ORGANIZED labor underwent a revolution during the 1930's. In a single decade it tripled its membership, altered its attitudes toward government, and enhanced its position versus management. John L. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers of America, a man who embodied the spirit of the change, partly generated the revolution when he reactivated his own union in 1933. Lewis' 1933 drive, which swept through the mining camps of Pennsylvania, met with both success and failure. Success came primarily in the commercial mines, where Lewis capitalized on the newly-elected Roosevelt administration's seemingly favorable attitude toward organized labor, the desire of the Pennsylvania coal miners for collective bargaining, the daring and skill of Lewis' organizers, the demoralized conditions of the commercial operators who had watched their profits vanish, and the collective bargaining safeguards of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. Failure came in the "captive" mines, owned by the steel companies, where the revolutionary ingredients of the early New Deal meant little. Although Lewis quickly organized the commercial camps, neither his organizers, nor the eager miners, nor legal protection for collective bargaining, nor intervention by President Roosevelt himself could compel the steel executives to recognize the UMW.¹

¹Richard Kirkendall, "The Great Depression: Another Watershed in American History?" In John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner and Everett Walters (eds.), Change and Continuity in Twentieth-Century America (New York, Evanston and London, 1964), 162-166; Henry Pelling, American Labor (Chicago and London, 1960), 159 and passim. Philip Taft, in Organized Labor in American History (New York, 1964), 432, has written: "It can truly be said that the revival of the United Mine Workers of America was the greatest labor event in the short history of the National Recovery Administration, an event which was to make possible the forthcoming labor revolution in the late 1930's."
Over-expansion of the bituminous industry during and just after World War I had wrecked the miners' union. Excessive demand because of the war had encouraged the opening of thousands of new mines, particularly in the South, where higher quality coal, cheaper labor, and favorable freight rates induced over-expansion. Unfortunately, the long-term demand for coal leveled off after the war. Oil and gas cut into coal markets, and consumers developed more efficient devices for burning it. Mechanization and strip mining reduced the need for labor, but they increased potential output of coal. Until in 1926 the Brookings Institute recorded that the soft coal industry's annual capacity doubled its demand. Two of every three miners had become expendable. When Pennsylvania coal operators slashed prices to compete with the newly opened Southern fields, southerners retaliated with cuts of their own.2

In 1924 Lewis had averred that his union would take “No Backward Step.” At Jacksonville, Florida, that year he had extracted from the operators of the Central Competitive Field (Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and western Pennsylvania) a three-year contract to maintain the $7.50 a day base wage for skilled workers. Although Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover felt that the Jacksonville Agreement was “the most constructive development in the bituminous industry for years,” Lewis and his union were soon sliding backwards.3

Faced with price competition from the South, union operators felt they had to cut prices and wages (which comprised two-thirds of coal’s value). Because the stubborn Lewis refused to re-negotiate the Jacksonville contract, the operators in the union territories set out to destroy the UMW. Pittsburgh Coal Company, a key company for Lewis and the Central Competitive Field, employed 17,000 men and had been union for thirty-five years, shifted management in 1924 when Andrew and Richard Mellon obtained a controlling interest. The new managers closed the plant and then reopened nonunion in 1925. They would pay only a $6.00 base.4 Youghiogheny and Ohio, Rochester and Pittsburgh

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3 Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, 128.
4 *Fortune*, VIII (October 1933), 60-61; David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, *Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Coal Miners’ Unions* (Silver Spring, Maryland, 1939), 171-177.
Coal and Iron, and Bethlehem Steel—among other Pennsylvania firms—followed Pittsburgh's lead. Lewis responded by striking the anti-union firms in Pennsylvania, initiating one of the most vicious labor disputes in modern times. Pittsburgh brought in scabs, and supposedly supplied them with women and liquor. Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Company's Coal and Iron Police offered two strikebreakers $25 each for shooting into the union bunkhouse. One union miner and his ailing wife were evicted from their company housing in the middle of December 1926. In the shack into which they moved, the wife died. Lowell Limpus told New York Daily News readers of the conditions in the 1926-27 strike:

We saw thousands of women and children, literally starving to death. We found hundreds of destitute families living in crudely constructed bare-board shacks. They had been evicted from their homes by the coal companies. We unearthed a system of despotic tyranny reminiscent of Czar-ridden Siberia at its worst. We found police brutality and industrial slavery. We discovered the weirdest flock of injunctions that ever emanated from American temples of justice.

We unearthed evidence of terrorism and counter-terrorism; of mob beatings and near lynchings; of dishonesty, graft, and heartlessness. . . .

Although neither the companies nor the UMW benefited from the strike, Lewis' organization took a savage beating. The

5 Anna Rochester, Labor and Coal (New York, 1931), 205.
7 Ibid., 11-12.
8 Quoted in Bernstein, The Lean Years, 130-131.
9 When Percy Tetlow, one of John L. Lewis' associates, was questioned about the effect of the evictions in Pennsylvania during 1927-28, he replied that the workers went back non-union or starved. Quote in MacAlister Coleman, Man and Coal (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1943), 133. Senator Frank Goodling of Idaho reported to the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee that "conditions which exist [in 1928] in the strike-torn regions of the Pittsburgh district are a blotch upon American civilization. It is inconceivable that such squalor, suffering, misery and distress should be tolerated in the heart of one of the richest industrial centers in the world. The committee found men, women and children living in hovels which are more insanitary than a modern swinepen." Cited in Coleman, Man and Coal, 132.
Central Competitive Field slipped through the mine chief's fingers after Pittsburgh cut wages three times and some firms went to a dollar and a half base. By allowing districts to negotiate their own agreements, Lewis discovered in 1928 that he had left but three areas of strength: Illinois, the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company, and the anthracite mines. In Pennsylvania few companies recognized his union, and no major operator association would sign a contract. The once boastful and ebullient Lewis later grumbled that the steady decline among his workers from 1927 to 1933 was so severe he doubted that he would survive another similar debacle.

Sometime before January 1933, however, for reasons which are not clear, Lewis regained his zest and decided to recoup his losses. Possibly emboldened by the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the mine chief (who had supported Hoover) called his close lieutenants to Washington, D. C., soon after the first of the year. Lewis directed veteran UMW organizers like Van Bittner, James Mark, William Turnblazer, Patrick Fagan, William Mitch, Sam Caddy, Sam Pascoe, and UMW vice-president Philip Murray to launch a new organization drive. Lewis selected April 1, the anniversary of the eight-hour day in mining (a custom noted by its absence in 1933), as the date for the start of the drive.

Lewis had made an apt choice to head the Pennsylvania campaign. Philip Murray, a Scot who had immigrated to this country in 1902 at sixteen, had begun mining in the old country when he was ten. Soon after arriving in the U. S., Murray and his father had found work in the Pittsburgh area. Following a dispute with a company official which led to a strike, young Murray had quickly won a local UMW presidency. Appointed vice-president of the UMW in 1920, Murray had won reelection to that office since. A much warmer man than Lewis, Murray's quiet eloquence and sincerity evoked trust among the coal diggers.

10 *Coal Age*, XXXIX (February 1934), 68; Glen Lawhon Parker, *The Coal Industry: A Study in Social Control* (Washington, 1940), 76.
12 McDonald, *Coal and Unionism*, 195-196; Edward A. Wieck interview with W. A. Patton, vice-president of UMW District 5, April 27, 1934, Edward A. Wieck Papers (Wayne State University, Labor History Archives), Binder 1, Box 14.
Despite some operator resistance, Murray's ability and the spirit of the miners brought encouraging results during the spring and summer of 1933. When Pittsburgh Coal Company officials forced the owners of a hall in Suttersville the UMW had rented to cancel its April first engagement, the location was shifted to Blythesdale. Although Pittsburgh officials stood by to take down the names of men attending, enthusiasm for the UMW brought out nearly two thousand miners. Slowly during the spring the drive gained momentum. In May a crowd of four thousand braved an injunction against meeting to hear Murray speak in Clymer. Following the meeting, nearly seven hundred joined. By the middle of June, Murray addressed a huge crowd in Uniontown to celebrate the early successes in the commercial mines.

Two days prior to Murray's Uniontown speech, Congress gave American unions a tremendous boost by passing the National Industrial Recovery Act, containing the famous Section 7a, which put the force of law behind employees' "right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing." An omnibus measure which created both the Public Works Administration and the National Recovery Administration to revive the economy by allowing industries to draft codes of fair competition, the Act also provided that employees "shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents, in the designation of such representatives or in self-organization or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection." Following this important shift in American law, the UMW campaign in the commercial fields picked up speed. Locals formed on their own. Lewis men plastered the mine tipples with signs. Murray's organizers shouted, "The law is on our side."


E. A. Wieck interview with W. A. Patton.

Johnstown (Pennsylvania) Daily Tribune, May 15, 1933, and John Ghizzoni, international board member UMW District 2, to John L. Lewis, June 12, 1933, both in John Brophy Papers (Catholic University, Washington, D. C.), Box for 1930-1933.


Even non-union citadels like Greensburgh and Connellsville fell to the union.¹⁸

The National Recovery Administration further sparked the union campaign by pressuring industries to draft codes of fair competition. Although the Act did not require employees (much less unions) to participate in the drafting process, Lewis seized the opportunity to offer the NRA a draft of a code. Some northern operators, sensing that a nationally codified industry could help equalize prices and wages with the South, supported Lewis’ code. By June 14, many Pennsylvania coal men found little alternative to recognizing the UMW since District 5 claimed forty thousand members and sought to enter into collective bargaining. By August the UMW had over one hundred and thirty thousand members in Pennsylvania. Moreover, John L. Lewis was participating in NRA code discussions in the nation’s capital.

As an offshoot of the code negotiations, which were completed by mid-September 1933, Lewis’ reorganized UMW won a landmark wage and hour contract from the operators. The Appalachian wage agreement of September 21, 1933, revolutionized labor-management relations in the industry by shifting the coverage from the old Central Competitive Field to a new north-south field running nearly the length of the giant Appalachian chain. For the first time in its history, the UMW had bargained at the same time with both northern and southern operators. The agreement covered three hundred and forty thousand miners, provided for the eight-hour day and the forty-hour week, the election of checkweighman (a crucial figure who checks the weight of cars coming from the mine and thus tries to insure honest payment for the miners) and pit committees, and the check-off for union dues. It also established machinery for settling disputes, abolished child labor in the mines, and set the basic ton at 2,000 pounds. To run from October 2, 1933, to March 31, 1934, the new agreement seemed to many participants to mark the beginning of a new era.¹⁹

Completion of the code and the agreement produced a change of sentiment among Pennsylvania operators and miners. Local 3648 in St. Michael held a “code day” picnic, parade, and football.

²⁸ McDonald, Coal and Unionism, 195.

UMW district leaders worked out local contracts with various operator associations. One operator noted later that the new contracts “stabilized things” on both sides, that it was “much better than the old non-union way.” Although there were “still a few that would like to run open shop,” most commercial operators were willing to deal with the UMW. A western Pennsylvania where; they seem to feel that they are once more free men. coal digger sensed a “different feeling among the miners every-

By December 1933 Lewis had capitalized on these sentiments to re-establish his union in Pennsylvania’s commercial mines. Pennsylvania miners, encouraged by the passage of the NIRA and the organization drive had flocked into the union. By the end of 1933, Murray and his assistants had brought the union’s strength to nearly one hundred and fifty thousand men. Pennsylvania, once again, supplied pivotal strength for the UMW.

The shift in attitude marked by the passage of the NIRA had played a large role in speeding up the UMW campaign. The court historian for the UMW noted that governmental support under 7a was the “key to the tremendous success of the 90-day whirlwind drive.” A distinguished labor economist, Leo Wollman, similarly argued that the passage of 7a provided the “incentive” and the effective “spur to organization.” A miner testified that “the NRA made it possible to organize—before that the company always had guards—from 4 to 25 according to how the men were acting.” John Brophy, one of Lewis’s former opponents within the union reminisced, “Without the intervention of 7a there was not much hope for growth in the union.” Yet each of these comments neglects one fact.

The UMW resurgence was planned and begun before the Roosevelt administration even had a draft for the National In-
dustrial Recovery Act. Unexpected Senate passage of Alabama Senator Hugo Black's bill limiting the work week to thirty hours jarred the administration to come up with a substitute—eventually the National Industrial Recovery Act, which was ready for congressional debate by mid-May, and which passed both houses by June 16. Lewis planned his drive in January and initiated it on April 1, before passage of the Black bill and before consideration of the NIRA.  

The successful rebirth of the UMW in the commercial mines thus must be credited in large part to Lewis' timing, leadership, and co-workers. The hulking yet nimble Lewis fairly could claim that he knew more about coal than any other American. He particularly relished taunting the operators, whom he mocked as "brilliant managers of the industry who like to get a court injunction. I know them all well, and I know their weaknesses, their elements of strength, and I know their commitments and intrigues, and even the banks to which they owe money, and I can talk their language, and they cannot gainsay me." As Lewis awed many operators, so he ran the UMW like a feudal lord. His lieutenants marched to his commands; as Lewis remarked, "I work harder than anyone else in this nation, and I know more about the problems of the miners than anyone else. Therefore, I should think that my decisions would mean more than those of anyone else." Supported by able men like Murray, Lewis risked his treasury on a campaign in the midst of a depression and won. His success in 1933, however, came not only from his bold leadership.

American miners in 1933 were particularly receptive to an organizing drive. Working in isolated areas, living in company towns, trapped for life in the coal industry, miners then as now


28 Emanuel Stein, Carl Raushenbush, Lois MacDonald, Labor and the New Deal (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1934), 17; McDonald, Coal and Unionism, 163.


had a sense of unity. Lewis claimed that "The public does not understand, and I think never will, that almost spiritual fealty that exists between men who go down into the dangers of the mine and work together—that fealty of understanding and brotherhood that exists in our calling to a more pronounced degree than in any other industry." To the miners the union was, in James Wechsler’s words, "the pillar of their hopes. As the union is preserved they are not serfs." A poem of the camps ran:

We will have a good local in heaven,
   Up there where the password is rest,
   Where the business is praising our Father,
   And no scabs ever mar or molest.

The coal diggers’ willingness to join the UMW became intensified as conditions in western Pennsylvania worsened during the Depression. Pinchot wrote Roosevelt that men were “working there six and seven days a week who cannot earn enough to feed their families—working full time and yet on relief.” Miners caught in such a situation were desperate for a way to raise wages. Thus, once the union campaign began, locals formed on their own. Men wrote campaign offices asking for charters. Still, receptivity by the workers does not explain the resurgence completely.

The coal operators themselves were demoralized by the six year slump with no end in sight. Men who might have resisted organization at another time were grasping at straws. Perhaps a union, for example, could help equalize wages north and south. John Brophy recalled: “The fact that the workers organized so quickly was an indication of the general breakdown of the coal operators. They couldn’t marshal sufficient strength to resist this crusade of organization that swept the country.”

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29 James A. Wechsler, *Labor Baron: A Portrait of John L. Lewis* (New York, 1944), 7-9, quotes both Lewis and the poem from the camps.


31 John Brophy recalled, in *A Miner’s Life*, 236, that “within ninety days, the industry was organized. There was no need to campaign; an organizer had only to see that he had a good supply of application blanks and a place to file them, and the rank and file did the rest.” See also Coleman, *Men and Coal*, 30 and Madison, *American Labor Leaders*, 157.

T. Weir, president of National Steel who fought the UMW’s entry into his captive mines, noted that in the fall of 1933, he “was in such a state of mental confusion on the industrial, social, and political outlook” in the country that he could not put his thoughts together for a speech.37

A shift in government attitude, receptive workers, Lewis’ daring leadership, and a demoralized opposition combined to produce the UMW resurgence in the commercial camps. Lewis moved when other labor leaders were sitting on their hands, before the administration drafted any labor legislation. Yet Roosevelt’s election itself had marked a change in spirit—a vague sense that the government would be concerned with disadvantaged groups and “forgotten men.” Passage of 7a on June 16 injected further resolution into the organizational drive. Receptive coal diggers flocked back into old locals and formed new ones. Lewis revitalized his union in the commercial camps of Pennsylvania.

In stark contrast to the success in the commercial mines, the UMW had run into impregnable opposition in the captive fields during the summer. UMW sympathizers had fought pitched battles with company deputies in Fayette and Green Counties during a strike over the question of unionizing the subsidiary mines of United States Steel. Governor Gifford Pinchot had dispatched the National Guard to keep order. Even intervention from General Hugh Johnson, administrator of the National Recovery Administration, had been required to bring peace and a putative agreement among UMW leaders, the Roosevelt administration, and the steel company officers. An August 4 settlement which temporarily ended the strike, guaranteed a checkweighman and required all future disputes to be settled through the National Labor Board which Roosevelt had created to arbitrate this and other labor disputes of the summer.38

The struggle, however, was far from over. The steel firms stood intransigently in their refusal to recognize the UMW. Because the steel companies mined coal for their own use and sold none commercially, the steel men had resisted being drawn into any dealings with the NRA over the coal code. Both the steel

38Johnson, “Drafting the NRA Code of Fair Competition,” 535-541.
officials and Lewis knew that the captives were a potential entry into unionizing the steel plants themselves, which the steel executives would not allow. Their slight concessions to NRA and the UMW during the code drafting period had come on their own terms and only after presidential intervention and a violent strike. Overseeing their immense domain in the rolling hills and sooty mining camps of western Pennsylvania, under which lay some of the best coal in America, the steel bosses planned their defense. U. S. Steel president William A. Irwin spoke for all steel officials when he said: "As long as I live my company will never recognize the United Mine Workers."

In Washington, the administration had tried to keep peace between the two sides. On October 30 Roosevelt had gotten the steel men to allow the newly-created National Labor Board to hold representational elections among the captive miners. A compromise, the agreement did not specify that the companies recognize the UMW, if it won the election, but affirmed that "any officer, national, state, or local of the United Mine Workers of America may be elected." Company spokesmen told the President privately that under the bargain they did not feel bound to sign a union contract—regardless of the outcome. NRA administrator Johnson informed newsmen that "recognition" in the case of the captive miners was "hard to define." To intimates he declared that he feared that the captive operators were "stalling" while they organized company unions.

The H. C. Frick Coke Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel and the unofficial leader of the captives, fostered two company unions. One, the Workmen's Brotherhood, was supported by the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, and in both it and

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29 Danville (Illinois) Commercial News, December 2, 1933, clipping in John Brophy Papers, Box for 1930-33.
32 New York Times, October 14, 1933.
33 Johnson at an October 16, 1933, meeting of the Special Industrial Recovery Board (henceforth SIRB) said that he had "interior information" that the companies were stalling. SIRB "Proceedings," October 16, 1933 (School of Business Library, Columbia University), 6-7.
the Miners’ Independent Brotherhood, the other company union, a super-patriot named George Reynolds played a leading role. Reynolds, who viewed the battle as the “American Way” versus the “Red Menace” and considered Governor Pinchot “as much of a Red as any foreigner in this section,” spent his time writing the Commissioner of Immigration in Washington seeking ways to deport aliens. Since Frick consulted the Brotherhoods’ lists of “good men” when hiring, the company unions blossomed. UMW miners in the company’s employ were given the worst working places in the mines—places they dubbed the “UMW section” or—in honor of one local president—the “Feeney section.”

Correctly wary of their chances of obtaining a fair NLB election, the insurgent UMW forces sent their leaders to petition President Roosevelt for supervision. Governor Pinchot urged the President to give them an audience. Led by Martin Ryan, a firebrand who had rallied the local miners to the union, and scrubbed clean for the occasion, the group consulted with Roosevelt early in November. He told them that the October 30 agreement had been signed by their officers and would be enforced. Afterward, one delegate commented that he thought the NRA was “on the square” and that the October 30 pact would be strictly followed. From both Roosevelt and Johnson, the miners’ delegation won a promise to send National Labor Board representatives to the camps to insure an honest election.

The miners found, however, that promises made in Washington could bind neither the captive owners nor their foremen. The elections were postponed by dilatory company tactics until November 23 and 24, a delay which allowed the company unions to enlist members. When held, the elections proved to be anything but models of the democratic process. Representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union telegraphed Senator Robert F. Wagner, NLB chairman:

THE UNDERSIGNED WHO HAVE FUNCTIONED AS OBSERVERS PROTEST YESTER-

"Gifford Pinchot to Roosevelt, November 1, 1933, Gifford Pinchot Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress), Box 2554.
"Time, XXII (November 13, 1933), 9; Wieck, “The Miners’ Union in the Steel Industry,” 67-68.
DAYS ELECTION AT THE H C FRICK COKE COMPANY STOP A MINE SUPERINTENDENT WAS PERMITTED TO SIT AT THE POLLING PLACE WHERE MINERS VOTED AT COLONIAL MINE NUMBER 4 AT GRINDSTONE PA STOP AT COLONIAL NUMBER 3 ARMED DEPTY SHERIFFS IN PLAIN CLOTHES ALONG WITH ARMED MEMBERS OF THE INDEPENDENT BROTHERHOOD DISPLAYED FIREARMS IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF THE POLLS POINTED GUNS AT WOMEN AND CHILDREN AND ATTACKED A MEMBER OF THE UNITED MINE WORKERS AS HE PASSED THROUGH IN HIS CAR STOP

A miner willing to sell his vote to the company could get as much as ten dollars. The rumor was spread that any mines which the UMW carried would be shut down.48

The results of the two-day poll themselves became a focus for controversy. In total votes the UMW won 10,122 to 4,403. Although the union carried the individual mines at the Inland, Jones & Laughlin, Crucible, Allegheny, and Weirton steel companies, it was victorious in only seven of the sixteen Frick camps. The totals in the Frick mines gave the union a majority of nearly two hundred votes there also, but since the brotherhoods outpolled the UMW in nine strategic camps, the company could argue that its workers had rejected the UMW.49

On the strength of its overall numerical victory in the two days of voting, the union had proposed to begin collective bargaining, but the operators refused, and the National Labor Board stepped in. In hearings on January 4 and 8, 1934, the two sides stated their positions. The UMW claimed that since its international officials had been listed as “representatives” of the miners on the UMW slate, the union had won recognition (at least where it had a larger poll—in seven Frick camps). Speaking for the miners, American Federation of Labor President William Green asked, “If seven or eight hundred men voted for these officers, isn’t it


49 The tallies are in Wieck, “The Miners’ Union in the Steel Industry,” 93.
reasonable to conclude that they had in mind they were voting for the representatives to negotiate an agreement for them as officers of the union?" The Frick officials felt that the "individuals" running had won the right to represent the miners in the individual camps, but that the union had not won recognition. The companies argued that John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, and the other elected officials must actually serve on the local pit grievance committees in the mines where they had won election. The companies characterized the October pact with Roosevelt—in which they had agreed to the election—as a "press release," which was not a correct "statement of the agreement arrived at with the President."

Caught between the two sides, the NLB avoided the central issue of recognition. In its January 19 decision, the board seemingly sanctioned the Frick argument on recognition, but offered the union a preamble to be used at the head of the contracts between the two sides. The preamble listed by name the seven UMW officers who had been elected and stated that the officials had been selected by the employees "to represent" them. But the NLB decision itself affirmed that "whether a contract made and executed in this form does or does not as a matter of law, amount to recognition of the union is not a question before us and which we need not here decide." The UMW won the right to the check-off in the mines where the employees wanted it, but again the contracts would not mention the union by name. The New Republic characterized the decision correctly: "a ridiculous compromise."

Following the election, Frick stepped up the campaign against the UMW. Having beaten the union at Colonial No. 4, the company set December 6 as the date for the miners there to decide whether or not they wanted a checkweighman—a question not unlike asking them whether or not they wanted to be paid fairly. During the November 24 elections, the company's mine manager had challenged the men he judged favorable to the UMW to

82 Ibid., 115-119.
84 "Labor and the NRA," New Republic, LXXVII (January 31, 1934), 335.
present tax receipts before they could vote. Martin Ryan, who at the time was the checkweighman, had protested his challenges. There had been a scuffle; then Ryan slugged the manager in the head. Charged with “assault on a voter at the polls,” Ryan had received a $100 fine and had lost both his position as local president and as checkweighman. The UMW miners boycotted the December 6 election, which produced a grotesque result—yet one which revealed the subservience Frick had instilled in many of its miners. The employees voted 103 to 14 to abolish the position of checkweighman. When the UMW diggers stayed home from work in protest, the company quickly filled their places with members of the Workmen’s Brotherhood.54

The owners finally did sign contracts for all the captive mines where the UMW had won, and Murray called these compacts a “signal victory for the United Mine Workers.” But the contracts turned out to be better weapons for the employers than the miners; like most coal agreements, the contracts contained penalties for loading dirty coal, under which Frick in March fired 103 miners—all members of the UMW.55 When Frick president Thomas Moses was questioned by the Bituminous Coal Labor Board set up under the NRA code for the industry about his company’s firing practices, he pleaded ignorance.56 A retaliatory strike called by the UMW miners at Colonial 1 brought out the Frick deputy sheriffs, who bombed several UMW homes and Martin Ryan’s automobile. An investigator sent by Governor Pinchot was fired upon as he approached the mines.57 Not until World War II would the United Mine Workers of America have a solid union in the captive mines.58 In the early New Deal, Section 7a could not be enforced where operator resistance was adamant. William Irwin had kept his pledge.

Although John L. Lewis harnessed the forces for change which dominated the first years of the New Deal and reorganized his union in Pennsylvania’s commercial mines (as well as through-

56 John Carmondy to Thomas Moses, April 10, 1934, NRA Records, Records of the Bituminous Coal Labor Boards, Division I North, Subject File.
57 Wieck, “The Miners’ Union in the Steel Industry,” 144-149.
58 Madison, American Labor Leaders, 186-189.
out most of the rest of the country), he failed to break down the opposition of the steel men. Because they were less adversely affected by the Depression than the smaller, commercial companies, because they had always maintained a firm anti-union tradition, but most significantly because their mines were the opening wedge for unionization of the steel industry, the steel men kept Lewis at bay. A new President, a shift in policy toward labor by his administration, legislation protecting collective bargaining, a determined unionization drive by a dynamic labor leader—ingredients which later in the decade would revolutionize the American labor movement—could not bring union recognition for the UMW in Pennsylvania's captive mines during the early New Deal.