EVEN students of labor history are today scarcely aware of the existence a quarter of a century before the formation of the United Mine Workers of a miners' union in the anthracite region strong enough to call a general strike, sign a contract with the operators, arbitrate disagreements with the employers, and force a closed shop. Yet all these modern rights of labor unions were possessed by the now forgotten Workingmen’s Benevolent Association.

The W. B. A., as it was universally called, was the creation of one of Pennsylvania’s ablest labor leaders, an Irishman named John Siney. Born in Ireland about 1831, he had come to America in 1862 and settled in St. Clair, near Pottsville. His first years as a miner were troubled ones, even for the always unruly anthracite region. Wartime inflation sent the cost of living soaring, and strikes were frequent as the men sought increases in wages. With no machinery to settle grievances the rough and turbulent miners sometimes attempted to find relief by the assassination of unpopular bosses. Excitement rose so high during the last two years of the Civil War that soldiers were permanently stationed in Pottsville to preserve order, and unrest continued through the first years of peace.

In 1867 Siney first demonstrated his leadership by organizing a grand ball for the relief of the striking miners at the Eagle Colliery, where he was employed.1 Seeing the need for some more permanent form of relief, he then laid plans for an association which would provide sickness and death benefits for the miners and incidentally build up a treasury to support a strike.

The organization of the Workingmen’s Benevolent Association of St. Clair was announced in March, 1868,2 and on April 6

1Siney obituary, Pottsville Evening Chronicle, April 16, 1880.
2Pottsville Miners Journal, March 21, 1868.
seventeen members, John Siney among them, applied to the Schuylkill County Court for a charter. Their petition gave no hint that there was any intention of acting as a labor union; it stated only vaguely that the organization was being formed "in order that the stranger may find the kind attention and fostering care of a brother when needed [sic] assistance, and be encouraged in resolutions of morality and sobriety at all times." The organization, whatever its original purpose, soon became a forthright labor union. On July 1, 1868, a new state law stipulating that eight hours should constitute a day's work went into effect. The miners, who had been paid by the day for ten hours of work, expected to benefit by receiving the same pay for eight hours, but their employers found a ready loophole by changing wages to an hourly basis. This evasion of the statute resulted in general dissatisfaction throughout the coal regions. On Monday, July 6, men at several collieries near Ashland, in the northern part of Schuylkill County, went out on strike, and, according to the customary practice of the time, marched to other mines to persuade the workers there to join them. The strike spread quickly with little opposition from the employers, who were glad to have production suspended temporarily. The Pottsville Miners Journal, leading authority on the coal trade, commented: "The coal operators, as far as we can learn, do not object to a stoppage for a few weeks; without it, it was difficult to maintain even the present ruinous prices of coal."

This eight-hour strike offered an excellent opportunity to expand the Workingmen's Benevolent Association over the entire coal region. Delegates from Schuylkill County moved on into the Lehigh region—Carbon County and the Hazleton district of Luzerne—and up to Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, and Scranton, urging the miners there to join. Although the strikes from Wilkes-Barre northward were brief and unsuccessful, the Scranton Republican reported of a meeting at Hyde Park: "It is understood that arrangements were perfected for forming unions in every mining county in the State." Schuylkill, however, was the only county to complete its organization at this time. The miners

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a Miscellaneous Book 11, Recorder's Office, pp. 616-620. The charter was granted June 11, 1868.
b Miners Journal, July 11, 1868.
c Quoted in Miners Journal, August 8, 1868.
met at Mahanoy City in August to expand the St. Clair association to cover the entire county,\(^6\) and on September 3, 1868, the W. B. A. held its first formal convention at St. Clair, with John Siney presiding, to divide the county into districts.\(^7\)

The strike itself had been settled with little trouble. The suspension of mining had raised the price of coal twenty-five to fifty cents a ton; and the operators in the Schuylkill region, where the strike had been most general, agreed to a ten-per-cent increase in wages, while the men gave up their demands for an eight-hour day.\(^8\) Further increases in the price of coal brought renewed grumbling from the men in October. The operators, however, quickly agreed to a further fifteen-per-cent advance in wages on condition that no more increases be sought for the rest of the year.\(^9\) In December the operators asked a fifteen-per-cent cut, but the men refused to take more than ten.\(^10\) As a result coal mining was virtually suspended in the Schuylkill region during the winter.

These constant fluctuations in the price of coal and in wages had long been a source of dissatisfaction both to the miners and to their employers. The operators themselves desired some form of combination which would restrict the production of coal to the demands of the market and thus stabilize prices. Nevertheless they were not altogether happy when John Siney announced his intention of doing this very thing. These fluctuations, declared the labor leader, "are not known in any other business and it need not be in the coal business after we become united; it is very easy to stop when the market is full, for every ton of coal mined after that deranges the market and creates bad feeling at home and abroad, and to accomplish that end is the main object of the Association."\(^11\)

Before a general suspension in all six anthracite counties could be brought about, all the miners had to be organized, and Siney spent the winter at the task. In March, 1869, the first general council of the W. B. A. met at Hazleton, with four

\(^6\) Miners Journal, August 8, 1868.
\(^7\) Miners Journal, Sept. 12, 1868. The name was officially changed to Workingmen's Benevolent Association of Schuylkill County on April 3, 1869. Miscellaneous Book 12, Recorder's Office, pp. 129-131.
\(^8\) Miners Journal, Aug. 15, 22, 1868.
\(^9\) Miners Journal, October 17, 1868.
\(^10\) Miners Journal, Dec. 12, 1868.
\(^11\) Miners Journal, Dec. 12, 1868.
representatives from Schuylkill, four from Luzerne (then including Lackawanna), three from Carbon, three from Northumberland, two from Columbia, and one from Dauphin. The delegates decided to find out whether the miners desired a general strike, both to raise the price of coal and to win higher wages.

At the second meeting of the council, on April 20, 1869, the members voted in favor of a general suspension of mining on May 10, the first general strike ever called in the anthracite region. The order was well obeyed except in the district around Scranton and Pittston, where the collieries were owned by the three so-called "Scranton companies"—the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad Company; the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company; and the Pennsylvania Coal Company—and the men had in consequence much stronger opposition than did those who worked for individual operators. After some persuasion the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western and the Delaware and Hudson miners joined the strike, but the Pennsylvania Coal Company employees refused to quit their jobs.

After a month of suspension the general council in a meeting at Mahanoy City on June 9 voted in favor of resumption of work after June 16, as soon as the men in each region could reach an agreement with their employers. It also took occasion to reply to criticism of its action in a resolution:

Whereas, the public press of the country in most instances, through which public opinion is formed and expressed, has denounced our association in this its first movement, representing that we have designed to run up prices to an exorbitant height, and in some instances even threatened to appeal to Congress to repeal the tariff of foreign coal, therefore

12 The general council was chartered by the state on March 11, 1870 (P. L. 399), under the more accurate name it adopted at that time of the General Council of the Miners' and Laborers' Benevolent Association of the State of Pennsylvania. The organization, however, was still popularly referred to as the W. B. A.
13 Miners Journal, Mar. 27, 1869.
14 Andrew Roy, A History of the Coal Miners of the United States (Columbus, 1907), p. 75.
Be It Resolved, That we do not, nor have we desired to run the price of coal up too high in the market, but on the contrary, prefer a steady healthy market, which will afford to the operators and dealers fair interest on their investments, and at the same time that we may receive a fair day's wages for a fair day's work.16

One of the demands the W. B. A. had made was for a wage-adjustment formula to prevent the necessity for a renegotiation of wage contracts every month or two, as had been the case in 1868. The Schuylkill men reached an agreement embodying this "sliding scale" on June 16, and the Lehigh men—those around Mauch Chunk and Hazleton—followed on July 1. The operators in the Wyoming region, however, refused to grant a sliding scale, and their employees stayed out two months longer until September 1, when they gave up their demands for an adjustable wage in return for an advance in pay.

It is important to understand the principles of the sliding scale, for it remained the basis of pay in the southern regions for more than thirty years. In the Lehigh region the miners were paid according to the price of coal at Elizabethport, New Jersey—that is, at seaboard and in the New York market. When coal sold at five dollars a ton there, they received their minimum pay, and for every dollar coal advanced above that price they were given an increase of fifteen per cent. In the Schuylkill region, where coal was shipped to Philadelphia rather than to New York, the basis was the price of coal at Port Carbon, the shipping point for that region. In other words, the cost of transportation to market was not included, and wages were not affected by changes in freight rates. The Schuylkill men received their minimum wage when coal brought three dollars a ton at Port Carbon; for every advance of twenty-five cents above that price they gained a five-per-cent increase in wages.17

There were at this time three different classifications of labor at the mines: laborers outside the mine, laborers inside the mines, and miners. The base pay in the Schuylkill region for outside labor under the agreement of 1869 was eleven dollars a week, with inside labor at twelve dollars a week. This was for a week of six days, and men were paid only for days actually worked. Labor

16 Roy, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
17 Roy, op. cit., pp. 77-78.
rates in the Lehigh region appear to have been slightly higher. Miners, working by the day, earned fourteen dollars a week, but the statement is misleading since miners very seldom worked at day rates. Except in unusual situations they worked by contract and might be paid by the linear yard, the cubic yard, or the wagon. The rates were set by the foreman according to the difficulty of mining; a man working a six-foot vein of solid coal, for example, would be paid at a lower rate than a man who was working a thin one-foot vein. Out of his gross earnings were deducted charges for oil for his drill, for blasting powder furnished by the operator, and usually for his laborer's wages. At times he had a "buttie" with whom he worked as partner on the contract, the earnings being divided between them. It was his privilege to work as much or as little as he pleased. For all these reasons it was impossible even for contemporaries to determine the average earnings of a contract miner. A good guess would be that rates were set in the Schuylkill region in 1869 so that an average miner would net about a hundred dollars a month as his base pay. This amount was, of course, only for the months worked—about seven that year.

These agreements resulted in harmonious relations during the rest of 1869. Coal remained above three dollars at Port Carbon most of the year, partly because of the prolonged strike in the Wyoming valley, and the Schuylkill men received an average of twelve per cent above their base pay. In December, however, coal fell to two dollars and seventy-four cents, and the Schuylkill operators, now organized as the Anthracite Board of Trade, proposed that wages in 1870 should slide downward as well as upward, with the minimum basis two dollars and a half—that is, the 1869 base pay might be cut up to ten per cent if the price of coal continued to fall. Since the laborers in that region had been receiving a dollar and a half to two dollars a week less than laborers elsewhere and had demanded an increase for 1870, the W. B. A. was in no position to accept such an offer. At a meeting in Mahanoy City on January 4, 1870, it rejected this proposal and made the counter demand that Schuylkill wages should be the same as those paid in the Lehigh region.

18 Miners Journal, Jan. 13, 1873.
19 Miners Journal, Feb. 4, 1871.
20 Bannan's Coal Trade Statistics, quoted in Roads, op. cit.
21 Miners Journal, Jan. 18, 1871.
Because the winter was a slack season anyhow, no definite action was taken for some time. About a fifth of the collieries in the Schuylkill district continued work on the 1869 basis until April 1, when the Anthracite Board of Trade decided to enforce its demand for a new wage agreement. After the mines had been idle for some months, the rumor spread that several operators with more profitable collieries were planning to break the united front and go back to work by paying the 1869 basis. This action would inevitably have forced the other operators to resume mining by surrendering to the union, if the young and handsome president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad had not decided to take a hand.

The Reading at this time was about to take over the Schuylkill Canal and was thus in control of the only two means of shipping coal out of Schuylkill County. Its thirty-four-year-old president, Franklin B. Gowen, had been an unsuccessful coal operator and an eminent Pottsville lawyer before becoming head of the Reading the previous year. Since most of the Reading’s profits came from hauling anthracite, he had a vital interest in the settlement of the strike, but he was opposed to the W. B. A.’s policy of holding coal at the three-dollar level, for he believed that lower prices would increase consumption and incidentally the Reading’s business. He was therefore willing to throw his influence on the side of the operators in this conflict. When Colonel Henry L. Cake ordered his collieries to go back to work at the old wages, Gowen quietly announced an increase of twenty-five per cent on the anthracite freight rates. This advance served to deprive the colonel of some of the profits of his treachery and also to discourage anyone else from following his example.

Although the other operators roundly denounced Colonel Cake and expelled him from the board, they were getting tired of the strike. One of them, Benjamin B. Thomas, took it upon himself to confer with Siney and to ask Gowen to use his influence to bring about a settlement. Believing the operators were ready to surrender if no compromise was reached, Gowen on July 18 offered his services as mediator. Both sides, weary of the contest, promptly accepted this offer. Meeting first with the Anthra-

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23 Miners Journal, July 4, 7, 1870.  
24 Miners Journal, Feb. 4, 1871.
cite Board of Trade to receive its instructions, he then conferred with the executive committee of the W. B. A. on July 22. With an amazing display of his persuasiveness Gowen sold the miners a beautiful gold brick. He proposed that wages should advance or decline by eight and a quarter instead of five per cent for each twenty-five-cent change in the price of coal, with the minimum basis two dollars a ton. The men who had indignantly rejected the operators' proposal of the preceding December for a maximum ten-per-cent cut now enthusiastically accepted Gowen's suggestion, which would permit a cut of thirty-three per cent. Of course, he must have persuaded them that coal would sell above three dollars the rest of the year, in which case they would have obtained an increase over their 1869 pay, although such an argument is not mentioned in his own version of the meeting.24

Even more amazing than the miners' eagerness to accept the "Gowen compromise" was the attitude of the Anthracite Board of Trade. Declaring that Gowen had departed from his instructions, it rejected the proposal by the resounding vote of thirty-eight to four.25 The W. B. A., however, felt that it had won a victory; John Siney told a meeting of the workers at St. Clair that the president of the Reading Railroad was now with them and all they had to do was to hold out to accomplish their object.26 They had, in fact, won, for B. B. Thomas announced his intention of resuming work whether the rest did or not, and on July 29 the board capitulated.27 On that day the members signed with the W. B. A. the first written contract ever drawn up between miners and operators in America. In addition to the new sliding scale proposed by Gowen this agreement provided for a cut in the base pay of contract miners whose earnings were unusually high, ranging from ten per cent for those with net earnings of a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month to forty per cent for those earning over two hundred dollars a month.28

The Gowen compromise proved a Pyrrhic victory for the miners. Whatever hopes they may have had that coal would

24 See Report of the Committee on the Judiciary, General, of the State of Pennsylvania, in Relation to the Anthracite Coal Difficulties (Harrisburg, 1871), p. 58; hereafter referred to as Judiciary Committee Report.
25 Miners Journal, July 26, 1870.
26 Miners Journal, July 23, 1870.
27 Miners Journal, March 27, 1873.
sell above three dollars and their pay for the last five months
of 1870 be raised higher than it had been in 1869 were soon
dissipated. With the resumption of work the price of coal fell
rapidly, and in the very first month the miners found their pay
envelopes docked eight and a quarter per cent,29 whereas under
the 1869 agreement they would not have been cut at all and
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only five per cent. John Siney addressed a letter to the president
of the board asking that the wage question be reopened, but his
request was summarily dismissed by the outraged operators.30
Coal dropped to two dollars and a half in September and October,
which meant a cut of sixteen and a half per cent, and in the
last two months of the year it fell to two dollars and a quarter,
reducing wages twenty-four and three-quarters per cent.31 With
a not altogether logical resentment the miners, who had been
exultant over winning the support of Gowen, now denounced him
for their plight.32 A St. Clair man who signed himself “A
Miner” declared:

We were positively assured that if coal fell in the
market, when the compromise was made, that tolls
[freight rates] were to correspond with the prices of
coal and wages; but both coal and wages are falling,
while the prices of tolls are going up as rapidly as coal
falls, all of which comes off of the miners and laborers
who produce the coal. This is not what we bargained
for. . . .

Despite this discontent the union made no effort to gain better
terms for 1871. On November 7, 1870, committees of the
W. B. A. and the Anthracite Board of Trade readily came to
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adjusted to one per cent for every increase of three cents in the
price of coal instead of eight and a quarter per cent for every
change of twenty-five cents.34 The agreement of the committees

29 Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
30 Miners Journal, Sept. 9, 1870.
31 Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
32 Ibid.
33 Miners Journal, Oct. 4, 1870.
34 Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
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\(^2\) Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
\(^3\) Miners Journal, Sept. 9, 1870.
\(^4\) Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
\(^5\) Ibid.
\(^6\) Miners Journal, Oct. 4, 1870.
\(^7\) Miners Journal, Jan. 27, 1872.
was left subject to the approval of the organizations they represented. A few days later members of the two committees called on Gowen, showing him their agreement and asking for a reduction in freight rates. Gowen approved and promised a reduction if there was no suspension of mining. To this proposal Siney objected that there would be too much coal produced if the men worked all through the season. Something should be done, he said, to create a scarcity of coal in order that wages might be made certain. Being more interested in certain railroad traffic than in certain wages, Gowen refused to accept this theory, and the point was left undecided.

Unfortunately for the prospects of industrial peace, the three Scranton companies, which were still paying the high wages they had granted in 1869, now decided that the time had come to reduce them. Their employees went out on strike December 1, 1870. A meeting of the general council of the W. B. A., against the wishes of the Schuylkill men, decided to suspend mining in all the regions on January 10, 1871. The Schuylkill operators, apparently in favor of the suspension, agreed to pay on the three-dollar basis—that is, the base pay without the deduction of twenty-four and three-fourths per cent taken off in December—for time worked in January, provided the suspension was carried out.

This action was in effect a mutual cancellation of the Schuylkill agreement made on November 7. The W. B. A., nevertheless, was later subjected to much criticism for not having adhered to its contract. Union leaders defended themselves on the ground that the contract had not been approved by the members, but it appears that the men actually had agreed to it. They had accepted it with considerable reluctance, however—especially the laborers, who were still paid less than those in other regions and had even received a slight cut under the November 7 agreement. Consequently they now demanded a return to the basis of 1869, although the leaders apparently had little hope of getting it.

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35 Judiciary Committee Report, pp. 16, 131.
36 Judiciary Committee Report, p. 86.
37 Judiciary Committee Report, pp. 32, 166, 168. Siney at first admitted that the members had accepted the contract but later claimed that he had been “taken by surprise” when he made this statement.
38 Under the Gowen compromise outside labor had received $9.19 and inside labor $10.02 a week when coal sold at $2.50. Under the November 7 agreement the figures were rounded off to $9 and $10 when coal sold at the same price.
As soon as the general council voted to end the suspension on February 15, a committee of the Schuylkill W. B. A. approached the Anthracite Board of Trade with an offer to work on a minimum basis of two dollars and a half instead of the two dollars which had been understood in the November 7 agreement. The head of the board replied that he was not prepared to treat with the members of the committee but did not explain that Gowen was planning to settle the strike in his own way.

Gowen, although he had been angry at what he considered the W. B. A.'s. repudiation of its contract in the interest of the Scranton miners, seems to have been motivated primarily by the demands made by the W. B. A. for a three-dollar basis on January 25. Since he was still an advocate of the doctrine of cheaper coal and bigger markets, he felt called upon to interfere and keep coal at the level of two dollars and a half. At a secret meeting of the Schuylkill coal trade in Philadelphia on February 2, 1871, he therefore asked for the appointment of delegates to attend with him a conference of all the coal-carrying and producing interests in New York. He also made a veiled threat that if work was resumed on such a basis, only a few operators could show a profit. In other words, if the operators granted the union's demands, correspondingly high tolls would be charged.

The first meeting in New York City was attended by representatives of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company (which between them controlled all transportation out of the Lehigh region), the three Scranton companies, and the Schuylkill operators. Because operators of the other regions were not represented, the meeting adjourned until February 14 so that the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre operators might send delegates. At the second conference a committee was appointed to determine a uniform wage scale for all the regions. Gowen also repeated his announcement that freight rates would be raised unless all the operators in the Schuylkill district went back to work.

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30 Judiciary Committee Report, pp. 92, 93. This meeting appears to have occurred on Feb. 18.
31 Miners Journal, Feb. 18, 1871.
32 Judiciary Committee Report, pp. 52-53.
This increase, which took effect that day, was an advance of one hundred per cent and was obviously intended to be prohibitive. The other anthracite roads followed Gowen's lead, and coal mining was brought to a virtual standstill save in the Northumberland region. Operators there had reached an agreement with their men on February 13, and they were able to continue shipping coal over the Pennsylvania Railroad, which had not participated in Gowen's arrangements. Colonel Cake, the Anthracite Board of Trade exile, tried to continue mining coal, even under the new rates, whereupon Gowen raised them another hundred per cent, making the freight six dollars a ton to Philadelphia on coal that sold at the mines for three dollars.

The wage committee appointed in New York made its report on February 23 at a conference in Philadelphia, at which the major consumers—the iron manufacturers—also were represented. The committee reported regional wage scales roughly comparable to those in the Schuylkill region. The Schuylkill men were offered the terms agreed upon on the previous November 7; the Lehigh region was to keep its minimum basis of five dollars at Elizabethport but to have its base pay cut ten per cent to bring it down to the level of the Schuylkill region; the Scranton companies would present a fixed rate, the equivalent of the Schuylkill scale. The operators in each region were to hold out for these terms and not go back to work until their men accepted them.

The offer was reasonable enough to provide the basis for a settlement. In fact, Gowen declared that Siney had conceded it to be fair and right. Gowen's high-handed action in raising the freight rates, however, had meanwhile stirred up a hornet's nest of angry excitement, even outside the coal regions. Resentment had sounded across the state and reverberated within the walls of the state capitol at Harrisburg. Consternation struck the people of Pennsylvania as they suddenly awoke to the vast privileges they had granted to the railroads. If the railroads could use their rate-making power to settle a strike, they could employ...
the same weapon to crush any business unless the state could control them. Representing aroused public opinion, the Pennsylvania senate on February 24 called on Governor John White Geary for an opinion from the attorney-general as to whether the railroads had the authority they asserted. The old soldier replied: "These things ought not so to be; and it is considered both the right and the duty of the Legislature to apply the proper remedy and arrest the evil." As a result of the governor's message the senate's committee on the judiciary, general, began an investigation to determine whether the railroads had the right to charge prohibitive freight rates.

Unfortunately for the purposes of the investigation the committee did not confine itself to the point of law it was supposed to examine but decided to hear testimony on the whole situation in the anthracite regions. The result was farcical. Gowen, supposedly the defendant, turned himself by means of his brilliant legal talent into prosecuting attorney, and the committee found itself conducting an inquisition of the W. B. A. So skillfully did the railroad man divert the investigation that one newspaper scornfully suggested that the committee's report would probably find "that the ill-used railroads simply acted in self-defence against the outrageous demands of the audacious miners for wages upon which they and their families can live."

In the two hundred pages of testimony taken by the committee almost the only reference to the supposed subject of the investigation was Gowen's statement that the Reading Railroad had the right to establish such rates as it pleased. Gowen and Asa Packer, president of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, declared with straight faces that they had raised their rates in order to increase their revenue and denied that they had made any agreement on the matter. After hearing testimony from the railroads, the operators, the iron manufacturers, and the W. B. A. the committee found itself a trifle confused. It submitted a preliminary report which, according to the indignant Philadelphia Inquirer, "suggests that, if the parties would not quarrel, there would be no

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49 Legislative Journal, 1871, p. 226.
50 Harrisburg State Journal, Mar. 24, 1871.
51 Judiciary Committee Report, p. 13.
52 Ibid., pp. 25, 48.
quarrel to settle!" It did, in fact, ignore the original purpose of the investigation, merely recommending that the strike be settled by arbitration.

The climax of the investigation was an eloquent speech by Gowen, which held the audience spellbound. It was devoted to an attack on the W. B. A.; only incidentally did the speaker refer to the supposed purpose of the committee, when he declared that the railroads might charge whatever rates they chose and that there was nothing the legislature could do about it. Instead of resenting this arrogant attitude the committee was so moved by his eloquence that it included the argument as part of the record and in its final report confessed its inability to act.

Governor Geary, not so easily swayed by oratory, thundered a threat to seize the railroads and ordered his attorney-general to file suit against the Reading Railroad for the surrender of its charter. After these gestures Gowen condescended to meet with Governor Geary and representatives of the W. B. A. on April 5. Both sides were willing to submit to arbitration, but, since neither would compromise on the wages to be paid pending arbitration, the conference was unsuccessful.

The next night striking miners in Scranton gathered together and paraded to several mines, where they attempted to persuade the men at work to quit. While there appears to have been no violence, this action was considered riotous, and Governor Geary felt compelled to restore law and order. He proclaimed that it was unlawful to prevent laborers from working or to hold riotous assemblies. At the same time he said that railroads had no right to charge prohibitory rates and called out the military power of the state against the railroad companies. This eminently impartial proclamation at least had the effect of preventing further demonstrations by the miners, although it accomplished nothing toward getting the railroads to reduce their rates. Finding that the governor was supporting its cause only by word and not by

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"Quoted in Harrisburg State Journal, March 28, 1871.
Judiciary Committee Report, pp. 3-8.
Harrisburg State Journal, Apr. 10, 1871.
Harrisburg State Journal, Apr. 6, 1871.
Miners Journal, Apr. 10, 1871.
deed, the general council of the W. B. A. assembled at Mauch Chunk on April 12 and agreed to meet the operators in that city the following Monday to arbitrate. Judge Elwell of Columbia County was chosen as arbitrator. His report covered everything but the all-important subject of wages; since the W. B. A. had returned to its old demand that the cost of transportation be included in the basis, no agreement had been reached on that point.

The strike was thus left as far from settlement as ever. The miners, however, were weakening in their resolve. The committee of fifteen which represented the operators, the railroads, and the iron manufacturers attempted to sow dissension in their ranks by making an offer direct to the men, although it suavely added: "We wish you distinctly to understand that we do not desire to interfere with your association in any manner whatsoever. . . . We shall at all times be willing to assist you in maintaining your association for the relief of those members who, by accident or sickness, may require your aid." The terms offered were attractively high but were fixed as to rate, without a sliding scale. As an alternative the committee expressed its willingness to submit wages to arbitration. The W. B. A., replying with a counteroffer, also consented to submit to arbitration. The way to settlement was further paved when the general council decided on May 3 to allow each district to make its own agreement. The Wilkes-Barre men had, in fact, already reached a compact through Charles Parrish, president of the Wilkes-Barre Coal and Iron Company, a businessman ahead of his time in his willingness to treat with his employees.

In the Schuylkill region the Anthracite Board of Trade and the W. B. A. agreed on arbitration on May 11. Gowen announced a reduction in freight rates, adding the threat that "they will again be advanced if resumption is not general throughout the whole Region."

Judge Elwell, again called in, split the difference

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61 Harrisburg State Journal, Apr. 13, 1871.
62 Miners Journal, Apr. 20, 1871, Jan. 27, 1872.
63 Miners Journal, Apr. 24, 1871.
64 Miners Journal, Apr. 28, 1871.
65 Harrisburg State Journal, May 5, 1871.
67 Miners Journal, May 12, 1871.
68 Miners Journal, May 16, 1871.
between the offers of both sides. A new basis of two dollars and seventy-five cents was set, with wages about the same as they had been the previous year when coal was at that price, with two dollars and a quarter as the minimum. Fluctuations were to be at the rate of one per cent for every change of three cents in the price of coal.

Practically the only difference between this agreement and the one of November 7, 1870, was in the minimum—two dollars and a quarter as against two dollars. The miners were to win a more important concession during the year, however, without the necessity of resorting to a strike. After mining was resumed in all the regions in May, the price of coal fell rapidly, and wages dropped correspondingly. In September inside laborers received only ten dollars and twenty-three cents a week and outside laborers nine dollars and thirty cents. At these rates men began to drift away, and Colonel Cake, the independent, offered higher pay. The laborers at B. B. Thomas' colliery thereupon also demanded more wages, and Thomas said he would pay his laborers on a minimum of two dollars and seventy-five cents regardless of the price of coal. This offer created a general demand for the same rates elsewhere. The men at two collieries walked out but went back to work at the request of the W. B. A. At a meeting with the Anthracite Board of Trade the W. B. A. leaders were granted their request for the minimum of two dollars and seventy-five cents, and day wages were paid on that basis during the last three months of the year.

Anxious not to stir up the hornets again, Gowen proposed a basis for 1872, which both sides accepted on January 6, 1872, without a hint of controversy. Under this plan the minimum basis was raised to two dollars and a half, except that it should be allowed to slide down to two dollars and a quarter for any two months of the year; day wages were to be the same as they had been in 1871 on the basis of two dollars and seventy-five cents,

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69 Miners Journal, May 18, 1871. The basis pay for outside laborers was $10 a week; for inside laborers, $11; for miners by the day, $13; and for miners on contract, 10 per cent off the 1869 rates.
70 Miners Journal, Nov. 4, 1871.
71 Miners Journal, Sept. 16, 1871.
72 Miners Journal, Sept. 30, 1871.
and thus the laborers were given the increase they had been seeking for two years.74

During 1872 the coal trade suffered its most disastrous season in years. The average price of coal at Port Carbon ran only two dollars and fourteen cents,75 a figure at which many collieries lost money. Nevertheless, the operators made no attempt to escape their agreement. Except for the permitted eight-per-cent cuts in April and May they maintained the basis pay throughout the year. The Anthracite Board of Trade even agreed to the elimination of the two-months clause for 1873, making the minimum two dollars and a half for the entire year.76

Meanwhile several important changes were taking place in the anthracite industry. In 1873 the Miners’ National Association was organized at Cleveland with John Siney as its president. Siney apparently expected to incorporate the W. B. A. in this national organization, but the members, especially in the Schuylkill and Lehigh regions, clung stubbornly to the older association, although they agreed to exchange membership cards with the national union.77 Locals of each union existed side by side in the same region and worked together, but the unity of the anthracite miners was at least partially destroyed.

Another far-reaching change was the organization of the anthracite industry into the first of the great monopolies which were to dominate the United States for many decades. The W. B. A. had been able to attain its power because the operators were badly divided. In 1869 only the mines around Scranton and Pittston were controlled by large corporations, but by 1874 virtually the entire industry had come under the domination of six great corporations: the three Scranton companies, the Central Railroad of New Jersey, the Lehigh Valley Railroad, and the Reading. At the close of the disastrous season in 1872 these six companies under Gowen’s leadership had reached an agreement to limit their tonnage of coal transported to competitive points according to a fixed percentage apportioned to each corporation and in addition to control price and marketing.

74 Miners Journal, Jan. 8, June 18, 1872.
75 Miners Journal, Jan. 17, 1873.
76 Miners Journal, Jan. 20, 1873.
77 Chris Evans, History of United Mine Workers of America, vol. i, p. 70.
The new combination was thoroughly successful in maintaining prices through 1873 despite the panic that occurred in the fall of that year. The business depression all over the country resulted in a general slashing of wages, and the Schuylkill operators proposed a ten-per-cent cut for the miners in 1874.\textsuperscript{78} When the W. B. A. refused to accept this offer, Gowen suggested as a compromise lowering the minimum basis from two dollars and a half to two dollars and a quarter, which would have meant a possible reduction of eight per cent.\textsuperscript{79} Several outlaw strikes broke out in protest against this threatened cut before the 1873 agreement expired on January 17, 1874, but on January 23 the operators agreed to continue the 1873 basis for 1874.\textsuperscript{80}

Notwithstanding the general decline in business in 1874 the combination was able to keep coal prices as high as in the preceding year. Since wages were falling everywhere, however, the operators felt that they were paying more than conditions warranted. A committee of the coal combination met in New York City in December to fix wage rates for 1875, and their proposals were ratified by the operators in the various regions. The Lehigh operators announced a cut of ten per cent for laborers and of fifteen per cent for contract miners.\textsuperscript{81} The Schuylkill operators proposed even more drastic cuts—ten per cent for laborers and twenty per cent for contract miners. Moreover, the minimum basis was to be eliminated, and wages were to be further decreased eight per cent for every twenty-five cents coal dropped below two dollars and a half. Either of these proposals alone might have been acceptable, but the suggested double reduction was so severe that the \textit{Miners Journal}, never very friendly to the workingmen, admitted: "We have no hesitation in saying that these wages are too low for mining."\textsuperscript{82}

The union, by now better known under its correct title of the Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association, presented a united front to the coal magnates. The Schuylkill men agreed to work only for operators who would pay the 1874 basis. This offer was rather meaningless, for no hapless independent would dare

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Miners Journal}, Dec. 24, 1873.  
\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Miners Journal}, Jan. 8, 1874.  
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Miners Journal}, Jan. 24, 1874.  
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Miners Journal}, Jan. 1, 1875.  
\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Miners Journal}, Jan. 4, 1875.
Gowen’s wrath by resuming. On January 11 the Lehigh miners refused the terms offered them, and on February 3 the Wilkes-Barre men unanimously rejected the cut. Only at Scranton, where the workers belonged to the Miners’ National Association, was the reduction accepted, probably on Siney’s prudent advice that the union was not strong enough to fight.

The men fully realized that this was a struggle of life or death for the union. One of the leaders of the Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association told a Philadelphia Times reporter: “This is not a war on the part of the company against the price of coal; it is directly against our organization.” A Mahanoy City correspondent wrote to the Miners Journal: “It is well-known that the coal market can afford to pay last year’s prices, but it seems that the wages question is not the trouble, but the disbanding of the M. & L. B. A.” The Philadelphia Press, on the other side of the fence, expressed its confidence that the operators would not resume work until the union had been destroyed.

The first incident of the strike occurred early Sunday morning, February 14, when fire broke out in the frame of a shaft the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company was sinking north of Pottsville. There was no evidence that the blaze was of incendiary origin, although it may have been the work of some resentful Saturday-night drunk; but Gowen suspected the strikers and promptly offered a ten-thousand-dollar reward for the arrest of the persons responsible. The Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association declared that Gowen’s chief motive had been to stir up sentiment against the miners and expressed its willingness to join in ferreting out the criminals. The union also showed that its spirit had not been weakened by two months of idleness by voting to ask after March 1 for a minimum basis of two dollars and seventy-five cents for contract miners and of three dollars for day laborers, on the grounds that the men were entitled to some reward for their sufferings.

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88 Miners Journal, Jan. 6, 1875.
86 Philadelphia Press, Jan. 12, 1875.
86 Miners Journal, Feb. 6, 1875.
86 Miners Journal, Apr. 3, 1875.
86 Miners Journal, Mar. 30, 1875.
86 Philadelphia Press, Mar. 27, 1875.
86 Miners Journal, Feb. 15, 1875.
86 Miners Journal, Feb. 27, 1875.
86 Philadelphia Press, Feb. 27, 1875.
In the Lehigh region some of the strikers were becoming restive. On the evening of March 9 about a hundred so-called "Molly Maguires," all said to be armed and masked, passed through Ashton, near Summit Hill, warning "blacklegs" to quit work.\(^9\) Three nights later a similar mob was reported in Coaldale.\(^9\) The Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company sent a dozen special policemen to protect its property.\(^9\) A group of miners, however, promptly disarmed the guards.\(^9\) A day later men from Audenried, near Hazleton, set out to stop miners who were working, but they were turned back by their Catholic priest.\(^9\) The next day there was another demonstration in Hazleton.

Isolated incidents occurred also in the Schuylkill field. The telegraph office at Locust Summit was burned, loaded coal cars were dumped several different nights, a train of loaded cars was started down the grade and wrecked, a switch was spiked at Shenandoah, and not a few trains were stoned.\(^9\) Although termed outrages by Gowen, these occurrences seem to have been either accidents or the work of striking railroad employees. Several strange men did threaten to burn the breakers at the Indian Ridge and Plank Ridge collieries, causing Gowen to consult Governor Hartranft, and crudely scrawled notices were posted at the Colket and Newkirk collieries threatening: "Now men i have warented ye before and i willnt warind you no mor—but i will gwrintee yo the will be the report of the revolver."\(^9\)

These demonstrations alarmed the citizens of property. The Miners Journal commented: "Affairs are getting warm in old Schuylkill, and it begins to look very much as if the Governor will have to be called on to order out troops."\(^9\) Influential men among the miners, not so easily excited, insisted that there would be no outbreaks and that the occasional disturbances were due to drunkenness.\(^9\) The Miners' and Laborers' Benevolent Association

\(^9\) N. Y. Tribune, Mar. 11, 1875. New York newspapers were accustomed to believe that all coal miners were Molly Maguires.
\(^9\) N. Y. Tribune, Mar. 14, 1875.
\(^9\) N. Y. Tribune, Mar. 22, 1875.
\(^9\) N. Y. Tribune, Mar. 31, 1875.
\(^9\) Ibid., pp. 102, 110.
\(^9\) Miners Journal, Apr. 1, 1875.
\(^9\) N. Y. Tribune, Apr. 3, 1875.
demonstrated its peaceful attitude by offering a reward for the arrest and conviction of persons posting threatening notices.101

On March 31 striking miners and railroaders demonstrated at Gordon and Ashland, ordered some railroad employees to quit work, and stopped several trains.102 The Schuylkill County sheriff called for law and order, and Governor Hartranft issued a proclamation demanding order in both Schuylkill and Luzerne.103

The Luzerne County sheriff, resting comfortably at Wilkes-Barre, decided that the Hazleton situation had become too much for him, and on April 7 he asked the governor to send troops to keep the peace.104 Five hundred state militia arrived, ending whatever disorder there had been. A New York Herald correspondent on the scene condemned calling out the troops for "an imaginary disturbance,"105 and another reporter in Hazleton declared that the arrival of the militia had been denounced by the citizens of all classes.106 A committee of citizens and miners called on Hartranft and denied that there had been any disturbances. The governor asked the Luzerne sheriff to go to Hazleton to investigate, but the troops stayed on.107

Angered by the refusal of the labor leaders to surrender, the Miners Journal fulminated: "To judge them by their ignorant and insane acts, a better term to apply to them would be incarnate fiends, dressed up in a little brief authority to crush and degrade the working class of this region. For the damage they have already done, and the destruction of property they have already caused, they deserve a place in the penitentiary much more so than those guilty of petty thefts ... they all deserve hanging."108 The New York Tribune found the state of affairs "deplorable" and "lamentable" and the union leaders "ill-regulated and turbulent spirits."109

Some newspapers, however, placed part of the blame on the operators. The Newark Daily Journal said that the operators wanted to reduce wages because the miners had "saved money, which to be sure is an unheard of thing, and an atrocity to be

101 Miners Journal, Apr. 6, 1875.
102 Argument of Franklin B. Gowen, pp. 101, 102.
103 Ibid., p. 102.
104 N. Y. Tribune, Apr. 8, 1875.
105 Harrisburg Patriot, Apr. 10, 1875.
106 Harrisburg Patriot, Apr. 9, 1875.
107 N. Y. Tribune, Apr. 10, 1875.
108 Miners Journal, Mar. 23, 1875.
109 N. Y. Tribune, Apr. 17, 1875.
put down at once. Men with money in their pockets are the most restless of slaves.” The Harrisburg *Patriot* conceded: “The miners’ union, pernicious and arbitrary as are many of its rules, is necessary to defend them against monopoly.”

There was, in fact, enough criticism of the coal monopoly to arouse the legislature to another investigation of Gowen and the Reading Railroad. Taking heart, the general council of the Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association, representing the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions, asked that the wage dispute be submitted to arbitration. When the operators met this offer with stony silence, the union sent delegates to Philadelphia and New York to solicit funds to aid the strikers in holding out. On May 14 the Schuylkill operators consented to meet with the representatives of the organization, and the union leaders presented a proposal that miners should go on a flat rate of fifteen dollars a week with an eight-hour day. The operators’ committee agreed to submit this to their organization, but the union men confessed that their offer had not yet been authorized. When the executive board of the association approved the offer four days later, the operators took no action.

The mine owners could afford to be indifferent for the men were reaching the end of their resistance. Savings from the years of prosperity were gone, storekeepers were cutting off credit, and the union treasury was bankrupted. “Hundreds of families rose in the morning to breakfast on a crust of bread and a glass of water, who did not know where a bite of dinner was to come from. Day after day, men, women and children went to the adjoining woods to dig roots and pick up herbs to keep body and soul together.”

Men at two Schuylkill collieries had already started back to work, but they quit again when several hundred men arrived to persuade them to stop. By June 3 a number of collieries in

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10 Quoted in Harrisburg *Patriot*, Apr. 20, 1875.
11 Harrisburg *Patriot*, Apr. 17, 1875.
12 This investigation dragged on until after the strike had ended, and Gowen came off as triumphantly as he had four years before.
14 Harrisburg *Patriot*, Apr. 30, May 1, 1875.
15 Harrisburg *Patriot*, May 15, 1875.
16 Harrisburg *Patriot*, May 20, 1875.
17 Roy, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-97. Roy was from the soft-coal fields, but he was personally acquainted with some of the W. B. A. leaders.
18 *Argument of Franklin B. Gowen*, p. 106.
the Schuylkill region had resumed mining, and some of the desperate strikers attempted to bring them out again. That morning about five hundred men set out from Hazleton for Mahanoy City, stopping work at half a dozen collieries along the way. About noon another group of strikers, who had gathered in Shenandoah for a picnic the night before, paraded into Mahanoy City after having persuaded the men at three collieries along the way to leave. The afternoon of the same day several hundred of these men went out to another mine, where they were met by a sheriff’s posse. In the excitement a few shots were exchanged, two policemen being slightly wounded. At the sheriff’s request Governor Hartranft ordered the militia to Mahanoy City and Shenandoah. The next day all the collieries which had been closed by the demonstration went back to work.

Still the union refused to surrender. Meeting at Pottsville on June 8, the executive board of the Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association voted against resumption. Two days later, however, a mass meeting near Mount Carmel adopted a resolution agreeing to submit to a reduction of ten per cent in contract pay and five per cent in day wages provided charges for powder and oil were lowered. The union’s executive board gathered in Shenandoah on June 12 to discuss these terms with the operators, but none appeared.

This was the union’s last stand in the Schuylkill region. By Monday, June 21, most of the collieries there had gone back to work, and two days later the troops at Shenandoah and Mahanoy City went home. In the Wilkes-Barre field the Miners’ and Laborers’ Benevolent Association was able to negotiate a peace, but the terms virtually destroyed it. On June 14 union leaders met Charles Parrish, president of the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre Coal Company, and agreed to accept his terms. A final settlement was reached a week later, when Parrish agreed to reinstate the strike leaders, who had been denied their old jobs, with the under-

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139 *N. Y. Tribune*, June 5, 1875.
139 *N. Y. Tribune*, June 9, 1875.
139 *N. Y. Tribune*, June 11, 1875.
139 *N. Y. Tribune*, June 14, 1875.
139 Harrisburg *Patriot*, June 21, 23, 1875.
126 *Miners Journal*, June 16, 1875.
standing that the union was no longer to be recognized on questions of employment and discharge.128 After another week the Lehigh men went back to work. By July 1, 1875, the "long strike" was over.

The Miners' and Laborers' Benevolent Association collapsed along with the strike. Seven months later the president issued a last despairing appeal:

After almost unanimously determining to uphold your organization, pay the debts it had incurred, correct the defects in it which the fight had demonstrated to be defects, and recruit its ranks until it became sufficiently strong to warrant a renewal of your resistance to robbery and wrong, scores of you, from various causes and on various paltry pretexts which need not be detailed here, seemed to have entirely forgotten and gone back on that determination, and all the duties it involved. In consequence, the organization is decimated as it never was before, it is weak and tottery in most places, and in many has gone altogether out of existence. . . . Instead of recruiting the ranks of the Association, there are dozens who seem to have made it their special business, by grumbling, and complaining and lying, to make those who still remained true to their principles, as bad as themselves. The time has now arrived for you to finally decide what is to be done. There are but two courses open to you. You must once more combine in union, or you must prepare to give up every vestige of organization, and to suffer privation and indignities at the hands of your taskmasters such as you have never yet been called upon to suffer.127

The call fell upon deaf ears. The union was already dead. An unknown miner sang its obituary:

Well, we've been beaten, beaten all to smash,
And now, sir, we've begun to feel the lash,
As wielded by a gigantic corporation,
Which runs the commonwealth and ruins the nation.
Our "Union" lamp, friend John, no longer shineth;
It's gone up where the gentle woodbine twineth;

120 Harrisburg Patriot, June 23, 1875.
127 Miners Journal, Feb. 7, 1876.
A great man demonstrated beyond a doubt
The miners would better fare without
Any such thing; trade unions were a curse
Upon God's fair creation, nothing worse.
It died, because the miners did neglect it;
And he declares they shall not resurrect it.
And thus the matter stands.\textsuperscript{128}

And thus the matter was to stand for a quarter of a century
until on a memorable day in 1903, when George F. Baer had suc-
cceeded Franklin B. Gowen and John Mitchell had taken John
Siney's place, the anthracite operators signed their first contract
with the United Mine Workers of America.

\textsuperscript{128} George Korson, \textit{Minstrels of the Mine Patch} (University of Pennsyl-