

## A Profusion of Issues

# Immigrant Labour, the World War, and the Cominco Strike of 1917

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## ***A PROFUSION OF ISSUES:***

***Immigrant Labour, the World War, and the  
Cominco Strike of 1917***<sup>1</sup>

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"In the heart of the Rocky Mountains," a reporter for *Saturday Night* wrote in 1926, "nestles the little town of Trail, the workingman's paradise." Pointing out that newspapers had been lauding the famous Henry Ford quote — "all that the workingman wants is justice" — the writer offered first class Canadiana instead. "Why quote Ford? Why not quote S.G. Blaylock, head of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada?" After all, the magazine continued, since Blaylock headed the largest smelter in the Empire, his "practical demonstration of the wisdom of a square deal to the workingman" certainly could apply for all union/management affairs in the Dominion. "For the benefit of its workers," the author recounted in amazement, the Company operated a general store and a dairy "at a very small profit," even though no one was "obligated to trade at these stores." Throughout the town, in fact, "on the streets . . . or in the places of amusement where the men gather, no talk of strikes, no words of discontent or disloyalty to the Company is heard." Jobs for unemployed? Some were available, but not many, for "this paradise, however, like the heavenly one, is hard to enter, vacancies being caused only by promotion or death. Could we not

<sup>1</sup>The author is deeply appreciative to Eric Christensen for his research and organizational assistance. Much of this paper would have been impossible without his help. The interpretation, of course, is the sole responsibility of the author. Grants from the Department of State, Multicultural Programme, and the British Columbia Professions for Tomorrow, aided the research of this project.

have a few more men," the writer concluded, "like S.G. Blaylock helping to turn each industrial centre into a workingman's paradise?"<sup>2</sup>

Despite such overwhelming praise, Trail, British Columbia was not always a "workingman's paradise," for labour-management problems had existed almost from the beginnings of the town in the late 19th century. But the joint mining and railroad ventures of the 1890s had changed the West Kootenays from an isolated wilderness into one of the biggest boom regions of the era. Discoveries around Kootenay Lake and at Rossland proved interesting enough for rumours, then ore, to flow back to the large smelting and copper works of Butte, Montana by 1895. And there, always curious about new mining areas, was F. Augustus Heinze, millionaire miner who was not yet thirty years old. Literally "king of the richest hill on earth," Heinze decided to invade the Kootenays that year, agreeing to treat 75,000 tons of ore from Red Mountain. Since Butte was too far for effective reduction, he decided to build a smelter at the confluence of Trail Creek and the Columbia River. Despite bad weather and poor transportation, the plant was constructed in four months and operational by February, 1896. Four furnaces were in operation by August. Now bigger profits attracted his interests. Railroads, financed by lucrative government grants, were necessary for such a vast, undeveloped, and isolated region. So Heinze the miner became Heinze the railroad builder. First he constructed a line twelve miles up the hill to the mines at Rossland. He "manifested remarkable enterprise," the *Rossland Miner* proclaimed. Significantly, the two journalists that staffed the *Miner* were Heinze employees. Success — and the promise of governmental grants — followed. For British Columbia gave him the right-of-way from the Kootenay mines to Penticton in 1897, after six months of skillful lobbying in Victoria.<sup>3</sup>

But the next year Heinze had troubles back in Butte. Law suits and other expenses proved too expensive for him to continue his

<sup>2</sup>*Saturday Night*, 10 April 1926.

<sup>3</sup>H.F. Angus (ed.), *British Columbia and the United States: The North Pacific Slope from Fur Trade to Aviation*, (New York 1970 ed.), pp. 247-257; J. Lorne McDougall, *Canadian Pacific: A Brief History*, (Montreal 1968), pp. 77-81; *Rossland Miner*, 23 September 1897; K. Ross Toole, "When Big Money Came to Butte: The Migration of Eastern Capital to Montana," in *The Montana Past: An Anthology*, ed. by Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, (Missoula 1969), pp. 181-192. For more information on Heinze, see Sarah McNelis, *Copper King at War: The Biography of F. Augustus Heinze*, (Missoula 1968).

quest for free government money in British Columbia. Seeking interested purchasers, he found the Canadian Pacific Railway anxious to acquire his right-of-way; but he realized that a smelter isolated and trapped by the geography of transportation had little chance of success in the rugged interior. Speculator to the end, he offered the C.P.R. a package — all his holdings or none at all. He proved right in second guessing the railway. In March, 1898, the C.P.R. bought the right-of-way, the smelter, and his Canadian inventory: the price, \$805,980.16.<sup>4</sup>

Now the C.P.R. owned a smelter, more by accident than by design. But the company also needed traffic for its far-flung empire, and refined ore, particularly if smelted by the company, provided an excellent cargo. Numerous key decisions occurred during the next twenty years. The C.P.R. transferred management personnel from other successful operations; in 1902 the first of these men, Walter Aldridge, adopted the new Betts process for reducing lead with electrical rather than coal-fire furnaces. Immediately successful, the change stimulated other and equally spectacular expansions. In 1905, Aldridge rectified a common smelter problem (that of assured supplies of ore), purchasing options in the surrounding mines. Later that same year the C.P.R., at Aldridge's suggestion, merged the mines and the smelter into the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company. Capitalized at \$5.5 million, the new company was controlled by the C.P.R., a relationship which tremendously stabilized the firm, as well as providing direct access to the circles of power in Eastern Canada.<sup>5</sup> Profits reflected these aggressive activities. Between 1906 and 1946, aided, of course, by two World Wars, zinc production grew from 10,000 short tons to 165,000; silver, from 10,000 short tons to 150,000; lead, from 10,000 short tons to 240,000. By 1925 the smelter was the largest in the British Empire.<sup>6</sup>

Yet another decision was necessary for the rapid progress of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company — the creation by 1920 of a dependable and subservient work force. Passive employees, however, had not always been the rule of the Kootenays, for before 1900 most of the miners had been Americans and British. Like American capital, U.S. workers had immigrated to the region; one

<sup>4</sup>Profit to Heinze was profit. The sixteen cents represented four pounds of rosin at four cents per pound. McDougall, *Canadian Pacific*, pp. 143-144.

<sup>5</sup>The official title of the company was the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada, Limited. Cominco, the telegraph cable address since 1906, officially became the name in 1966.

<sup>6</sup>"Zinc Production," *Cominco Magazine*, (September 1947), pp. 6-8.

Canadian customs official, in fact, noted that "the Kootenay country is peopled altogether by American prospectors and its development is in the hands of American capitalists."<sup>7</sup> Hardly surprising, many hardrock miners that remained were also American. After all, the border had not stopped the advance of prospectors and profits, why should it stop labourers? The *Rossland Miner* in 1900 noted that eighty-five percent of the trade was across the border to the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

Although British miners needed little encouragement to flee depression-torn Great Britain during the 1890s, they nevertheless were targets for several recruiting campaigns over the next ten years. Numerous organizations such as the Salvation Army directly exported workers for the new world, while the Canadian Government recruited full time throughout the British Isles. Primarily interested in agrarian settlers for the prairies, the Government also encouraged industrial workers to immigrate. The C.P.R. as well enticed newcomers, claiming, for example, that in the Kootenays "there was great demand for labour — skilled and unskilled at high wages."<sup>9</sup> Rudyard Kipling best expressed the imperial motivations behind these actions when he exhorted Canadians to "bring out your own people, so that there will be no room for the Oriental, and do not bring out the lower European Nationalities who have no respect for the law, and no conception of your ideals, but bring out the Englishman."<sup>10</sup>

But pragmatic mine operators of the Kootenays disagreed with Social Darwinist Kipling, for American and British miners not only brought their "democratic" traditions but also their trade unionism. Soon after hardrock mining began, the American Western Federation of Miners had organized the first local at Rossland in 1895; just four years later, District Number Six of the W.F.M. was formed, composed of one Alberta and thirteen Kootenay locals. Union ambitions included the creation of an official newspaper, the establishment of libraries and lectures, and the enforcement of the eight-hour day Act. When the W.F.M. unsuccessfully struck in Rossland in 1901, British

<sup>7</sup>Earl Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope*, (New York 1965), pp. 255-259.

<sup>8</sup>*Rossland Miner*, 10 November 1894; 16 September 1896; 10 October 1900: Isabel M.L. Bescoby, "Some Social Aspects of the American Mining Advance in Cariboo and Kootenay," M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1935, pp. 32-40.

<sup>9</sup>Canadian Pacific Railway, *The Resources and Climate of the Kootenay, Boundary, and Okanagan Districts of British Columbia*, (Calgary 1905), pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>*The Week*, 1 October 1907, as cited in Martin Robin, *The Rush for the Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933*, (Toronto 1972), p.45.

gentlemen caustically referred to American miners as the "War Eagle savages."<sup>11</sup> Nor had the British miners, veterans of an advanced industrial society, come without their past. "Fifty years ago," publisher George Parkin wrote in 1895, "the British immigrant was almost always welcomed aboard, for he was usually the son of the soil, accustomed to the simple life, hard work and long hours. But the British immigrant [of the 1890s] . . . fresh from the atmosphere of trade unions, strikes, and social agitations is looked at rather askance in Canada."<sup>12</sup>

Thus distrusting both American and British workers, most Kootenay managers had begun a systematic conversion of their work force by 1900. "In all the lower grades of labour, especially in smelter labour, it is necessary to have a mixture of races which includes a number of illiterates who are first class workmen," Edmund S. Kirby, manager of Rossland's War Eagle Mine, contended. "They are the strength of an employer and the weakness of the Union. How to head off a strike of muckers or labourers for higher wages without the aid of Italian labour I do not know."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the entrance of the C.P.R. into the mining industry of the Kootenays had signalled a significant shift to Italian labour. And why not? The railway had profited greatly from the exploitation of these ethnic immigrants during the western construction era. Sometimes the C.P.R. had recruited workers directly from Italy — Peter Lauriente, a retired Cominco employee, recalled that his father came "directly to Nelson from Naples in 1896 to work the road."<sup>14</sup> Soon the son followed his father into the C.P.R. work force, choosing instead the smelter at Trail. Other Italians joined the railway in Montreal, port of entry for most immigrants. Since the road headquartered there, many newcomers began work immediately: Antonio Cardasco, "King of the Italian Workers," boasted that he could place or displace 10,000 workers per day. Since he was special assistant to the C.P.R., few Italians cared to dispute his claim. The railway readily employed these immigrants, exploiting their newness to the country, their lack

<sup>11</sup>Edmund Kirby to George Gooderham, 6 February 1900, *Laurier Papers*, Public Archives of Canada, as cited in Robin, *Company Province*, p. 25.

<sup>12</sup>George R. Parkin, *The Great Dominion*, (London 1895), p. 142, as cited in Robin, *Company Province*, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup>Edmund S. Kirby to T.C. Blackstock, 31 January 1901, *Laurier Papers*, Public Archives of Canada, as cited in Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930*, (Kingston 1968), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup>Peter Lauriente, (retired Cominco Employee) Interview with Eric Christensen, 4 April 1976, *Kootenay Collection*, Notre Dame University Archives.

of language skills, and their genuine desire to work. Many worked their way west on section gangs. Some finally settled at Trail. There, full time, stable employment was available which meant they could then save money to send for their families in Italy. A growing immigrant community in the gulch below the smelter quickly developed beside the expanding company on the hill. By 1910, approximately sixty percent of the mill workers and forty percent of Trail citizens were of Italian origins — ninety-five percent lived in the gulch. "The gulch was beautiful," Gino Tognotti, another retired C.M. and S. worker recalled, "not only was it Canada, but it was full of Italians and was home."<sup>15</sup> "Beer, boccie, and Italian cards," his nephew Allan Tognotti noted, "were a two-minute walk."<sup>16</sup>

But despite Blaylock's glib claims in 1926, conditions on the hill hardly reflected a workingman's paradise between 1906 and 1916. Eighty percent of all the work in the plant was done manually; only twenty percent, by machines. Foremen ruled their domains as medieval lords dominated their serfs. Jobs were often bought. "Many men were hired," Lauriente recounted, "after slipping a foreman \$20. To hire one, of course, meant another man was fired." No one was ever sure of continued employment. "Sometimes a foreman could say, 'I don't like your face,' and you are laid off, and there was nothing you could do."<sup>17</sup> Few jobs were far removed from the blistering 160° heat of the lead furnaces. Huge twelve-ton pots had to be tapped by hand and Gino Tognotti recalled numerous workers who literally caught fire while performing these tasks.<sup>18</sup> The zinc plant was hardly better. No equipment, not even gloves, was available from the company. "I had black hands because the acid burned all my skin off," Lauriente ironically laughed. "People around town called me the 'Black Hand' not because I was a criminal like down in New York, but because I worked at Consolidated Mining and Smelting."<sup>19</sup>

Work on the hill was obviously hazardous, while no compensation existed for illness or injury. "If someone got hurt then his friend or the Columbo Lodge took care of him," Lauriente reported, "be-

<sup>15</sup>A. V. Spada, *The Italians in Canada*, (Ottawa 1969), pp. 8-15; Gino Tognotti, (retired Cominco Employee), Interview with Stanley Scott, Dan Grant 10, 16, 26 July 1976, *Kootenay Collection*, Notre Dame University Archives.

<sup>16</sup>Allan Tognotti, (former Cominco Employee) Interview with Stanley Scott, Dan Grant, 3, 10 and 12 August 1976, *Kootenay Collection*, Notre Dame University Archives.

<sup>17</sup>Lauriente Interview.

<sup>18</sup>G. Tognotti Interview.

<sup>19</sup>Lauriente Interview.

cause the company didn't have anything to do with that."<sup>20</sup> Lead poisoning, although undiagnosed and unrecognised by management, began to affect workers as early as 1906. "My father was leaded when the rest of the family arrived," Gino Tognotti noted. "So bad, in fact, that sometimes he couldn't get out of bed."<sup>21</sup> No first aid existed on the hill; if someone broke an arm or a leg, both common injuries, "then a big, strong friend would load him on his back and take him to the hospital," according to Lauriente. Naturally the healthy friend lost wages, if not his job, for the trip to the hospital was on company time.<sup>22</sup> In three months, for example, January to March, 1916, the *Trail News* reported three deaths at the plant; one man, aged "about twenty-three," was electrocuted in his second month on the hill.<sup>23</sup>

Nor did plant discharge of wastes enhance life in the "little town of Trail... in the heart of the Rocky Mountains." Air pollution, primarily sulfuric smoke, was so bad that trees died on the mountain-side, residents in the gulch had to cover their gardens with burlap sacks, and children miles away choked and cried. Toxins in the zinc plant forced workers to learn quickly that survival was enhanced by covering their mouths with cotton pads, furnished, of course, at their own expense. "Zinc plant workers," Lauriente laughed, "were always known — the smell alone marked them from others when we would leave the shift and go into town."<sup>24</sup> Downwind from the smokestacks, the ethnic communities at the foot of the hill suffered dreadfully while management, safely guarded by town and mill security, retired each evening to Tadanac, a village constructed by immigrant labour but by 1916 forbidden to them. It was, of course, upwind from the smoke and pollution, overlooking the Columbia River.<sup>25</sup>

Wages and time-on-the-job, too were less than satisfactory, for they had not been able to keep pace with spiralling inflation and profits. Everyone worked 365 days each year; "Christmas, even weddings and funerals," Gino Tognotti pointed out, "were just like any other day."<sup>26</sup> And Lauriente added that "we didn't dare get sick,

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>G. Tognotti Interview.

<sup>22</sup>Lauriente Interview.

<sup>23</sup>*Trail News*, 24 March 1916.

<sup>24</sup>Lauriente Interview.

<sup>25</sup>G. Tognotti Interview. Tadanac was Canada spelled backwards, plus a T for Trail.

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



because someone else would take our jobs. The work was there and had to be done by me or someone else." Actual hours varied, even though British Columbia had adopted the eight-hour day in 1899 for the metal mining industry. "Each day when we came to work," claimed Lauriente, "we didn't know whether we would work eight, ten, eleven, or even twelve hours." Financially it didn't matter, since overtime was unknown. "The wages were the same, since we were paid by the day, not the hour."<sup>27</sup> Rates, in fact, had remained virtually the same throughout the period, rising from \$2.50 in 1907 to \$2.75 per day in 1911 regardless of hours per day, and staying at that level for the next five years.<sup>28</sup> Yet inflation had skyrocketed during the ten years. The annual increase averaged twelve percent; between 1914 and 1916, the price index jumped over thirty-five percent.<sup>29</sup> During the same two years, the price of metals, buoyed, of course, by the demands of the First World War, also rose astronomically. Zinc, for example, climbed from 5.30 cents per pound, to 14.35 cents per pound, an unbelievable windfall of almost 300 percent.<sup>30</sup>

So by 1916 impossible working conditions, poor wages, and the obvious discrepancies in town living conditions forced even the most docile employees to question management practices; to many, a union was becoming more and more attractive. Until then Italian workers had avoided making a union commitment; fear, apathy, and ignorance played a significant role in their attitudes. Since over 600 of the 1,000 employees were Italian, their reluctance had blocked any plant organization. New to British Columbia and Canada, they sought only fulltime work, which, of course, offered the financial security that they had sought by immigration. From the viewpoint of destitute immigrants, "management treated the Italians good, just like one big happy family at the plant. Made no difference if you were Italian or Austrian or anything else, just as long as you worked hard." The disastrous Rossland Miners' strike of 1901 and the ensuing dismissals and blacklistings were legendary at the big smelter in Trail; nor did the notorious C. M. and S. Foremen encourage unionization. "I never went to union meetings," Lauriente confessed, "because my foreman had told his Italians that 'unions are the worst thing possible. They bring strikes, then we would have to close the smelter and then

<sup>27</sup>Lauriente Interview.

<sup>28</sup>"Average Daily Wage Rates Paid for Common Labour at Trail Operations of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada, Limited, 1898-1930," *Cominco Files*, Trail, British Columbia.

<sup>29</sup>*Canada Yearbook*, 1918, p. 470.

<sup>30</sup>*Trail News*, 14 January 1916.

there would be no jobs for anybody.' " During the war, tensions increased. "Since Italy was on our side," Lauriente recalled, "Blaylock and the foremen told us to talk English, do our work, keep quiet, and don't make any trouble during the war."<sup>31</sup>

So for ten years, the organization of the plant had slowly progressed. Union leaders were intimidated, blacklisted, even fired. While the Western Federation of Miners had first appeared in 1905 (the constitution and bylaws were printed in both English and Italian), leaders and organizers suffered severe setbacks in the region at Rossland in 1901 and later during the Saint Eugene Arbitration of 1907. Settled under the terms of the Industrial Disputes Act of 1907, the arbitration fixed wages to metal prices by establishing three schedules — one for normally favorable conditions, another for abnormally unfavorable situations, and a final schedule for abnormally favorable markets. Since the rates applied throughout District Six of the W. F. M. (British Columbia), the smelter at Trail was affected. The terms were unclear, because the actual application of which condition existed was undefined.<sup>32</sup>

But after Albert "Ginger" Goodwin, a Canadian organizer for the Western Federation of Miners, arrived sometime early in 1915, substantial progress was made. Coupled with the runaway prices and low wages, Goodwin's oratorical skills, organizational capabilities, and dedication attracted new members. Indeed, his abilities were impressive enough for him to secure the Trail Socialist Party nomination during the provincial elections of 1916; the *Trail News*, no friend of the Socialist Party, grudgingly admitted that he was a splendid public speaker.<sup>33</sup> Like tent religion converts, new members of the

<sup>31</sup>Lauriente Interview; G. Tognotti Interview; Lance Whitaker, "All is Not Gold: A History of the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company at Trail, B.C.," Unpublished Manuscript, 1947, *Cominco Files*, Trail, B.C.

<sup>32</sup>*In the Matter of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, 1907, between the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada and Certain Employees, of the said Co., in and around the St. Eugene Mine, Moyie, B.C.*, 21 December 1907, *Cominco Papers*, Provincial Archives of British Columbia; *Nelson Daily News*, 20 December 1907; United Steelworkers of America, *A Time to Remember*, (N.P.: N.P., 1976).

<sup>33</sup>The exact date of Goodwin's arrival is unknown, since all the union records disappeared in the 1917-1938 period. A.L. King, Representative of the United Steelworkers of America, to Eric Christensen, 19 February 1976; Lauriente Interview. In the City of Trail Goodwin received 214 votes, the Conservative candidate 237, and the Liberal candidate, 319. *Trail News*, 4, 18 August, 8, 15 September 1916. Socialist successes in the Kootenays had fluctuated wildly — in 1903 Slocan returned William Davidson on the Inde-

budding W.F.M. minority were exhorted to bring friends to meetings, to spend extra hours talking to colleagues, to get as many "pledge signers" as possible. By early winter, 1916, the hard work paid off when the majority of the workers agreed to join Local No. 105 of the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, the old W.F.M. with a new name.<sup>34</sup> Helping celebrate the victory, Charles Moyer, the International President and long-time leader of western movements, addressed the newly expanded District Six annual convention in March, 1916.<sup>35</sup>

Yet the men had accepted the union to improve conditions at the mill, not to attend festive meetings; hence negotiations for a new contract began almost immediately. Although high prices suited the most favorable expectations of the St. Eugene arbitration, wages reflected no corresponding increase. In May, the men tabled demands for an increase of fifty cents daily, expressing little concern with other matters such as conditions of employment. When the company countered with an offer of twenty-five cents, the union members displayed their new solidarity by rejecting the offer by a vote of 500 to 12, seeking instead an arbitrator from the Department of Labour in Ottawa. After J. D. McNiven, Dominion Fair Wage Officer, arrived in June, discussions moved forward. In less than two weeks, he encouraged both sides to moderate their positions and compromise for "the interests of peace and harmony."<sup>36</sup>

Then on 29 June, the men in a referendum ballot accepted the negotiated proposals by a large majority. The agreement specified a sliding scale above the basic offer of twenty-five cents, with additional increases based on the Montreal price of lead and copper. Since the Canadian Munitions Board had guaranteed prices for three months, between 1 July and 30 September 1916, there would be an immediate raise of fifteen cents for three months, or a daily bonus of forty cents. If copper (twenty-five cents per pound) and lead (eight cents per pound) dropped at the end of that time, the wages would adjust downward. The men would get a ten cent bonus if lead fell

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pendent Labour ticket. He was also a member of the W.F.M. But Rossland, on the other hand, only gave William Le Feaux, the Socialist candidate, twelve votes in 1916. Robin, *Company Province*, pp. 90, 158. See also A. R. McCormack, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia," *B.C. Studies*, XXI (Spring 1974), 3-28.

<sup>34</sup>Again, the exact dates of certification are unknown. Lauriente Interview; G. Tognotti Interview.

<sup>35</sup>*Trail News*, 10 March 1916.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 5 May 1916; 30 June 1916.

below eight cents but remained above seven cents, and if copper remained above twenty-two cents; if prices fell to six cents and eighteen cents, respectively, then the employees would receive a five cent bonus. Management, however, retained an important escape clause, since they could revise the wage scale if and when the metals dropped below six cents and eighteen cents. These reservations failed to dampen the smeltermen's spirits, for the new union had extracted the first increases since 1911, and unless prices dropped unexpectedly, the company had agreed to pay a minimum wage of \$3.00 per day for all employees. The men had thus attached future interpretations of the St. Eugene arbitration to an external process — the Montreal price of metals.<sup>37</sup>

The increase of almost fifteen percent, however, hardly dented the inflationary rate of almost forty-seven percent since the previous raise in 1911; even so, the additional wages quickly meant still less for the workers since the inflationary index for 1916 was an unbelievable thirty percent. By March, 1917, rumours reached management that the men were "complaining about exorbitant prices being charged them for necessities by the merchants." Apparently the company had decided to aid the men, for James J. Warren, Managing Director of C. M. and S., noted that "in order to control the situation, it may be necessary to put in some stores so that our employees may get the reasonable necessities of life at fair wages."<sup>38</sup>

Warren was pragmatically reacting to a pending crisis. Earlier that month the District Six officers of the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers had met in Nelson and agreed to seek a mandate for new demands of fifty cents per day and the check-off system of union dues. The alternative was clear for the union leaders — successful negotiations or strike.<sup>39</sup> Uneasiness and tension marked the atmosphere for the rest of the month, as the company moved to head off any possible confrontation. Attempting to deal with the men instead of the union, Warren issued an open letter to all daily workers on 31 March. Acknowledging that wages were fixed by union negotiations, he noted that the men were earning the maximum wage "pro-

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 30 June 1916.

<sup>38</sup>James J. Warren, Managing Director of Consolidated Mining and Smelting to A.M. Johnston, Deputy Attorney General of British Columbia, 10 March 1917, *Cominco Papers*, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

<sup>39</sup>*Nelson Daily News*, 11 March 1917; Warren to T.W. Crothers, Minister of Labour for the Dominion of Canada, 20 April 1917; Warren to Glenn Marshall, Secretary of the Rossland Miners' Union No. 38, Western Federation of Miners, 14 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

vided by the contracts." But "after a careful investigation," he realized that the war had caused "an unusual increase in the cost of necessities:" the company, therefore, had decided after 31 March 1917, to pay an additional special war bonus of twenty-five cents per day. Warren also promised a full investigation into the high prices, concluding that the company would "take adequate measures to protect you [the workers], and in particular to prevent this war bonus being absorbed by middlemen."<sup>40</sup> Discussions with the union did occur, regarding the creation of a company owned store and boarding and bunk houses. Obviously the C. M. and S. intended to become the middleman.

Warren failed to impress the union leaders. On 20 March they rejected the company store, lecturing him instead. "In different sections of the country where Company Stores are established, we find that they become a monopoly, to the great disadvantage of the employees . . . we would hesitate to endorse the establishment of any institution which might eventually become detrimental to our welfare." Company boarding and bunk houses were not needed, since most of the men were married. Significantly, the unionists did not even mention the money offer.<sup>41</sup>

Quickly the union position became known. Rejecting the open letter increase — in fact, showing disdain by not mentioning the offer of less than ten percent — the District Six officers on 5 April 1917, tabled their own proposals. Simple and to the point, they sought a "voluntary system of checking off Union dues, and an increase of wages of fifty cents per day for all men being paid by the day." For both points the men were willing to strike if necessary.<sup>42</sup> Placing much faith in McNiven, the Dominion official, they sent for him immediately.<sup>43</sup> First the union maintained that their International organization at Denver had not ratified the 1916 agreement,<sup>44</sup> and secondly, obvious confusion arose over which letter was, in fact, the agreement. The only remaining record of the 1916 pact appeared in the *Trail News*, which had noted that the company had issued "a full

<sup>40</sup>*Trail News*, 16 March 1917.

<sup>41</sup>Marshall to Warren, 20 March 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>42</sup>Albert Goodwin, President, T. B. Roberts, Vice-President, G. C. Marshall, Secretary-Treasurer, District Association No. Six of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, to Warren, 5 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*; Warren to Marshall, 14 April 1917.

<sup>43</sup>J. D. McNiven, Dominion Fair Wage Officer, to Warren, 5 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>44</sup>Warren to Crothers, 20 April 1917.

statement of the new scale, addressed to Mr. McNiven, each employee being given a copy" on 28 June 1916. No duration of the agreement, nor the maximum wage scale was mentioned; from this letter the men voted their acceptance on 29 June.<sup>45</sup> But the company, on 16 July, made significant changes in a letter to the Rossland Local, setting the length of the contract.<sup>46</sup> The only revision clause in the 1916 agreement had allowed the company to lower wages; unstated but obviously a negotiating point in 1917 was the paternalistic offer by the company. Unions, even in 1917, did not often accept unilateral management decisions — certainly the twenty-five cent raise could only have been construed as an opening company offer. By assuring a source of income, the check-off system for dues would strengthen the union, providing much needed revenues from the men but collected by the company. Finally the District officers firmly maintained their central position in the negotiations by speaking collectively for the locals at Kimberley, Ainsworth, Moyie, Greenwood, Trail, and Rossland.<sup>47</sup>

Displaying many of the stereotyped images that management often held toward labour during the early twentieth century, the officials of C. M. and S. had grown impatient with their newly formed union. Blaylock, in an internal memo to Warren, wrote that "there appears to be a general tendency for labour to give less value for the money they are receiving . . . the more money the ordinary labouring man gets the more he worries about his rights." Efficiency, not conditions of employment, was the answer, for Blaylock believed that there was "at least 25% of 'killed time,' lost output, or any other name you wish to call it . . . the loss of work is not, by any means, all due to the lack of energy on the part of the foremen. Many of the foremen have complained bitterly of it being impossible to get the proper work out of the men." Blaylock certainly rejected the collective bargaining process, stating that "each settlement only puts us further away from getting what we want, that is, cheaper production."<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup>The letter, directed to the men, was reprinted in the *Trail News*, 30 June 1916.

<sup>46</sup>Warren to Marshall, 14 April 1917.

<sup>47</sup>Goodwin, Roberts, Marshall to Warren, 5 April 1917.

<sup>48</sup>S.G. Blaylock, Assistant General Manager, Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company to Warren, 26 March 1917, *Cominco Papers*. "A simple principle has been carried out in many industries — notably the Ford Motor Car Company — in which case, the profits have continued to grow in spite of the fact that the men are earning nearly double the wages they were earning before the profit-sharing scheme started."

Naturally Warren concurred with Blaylock. Responding to a query from McNiven, the Fair Wage Officer, he complained that "labour seems to have completely lost its head. It is very doubtful if conciliation . . . will do any good, but of course we must do the best we can no matter how unfair or unreasonable the other party's attitude may be."<sup>49</sup> Then in correspondences with T. W. Crothers, the Dominion Minister of Labour, he clearly indicated his position. Ostensibly while discussing the coal strike of the Crow's Nest District (which, of course, furnished coke for the smelter), he reflected his attitudes about his own workers. If the coal miners rejected their present offer, and he cynically predicted that they would, then the only alternative was "a firm Government policy under which production would be assured through the operators being ordered to operate the mines with such men as are willing to work, adequate military protection being provided." Bad precedents, Warren admonished, had occurred, since there had been such "consistent weakness displayed [by government] in dealing with the men that they appear to have come to the conclusion that there is no strength left to which they need pay attention."<sup>50</sup> Three days later, he again wrote Crothers, this time detailing the Trail situation. "I do not think," he lamented, that "the District Officers have treated us fairly." The men were led by these officers, who were more radical than the rank and file. "I do not think that the locals would have made any such [demand] if left to themselves." Naturally the unpatriotic Western Federation of Miners was trying to exploit the wartime demand for metals and "get a complete hold on the labour situation in the southern interior of British Columbia. The check-off would give them this hold in three months. Once obtained it would be next to impossible for us to get back to where we are now." Union advances, Warren cautioned, "must be checked, or the country will go to the dogs."<sup>51</sup>

For a month, Warren attempted to negotiate directly with the union locals rather than the central group, but to no avail. Informing the District officials that he had agreements with the individual groups, he told the leaders, "until we hear that these unions would not live up to [the contracts], we assume that the contracts are in existence."<sup>52</sup> He also held a significantly different view of the 1916

<sup>49</sup>McNiven to Warren, 5 April 1917; Warren to McNiven, 9 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>50</sup>Warren, Night Letter to Minister of Labour (Crothers), 17 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>51</sup>Warren to Crothers, 20 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>52</sup>Warren to McNiven, 9 April 1917.

agreement. Dated 13 July 1916 (two weeks after the vote of acceptance by the men of 29 June), a General Manager's letter to the Rossland Miners Union No. 38 had specified that the arrangement "shall date from 1 January 1916 and shall continue for a period of three years;" another letter, to the Trail Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers No. 105, obviously had made the terminal date even more ambiguous, since agreement in Trail did "not expire until the end of the war."<sup>53</sup> Again, Warren did not impress the leaders of the locals, for they referred him to the District officers and firmly noted that "the matter was made very clear as to the attitude of this Union on the proposals presented through J. D. McNiven, the Fair Wages Officer."<sup>54</sup>

Pragmatism, not managerial reservations, however, dominated Warren and Consolidated, Mining and Smelting. Apparently the threat of a strike coupled with high metal prices and huge demands by government allowed him to adopt a compromise position. Lead, to become the pivotal commodity in the negotiations, had risen in less than a year to 11.82 cents per pound, while the combined production of the mill had reached sixty tons daily.<sup>55</sup> Nor had the government intervened as Warren had hoped: instead, McNiven had notified the Minister of Labour that management had refused to "deal with the Union officials." Crothers then suggested that Warren should yield "on this point."<sup>56</sup>

By the end of April, a settlement was near. Warren, anxious to avoid a work stoppage, began to relax his intransigence on the agreement of 1916. He refused, however, to consider the check-off system. Apparently restricting the financial stability of the union was a higher priority than denying wage increases. Warren made a formal offer on 28 April and hard negotiations occurred for the next four days. Aware that he would not move on the check-off system, the District officers finally agreed to take the offer to the men; on 3 May 1917, the smeltermen accepted, but voted in favor only by 262 to 200. The new settlement agreed to build on the earlier company offer of a twenty-five cent per day war bonus; additionally, miners would receive five cents per day for each increase in lead above the Montreal price of eight cents per pound. Hence the immediate increase was forty cents (25¢ for war bonus, plus 15¢ for lead at 11.12¢). No concession was

<sup>53</sup>Warren to Marshall, 14 April 1917; Warren to Crothers, 20 April 1917.

<sup>54</sup>Albert Goodwin, Business Agent, International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, No. 105, to Warren 18 April 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>55</sup>Whitaker, "History of C.M. and S.," p. 206; *Trail News*, 4 May 1917.

<sup>56</sup>Warren to Crothers, 20 April 1917.



granted on the check-off, but the maximum raise, dependent on the price of lead, was the demanded fifty cents per day. Although neither side could claim victory, neither had lost face. Marshall, in the formal acceptance by the Rossland miners, thanked Warren for the "friendly spirit that has characterized the negotiations."<sup>57</sup>

Between May and November, 1917, issues other than financial arrangements occupied the District officials; "the friendly spirit" of May disappeared quickly. During the summer C.M. and S. had opened a company store in Trail, although the unions had long objected to such an establishment. The labour leaders, in fact, had consistently and adamantly rejected all mercantile suggestions by management. By November, the venture was successful enough to expand into other communities, including Rossland and Kimberley. Local merchants, none too pleased, also protested the move.<sup>58</sup>

But other, more ominous events developed at the national level. The personnel needs of the Canadian military continued to drain the supply of available manpower. Although approximately 400,000 troops were in the forces by 1917, the casualties and death rates had taken a staggering toll on the Canadian population of 9,000,000; volunteers could no longer supply the 30,000 new recruits required each month. By summer enlistments had dropped to only 6,000. Rumours, of course, circulated widely; then, on 11 July the Government of Sir Robert Borden introduced a mandatory conscription bill. Much stronger than the National Registration Act of one year earlier, the new proposal was attacked by the opposition Liberals to no avail. On 8 November, the Military Service Act became law. To assure his government's continued success at the polls, Borden also rammed an oppressive Wartime Elections Act through Commons in September, disfranchising Quakers, conscientious objectors, pacifists, and all Canadians who had been born in Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Italy. Then in November 1917, he called an election. Obviously all foreigners, not just Central Power immigrants, were

<sup>57</sup>Despite the increases, the company had moved further ahead than the men. Lead had increased in less than a year over thirty-eight percent; wages, less than thirteen percent. *Trail News*, 4 May 1917; *Rossland Miner*, 4 May 1917; *Nelson Daily News*, 4 May 1917; Marshall to Warren, 11 May 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>58</sup>Warren to James R. Wiseman, Secretary-Treasurer, Kimberley Miners Union, 7 November 1917, *Cominco Papers*; Blaylock to Warren, 26 March 1917; Warren to Johnston, 10 March 1917; Warren to McKinnon, 30 April 1917; Marshall to Warren, 20 March 1917; Warren to Marshall, 28 March 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

suspect. The unions were outraged; not only would their members be conscripted, many of them would no longer have the right to voice their political opinions.<sup>59</sup>

In Trail reaction was rapid. Even the plant mandarins protested, issuing a nullification of the Military Service Act for their employees; but as usual they communicated directly with the workers and not the unions. Nobel Binns, member of the Trail Exemption Board, immediately began an investigation of the letter. His findings: "as far as he was concerned, the act would be carried out fully."<sup>60</sup> Perhaps protesting the Military Service Act, Binns' ruling, and disfranchisement by the Wartime Elections Act, Goodwin hotly protested the whole concept of country and war by informing Blaylock that "if patriotic money is taken out of the mens' envelopes on next payday, the men will refuse to work the following day."<sup>61</sup> Blaylock, normally a man of caution, wasted no time in drafting a response that same day. "I am instructing all the foremen," Blaylock wrote, "that men may not be fired because they will not subscribe to the Patriotic Fund . . . I feel that this is a matter for each individual to decide for himself, which he may do without fear of molestation in his work."<sup>62</sup> His offer was indeed generous for no doubt the patriotic fund had been compulsory.

Again rumours drifted through the plant and the bosses' uneasiness became obvious. Warren, in fact, became frightened enough to wire two different executives of the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union, Board member William Davidson and Vice-President Rankin. "Agitation has begun at Trail," he urgently reported, "to repudiate agreement made last May. Hope you can come up personally and immediately before situation gets out of control. Telegraph answer."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup>Phillips, *No Power Greater*, pp. 66-70; Tim Buck, *Canada and the Russian Revolution*, (Toronto 1970), pp. 22-26.

<sup>60</sup>*Nelson Daily News*, 25 October 1917. Binns was a prominent Liberal Party member from Trail. Lauriente recalled that "in fact, he was a one-man town. He owned a store, was a judge, and was the undertaker. He'd get you one way or the other — dead or alive!" Lauriente Interview.

<sup>61</sup>Goodwin to Blaylock, 30 October 1917, *Cominco Papers*. The men had good reason to be upset, for the Smeltermen's War Fund had gathered \$2,960 for October 1917, *Trail News*, 23 November 1917.

<sup>62</sup>Blaylock to Goodwin, 30 October 1917, *Cominco Papers*.

<sup>63</sup>Warren to William Davidson, International Board Member (New Denver, B.C.), 6 November 1917; Warren to Mr. Rankin, Vice-President, International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Union (Anaconda, Montana), 7 November 1917; Davidson to Warren, 7 November 1917; all in *Cominco Papers*.

Although the present crisis had been partly caused by apparent anger and disillusionment with the Dominion Government, there was another problem, far more company/union-oriented and far more difficult to settle — the establishment of the eight-hour day. The issue had been a matter of periodic union agitation in the province for twenty years; at the annual meeting of the British Columbia Federation of Labour in January 1917, resolutions favouring the eight-hour day, and opposing company towns and conscription were adopted. Union/management problems at Trail obviously typified provincial situations. Significantly, Goodwin had been elected Vice-President; surely he would respond to the wishes of the organization.<sup>64</sup>

By 1917 the District Six officers were adamant in their demands for the eight-hour day; their chief ambition, in fact, was to institute shorter hours throughout the region. Negotiating results varied that fall. In protracted and often bitter sessions, the officers extracted an agreement with the Granby Company in September. Amazingly, they not only secured a bonus of nearly \$2.00 per day per man, but the Company also "voluntarily" agreed that all men who had "been working nine hours a day will now only be required to work eight hours."<sup>65</sup> The officers had thus gained a long-time goal from a long-time foe; now only the District giant, C.M. and S., remained.

On the hill, however, progress was not evident. By 1917 a majority of employees worked eight hours; but for electricians, helpers, pipefitters, machinists, boilermakers, carpenters, plumbers, and general labourers (composing some forty percent of the work force), each day meant at least nine hours, often more. Although local trade unions represented each group, these organizations were small and ineffective in dealing with management. The carpenters, for example, had been locked out in August when they refused to work on Sun-

<sup>64</sup>The socialists had gained control of the B.C. Federation of Labour in January 1917, at the Revelstoke meeting. Phillips, *No Power Greater*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>65</sup>The managers of C.M. and S., as well as the mining industry in general, had long opposed the eight-hour day. As early as 1908, General Manager Aldridge had disapproved such legislation, writing Premier Richard McBride a personal letter against a pending bill, and after its defeat "profusely thanking him for defeating it." A.B. Hodges, manager of the Grandby Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Grand Forks, had sponsored the bill. Richard McBride to W.H. Aldridge, 10 March 1909; Aldridge to McBride, 4 March 1909; A.B. Hodges to McBride, 9 March 1909, all in *McBride Papers*, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, as cited in Robin, *Company Province*, pp. 108-118. *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 September 1917.

days. Six days at nine hours, they reasoned, almost equalled seven days at eight hours.<sup>66</sup>

Flushed with the Granby victory, the District Six Miners offered support to the smaller unions late in September. Solidarity and cooperation came from the newly organized Trail Trades and Labour Council, representing all the unions in town. Goodwin, Business Agent of the Smeltermen, Secretary of District Six Miners, Vice-President of the B.C. Fed, and conspicuous union organizer, became President of the new group.<sup>67</sup> In October, the Council attempted to begin negotiations for the eight-hour day at the smelter; each time Blaylock informed them that the company had an "agreement with the Mill and Smeltermen's Union, and that he could not do business with another association." Thus rebuffed, the Trades and Labour Council called for a referendum regarding the eight-hour day. On Monday, 12 November, 394 men voted and 352 favoured strike action.<sup>68</sup>

Still hoping to avert a walkout, Goodwin again attempted to initiate discussions. On Tuesday, a committee presented their demands, now backed by the strike vote. Blaylock refused once more, stating that the company had an effective and binding agreement. Completely frustrated, the committee then gave notice that the men would strike Thursday, if a favourable answer was not forthcoming by Wednesday afternoon. Blaylock, cautiously silent, did not respond, so 1,200 men struck on Thursday, 15 November 1917.<sup>69</sup> Picketers marched at the main gates, manned by rotating volunteers. Now the workers would experience the ultimate test of unionism — a strike, affecting neither wages nor the majority, was underway.

The Trades and Labour Council quickly established a Press Committee to disburse information to a hostile community. On 20 November, they issued a formal statement systematically spelling out

<sup>66</sup>*British Columbia Federationist*, 1 September 1917; 23 November 1917; *Trail News*, 16, 23 November 1917; G. Tognotti Interview; Lauriente Interview.

<sup>67</sup>Although generally mixed in creditability, Whitaker, "History of C. M. and S.," p. 206, placed the creation of the Trail Trades and Labour Council "in early spring, 1917." But the spring negotiations had clearly been conducted by the District No. Six Miners.

<sup>68</sup>According to the *Trail News*, 16 November 1917, there were approximately 1,200 workers at the plant.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*; G. Tognotti Interview; Lauriente Interview. Company correspondence ended at this time, at least in the Records of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia and began again in January 1918.

their position. "The difference between the men and C.M. and S.," they began, was "over the eight-hour day, a question that has been pending for many months." Rather than grant such a concession, the company was hiding behind a "so-called agreement." Since the 1917 negotiations had never considered conditions of employment, the men believed that "such a thing as an agreement was never entertained;" instead a simple memorandum for wages had been signed. The smeltermen, in fact, had told the "management of the smelter that they [Smeltermen's Union] would take up the question of signing an agreement. . . . This the company would not consider up to the time of the shutdown." Embracing "all the unions that are working at the smelter," the Trades and Labour Council was conducting the strike, not the individual unions. And finally, the committee challenged the company to publish the "so-called agreement," if such a document existed.<sup>70</sup>

Producing equally impressive arguments, the mandarins, led primarily by Blaylock, firmly maintained their stand. Economic reality seemed to favor them. Lead prices, which had buoyed the remarkable concessions in May, had dropped disastrously during the last quarter of 1917. These declines, coupled with earlier overproduction and cutbacks in purchases by the Imperial Munitions Board placed the company in an advantageous position to comfortably wait out the strikers. Besides, cutbacks and lay-offs appeared inevitable. In the meantime, local police, reinforced by additional constables "who had come to Trail for strike duty," began day and night patrol at the smelter.<sup>71</sup>

Publicly, however, the company retained its community-oriented posture. Blaylock pointed out the losses in wages (\$24,000 per day), the regional hardships ("every mining camp in the Kootenays will be affected by the walkout"), and local misconceptions ("the plant is being shut down completely, and now, even if the men were willing to come back to work tomorrow, it would be some weeks before it could be run to its full capacity"). At the same time he paternalistically promised the men that 20,000 people were affected by the strike, some in the United States and others as far away as Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and the Yukon. In any case, manage-

<sup>70</sup>*Trail News*, 23 November 1917; *British Columbia Federationist*, 23 November 1917.

<sup>71</sup>*Trail News*, 16 November 1917; Constable John F. Johnston, Daily Provincial Police Report for November and December 1917, *British Columbia Provincial Police Papers*, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

ment remained firm in their claims: an agreement existed that must be honored.<sup>72</sup>

Other issues soon clouded the eight-hour day issue. Discrimination, always present in Trail, surfaced when Blaylock bitterly complained that some of his shift bosses were "being molested by some of the union pickets — one of them an Austrian."<sup>73</sup> Premier H.C. Brewster vehemently attacked the strikers, stating that "the employees of the Trail smelter, who are mostly foreigners," two days before the strike had "decided they would subscribe nothing to the victory loan fund and a number of members made a bonfire of the literature dealing with the flotation of bonds." Conscription also became an issue when the *Victoria Colonist* reported that "there is reason to believe that there has been considerable agitation of late by a certain element of the workmen antagonistic to conscription."<sup>74</sup> Trail, divided over the strike, united in denials. The workers, the Board of Trade, even Warren (who had been in Victoria at press-time) renounced the coverage, all agreeing that the eight-hour day and not the draft had caused the strike.<sup>75</sup>

But the conscription issues did not disappear. The *Victoria Colonist's* charges, despite their origins in the middle of the Dominion elections of 1917, soon became more than coast paranoia. Goodwin, chief architect of unionization at Trail, had been classified "D" (temporarily unfit), since he had been suffering from tuberculosis for over two years; mysteriously, he received a telegram on 26 November, eleven days after the strike had begun, ordering a "re-examination" before the medical board. The smeltermen immediately protested, but unsuccessfully; by January 1918, Goodwin had been reclassified "A". Obviously union leaders and Labour Party politicians were right, for they had predicted that the Military

<sup>72</sup>*Nelson Daily News*, 23 November 1917; *Trail News*, 16, 23 November 1917.

<sup>73</sup>*Trail News*, 23 November 1917. Lauriente had lively memories about the Austrians in Trail. "Before the war, there were lots of Austrians. When somebody would get married, they would celebrate for three or four days. There was a big celebration just at the time the Germans started to bombard Paris from thirty miles. Well, a policeman heard about the celebration and arrested everyone because he didn't know it was a wedding and didn't care to ask. A whole group of the men were shipped off to the camp. And since there was no welfare, the families either starved, lived off friends, or drifted away. Most left and that was the end of most Austrians in Trail." Lauriente Interview.

<sup>74</sup>*Victoria Colonist*, 15, 16 November 1917.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 17 November 1917; *Trail News*, 17, 30 November 1917.

Services Act would be used to "take men away . . . from active production."<sup>76</sup>

Meanwhile the strike had continued with no settlement in sight. On 15 November the strikers gathered for a union meeting at the town ballpark; over 1,000 men attended, hearing an unexpected speaker — Blaylock, who had requested and received an invitation. At that time he claimed "the company was willing to arbitrate the matter and abide by the decision." The men listened first to Blaylock and then to Goodwin. The next day, Goodwin again spoke, this time at the Starr Theatre; and to avoid confusion, Dick Marshall of the Smeltermen's Union also addressed the large crowd in Italian. The men then rejected the company's arbitration offer and resumed their strike posture. Workers lounged about town, frequented the pool rooms, had the option of reduced tickets at the Starr Theatre. Although some gathered in crowds, they remained orderly, even on the picket lines.<sup>77</sup>

Soon after the strike began, outside efforts of reconciliation had started. McNiven arrived first, on Sunday, 19 November. For the next two weeks he tried to bring the two adversaries together, but was unable to generate any negotiations whatsoever. Both sides remained intransigent — the men demanded eight hours and the company maintained that an agreement existed and the men should first return to work. Next the local Board of Trade expanded its membership to include the Associated Boards of Trade of Southeastern British Columbia. They too met with union and management, held public meetings, found no basis for negotiations. On 29 November another mass meeting was conducted in the ball park, but this time Goodwin consented to a secret ballot to see if the men wanted to capitulate and leave the matter to conciliation. Again the crowd numbered over 1,000. Speakers from the Board of Trade and the union talked, with Marshall once more translating in Italian. The mood was festive, almost as if a carnival were in town. But the men remained resolute, holding out for the flat eight hours. No ballot was taken, nor was one needed.<sup>78</sup> Then a week later, on 6 December, W.H. Armstrong arrived to investigate the strike. Appointed by the Dominion Gov-

<sup>76</sup>*British Columbia Federationist*, 16 November 1917; 14 December 1917; Phillips, *No Power Greater*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>77</sup>*Rosslund Miner*, 17 November 1917; *Trail News*, 16, 23 November 1917; *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 November 1917; *Victoria Colonist*, 17 November 1917.

<sup>78</sup>G. Tognotti Interview; *Trail News*, 23, 30 November 1917; *Rosslund Miner*, 24, 26 November 1917; *British Columbia Federationist*, 30 November 1917.

ernment, he was a one-man commission to resolve the situation. Holding conferences and setting up mass meetings, he covered much ground previously covered by others; unfortunately he also failed to discover a solution. As a last resort, yet another visitor arrived. J.B. Pietro, royal consular agent for Italy at Winnipeg came at the expense of the C.P.R. to settle the situation. Addressing public meetings at the Columbo Lodge and speaking privately with influential Italians, he exhorted his "compatriots to end the strike and continue the war effort." He too failed.<sup>79</sup>

By the middle of December the company had displayed no indication of seeking a settlement; apparently Blaylock and Warren fully intended to beat the strike and hopefully break the union. And the men, with one month of lost wages behind them, were becoming disillusioned. Goodwin, returning from a trip to Vancouver, commented that it would only be a "short time till the matter could and would be adjusted."<sup>80</sup> For the first time the leaders indicated that a solution — or capitulation — might be near. Several factors were apparent. The company's earlier refusal on the check-off system of dues had left the union without strike funds and now, the men's meager savings had dwindled away, just as Christmas was approaching. At each mass meeting, the workers could see that no progress had been made; for the Italians particularly, the sessions had undermined the morale. "By the end of a month," Gino Tognotti reported, "Blaylock had us on the ropes. We were all starving to death." Pietro's visit was also important. "Well, he came here," Tognotti continued, "just to talk to us. Made us all feel good — and bad at the same time." And the Italians knew little, perhaps cared even less, about the politics of the time. "At the meetings," he noted, "there were a lot of people talking about a lot of things. We [the Italians] never said anything. Some guys used to get your nerve, you know, talking all the time — they never want [sic] to quit." Skeptical of unionization, the Italian workers obviously had supported the raises — other conditions were not understood. "Blaylock told us to go back to work and the Government would pass an eight-hour day," Gino bitterly remarked. "But the radical leaders said no! We want it now! We want it now! Only for about fifty workers, we went on strike."<sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup>G. Tognotti Interview; Whitaker, "History of C. M. and S.," p. 208; *Trail News*, 7, 14 December 1917; *British Columbia Federationist*, 21 December 1917.

<sup>80</sup>*Trail News*, 14 December 1917.

<sup>81</sup>G. Tognotti Interview.



The most devastating turn of events, however, came from the International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union. For weeks rumours had circulated that Moyer would visit Trail.<sup>82</sup> It was widely known before the strike that he had requested all miners not to walk out for the duration of the war, but rather seek alternative methods of settling disputes.<sup>83</sup> Mine, Mill Board Member William Davidson from New Denver had attempted to speak several times but "was not given an opportunity to do so," the *Trail News* reported. "He is understood to have decided views on the subject."<sup>84</sup> Then unexpectedly, the International refused to endorse the strike, instead condemning the action. On 6 December, Davidson and another International Board Member, Alfred Bordsen, telegraphed that the Trades and Labour Council had no legal sanction under either the American Federation of Labor or the International to call the strike. Further, they pointed out that the central group had no authority to negotiate working conditions. Finally they held that "the strike call by the Trail Trades and Labour Council was unlawful and, therefore, cannot be recognized or indorsed by our International; and we hereby declare the plant of the Consolidated Company at Trail fair. We would advise all members of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers to return to work."<sup>85</sup>

Discouraged and bitter, the Labour Council had little choice. Certainly the International's decision would split the ranks and without the large miners union continuation would be folly. Blaylock, buoyed now by the men's own union, would redouble his efforts at resistance. So on 20 December at 3:00 p.m., the organizers called another general meeting but this time recommended that the men return to work. Perhaps anticlimactic, they took another vote; this time it was almost unanimous: return to work.<sup>86</sup> The next morning, thirty-six days after the strike began, the *Rosslund Miner* reported that those who had not heard the news "must have been agreeably surprised this morning when they heard the whistles at the big plant summoning the employees to work at 5:30."<sup>87</sup> The same sound, of course, signalled the end of the Cominco Strike of 1917; back to work went the men with no gains whatsoever.

Management, despite their claims of reconciliation, used their

<sup>82</sup>*Rosslund Miner*, 28 November 1917.

<sup>83</sup>*Trail News*, 14 December 1917.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 December 1917.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 21 December 1917; *Rosslund Miner*, 21 December 1917.

<sup>86</sup>*Trail News*, 21 December 1917.

<sup>87</sup>*Rosslund Miner*, 21 December 1917.

victory to its fullest. While they had promised everyone a job upon return, such was not the case. Over 500 men were not called back. Declining prices were part of the reason; the destruction of the union, was, however, the most important rationale. "When the strike was over," Tognotti reminisced, "all those hotheads lost their jobs. And they couldn't get a job in Trail — not in any of B.C. The company, or its friends, owned everything. If you were on the blacklist — and, of course, everyone was — you could never get a job. You'd had it."<sup>88</sup> The leaders left town; Goodwin, for example, fled the draft to hide on Vancouver Island where late in July 1918, he was killed. Significantly, the local newspapers never mentioned his death.<sup>89</sup> Union solidarity quickly vanished; soon the union lost its International Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers majority. Workmen's Co-operative Committees organized instead, "to help management run the plants fairly and safely," according to Blaylock in 1942.<sup>90</sup> Record production, no strikes, and the "working man's paradise" followed. Unfortunately for the men, wages did not rise correspondingly. The base rate remained the same until 1930 and the bonus system fluctuated wildly. Blaylock got his efficiency bonus, as he had proposed in 1917, in 1922. The men got the eight-hour day when it became law.<sup>91</sup>

But the ideal of unionization remained. Despite incredible harassment and intimidation, A. L. King of the United Steelworkers of America helped reorganize the plant in 1938; he recalled that "there was absolutely no documentary or other information concerning [the strike] . . . and there was not one individual . . . among our officers or members at that time that had been involved in that strike some twenty years earlier." Shortly after World War II, four shop stewards, acting as private individuals, distributed an article about Ginger Goodwin at the plant gates and on public property. Although the union vociferously protested, they were subsequently fired.<sup>92</sup> The C. M. and S. Company obviously remembered 1917.

<sup>88</sup>G. Tognotti Interview; *British Columbia Federationist*, 28 December 1917; *Trail News*, 28 December 1917; Whitaker, "History of the C. M. and S.," pp. 210-212.

<sup>89</sup>Lauriente Interview. Goodwin's death provoked the first Canadian General Strike, conducted by the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council for twenty-four hours on 2 August 1918. Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 72-78; William Bennett, *Builders of British Columbia*, (Vancouver 1937), pp. 77-81.

<sup>90</sup>"A Personal Message From S. G. Blaylock, President and Managing Director," *Cominco Magazine* (September 1942), pp. 13-16.

<sup>91</sup>"Cominco Average Daily Wages," Lauriente Interview; "Zinc Production," *Cominco Magazine*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>92</sup>King to Christensen, 19 February 1976.