canadian officials of the nature or contents of the telegrams sent by him to Moyer, in which he stated that Ladysmith asked Cumberland out in sympathy, point, in our opinion, to a deliberate move on his part to bring about a strike at Union (Cumberland) which might strengthen the hands of the strikers at Ladysmith, and at the same time stop the supply of coal to the Canadian Pacific Railway from Union.⁶⁷

When the Cumberland miners were questioned by the Commissioners concerning the telegram, they reported that the telegram was not the reason they called a strike. George Richards, secretary of the Cumberland union, stated that the miners understood that the Extension union wanted them to strike in sympathy but the miners did not choose to act on the request.⁶⁸ Cumberland miners, he said, were concerned about the dismissal of the officers of their union. If a strike occurred at Cumberland, it was to be over the issue of the right of the miners to establish a union in the mines.

James Dunsmuir's counsellor, E.V. Bodwell, realized the miners were not prepared to strike in sympathy with the Extension miners even if the officer had conspired to bring on a strike. But he learned from president Orim Barber that

67 Report, op.cit., p.57.

68 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.477-478.

a conspiracy had in fact not occurred.

Q. (By Mr. Bodwell) As a matter of fact, the officers of this lodge wanted the men to go out in sympathy with (Extension), and the men would not do it? A. No. Q. You did not advocate that yourself? A. No. Q. None of the officers of the lodge? A. No. Q. Mr. Baker did? A. I never heard him. Q. How do you account for Mr. Moyer telegraphing to him that he approves of calling out enough men to win at Ladysmith? A. That is correspondence between themselves... Q. Then you did not discuss the question of sympathetic strike with Ladysmith? A. No, sir. Q. This telegram was read, I understand, at a meeting on April 29, the regular weekly meeting? A. Yes. Q. And you say that no particular action was taken? A. No, sir. Q. Was not discussed at all? A. No, sir. Q. When was the committee appointed that went to see Mr. Mathews in regard to the taking back of the men? A. I would have to look up those dates....Q. So you did not know that you had a grievance until the refusal of Mr. Mathews to reinstate the men? A. Yes, we knew we had a grievance. Q. If he had taken back the men there would have been no strike? A. Leaving a reasonable length of time (for the company to take back the miners). Q. Supposing Mr. Matthews had assented to your proposition, there would have been no strike? A. Yes, no strike. Q. It was upon his refusal that the meeting (to discuss strike action) was called, I understand? A. Yes. Q. So that was to prove that your men were being discriminated against, and you took action on that on May 2? A. Yes.⁶⁹

George Richards explained in more detail why the telegram had no influence whatever on the course of the strike at Cumberland. The Commissioners' Report did not consider the evidence of these miners.

The Cumberland strike did not halt coal production

69 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., pp.409-410.

in the mines. John Mathews had told James Dunsmuir that the mines could continue to operate without the white miners. One out of two shifts produced enough coal to make mining profitable and with an adequate supply of Chinese and Japanese labour the mines continued to operate. The employment of increasing numbers of Chinese miners shortly became of serious concern to the Inspector of Mines as safety conditions began to deteriorate.

The Cumberland strike occurred for reasons that primarily lay within, not outside, the coalfield. James Dunsmuir told the Commissioners that he believed that unions were intolerable because they would interfere with the operation of his mines. As in the past he gave orders in April 1903 for the leaders of the new union to be dismissed. The strike was a protest against the dismissals.

For the first time since 1890 Dunsmuir's miners had the support of a large and financially wealthy union. The Dunsmuir miners believed at the beginning of the 1903 strike that the Western Federation would support them with funds during a long strike; that the combined forces of the island miners and the international Federation would bring James Dunsmuir around to the view that unions in his mines were preferable to the greatly reduced business that a long strike entailed. Although James Baker and the Federation did not conspire to bring on strikes in the Dunsmuir mines, the effect was the same: the island miners used the Federation to fight James Dunsmuir and strikes resulted.

CHAPTER VI

The Royal Commission Hearings at Extension and Cumberland and the Termination of the Strikes

The federal Minister of Labour, Sir William Mulock, told Sir Wilfrid Laurier on April 5, 1903 that the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia should "educate" Canadian workmen to the harm they did themselves when they came under the control of American unions.¹ Unaware of the real purpose of the Commission, Vancouver Island miners expected that the Commissioners would conduct an impartial inquiry into the causes of the mine strikes. The strikes continued during the period of the Commission's hearings from May 4 to May 30. During this period island miners became increasingly disillusioned with the obvious bias of the Commissioners in favour of Wellington Collieries. When the Commissioners early in the hearings adopted the view of James Dunsmuir's counsellor, E.V. Bodwell, that Nanaimo miners had conspired with leaders of the Western Federation to cause strikes on the island, the Dunsmuir miners perceived that their case for union recognition was lost.

1 Sir William Mulock to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, April 4, 1903, Laurier Papers, Microfilm. Reel 328A. 44692-78022A. Letters Relating to British Columbia, PABC.

On May 5, when the Royal Commissioners began hearings in Ladysmith, ^{Chief} Mr. Justice Hunter almost immediately demonstrated his lack of impartiality. He announced that the Commissioners had no power during the hearings to make an award or judgment of "any kind" as to the justness of the conflicting cases of the disputants.² But he seemed to contradict himself when he recommended that the men return to work until the federal government had an opportunity to act upon the Commissioners' conclusions with regard to the right of the miners to affiliate with the Western Federation. In the meantime he suggested that the miners abandon their affiliation with the Federation until the government had legislated on the question of Canadian locals affiliating with international unions. x 9

The first reaction to Chief Justice Hunter's advice to the miners came from Charles K. Wilson, counsel for the Extension miners. He said that Chief Justice Hunter was in effect asking the miners to assume the onus of guilt in the strike.³ Mr. Wilson argued that the dispute was a lock-out because the company had first altered the conditions of employment when James Dunsmuir ordered the dismissal of union miners. E.V. Bodwell replied to Mr. Wilson's argument and made a somewhat ambiguous statement to the effect that x

2 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.2.

3 Ibid., pp.5-6.

James Dunsmuir:

has given no instructions whatever to refuse to recognize a union among his own men, but his objection is that the men who work in his mines should affiliate themselves with an organization whose headquarters and constitution are actually out of the jurisdiction of this country.⁴ x?

E.V. Bodwell appeared to say that Dunsmuir might be prepared to permit a local union in his mines as long as the union was not affiliated with an international organization. The hearing then adjourned for the day in order that the miners might have an opportunity to consider Chief Justice Hunter's recommendation that the miners give up their affiliation and return to work. x

The miners met the same evening. E.V. Bodwell's ambiguous statement that Dunsmuir had "given no instructions" to refuse to recognize a local union, temporarily split the union into a majority who wanted to continue the affiliation with the Federation and a minority who were ready to form a local union. x
The miners voted 216 to 49 to remain in the Federation and to continue the strike. Dunsmuir's attitude to local and regional unions in the past had an important bearing on the miners' decision to reject Chief Justice Hunter's advice to return to work. In a written reply to the Commissioners the miners said:

⁴ Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.5.

...past experience has taught us beyond the shadow of a doubt that if we at this time comply with the suggestions of His Lordship and the Commission, we feel we would be at the mercy of our employers; and that to abandon our affiliation with the Western Federation of Miners would be to lose its sympathy and active support, and thereby destroy all unity among the workers. That without the support of a union or organization in sympathy with it, men would now, as in the past, be discharged or in some manner forced to quit work. That no men would dare to move in the direction of organization for fear of discharge; therefore this union respectfully declines to abandon its affiliation with the W.F.M.⁵

Mr. Justice Hunter said he "regretted" the miners' decision. He thought "the men's stand (was) likely to prejudice their case in the minds of the public" because of the economic effect which the strike was having on the region.⁶ If the newspapers on the island were an indication of public opinion, then Chief Justice Hunter's concern was without much foundation. The only newspaper which criticized the miners for striking was the Victoria Daily Colonist⁷ and James Dunsmuir owned half the stock of the paper.⁸ The miners were reportedly "suspicious and resentful" of the Commissioners. The miners were asked to give up the union until the federal government had made a decision but Wellington Collieries did not have to recognize the union if the government legislated in favour

5 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.5.

6 Ibid., p.7.

7 Victoria Daily Colonist, March 15, 1903, p.8; Colonist, April 7, 1903, p.7.

8 Dunsmuir Files, PABC.

of the miners.⁹

The miners learned a second time during the hearings that the Commissioners were eager to conciliate Dunsmuir, but were unwilling to impress on him that the miners had valid reasons for demanding union recognition. Dunsmuir went to Ladysmith and gave evidence before the Commission. During the proceedings, a delegation of three miners presented a written statement to the Commissioners in which the miners expressed their willingness to meet with Dunsmuir. The statement included the condition that although the miners were not "officially representing any union," they wanted it understood "that we, in doing so, are not foregoing any rights that we have, or ought to have, in connection with organized labour."¹⁰ Dunsmuir said he would not talk with the miners until the condition was removed. He said he refused to deal with the union or any of the executive. In an effort to get negotiations started E.V. Bodwell and Chief Justice Hunter suggested that the miners withdraw the condition. Aaron Barnes, the spokesman for the miners, agreed to take this proposal back to the union. When the miners met the same day to consider the proposal, they rejected it. The Daily Herald reported that the miners were angry at this second attempt by the Commissioners to have them return to work on James Dunsmuir's terms.¹¹

9 Nanaimo Daily Herald, May 6, 1903, p.2. See also statements by Aaron Barnes, president of the Extension union, in Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.369.

10 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.246.

11 Daily Herald, May 20, 1903, p.2.

James Dunsmuir explained the reasons behind his labour policy when he was examined by counsel for the miners. Dunsmuir argued that miners did not have any cause to demand X union recognition in his mines. No amount of persuasion or argument would change his point of view. His deep attachment to his property rights was reminiscent of his father, Robert Dunsmuir.

Q. Holding these views-an irreconcilable disbelief in organized labour, you refuse, as I understand it, to have any man in your employment who is in any way connected with a union-you have heretofore?
A. No, we have never done that. We have, of course, refused to have an organization or union around the works, but we have never refused to take men on, whether union or not. We don't ask him. Q. Have you not, when you became aware of a man belonging to the union, got rid of him? A. You mean fired the heads of the union? Q. Yes? A. Every time. Q. And you have done that in pursuance of a settled policy of antagonism to organization? A. Yes, around the works. Q. You recognize, surely, the right of the workmen to organize? A. Of course, that is their own right. They can organize and belong to whatever X union they like. Q. Just on the same principle that you consider you have an absolute right to handle your own property? A. Yes, I think that is my right; they have their rights. Q. You hold that you have an absolute right to deal with your own property? A. Just as I like. Q. Did it ever occur to you that wealth carried some corresponding obligations with it-the possession of large riches and lands? A. No sir. From my standpoint it doesn't. Q. You carry your opinion as far as this: you say you can shut up your mines just as you please, no matter to whom it brought ruin or loss? A. No, they didn't need to go to work, just in the same way that I did not need to open up the mines. Q. The store-keeper might go broke, the inhabitants of cities suffer from want of fuel, general suffering might arise-all these things might happen, and you would still think you were right? A. Yes, I would still think I am right. X Those are my rights. Then the men don't need to work, unless they like, those are their rights.¹²

The Commissioners supported Dunsmuir's defense of his property rights and concluded that the miners in this case did not have any property rights over the conditions under which they were employed.¹³ The Supreme Court of British Columbia later in the year even upheld Dunsmuir's legal right to employ Chinese workers underground in defiance of the Coal Mines Regulations Act as amended in 1903.¹⁴ The decision seems to epitomize the degree to which Dunsmuir's property rights took precedence over labour's demand for some voice in determining conditions of work in the mines.

The miners' decision to return to work on July 2 at a 5% reduction in wages was neither a unanimous nor a popular one. Of the 800 original union miners 285 voted 168 to 117 to return to work on the company's terms.¹⁵ The Cumberland News reported that the miners felt compelled to end the strike because the company started to employ a few Chinese labourers around the mines near the end of June.¹⁶ As Chinese labourers had never been employed at Extension in the past, the miners had good reason to fear that if

13 Report, op.cit., p.68.

14 "Report of Proceedings in Attorney-General v. Wellington Collieries Re Violation of Coal Mines Regulations Act, Section 82, Rule 34," Pamphlet, PABC, 1903, p. 3 pages. The pamphlet was published by the Conservative Association of Rossland and was issued to prove to workingmen in British Columbia that the Conservative Party was sympathetic to the concerns of workingmen.

15 Daily Herald, July 2, 1903, p.1. See Appendix, pp. 222-223. for the agreement.

16 News, July 3, 1903, p.8.

they did not return to work their jobs might be in jeopardy. If James Dunsmuir had used the Chinese to frighten the miners back to work, his tactic was an effective one.

Dunsmuir promised that he would not discriminate against union officers if the miners entered into contracts on an individual basis. He had told the Commissioners and Counsel for the miners that he did not care whether or not a miner belonged to a union as long as the union did not attempt to force a collective contract on the company.¹⁷ The miners returned to work with the understanding that they could remain in the union. However, the company refused to re-employ union officers at Extension and by October the miners had no alternative but to abandon their affiliation with the Federation if they were going to let their officers find work in the mines.¹⁸

The disillusionment that Extension miners felt concerning the partiality of the Royal Commissioners and the value of James Dunsmuir's word was experienced at Cumberland as well. The Commissioners mediated during the first negotiations on May 30 between the company and the Cumberland miners. The Commissioners tried to induce George Richards, the miners' secretary, to agree to the company's terms and return to work.¹⁹

At the beginning of the strike the company offered

17 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit. p.380.

18 Labour Gazette, vol.4 1903, p.320.

19 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.503.

work to any union or non-union miner on an individual basis.✓
The company firmly rejected the idea of entering into a x
collective contract with the miners. Although the company
was prepared to pay the regular contract price at Cumberland
of \$.75 per 2500 pounds of coal and promised not to dis-
criminate against union miners who returned to work, no
union miner broke the strike. Chief Justice Hunter argued x
that the miners had absolutely no justification for continuing
the strike.²⁰

Chief Justice Hunter reiterated E.V. Bodwell's
argument that James Baker had in effect caused the strike
and had induced the miners to strike in sympathy with
Extension miners and the C.P.R. employees in Vancouver. The
miners had a right to form a union, said the Chief Justice,
if they had grievances of their own; but even in a case
where they had grievances and formed a union, the miners did
not have to right "to force a union contract."²¹ On May 30
the miners voted on the Commissioners' recommendation that
the miners return to work on the company's terms. Less x
than half the original 275 strikers voted 130 to 3 to continue
the strike for union recognition.²²

Mines Inspector Thomas Morgan went to Cumberland in
early June and reported that because of the employment of so

20 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.503.

21 Loc.cit.

22 Nanaimo Free Press, May 30, 1903, p.2.

many unskilled Chinese workmen many safety precautions were ignored in the mines.²³ Acting through the Attorney-General's office, Inspector Morgan laid a charge against F.D. Little, general manager of the Company's operations at Cumberland. On July 24 in magistrates court in Cumberland, D.M. Rogers, solicitor for the Crown, proved that the company had violated Rule 34 of the Mines Act.²⁴ The Court fined F.D. Little \$25.00 and costs. Mr. Cassidy, solicitor for the company, informed the court the company would appeal the decision. At one point in the trial Cassidy used the courtroom as a platform from which to lecture the miners. He turned to the spectator's gallery and told the miners present that the company intended to give the Chinese "every opportunity to earn a living" despite the miners' attempts to have the Chinese removed from the mines. He advised the miners to end their strike and dissociate themselves from the "alien agitators who had kept up the hostile feeling against the Chinese."²⁵ As the Western Federation had advised its locals to organize the Chinese, it is difficult to see how Cassidy's condemnation applied to the Federation. Cassidy's remarks were discussed at a miners' meeting the same evening. The miners voted unanimously not to return to work until their demand for union recognition was met.²⁶

23 Daily Herald, June 7, 1903, p.1.

24 Free Press, July 24, p.2.

25 Loc.cit.

26 Free Press, July 25, p.1.

Solicitor D.M. Rogers' report to the Attorney-General contained evidence that Cumberland miners were afraid to give evidence against the company at the trial held on July 24. X

Mr. Rogers said at the end of his legal report:

I may add that, on consultation with miners now on strike, who undoubtedly are the chief objectors to employment of Chinese underground, I pointed out the advisability of strengthening the hands of the Crown by evidence of white miners, to show that the Chinese, as a class, whether educated in English and mining or not, are an element of danger to fellow-workmen in mines, and the Secretary of the Miners' Union undertook to produce plenty of witnesses to that effect. Shortly before the hearing, the Secretary called upon me and stated that he had worked continuously since the previous day to procure such evidence, but, although the striking miners were most eager to see a conviction obtained, they one and all absolutely refused to appear or testify.²⁷

The miners obviously feared that if they testified against F.D. Little the company might retaliate when the strike was over by refusing to re-hire those who gave damaging evidence. The miners' actions were consistent with Reverend Hall's statement that in the past miners on coroners' juries had been intimidated by company managers and foremen at Cumberland during hearings in which the company's responsibility for accidents was in question.²⁸

27 Attorney-General, Correspondence, Letters Inward, Roll No.4, File No.3400/033999/03, PABC.

28 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.495.

Safety conditions at Cumberland caused some dissension within the management of Wellington Collieries. In July three company managers from the closed mines at Extension left Cumberland and refused to return. According to the Free Press, Alexander Bryden, Dave Wilson and John Johns left Cumberland and returned to Extension where the company told them that either they returned to Cumberland or they would have to resign.²⁹ As the incident occurred twelve days after one hundred Chinese miners received mining certificates in Cumberland, the managers had probably left in protest against the employment of many new inexperienced miners.³⁰ Faced with the treat of dismissal the managers returned to Cumberland.

Mines Inspector Morgan was dissatisfied with the results of F.D. Little's trial. When the company did not remove Chinese miners from underground works as the law required, Inspector Morgan requested the Attorney-General to seek an injunction to restrain Wellington Collieries from employing Chinese and Japanese in the mines. In an affidavit sworn by the Inspector, he reviewed the occasions from 1879 to 1903 when Chinese had been held responsible for mine accidents.³¹ On September 15 in B.C. Supreme Court,

29 Free Press, June 29, p.2.

30 Free Press, June 17, p.6.

31 "Report of Proceedings in Attorney-General Wellington Collieries," op.cit., p.1.

the Attorney-General, A.E. McPhillips, gave his reasons to Mr. Justice Irving as to why the court should grant the Crown its request for an injunction against Wellington Collieries. The Attorney-General first pointed out that the company had continued to violate a provincial law. Secondly, he argued that miners had a "right to labour" and this right implied that they had property rights over the conditions under which they laboured. On the question of the company's violation of the law Mr. McPhillips said:

the power is inherent in the court to compel a company to desist from doing that which is illegal under the laws of the province, because these mines can only be operated under these laws; they are subject to inspection; to all these regulations, and they must live within them. If such is not the case, then the legislature is powerless to govern and to guard the interests of the public in the carrying out of what is after all a very large and important industry in this province.³²

Chief Justice Irvine denied the validity of McPhillips' arguments. He said the public was not affected by the employment of Chinese in the mines even though the Chinese may have constituted a safety hazard. He said "as long as your affidavit is confined to the question of employing Chinese below, the public are not affected" and "the rights of the public are not interfered with."³³ He said there

32 "Report of Proceedings in Attorney-General Wellington Collieries," op.cit., p.2.

33 Loc.cit.

were numerous cases in which the court refused to grant injunctions against colliery companies in cases in which the reasons given for the injunctions were similar to those mentioned by the Attorney-General. The Crown did not have the right in the present case, said Chief Justice Irvine, to interfere in the private business affairs of Wellington Collieries. x

On August 4 the company offered a new contract which included one of the miners' demands. Manager John Mathews said he would not recognize the Western Federation or a local union but he assured miners they could return to work without fear of discrimination against union officers.³⁴ Mathews offered the same wage as paid before the strike began. He conceded one of the miners demands that if a miner had a dispute over the price to be paid for digging a place in which there was much rock or dirt, the miner would be paid \$3.00 per day. In addition John Mathews promised to receive at any time a delegation who represented the miners provided the delegation did not call themselves a union. On August 7 the miners voted to reject the company's offer. The reason given by the miners for rejecting the offer was their suspicion that the company would not honour its promise not to discriminate against union officers.³⁵ x

34 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.485.

35 Daily Herald, August 7, p.2.

Although no report confirmed it, it was possible that Cumberland miners heard that union officers at Extension had not been re-hired since the strike ended on July 2.

The Cumberland union had greatly declined in numbers in the months since May 2 when 275 miners struck work. Only ninety-six voted on August 7. On August 22 eighty-eight miners voted 48 to 40 to return to work on the company's terms. The miners conceded that their inability to win the strike against the company forced them to return to work even though the miners were suspicious of the company's promise not to discriminate against union officers.³⁶ On September 12 George Richards sent the union's charter of affiliation back to Denver; the company did not re-employ union officers in August and the union had no alternative but to disband.³⁷

In a rare moment of insight during the hearings, Reverend E.S. Rowe observed that while the union mines at Nanaimo were operating, the non-union mines at Wellington Collieries were closed. The Commissioners understood that there had been a long history of industrial peace at Nanaimo before and during the time a miners' union was officially recognized in 1891. The Commissioners reported that "a reasonable and conciliatory attitude" pervaded relations

36 Daily Herald, August 22, p. 1.

37 Daily Herald, September 12, p. 2.

between the Nanaimo company and the union leaders.³⁸ But ^x
James Dunsmuir would never have dealt with the Nanaimo
union leaders no matter how reasonable or responsible they
wanted to be. The leaders included Tully Boyce, Ralph Smith
and Thomas Shenton and Parker Williams, men whom Dunsmuir
would have proscribed from his mines. Thus it was not to
the credit of the Royal Commissioners that they failed to
uncover the real reasons behind the strikes in 1903. Had [✓]
they endeavoured to see beneath the surface events and
coincidences that surrounded the strikes at Extension and
Cumberland, the Commissioners would have concluded in much
the same words as the provincial mines commission had in
1891: the strikes resulted from "the refusal of the mine- [✓]
owner to recognize or treat with the union." ³⁹ [?]

38 Report, op.cit., p.65-66.

39 "Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike,"
op.cit., 1891, p.241.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

The Recommendations and Conclusions of the Report of the Royal Commission

The Royal Commissioners who investigated industrial conflict in the mining and transportation industries of British Columbia reacted strongly to the evidence they uncovered.¹ Many of the Commissioners' recommendations and conclusions reflect their strong reactions to the harsh realities of life and work in the primary, economically unstable industries of the province. The Commissioners heard testimony concerning the fight - which sometimes erupted into violence - of miners and dock-workers against strike breakers imported from the United States by Canadian corporations. The industrialist James Dunsmuir told the Commissioners how he shut down his mines and uprooted communities because his miners disobeyed his orders not to form unions. In this industrial society on the frontier of North America where material insecurity was particularly marked among industrial workers, the Commissioners believed they uncovered

1 See Appendix, Excerpts from the Conclusions of the Report, pp. 224-241.

a socialist conspiracy organized by the American Western Federation of Miners and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees. These unions had organized thousands of industrial workers who responded enthusiastically to militant leadership. For these reasons the Commissioners proposed legislative changes to restrict the activities of all American unions in Canada.² As the Commissioners concluded that the rising incidence of industrial conflict in British Columbia was due to labour's new radicalism,³ they recommended new laws to control the amount of free collective bargaining permitted in Canada.

The Commissioners did observe that "wise legislation" alone could not solve "the labour problem".⁴ Much depended, they said, on the willingness of large employers to treat workmen not as "submissive and unquestioning units of labour" but as human beings who have some right to expect reasonable labour policies. In the only part of the Report in which labour's demands received a sympathetic interpretation the Commissioners stated:

And here it may not be amiss to warn employers of labour that the old relation of master and servant no longer obtains, that it has been supplanted by that of employer and workingman, with the probability that it will develop in the near future into that of co-contractors.

2 See Appendix, p.224-241.

3 See Appendix, pp.229, 237.

4 Report, p. 77.

There is no doubt that a considerable percentage of strikes are caused; not so much by the refusal of the employer to yield to the particular demand, as by the way in which it is done, or by a long course of arbitrary conduct. One of the results of the spread of unionism throughout the various trades has been to put the workman in a better position to make terms with his employer; to preserve his independence of character; he is now able to drive a bargain and does not have to accept a dole....The workmen of modern times demands as his due a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, and that he shall get a reasonable share of the product of his toil; what he seeks is honourable employment, not slavery; he wants fair dealing and justice, and not charity or patronage.⁵

The warning was not however to be contr^sued as an ultimatum from the Commissioners for employers to recognize all unions. The tone of these remarks was reversed when the Commissioners came to discuss specific legislative changes to control industrial conflict.

While employers were advised by the Commissioners not to be "arbitrary," "tyrannical," or "arrogant" with their employees, the Commissioners recommended that certain "reprehensible" actions of labour should be made illegal.⁶ In justification of proposed new restrictions on labour's economic freedoms, the Commissioners argued that the general public should not be inconvenienced because of a prolonged dispute between coal and transportation companies and their workmen. Thus sympathetic strikes such as allegedly

5 Report, op.cit., p.63.

6 Loc.cit.

occurred in the island coal mines in 1903 were to be made + illegal. Strikes for union recognition were not illegal, said the Report, but authorities were advised to watch carefully lest criminal or illegal methods such as boycotts / of employers or intimidation of non-union workers were used by strikers to win their demands. In this connection the Commissioners condemned but did not outlaw picketing. Other methods by which workmen tried to support others on strike / were made illegal. The Commissioners wished to penalize x unions when they circulated lists of employers who dismissed union workers and replaced them with non-union workers and when they circulated lists of professional strike breakers or "scabs." The Commissioners argued that once these hostile actions of labour were outlawed then employers would not find it necessary to retaliate by blacklisting workmen. The Commissioners' interpretation of all these aggressive acts by labour did not take into consideration the fact that in many cases, as in the strikes under investigation, workmen were trying to gain some measure of economic security from x their struggle with anti-union employers. With most of labour's weapons taken away, the struggle for collective bargaining would have been much more difficult than it was. 7

7 The Commissioners were quite inconsistent in this respect. While they stated that a "workman..shall get a reasonable share of the product of his toil," and a "fair day's pay" (p.63), they then said in effect that the miners were not to have the power to negotiate for or strike for this share or pay.

Another of the controversial recommendations made by the Commissioners concerned incorporation of unions. The Commissioners argued that "legitimate trade unionism" should be "encouraged and protected" but unions such as the Western Federation of Miners and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees should be made illegal because the latter unions had conspired to bring on sympathetic strikes on the island.⁸ Incorporated unions would be accorded protection to the extent that employers would be penalized if they discriminated against union members. The Commissioners stated that "the majority of the intelligent and reasonable leaders in labour circles" approved of the incorporation of unions. But it is difficult to understand why the Commissioners assumed this. Of nine "leaders in labour circles" questioned by the Commissioners concerning the incorporation of unions, one supported incorporation, six questioned or opposed it, and one noted that it was to the advantage of employers to be able to take a union to court for a breach of contract. Chris Foley, a labour leader, assumed that if unions were incorporated, companies would be compelled to recognize the union in question as the representative of the employees.⁹ But the Commissioners did

8 See Appendix, p.229.

9 See Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.678. There were a number of cases where the Commissioners misinterpreted the intention of witnesses' statements. One witness said that the effect of the incorporation of unions would be to discourage the practice of boycotting employers. The Commissioners reported that the witness said incorporation of unions would be a good idea because it would discourage the practice of boycotts. Minutes of Evidence, p.207, Appendix p. 232.

not believe that workmen had the right to impose a closed shop on an employer.

As the Report acknowledged, "objections were raised" against incorporating unions. Witnesses told the Commissioners that once unions were incorporated wealthy companies could more easily bankrupt them by forcing them into costly court cases. For example, the British America Corporation of Rossland assessed the Western Federation of Miners \$12,500 in damages arising from the 1901 strike. The case was not concluded until 1905.¹⁰ To protect unions from such costly litigation the Commissioners suggested that if a union won a court case, a company could only appeal the decision if the presiding judge approved the appeal. This proviso did not seem to promise much security against expensive litigation for unions. Critics of the Report, Ferns and Ostry, have concluded that the legal restrictions on free collective bargaining advocated by the Commissioners would have nearly ^ destroyed the Canadian labour movement.¹¹ Mackenzie King and the Commissioners were convinced that "the rash radicalism" of British Columbia labour had to be brought under more legislative control if there was to be less industrial conflict.¹²

10 For a discussion of this case see Phillips, Paul, op.cit., pp.33-34.

11 Ferns H.S., and Ostry B., op.cit., p.63.

12 King wrote in 1906 that "the rash radicalism" of British Columbia workmen needed "the curb." Eastern workmen, he said, were too indifferent to labour problems. The Secret of Heroism (Toronto, 1906), pp.158-159. Cited in Ferns and Ostry, op.cit., p.58.

King's contribution to the Report was in proposing new conciliation and arbitration machinery which would compel labour and capital to resolve their differences before long strikes occurred. King advocated that a strike or lock-out should not be permissible until one side in the dispute had given thirty days notice to the Registrar of the Supreme Court of the province. With the facts of the case reported to the Court and the Department of Labour thirty days before the beginning of a threatened strike or lock-out, King hoped that one or both sides might respond to public pressure to resolve the dispute by conciliation. King recommended the use of compulsory arbitration but he reserved it for special cases in which important public services such as water and light or transportation and communication were threatened with work stoppages. Compulsory arbitration would also be used to keep major industries such as coal mining from being shut down for a long period. King wanted the Governor in Council to have the authority to intervene and compel labour and capital to settle their differences in court. If they could not agree, then an arbitrated settlement would be binding for one year.¹³

Undoubtedly the most controversial recommendation in the Report was that Canadian locals of international unions should not be able to consult with their executives

13 See Appendix pp.233-235.

in the United States over the question of whether they could strike or not.¹⁴ Most international unions required their locals to seek approval from the executive before they struck. The purpose of this formality was to give the executive an opportunity to judge whether they should provide strike funds. The Commissioners' recommendation that Canadians and Americans should not be able to consult during a strike in Canada would have made it virtually impossible for Canadians to receive strike funds from the international.

The Commissioners had endeavoured in the Report to appeal to the "right thinking", "intelligent and reasonable" leaders of the Canadian labour movement. But when the moderate men of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada met in convention in September 1903, they denounced the Commissioners' recommendations and conclusions.¹⁵ When the federal government received the Congress' annual submission, it learned the deep concern with which the labour movement viewed the Report. Had the government acted upon the recommendations in the Report, it would have lost the considerable support it enjoyed among trade unionists. The government, therefore, chose not to act upon any of the Report's recommendations. As the Canadian Manufacturers' Association had already demanded legislation to restrict

¹⁴ See Appendix p.237.

¹⁵ Labour Gazette, vol. IV, p.325.

the activities of American union organizers and officials in Canada, the Report must have presented a difficult dilemma for Sir Wilfrid Laurier.¹⁶

The Congress also attacked the interpretation of the Commissioners that the organization of unions in the island mines was the cause of the strikes. Considering the fact that the committee did not have the record of the hearings, its analysis of the Commissioners' interpretation was perceptive.

The ground that appears to be taken (in the Report) is that the organization of a trade union is the natural cause of a strike, overlooking the causes that make the trade unions an absolute necessity.¹⁷

The Congress saw behind the Commissioners' narrative of the events surrounding the alleged conspiracy to the fact that the miners had organized unions to settle grievances and disputes in the mines. In fact an analysis of why miners formed unions in 1903 and in the previous decades shows that unions were formed as a result of the miners' inability to settle disputes and grievances over conditions of work and wages. Since James Dunsmuir refused to deal with the miners' union representatives, strikes frequently resulted when Dunsmuir tried to intimidate the miners by dismissing union

16 Labour Gazette op.cit., p.337.

17 Ibid., p. 325.

leaders.

Even more than the Royal Commission hearings of 1885, 1891 and 1901, those of 1903 reveal the deep sense of social injustice felt by miners employed in the Dunsmuir mines. The forced removal of miners who lived at Extension village, the miners' grievances over inadequate payment for digging dirt and rock, the absence of a check-weighman, the demand for a 10 per cent wage increase after the company had gained the benefit of the rebate on coal imports entering San Francisco, and the irritating presence of Chinese miners at Cumberland, were the real reasons for conflict between the miners and Wellington Collieries. But behind these sources of conflict lay the authoritarian policies of James Dunsmuir. To challenge, and if possible weaken, the inflexible labour policies of James Dunsmuir and his managers, the miners in 1903 called in the numerical and financial power of the 50,000 coal and metaliferous miners of the Western Federation.

All the leaders of the union movement in Nanaimo, Extension and Cumberland-Thomas Senton, Parker Williams, Samuel Mottishaw, Aaron Barnes, George Richards and David Halliday and others-were either first generation Canadians or recent British immigrants. These miners stated that the principal reason that they and other island miners wished to join the Western Federation was to gain the support of a strong union which would help them gain improvements in wages and working conditions. When David Halliday told the

Commissioners that the Federation's official endorsement of the Socialist Party of America made the union particularly appealing to him, the Commissioners immediately leaped on this admission as proof that the Federation and its supporters on the island were mainly concerned with spreading revolutionary socialism.¹⁸ The Commissioners argued that since revolutionary socialism was a threat to the existing private ownership of the coal and transportation industries of the province, the Western Federation should be made an illegal organization in Canada.¹⁹ Evidence from the hearings indicated that the miners' radicalism was in reality a protest against the continuation of what the miners believed were low wages, dangerous and difficult working conditions and authoritarian labour policies.

Mackenzie King believed that disputes between employers such as James Dunsmuir and militant miners' unions such as the Western Federation would increase unless some remedial legislation was introduced. But King's recommendations were of little value to the island coal industry because Dunsmuir was unwilling to make any concessions to the miners' demand for a greater voice in the running of the mines. The Commissioners and King knew that the Vancouver Coal Company at Nanaimo had had few strikes after Superintendent Robins

18 Minutes of Evidence, op.cit., p.427.

19 See Appendix, p.230.

took over in 1883. One of the reasons for this record was that Robins permitted miners the privilege of discussing and resolving labour disputes through their pit committees and miners' union. Whereas the contract at Wellington Collieries was laid down,²⁰ the contract at Vancouver Coal was negotiated.²¹ The Commissioners failed to recommend specific changes in the methods of collective bargaining in the Dunsmuir mines in 1903; the Royal Commissioners who investigated the 1912-1914 coal strike in these same mines did recommend the need for negotiated contracts, miners' pit committees and freedom to join unions if industrial discontent in the mining industry was to be reduced.²²

20 See Appendix, pp.222-223. Agreement of Wellington Collieries with its Employees, July, 1903.

21 See Appendix, pp.220-221. Agreement of the Western Fuel Company and the Nanaimo Miners' Union, February, 1903.

22 Report of the Royal Commission on Coal Mining Disputes on Vancouver Island (Ottawa, 1913), pp.20-26. On the existence of other unresolved grievances, including oriental labour, and the employment of check-weighmen, on the coalfield from 1903 to 1914, see British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, "Royal Commission on Labour," S.P. 1914, pp. M 15-16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

A Correspondence

Attorney-General. Correspondence. Letters Inward, Roll No.4, File No.3400/033999/03, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Dunsmuir, James. Letter to Sir Joseph Trutch. February, n.d., 1889, Vancouver Sun, July 22, 1965, p.1.

Dunsmuir, James. Business Papers. (Graham Folder), Public Archives of British Columbia.

Dunsmuir, James. Premiers' Papers. June 1900 to December 1902, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Hall, L.W. Correspondence. Ebenezer Robson Collection, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Laurier, Wilfrid. Papers. Reel 328A, 44692-78022A, April 4, 1903.

Prior, Edward G. Premiers' Papers. January 1903 to June 1903, Public Archives of British Columbia.

Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. Minutes. Held by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, West Broadway Street, Vancouver, B.C.

B Unpublished Theses

Bescoby, Isabel M. "Some Aspects of the Mining Advance into the Cariboo and the Kootenay." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1935.

Cail, Robert E. "The Disposal of Crown Land in British Columbia: 1871-1913." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia.

Church, John S. "Mining Companies in the West Kootenay and Boundary Regions of British Columbia: 1890-1900." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1961.

Davis, Isabelle F. "49th Parallel City: An Economic History of Ladysmith." Graduating Essay, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1953.

Grantham, Ronald. "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia." MA. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia.

Loosemore, Thomas R. "The British Columbia Labor Movement and Political Action: 1879-1906." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1954.

Matheson, Marion H. "Some Effects of the Coal Mining Industry Upon the Development of the Nanaimo Area." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1950.

Silverman, Peter G. "A History of the Militia and Defenses of British Columbia." M.A. Thesis, Vancouver, British Columbia, 1956.

Smith, Brian R.D. "A Social History of Early Nanaimo." B.A. Honours Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1956.

Underhill, Frank H. "Labour Legislation in British Columbia." Doctoral Thesis, Berkeley, University of California, 1935.

Wargo, Allan J. "The Great Coal Strike: The Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike: 1912-1914." Graduating Thesis, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1962.

C Miscellaneous Manuscript Materials

Buckam, A.F. "The Company Office." Typescript History of the Company Office at Cumberland, 5 pp. Public Archives of British Columbia.

Dunsmuir, James. Miscellaneous Files. Public Archives of British Columbia.

Woodside, Frank, Secretary of the Rossland Miners' Union, Typewritten Letter Originally published in the Rossland Miner, August 20, 1901. Copy in Special Collections, University of British Columbia.

Anonymous. "Sixty Years of the Mine-Mill." An unpublished chronicle of the Western Federation of Miners and the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, n.d., 58 pp. Copy in Special Collections, University of British Columbia.

Anonymous. "Origins of Labour Unions in British Columbia." A chronological list to about 1900, n.d., 10 pages. Public Archives of British Columbia.

II PRINTED SOURCES

A Government Publications

The following were the main sources of evidence for the study of labour on the coalfields.

B.C., Legislative Assembly. Journals. Victoria Queen's (King's) Printer, 1871-1903.

An essential reference for legislative activity regarding the introduction and passage of bills related to coal mining and labour.

B.C., Legislative Assembly. Sessional Papers. Victoria, Queen's (King's) Printer, 1871-1914.

"Correspondence February-May 1877 Re Miners' Strike," 1878, pp.528-532.

"Petition Regarding Exclusion of Chinese from Coal Mines." 1888, pp.404-405.

"Miners' Petition Against Withdrawal of the Militia." 1890, p.312.

"Select Committee to Inquire into the Wellington Strike." 1891, pp.242-356.

"Correspondence Re Sending Militia to Wellington." 1891, pp.311-312.

"Petition Regarding Chinese and Japanese in Coal Mines." 1892, pp.464-470.

"Report of the Special Commission to Inquire into the Causes of Explosions in Coal Mines." pp.J9-16. 1902.

"Report of the Royal Commission on Labour." 1914, pp.M15-18.

"Reports of the Minister of Mines." 1874-1903.

A valuable source concerning the development of mining on the coalfield.

Returns and Reports. Published Separately by Government order.

Return of the 14th of March, 1878, of all Correspondence, Orders in Council, and Other Documents, Relating to the Miners' Strike at Nanaimo, and to the Disposition of a Body of Armed Volunteers of Militia to the District of Nanaimo in the Spring of 1877. Victoria, Government Printing Office, 1878.

Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration. Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1885.

Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration. Ottawa, King's Printer, 1902. Sessional Paper No. 54.

Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in the Province of British Columbia in 1903, Ottawa, Government Printing Bureau.

Evidence of the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia. Ottawa, King's Printer, Sessional Paper No. 36a, 1903.

Report of the Royal Commission on Coal Mining Disputes on Vancouver Island. Ottawa, Government Printing Bureau, 1913.

Report of the Royal Commission Regarding Coal in British Columbia, Vancouver, W.E.Cullin Printer. 1913

British Columbia, Legislative Assembly. Statutes. Victoria, Queen's (King's) Printer, 1877-1903.

A necessary source for referring to matters passed into law.

Canada, Government, Census of Canada, Ottawa, Queen's (King's) Printer, 1881-1901.

Decennial reports including the record of population changes and the record of national origins.

Canada, Department of Labour, Labour Gazette,
Ottawa, King's Printer, 1900-1903.

A valuable source on the economic and legal
aspects of labour in this period.

Canada, Parliament, House of Commons. Official
Record of Debates. Ottawa, King's Printer, 1903.

See index to Debates for references to Ralph
Smith and Sir William Mulock.

B General Works

1 Books

a British Columbia History

Audaine, James. Coal Mine to Castle. New York, 1950.

A useful account of the Dunsmuir family and
businesses. Newspapers are the main source for
the study.

Bennett, William. Builders of British Columbia. Van-
couver, 1937.

The first detailed history of labour in British
Columbia. More interesting for its interpretation
than as a factual source since the publication of
No Power Greater in 1967 by Paul Phillips.

Howay, F.W., Sage, W.N., and Angus, H.F. British
Columbia and the United States. Toronto, 1942.

Contains a useful chapter on the American mining
advance into southern British Columbia.

Howay, F.W., and Scholefield, E.O.S. British Columbia.
Vancouver, 1914. 2 vols.

Contains much valuable information on the economic
background of the province.

Ormsby, Margaret A. British Columbia: A History. Vancouver, 1958.

Useful as a source for the general social, economic and political background of the growth of the province during the 19th Century.

Phillips, Paul. No Power Greater. Vancouver, 1967.

A valuable history of British Columbia labour. Contains a useful chapter on the theory of labour development.

b Extra-Provincial Economic and Social History

Anton, F.R. The Role of Government in the Settlement of Labour Disputes in Canada. Montreal, 1962.

A valuable reference on the effect of court decisions and laws on the labour movement.

Bradwin, Edwin. The Bunkhouse Man. New York, 1928.

An interesting and revealing study of the life and work of the railway workers and lumbermen in the years 1903-1914. The men in these early camps were similar to miners in their proneness to strike in protest against poor conditions.

Brissenden, Paul. The I.W.W. New York, 1920.

In this study of the Industrial Workers of the World the writer explains the history of industrial unions in North America. The Western Federation of Miners was the largest union to join the I.W.W.

Cole, G.D.H., and Postgate, R. The Common People. London, 1956.

Contains useful background history on the British coal miners and the development of mining legislation in the United Kingdom.

Hansen, Marcus L., and Brebner, John B. The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples. New Haven, 1940, vol.1.

A valuable reference on the question of the penetration of American mining labour and capital into British Columbia in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Innis, H.A. and Lower, A.R.M. Settlement and the Mining and Forest Frontiers. Toronto, 1936.

Professor Innis studied the development of the mining region of southern British Columbia. A useful reference.

Jensen, Vernon H. Heritage of Conflict. New York, 1950.

An excellent study of the Western Federation in the United States from the beginnings of the union to 1930.

Kerr, Clark, Labor and Management in Industrial Society. New York, 1964.

Contains a chapter on the most strike-prone industries in North America in the years 1919-1949. Dr. Kerr analyses the reasons for strikes in these industries of which mining was the most strike-prone.

Logan, H.A. Trade Unions in Canada. Toronto, 1948.

A useful source on the growth of industrial unions in Canada. Logan's interpretation of the strikes in which the Western Federation was involved is questionable.

Logan, H.A., Ware, N.J., and Innis, H.A. Labor in Canadian American Relations. Toronto, 1937.

A valuable factual reference on the development of industrial unionism in North America and the penetration of American unions into Canada.

Lipton, Charles. The Trade Union Movement in Canada: 1827-1959. Montreal, 1967.

The most recent history of trade unions in Canada. Lipton questioned the interpretation of the 1903 Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes.

Parker, Carleton. The Casual Laborer and Other Essays. New York, 1920.

Western mining labour receives some attention in these essays. Parker reveals that migratory labour in the Far West tended to protest social and economic injustices through the means of the strike.

Paul, Rodman. Mining Frontiers of the Far West 1848-1880. New York, 1963.

Provides an interesting and scholarly analysis of labour in the period before organized unions became the rule in mining camps.

Pelling, Henry. A History of British Trades Unionism. London, 1963.

A useful reference on the changes which occurred in the mining unions in Britain before and after coal miners migrated to Vancouver Island.

Perlman, Mark. Labour Union Theories in America. New York, 1958.

Perlman brings together the most influential writers on the history of labour unions in North America. He analyzes the contribution each writer made to the understanding of why labour adopted different social and political philosophies and practices. A valuable reference.

Reynolds, L.G. The British Immigrant: His Social and Political Adjustment to Canada. Oxford, 1935.

Of limited use for British Columbia labour history. Reynolds' study deals mainly with eastern Canada. British unionists, he found, contributed greatly to the formation of unions in Canada.

Trimble, W.J. The Mining Advance into the Inland Empire. New York, 1914.

The earliest study of the phenomenon of American migration into southern British Columbia. Little discussion of unions.

Ware, N.J. The Labor Movement in the United States 1860-1895. New York, 1924.

Contains a good analysis of the spread of the Knights of Labor westward in the 1880's.

2 Articles

Buckam, A.F. "The Nanaimo Coalfield of B.C." Transactions. Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, vol.50, 1947, pp.460-472.

A useful reference on the question of the faulted condition of the two principal coal seams on the island coalfield.

Currie, A.W. "The Vancouver Coal Mining Company." Queen's Quarterly, (Spring 1963), vol.70, pp.50-63.

Currie explains how decisions made in the London boardrooms of the company influenced its development on the island. Some discussion of labour problems and competition in the coal business.

Fox, Paul. "Early Socialism in Canada." in J.H.Aitchison, ed., The Political Process in Canada. Toronto, 1963, pp.79-99.

Fox emphasizes the radical character of the metal miners but there is little reference to coal mining. Based on many tape interviews with old miners.

Graham, Charles. "The Problems of the Vancouver Island Coal Industry." Transactions. Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, vol.51, 1948, pp.456-477.

An invaluable explanation of the difficulties that miners and companies encountered in trying to make coal mining pay good returns.

Innis, H.A. "Liquidity Preference as a Factor in Industrial Development." in Essays in Canadian Economic History. Toronto, 1956, pp.327-358.

Innis discusses the influence of the gold rushes of 1849 and 1858 on the coast on the demand for coal and lumber.

Jamieson, Stuart. "Regional Factors in Industrial Conflict." The Case of British Columbia." Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science (August, 1962), vol.28, pp.405-416.

Discusses the theory of labour action in the province.

Lamb, H.Mortimer. "The Coal Mining Industry of Vancouver Island." British Columbia Mining Record (February-March, 1898), pp.1-26.

The writer describes and explains in vivid language one day in the life and work of Nanaimo coal miners. He entered the shaft in the morning and surveyed one of the mines.

McKelvie, B.A. "The Founding of Nanaimo." British Columbia Historical Quarterly (November, 1944), vol.8, pp.169-188.

A useful reference for the early pre-union period of mining at Nanaimo.

Nesbitt, James K. "Nanaimo Coal Miners Were Most Rebellious." Victoria Daily Colonist, November 13, 1966, pp.10-11.

The article actually concerns the Wellington strike of 1883.

Raines, J.A. "The Men and the Mines on Vancouver Island." British Columbia Magazine (September, 1913), vol.9, pp.521-527.

The writer was interested in the extent to which original Old Country accents were present in the speech of Nanaimo miners. Written during the long 1912-1914 coal strike.

Roy, R.H. "...in Aid of Civil Power." 1877, Canadian Army Journal (October, 1953), vol.7, pp.65-77.

Saywell, John T. "Labour and Socialism in British Columbia: An Historical Survey to 1903." British Columbia Historical Quarterly (July-October, 1951), pp.129-150.

A good introduction to the study of labour in this period.

Strachan, Robert. "Coal Mining in British Columbia." Transactions, Canadian Institute of Mining and Metalurgy, vol.26, 1923, pp.70-32.

A useful history of the growth of the coal industry to the end of the last main business cycle in the industry on the island.

Rowe, Reverend E.S. "Editorial on the Labour Problem." Western Methodist Recorder (July, 1901), vol.3, p.2.

The Recorder did not give any attention to the mining community where a large proportion of miners seem to have been members of the Methodist Church.

3 Newspapers

Cumberland, The News, January 24, 1898 -

Throughout the years 1898 to 1903 the editors of this paper consistently opposed the formation of a union in Cumberland. The editors supported the interests of the local merchants, the farmers and James Dunsmuir.

Ladysmith, The Leader, January 1, 1902 - December 31, 1902.
The Daily Ledger, 1903.

These papers supported the local merchants and James Dunsmuir, the founder of Ladysmith. The papers interpreted the demand for a union at Extension as the work of a few socialists and agitators.

Nanaimo, The Daily Herald, July 22, 1898 -

Reported labour news in considerable detail. Supported the Liberal-labour party in the region as against the independent Socialist labour party.

Nanaimo, The Free Press, January 1883 - December 1903.

This paper gave good coverage of labour news and attempted to be fair and unbiased in its judgments.

Vancouver, The Daily Province

Good coverage of labour news. Its reporting was fair. Editorially the paper tended to favour the interests of the Vancouver merchants and the railway employees in the strike of 1903 at Vancouver.

The Independent (1900-1905).

The official organ of the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council. Thorough coverage of labour news but little attention given to island coal strike in 1903.

The Western Clarion, 1903 - 1924.

Endorsed by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council, the Western Federation of Miners and the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees in 1903. Thorough coverage of labour news. Supported the Socialist Party of British Columbia.

Victoria, The Daily Colonist.

Fair coverage of labour news. Supported James Dunsmuir in the Island coal strike in 1903.

Wellington, The Enterprise, January 4, 1895-December 30, 1898.

Good coverage of labour news. Favoured the interests of the local merchants and opposed the formation of unions in the Wellington mines.

C Special Studies

1 Biography and Autobiography

Dawson, R. McGregor. William Lyon Mackenzie King. Toronto, 1958.

King's comments on the Royal Commissioners of 1903 gave an inside appraisal of their attitude towards the miners. Dawson was very uncritical of King's work on the Report

and did not acknowledge contemporary criticisms of it.

Ferns, H.S. and Ostry, B. The Age of Mackenzie King.
London, 1953.

The writers interpret King's involvement in industrial disputes conciliation as the means King used to further his own ambitions. The writers were very critical of his work on the 1903 Report.

Haywood, William D. The Autobiography of Bill Haywood.
New York, 1929.

Haywood was secretary of the Western Federation in 1903. There is no indication in his autobiography that the Federation tried to manoeuvre the island miners into the union. Haywood's life story gives a revealing account of life and work in the mining camps.

Steeves, Dorothy. The Compassionate Rebel. Vancouver, 1960.

The rebel, Ernest Winch, did not work in the mining industry but the author discusses many aspects of life and labour in British Columbia in the years after 1899.

2 Pamphlets

Chinese Labour. A Report of the Proceedings in Attorney-General v. Wellington Colliery Co. in 1903 Regarding the Violation of the Coal Mines Regulations Act. Published by the Rossland Conservative Association, Rossland, British Columbia, 1903. Public Archives of British Columbia.

APPENDIX 1

Constitution and By-Laws of the Rossland
Miners' Union No.38 (W.F.M.) Adopted October
22, 1896, November 23, 1898 and May 29, 1901

P R E A M B L E

Since there is scarcely any fact better known than that civilization has for centuries progressed in proportion to the production and utilization of the metals precious and base, and most of the comforts enjoyed by the great majority of mankind are due to this progress, the men engaged in the hazardous and unhealthy occupations of mining should receive a fair compensation for their labor, and such protection from the law as will remove needless risk to life and limb; we therefore deem it necessary to organize the Rossland Miners' Union as a branch of the Western Federation of Miners of America, for the purpose of securing by education and organization and wise legislation, a just compensation for our labor and the right to use our earnings free from dictation by any person whatsoever. We therefore declare our objects to be: -

First - To secure an earning fully compatible with the dangers of our employment.

Second - To practice of those virtues that elevate and adorn society and remind man of his duty to his fellow man, the elevation of his position and maintenance of the rights of the miners.

Third - To establish as speedily as possible and forever our right to receive pay for labor performed in lawful money, and to rid ourselves of the iniquitous system of spending our earnings where and how our employers or their officers may designate.

Fourth - To procure the introduction and use of any and all suitable efficient appliances for the preservation of life, health and limbs of all employees, and thereby preserve to society the lives of a large number of wealth producers annually.

Fifth - To labor for the enactment of suitable mining laws, with a sufficient number of inspectors, who shall be practical miners, for the proper enforcement of such laws.

Sixth - To provide for the education of our children by lawfully prohibiting their employment until they shall have obtained a satisfactory education, and in every case until they shall have reached sixteen years of age.

Seventh - To prevent by law any mine owner or mining company from employing any detectives or other armed forces, from taking possession of any mine, except the lawfully elected or appointed forces of the country, who shall be bona-fide residents of the district and province.

Eighth - For use all honorable means to maintain friendly relations between ourselves and our employers, and endeavor by arbitration and conciliation to settle such differences as may arise between us and thus make strikes unnecessary.

Ninth - To use all lawful and honorable means to abolish the system of convict labor in states where it now exists, and to demand the enforcement of the foreign contract labor law and the protection of our American miners and mechanics against imported pauper labor.

Tenth - To demand the repeal of all conspiracy laws that in any way abridge the rights of labor organizations.

Eleventh - To procure employment for our members in preference to non-union men.

APPENDIX 2

A Petition Against the Coal Mining Bill of 1877 by Four Vancouver Island Coal Companies

P E T I T I O N

To the Honourable the Speaker and Honourable Members of the
Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia in
Parliament now assembled: -

The petition of the undersigned, representing every
coal mine in operation in the Province, humbly sheweth:-

1. That a Bill now before your Honourable Body
intituled "The Coal Mines Regulation Act, 1877," is
calculated to work unjustly and oppressively upon all colliery
proprietors.

2. That if the said Bill become law its provisions
will hamper, without any good and sufficient reason, the
progress of mining enterprise, restrict the coal trade, and
occasion vexation and loss without any corresponding benefit
to any party.

Your petitioners, therefore, beg your Honourable Body
not to legislate with undue haste upon this important question,

but to appoint a Select Committee or a Commission to enquire as to the necessity for such a measure. And your petitioners will ever pray etc. etc.

The Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Co., Limited,

M. Bate,)
J. Bryden,) Managers.

Wellington Colliery,

Robert Dunsmuir.

Baynes Sound Colliery Co.,

Rod'k Finlayson, Chairman.
David Leneveu,)
Wm. Wilson,)
M.W.T. Drake,) Directors.
H.F. Heisterman,)

Harewood Coal Mine,

Thos. A. Bulkley, Proprietor.

APPENDIX 3

Agreement of Vancouver Coal Company with
Employees

Memorandum of Agreement Entered into Between the
New Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company, Limited,
and the Miners and Mine Labourers' Protective
Association of Vancouver Island, this 24th day
of July, 1891.

- 1 The company agrees to employ miners and mine labourers only who are already members of the Miners and Mine Labourers' Protective Association, or who within a reasonable period after employment, become members of the association.
- 2 The company agrees to dismiss no employee who is a member of the association without reasonable cause.
- 3 The association agree that under no consideration will they stop work by strike without exhausting all other means of conciliation available.
- 4 The association agree that they will not interfere with the company in employing or discharging employees.
- 5 The association shall comprise all men employed under-

ground, excepting officials and engine drivers, and above ground all day labourers not officials, engine drivers or mechanics.

- 6 This agreement can be terminated by 30 days' notice on either side.

For the New Vancouver Coal Mining and Land Company, Limited,

(Signed)

Samuel M. Robins.

For the Miners and Mine Labourers' Protective Association of Vancouver Island,

(Signed)

Tully Boyce,
John Humphries,
Robert B. Lamb, Committee.
John Horrobin,
Peter Baines.

(From the Minutes of Official Evidence, Royal Commission on Industrial Disputes in British Columbia in 1903).

APPENDIX 4

Petition of M.M.L.P.A. to Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration (1902)

John C. McGregor, Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council, of Nanaimo, presented certain resolutions of the Miners' Union which shortly and fully set forth the views of the miners and mine labourers of Nanaimo, and probably fairly represent the views of this important class in the whole province: -

The following resolution was unanimously discussed and carried at the Miners' meeting held on January the 26th inst.

That as a Miners' Union we implore the Commissioners to impress upon the Dominion authorities the great necessity there is for restricting or preventing the importation of the above class of labourers into our province. That as miners we know by hard experience that these workmen are very undesirable in and about our mines, because of their being an ignorant and therefore a dangerous class of workmen.

In 1887 a serious accident occurred in Nanaimo

resulting in the loss of over one hundred lives, and the following year at Wellington, with almost a similar result, and there were good reasons for supposing that these serious accidents were due to a considerable extent to the above class of workmen.

So much so, that the operators of these mines voluntarily agreed to dispose entirely of them from their mines and as a matter of fact no such accident has occurred since they were put out of these mines.

The fact of this has been made so clear to the members of our provincial legislature that they have exercised their powers to the utmost extent to safeguard the lives of white miners both in coal and metal mines by enacting laws prohibiting their employment underground; such legislation has however been declared ultra vires of the local House and we are now depending upon the disposition of the mine operators to keep them out, a state of things we consider should not be allowed to continue, considering the dangerous nature of underground work. We therefore present these facts and depositions to you in the hope that the Dominion authorities will as soon as possible give us greater security as miners.

On behalf of the above association.
WILLIAM STOCKER, President JAS. BRADLEY, Vice-President.
RALPH SMITH, M.P. Secretary NEIL McCUIISH, Assistant Sec'y.
WM. SMITH, Treasurer.

APPENDIX 5

Petition of the Miners' Protective Union

Special Meeting, Alexandria Mine, South
Wellington.

Friday, February 22, 1901, 4:30 p.m.

Meeting called in order to hear letter read from F.J. Deane, secretary of Royal Commission to inquire into Chinese and Japanese Immigration to British Columbia, and to discuss the subject and decide upon a reply to the secretary's letter. President calls meeting to order. Secretary reads the letter.

Correspondence received and open for discussion.

Resolved that the secretary be instructed to reply as follows:-

That we, the members of the Miners' Protective Union, as a body of British subjects, do, after due reflection and consideration upon the subject of Chinese and Japanese immigration into British Columbia, hereby declare and make our opinions and convictions, as follows: -

1. That, whereas the immigrants from China and Japan, employed in the coal mines of this province, constitutes a grave menace to the safety of the mining community of this province.

2. With regard to the fatal explosion at Cumberland, which took place on February 15th, 1901, we believe that better precautions would have been adopted by the management if the men employed in the mine had been all white men, and we believe that the explosion would not have occurred had no Mongolians been working in the mine.

3. We believe that the employment of Chinese and Japanese immigrants in the various industries of this province is inimical to the prosperity of the province, and that it is instrumental in and conducive to the lowering of the white men's wages.

4. We believe that Mongolians absorb, to a great extent, the revenues of this province.

5. We believe that the presence of Mongolians in this province is a great factor in keeping white men of all classes from settling in this province, and we believe it is also the cause of many white men leaving the province.

6. That whereas the Mongolian standard of living is far inferior to that of the white man, we believe that the white man can never assimilate with or compete with the Mongolians.

7. That whereas the habits and general character of Mongolians make them detestable to all white men throughout this province, we believe that the presence

of Chinese and Japanese immigrants in this province constitutes a grave menace to the public peace.

8. We believe that unless rapid action is taken with a view to expelling them from this province the white man will leave this province in possession of Chinese and Japanese immigrants.

Letter produced and read from Mr. McInnes re petition received and filed.

Meeting adjourned - no other business transacted.

EDWARD L. TERRY,

Secretary, M.P.U.

APPENDIX 6

Proposed Agreement entered into between the
Western Fuel Company and Nanaimo Miners' Union
No.177, Western Federation of Miners.

1 The company agrees to employ miners and mine labourers only who are already members of the Miners' Union No. 177, W.F.M., or who within a reasonable period become members of the same.

2 The company agrees to dismiss no employee who is a member of the union without a reasonable cause.

3 The union agrees that under no consideration will they stop work by strike without exhausting all other means of conciliation available. Neither to demand an advance of prices, or change of other recognized conditions, by striking, without first giving a notice of thirty days to the company.

And the company agree to give thirty days' notice before demanding a reduction of prices, or change of other recognized existing conditions.

4 The union agree that they will not interfere with the company in employing or discharging men without some reasonable cause.

5 The union shall comprise all men employed in and around the mines excepting officials only.

6 The company agree that in all deficient work, made

deficient by following causes, low coal, bodies of rock, or dirt, whether measurable or not, or for any other such cause, to pay not less than three dollars per day per man, so long as such deficiency exists.

7 The company agree to pay for stringers in the pillar and solid work alike.

8 The company agree to allow pay for the removal of timbers, placing of timbers, or removal of rock in the breaking away of new places. Such pay to be agreed upon by the pit boss and the men affected, and if unable to agree, then the management and the executive committee of the union.

9 The company agree to allow some consideration of pay for dirt in contract places, and where the digger is by such cause hindered making what he otherwise could make, or an average wage under average conditions.

Handed to Mr. Russell by the committee at meeting,
Friday, 27th February, 1903

APPENDIX 7

It is hereby mutually agreed by and between the 'Wellington Colliery Company, Limited,' (hereinafter referred to as the 'Company'), and (hereinafter referred to as the 'miner'), in consideration of the promise and agreement by the other of them herein contained, as follows:

1 The miner agrees to work continuously and exclusively for the company as a coal miner in their coal mines at or near Extension, for the period of years from the day of the date hereof, in a workmanlike and proper manner and in accordance with the usual practice in the mine, for the remuneration and upon the terms of this agreement. (Provided that the company shall not be bound to find work for the said miner in case of fire, explosion or trouble in the said mine, or lack of market.)

2 The wages or remuneration to be paid by the company to the miner for said work shall be seventy-five cents for each and twenty-five hundredweight of coal mines and loaded in miners' boxes by the miner in the said mines. Provided that in all deficient places the price to be paid by the company to the miner for yardage shall be such as shall be agreed upon by the company's manager, the overman, and the miner, and provided also that the price to be paid by the company to the miner for narrow work, and for taking out pillar coal shall be such as shall be agreed upon between

the said manager, overman and miner.

The said wages or remuneration to be paid monthly.

3 The miner shall employ in his said work at least one helper, and in case of taking out pillar coal, such further number of helpers as will enable him to take the same out as speedily as possible.

The company shall supply to the miner if and for so long as he performs the agreement on his part herein contained, one ton of coal per month for his own domestic consumption at the price of two dollars per ton at the bunker.

APPENDIX 8

Excerpts from the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Report on Industrial Disputes in 1903

Duties of Employers and Employees in regard to strikes.

As strikes are intended to cause loss and inconvenience to the employer in order to force him to yield in whole or in part to the demands of the strikers, and as they always cause loss and privation to the strikers themselves; and as they are almost invariably followed by loss and damage to many others in the community where they occur; as they are in some cases accompanied by sympathetic strikes and are frequently accompanied by reprehensible and illegal practices, such as boycotting, blacklisting, picketing and intimidation, and sometimes by assaults, riots and loss of life and property; it is the plain duty of the employer and employed and of the state, to exhaust all possible means to secure their prevention.

Rights of Employers and Employees in regard to Strikes.

With respect to the rights of employers and workmen in relation to strikes and lock-outs, we think much would be

gained if these could be clearly set forth in a code.

It is generally recognized that the workmen are justified in combining together to secure increased wages or shorter hours, or other legitimate changes in the conditions of their employment, and failing assent by their employer, in quitting simultaneously, or, as it is called, going out on strike. And this even though it may occasion the employer great loss and damage, unless some valid contract is thereby violated; or unless the strike is such as to amount to malicious injury to property; or is liable to cause loss of life; or is in furtherance of a conspiracy to injure or restrain trade, some of which acts involve only civil, others both civil and criminal liability.

On the other hand, we think that public opinion, as well as that of those prominent in labour circles, emphatically condemns the sympathetic strike, the boycott, intimidation, the blacklist, and picketing as it is commonly practices.

Rights of Union and Non-Union Men.

It is one of the fundamental rights of a free people that every man shall choose for himself whether he shall belong or not to a union, and that whether he belongs or not he may work without being insulted, molested, intimidated or oppressed by any person or union whatever. It is also

clearly one of the fundamental rights of every employer that he may employ any man he chooses, subject, of course, to any laws that may be regulating the particular business. Tried by this test, the sympathetic strike, which is declared on account of the employment of non-union labour to take the places of other strikers, is irrational and wrong. The original strikers may have the legal or moral right to strike on account of some disagreement with their employer, but they have no right by force to make him keep their places open until they see fit to return, or to beset, boycott or intimidate men who may see fit to work on the terms which they reject. Then, if they have no such right a fortiori, other union employees who may be working for the same or a different employer, have no right to interfere or to strike because of the employment of such substitute labour.

Sympathetic Strikes.

Similarly, other kinds of sympathetic strikes ought to be rigidly repressed, as they are opposed to public opinion, and to the great mass of opinion among the labouring classes themselves, as well as to natural justice and reason. For instance, take the case of a strike by a body of coal miners solely for the purpose of preventing coal being supplied to a railway company which has had a disagreement with some of its employees. Upon what principle can this be justified? Why should the employer of the coal miners be

to break his contract with the railway company? Why should he be subjected to great loss and damage because of a disagreement between others to which he is not a party, and which arises through no fault of his own, and why should the innocent public and neutral industries be subjected to embarrassment and loss?

The Strike for Recognition.

Whether the strike for recognition should be allowed or prohibited is not so easy to determine. It is true that in theory a body of men should have the right to say that they will deal collectively and not individually with an employer; and if all that was meant by a strike for recognition was that they would merely refrain from work until the employer saw fit to accede to the demand, such a strike could not be regarded as inherently wrong; but the fact is that strikes solely for recognition are frequently accompanied by coercion by illegal practices of both employers and any non-union men who may be disposed to take up the work which the strikers have left.

There is, however, one way for unions to get recognition which is obviously the surest and the best way. It is by showing employers by experience that it is to their advantage to deal with unions as such, and that the unions will regard the interests of the employers as well as their own, remembering that the financial burdens and risks of the

business fall upon the employers. And here, it may be remarked, lies the essential difference between the legitimate trade unionist and the revolutionary socialist: the former realizes that he has a common interest with the employer in the successful conduct of the business; the latter postulates an irreconcilable hostility and is ever compassing the embarrassment or ruin of the employer, all the while ignoring the fact that capital and labour are the two blades of the shears which, to work well, must be joined together by the bolt of mutual confidence, but, if wrenched apart, are both helpless and useless.

International Organizations.

It is thus plain that a Canadian, when he joins such a union, surrenders a considerable portion of his freedom in matters of contract to a small body of men in a foreign country, and is, to that extent at all events, subject to their dictation. However, so far as we have been able to gather, the control exercised by these foreign officials has, generally speaking, not been inimical to the interests of the Canadian members either as workmen or as British subjects.

The chief objection to the system of international unions is the liability of Canadian workmen to interferences by the officials in matters of contract and settlement of

differences with their employers. If, however, parliament were to declare that notwithstanding anything contained in the constitutions or in the rules of the international bodies, any agreement arrived at by the employer with his employees in settlement of disputes shall be valid and binding, we think the most formidable object to these bodies would be removed.

The Western Federation of Miners, the United Brotherhood of Railway Employees and the American Labour Union.

It is obviously against the public interest that any body of Canadian workmen should be subject to be called out on strike by a foreign authority over whom neither our legislatures nor courts can exercise any control, and that whether they have any grievances against their employers or not. Whether the wheels of Canadian industry shall run or shall rust ought not to depend upon the decrees of a secret council at Denver. With regard to these organizations we think they ought to be specially declared to be illegal, as their leaders have shown that they care nothing about the obligation of contracts or about the interests of their employers, against whom they are ever fomenting discontent; that they ignore the constitutions and rules of their own organizations whenever it suits them to do so; that they at all times preach the doctrine of confiscation of property

without compensation, and that society is divided into two classes, the toilers and the spoilers; that they justify the use of the boycott and the sympathetic strike; that they do not disapprove of violence and intimidation; that they are wholly indifferent to the loss and damage which they inflict upon the public; and that they recklessly allow suffering and privation to befall the families of their misguided followers, with regard to whom they are constantly guilty of deception and concealment.

The Incorporation of Unions.

We think, then, that legitimate trade unionism ought to be encouraged and protected, and that organizations of the class just dealt with ought to be prohibited and declared illegal, and that there ought to be strict enforcement of the law relating to the administration of voluntary oaths. We would, therefore, suggest that provision be made for the incorporation of trade unions with a model constitution; that among other things it should be provided that no strike should be declared without at least 30 days' notice to the employer except in cases where the employer is attempting to change the conditions of employment to the disadvantage of the employe without giving similar notice; that there should be at least a two-thirds majority of those present in its favour at a meeting called specially to consider the

question; that the matter should be decided by ballot; that no strike be declared which shall be in violation of any contract not already violated by the employer; that all strikes, lock-outs and disagreements with the employer shall be settled without the interference of any person residing outside of the Dominion unless by mutual consent.

The Union Label and the 'Unfair' and 'Scab' List.

Further, we see no reason why incorporated unions should not be given the right to use the union label on the products of their manufacture. And here is an illustration of the difference between methods which are right in principle and those which are wrong in principle. There is no reason why a union should not be allowed to advertise its products by means of the label, and in this way bespeak the patronage of the public. On the other hand, the publication of the 'unfair' and 'scab' list is wrong in principle. Why should any person or union be allowed to publish or placard any other person or body of men as 'unfair' or as 'scabs'? Such action tends manifestly to a breach of the peace and argues a contemptuous indifference to, and a high-handed attack upon the rights of others. There is no reason why the unions cannot confine themselves to the publication of 'fair' instead of 'unfair' or 'scab' lists- a 'white' list, and not a 'black' list.

The Boycott, Intimidation and Picketing.

We have already alluded to the boycott, intimidation and picketing. The two former are condemned by the best type of labour leaders, and indeed by all right thinking people.

With regard to picketing, some evidence was given to show that this was done in the case of the railway strike, accompanied by acts of intimidation, and there is no doubt that a number of assaults on both strikers and 'scabs' took place, resulting in one case in the death of a striker, which are directly attributable to the existence of the strike. All of which demonstrates, if it needed demonstration, that a strike is a very serious disturbance of the social peace and prosperity, and is to be prevented by all means possible.

Preventive Measures by Parties.

With regard to preventive measures by the parties themselves, obviously the simplest and best way is for the contending parties to settle their differences by compromise and mutual concession, either with or without the mediation of others, both keeping in mind the fact that there may be good reason for the other's stand, and that they both owe a duty to the community which protects and sustains them, not to inflict any more damage and inconvenience upon it than

is absolutely necessary. It is also too often forgotten by employees that they have families to support, and that they have no right to plunge the community into a state of strife which a strike invariably causes unless they are forced to do so by the most compelling necessity; and by employers, especially those who are in control of exclusive franchises and natural monopolies, that they do not own their franchise or property in any absolute sense, but that they enjoy their beneficial control by the sanction and approval of the society in which they live, and that they are therefore under a special obligation to society to see to it that their management does not, by arbitrary and unreasonable conduct, become a public nuisance.

Preventive Measures by the State.

As to the best method of minimizing the danger of strikes and lock-outs by legislation, we think the most effective means will be found in compelling publicity at the earliest stage of the trouble.

Greater Publicity.

No strike or lock-out should be allowed except upon giving at least 30 days' notice, (some of the unions prescribe 3 months), where the other party is not attempting to change the terms or conditions of the employment, and the intending strikers or employers should be compelled to file a sworn

statement, fully and accurately setting forth the reasons for the intended strike or lock-out in the office of the Registrar of the Supreme Court of the province, and of the Minister of Labour at Ottawa, at least 3 weeks before the day fixed for the strike or lock-out. The statement should also be served upon the opposite party, who should be required to file a sworn answer thereto within 10 days of its receipt. On the other hand, where the other party attempts to change the terms and conditions of the employment, provision could be made requiring statements to be filed either before or after the strike or lock-out takes place, according to the nature of the case. In this way the press and the public will at once become authoritatively informed by both sides of their position at the outset of the trouble, and public opinion will at once begin to act upon the parties, and no doubt in many cases, before the day fixed for the strike or lock-out arrives, better counsels will prevail. It would also afford an opportunity for settlement by means of conciliation or arbitration before the parties came to arm's length. Similarly if an employer were to order a lock-out solely on the ground that the men had joined a union not prohibited by law, we think public opinion would soon make it unmistakably appear that such a lock-out would not be justifiable.

Boards of Conciliation.

There is no doubt that the establishment of boards of conciliation will go far in the direction of avoiding strikes and lock-outs. The weight of opinion in Great Britain and in the United States, both among employers and employed, seems to be that conciliation ought to be the method invariably resorted to in the settlement of industrial disputes, and that a general scheme of compulsory arbitration would be productive of more harm than good, the chief grounds of objection being that it is a very serious interference with the freedom of contract, that it is generally a compromise which is not satisfactory to either party, being arrived at in the last result by an umpire who may not fully appreciate the position of one or other of the parties, and that it is seldom loyally accepted and lived up to by both parties.

Compulsory Arbitration.

The weight of opinion as expressed before the Commission was against compulsory arbitration, and while we do not think that a law applying this method of settling disputes to industries generally would meet with general approval, there are special cases in which it would seem to be the necessary final resort.

It does not need any argument to show that public

service undertakings, such as railways, telegraphs, telephones, steamships, the supplying of power, water and light, and particular industries, such as coal mining, must be carried on without interruption if the whole industrial business of the community is not to be seriously damaged or ruined.

Labour Leaders.

The testimony shows that it is of the utmost consequence to the workmen themselves that they exercise extreme caution in their decision to join any given organizations. There can be no doubt that the designs and aims of the organizations, which we have suggested should be declared illegal, were to a large extent concealed from the men by their leaders. Workmen ought not, in their own interests, to leave themselves open to the charge that they are, as some employers claim 'slaves of the union,' and yet the evidence shows that it would not be a wholly incorrect description of the position of those who were engaged in the strikes in question. If workmen are not careful in the selection of their leaders, if they do not choose straightforward and fair-minded men as the officers of their organizations, the case for recognition is hopeless.

Interferency of Foreign Officials.

As will be seen by the evidence already detailed, the question of how far there should be legislation directed against foreign interference with Canadian workmen comes up squarely for consideration.

The evidence presents two classes of interference: one, that of procuring and inciting to quit work by the foreign agitator in person; and the other, the case of officials of international or other organizations who remain in the foreign country, but who procure and incite by means of other officials within Canada, and who assume the control and direction of Canadian workmen until the termination of the dispute.

As has already been said, it should not be tolerated that Canadian industries should be subject to the dictation of foreigners who know no law, so far as such industries are concerned, but their own desires, and whose business and avowed object it is to keep up unceasing friction between the employer and employed, and who are not trade unionists, but socialistic agitators of the most bigoted and ignorant type. We therefore think that it is necessary for Parliament to interfere in the direction of making it an offence, punishable, in minor cases, on summary conviction before a country judge or police or stipendiary magistrate, by fine or imprisonment, and in graver cases, on conviction by imprisonment only, for any person not a British subject, and

who has not been residing in the province for at least one year, to procure or incite any employee or employees in Canada to quit the employment without the consent of the employer; or for any person within Canada to exhibit or publish, or in any way communicate to any employee or employees the contents of any order, request, suggestion or recommendation, (or any document purporting to be a copy thereof), by any person or persons ordinarily resident without Canada, that he or they quite the employment as aforesaid, whether such order, request, suggestion or recommendation, or copy thereof is signed, or purports to be signed by such person or persons on his or their own behalf, or on behalf of any other person, or of any association of persons, whether incorporated or not.

The testimony before us showed practical unanimity on the part of the intelligent and strong minded members of the labouring classes that foreign agitators and their methods were not wanted, in fact, as one of them put it, they regarded it as an insult that such proposals should be made to them by any outsiders.

Violation of Contracts.

The testimony shows that it is necessary to penalize the wanton violation of contracts as well as the sympathetic strike. The older unions for the most part show a commendable

appreciation of their obligations in this regard, but some of the recently organized bodies have shown little or no such appreciation, which is probably due to the fact that while they felt a new sense of power there was no sense of responsibility. We would, therefore, suggest that the courts be clothed with power to disincorporate any incorporated union and to declare illegal any unincorporated organization which is shown to have violated any contract without colour of right, or to have gone out on sympathetic strike. This, of course, would not authorize the court to give such a judgment where any reasonable justification is given in defence of the conduct impugned.

Blacklisting.

It was alleged by counsel for the United Brotherhood that the Canadian Pacific Company was privy to a blacklisting scheme, in common with other railway companies in North America, and some evidence was given to show that certificates of service, called 'clearances', did not always fairly state the cause of dismissal. Time did not admit of full investigation into this matter, and the charges respecting blacklisting to other railway companies of the names of employees who had been engaged in a strike, was vigorously repudiated by the officers of the company.

Hours of Labour.

During the sittings of the Commission a strike took place among the operators in the saw-mills and planing mills in Vancouver and New Westminster, which we were asked by them to investigate, but we were unable to do so. The demand was for a shortening of hours from 10 hours to 9, with Saturday afternoons off and without reduction of pay, and a memorandum was handed in to show that the produce is sold on the average at about three times its cost. As the employers have not filed any statement, we cannot pretend to pass on the merits of this dispute, but we think that much good would result by legislation moving in the direction of the shortening of hours. In these days, when the human energies are strained to their utmost amid whirling dust and machiners, long hours are a crime against man. The machine should be the servant of man, and not man the slave of the machine. One of the most legitimate modes in which a legislature can aid in improving the condition of the workmen is by the shortening of hours. Of course this ought to be done gradually, and after carefully taking into account the conditions of the particular industry in other countries so as not to transfer it elsewhere, or drive it out of our own country. If it could be brought to pass that the workman would have to work only long enough so as to make his work a pleasurable exercise, instead of an exhausting toil,

and at the same time secure a comfortable living, society will have advanced a long way towards the millenium.

At the same time we feel quite free to admit that, while much good can be accomplished by wise legislation, the labour problem, so-called, is incapable of final solution, and that it will be with us as long as human nature remains what it is, and present civilization endures.

Dated at Victoria,

this eighth day of July, 1903,

(Sgd.) Gordon Hunter,

Elliott S. Rowe.

Commissioners.