



TRADITION OF LABOR VIOLENCE IN PENNSYLVANIA ANTHRACITE

Allen Pinkerton, *The Molly Maguires and the Detectives* (New York, 1877), 332.

REBELLION WITHIN THE RANKS: PENNSYLVANIA ANTHRACITE, JOHN L. LEWIS, AND THE COAL STRIKES OF 1943

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THE 1943 coal strikes, which resulted in four nationwide mine shutdowns and ultimately destroyed the government's "little steel" wage formula, commanded America's attention for nine months during this crucial year in the history of World War II. These strikes enraged the populace against those seemingly unpatriotic miners who dared to break their "no-strike" pledge and engulfed their controversial leader, John L. Lewis, in excessive verbal abuse and vilification.¹ Governmental seizure of the mines, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's threat to draft the miners, and the enactment of the Smith-Connally War Disputes Act are only partial evidences of the wrath which the nation directed at her belligerent coal miners. The least understood and most generally ignored episode in these dramatic events revolves around the role played by Pennsylvania's anthracite miners. Failure to examine the hard coal miners' role has resulted in some serious misconceptions and the general acceptance of an unfortunate myth about miner attitudes in northeastern Pennsylvania.

A wildcat anthracite strike which began December 30, 1942, and continued through January 22, 1943, provided the catalyst for nationwide coal miner unrest in 1943.² This strike, which

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¹Saul Alinsky, *John L. Lewis: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York, 1949). See Chapter 12, "Lewis vs. the People," pp. 280-324, for the most thorough discussion of the strike events. The emotionalism of the situation is suggested in both the press and labor journals. See *The United Mine Workers Journal*, May 1, 1943, and editorial comments in the *New York Times*, January-November, 1943. In the *Anthracite Tri-District News*, October 8, 1943, an article entitled "Measure of a Man" stated that from March to October, 1943, Lewis was the subject of 2,176 cartoons and 71,819 columns of type.

²The most detailed accounts of the anthracite strike were carried in the *Scranton Times* and the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*. Also see Alinsky, *John L. Lewis*, 281-284.

effectively immobilized the anthracite industry although involving only between 15,000 and 25,000 of the 80,000 hard coal work force, symbolized coal miner anger at wartime wage restrictions which the government had imposed to halt inflation.³ Anthracite workers felt that wage restrictions were imposed unequally, benefiting unskilled workers who flocked to expanding war industries while unjustly penalizing skilled workers in the coal mines.⁴ In the summer of 1943 the official voice of Pennsylvania anthracite, *Anthracite Tri-District News*, succinctly articulated the poorly stated but deeply felt emotions of January. The government's wage policy, stated the *Tri-District News*, is a "vicious brew distilled from a mixture of fragmentary and unreliable computations—and sheer guesswork."⁵ It should be noted that the concerns and the demands made by the hard coal workers in January were precisely those which United Mine Worker chieftain John L. Lewis molded into the substantive issues he successfully used in the nationwide coal strikes of 1943.⁶

At the time, however, John L. Lewis, the international officers, and local officials exerted as much pressure as possible to end the anthracite strike which emerged from worker discontentment at the grass roots level. Despite the union's official stand and President Roosevelt's implied threat to seize the mines, work stoppage continued. Only after strike leaders were convinced that Lewis would honor his pledge to seek a substantial wage increase did the miners end their walkout, and even then a significant number of miners voiced skepticism about Lewis's ability and willingness to carry out his promises. The miners were frustrated with governmental policies and what they considered to be poor union leadership. It is this episode which must be examined in order to unravel the complex events of 1943 and test the basic thesis of this article. That is, the anthracite

³ The reason total production was cut from 40 to 60 percent was because the majority of the strikers were located in District One, the largest of the three anthracite districts. District One had approximately 45,000 miners, District Seven, 15,000, and District Nine, 20,000.

⁴ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 15, 1943. One strike leader indicated that he cleared only \$54 in a two week period. "Show me," he commented, "anyone working for \$27 a week in defense industry nowadays."

⁵ *Anthracite Tri-District News*, June 4, 1943.

⁶ Although this was never acknowledged by United Mine Workers officials, note demands listed in the *UMW Journal*, February 1, 1943, and compare these with Lewis's pronouncements from March through October, 1943.

wildcat strike accurately demonstrated the intensity of coal miner anger at the wage policies of the Roosevelt administration, and at the outset the strike was primarily a reaction to Lewis's ineffective leadership. Moreover, the belligerency of the anthracite region forced Lewis to take a more aggressive posture in his contract bargaining throughout 1943; to have done less would have undermined his leadership. The anthracite strike, then, emerged from deep-seeded economic frustrations which surfaced in the form of a rebellion within the ranks of the UMWA.

The anthracite workers originally went out on strike protesting a fifty-cent increase in United Mine Workers dues which had been approved at their 1942 convention in Cincinnati.⁷ Traditionally labor historians have disavowed this interpretation, accepting the view expressed by Saul Alinsky in his biography of John L. Lewis. "Students of the coal mining industry and the conditions of the coal miners," argues Alinsky, "seriously doubted that a new, slight increase in union dues would make the coal miners, the most union-minded group in the country, strike in the midst of war."⁸ Alinsky refused to accept the fact that the dues issue provided the spark which ignited the pent-up anger of the miners who resented the disparity between rising prices and frozen wages. He is correct in assuming that wartime economic problems are the paramount issue, but having stated this, how can increased dues be ignored? Is it not logical to assume that during times when every penny counts an additional outlay of fifty cents is worthy of some consideration, particularly when the international union seemed so wealthy and the individual so destitute? Alinsky documents his interpretation by quoting Senator Harry S. Truman's statement to Congress that he had "checked into the strike" and the anthracite miners were fighting for a wage increase rather than a decrease in union dues.⁹ Although Truman's comments were widely circulated, probably due to his increased prestige as the result of the Truman Special Investigating Committee, their apparent impact seems somewhat credulous. Where had Truman received his information? Who were his contacts in northeastern Pennsylvania? How was

⁷ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1943. A detailed discussion of debate and vote breakdown is given in this issue.

⁸ Alinsky, *John L. Lewis*, 282.

⁹ *Ibid.*; *Scranton Times*, January 14, 1943, also discusses Truman's statement.

he able to ignore the contradictory information originating in the anthracite region?

A cross section of representative anthracite newspapers clearly illustrates the primacy of the dues issue in sparking the anthracite walkout.¹⁰ The validity of this assertion is not even questioned in 1943, although it has been ignored or, as in the case of Alinsky, been deemed unimportant in post World War II labor literature. Most frequently during the month long wildcat strike, local newspapers, when making reference to the origins of the walkout, spoke of the "intra-union dues dispute."¹¹ The miners viewed the increased dues as an extra and unjustified burden which was placed upon northeastern Pennsylvania by a bituminous dominated mine international. "We feel in the anthracite region," commented a strike spokesman, "that we did not have justice at the International Convention."¹² Editorial opinion in the anthracite region sympathized with the miners, taking the position of the *Scranton Times* that the "mine workers have a right to demand changes in union wrong doings. . . ."¹³ At the same time the region did not believe the strike should continue if it would harm the war effort.¹⁴ The fact that only one-third to one-quarter of the miners were ever on strike at one time indicates that a majority of workers felt that it was their patriotic duty not to strike. There is considerable documentation to indicate that this was the general attitude of the non-striker.¹⁵ However, other than statements made by local district officials, there is no indication that the miners worked because of their loyalty to Lewis and the UMW.

The muddle over the origins of the strike issue was even more distorted as the result of a widely quoted, and dramatically in-

¹⁰ The *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, *Wilkes-Barre Record*, *Scranton Times*, *Hazleton Plain Speaker* and the *Pottsville Republican* were examined for this study.

¹¹ *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 11, 1943. Also see quotes in *Pottsville Republican*, January 7, 1943, *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 22, 1943, and *Scranton Times*, January 11, 16, and 22, 1943.

¹² *New York Times*, January 7, 1943.

¹³ *Scranton Times*, January 15, 1943.

¹⁴ Every anthracite newspaper consulted expressed this opinion. Perhaps it was best stated by the *Scranton Times* editorial, January 16, 1943; "The matter of dues may be a legitimate complaint," argued the writer, but it could not provide "justification enough to strike during a wartime crisis."

¹⁵ *Ibid.* This was particularly true in the lower anthracite regions. See comments of Shamokin and Mt. Carmel miners found in the *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 14, 1943; also *Scranton Times*, January 11, 12, 1943.

accurate statement made by the editor of the *United Mine Workers Journal*, K. C. Adams. At the height of the wildcat strike the *Scranton Times* sent a telegram to John L. Lewis, asking him to come to the anthracite region to discuss the situation with the recalcitrant miners.¹⁶ Lewis refused. Adams then decided to answer the wire for the absent mine leader. "You are probably aware," commented Adams, "that this trouble began with the demand for a \$2 a day pay increase." "Later," he continued, the "dues question popped to the fore."¹⁷ Adams continued to push this interpretation editorially in the *Journal*. Who could possibly believe, queried Adams, that men would go on strike over such a menial sum of money. For him, the dues issue was "nothing more than a subterfuge to becloud the issues."¹⁸ There is simply no documentation to support this widely accepted position, although there is considerable data available to indicate that the miners were protesting the dues increase. Possibly the protest over the dues question seemed like such an unimportant matter that a more Machiavellian and intricate explanation had to be found. Yet, the explanation of the strike leaders, which had been ignored as irrelevant, seems reasonable enough.

Carl Kratz, president of the South Wilkes-Barre local of the Glen Alden Company, largest producer of anthracite in the country, presented pertinent testimony before the War Labor Board, which had been called upon to handle the anthracite situation when initial efforts to end the strike failed. The increase in dues, stated Kratz, was "the last straw" which ultimately broke the miners' patience.¹⁹ He described the growing despair over the high cost of food in northeastern Pennsylvania, indicating widespread miner anger at government and union leadership. "But until the dues increase came along," stated Kratz, "the men didn't do a thing. But that was carrying it too far."²⁰ Fred Schraeder, chairman of the South Wilkes-

¹⁶ See accounts in the *Scranton Times* and *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 12, 1943.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *UMW Journal*, January 15, 1943. Adams further complicated the issues by inaccurately discussing "commie" influence. "... the rebellion immediately found support and favor among disappointed politicians of the region as well as the communist party and other disgruntled elements who are always, it seems, ready to knife the progress of the U.M.W.A."

¹⁹ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, January 16, 1943.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Barre Grievance Committee argued that the vote at the convention on the dues issue was not representative.²¹ "The biggest majority of the locals," said Schraeder, "are unable to send delegates to the convention because they haven't got the money." To illustrate his point, Schraeder indicated to the WLB that to get enough money to appear in Washington to present the anthracite case before the board it was necessary to borrow \$100 from a local storekeeper. The local treasury had \$1.25 while the national treasury of the UMWA had over \$6 million. To the leaders of the anthracite strike, this seemed grossly unfair. "The boys are just fed up," stated Schraeder, "and can't stand it."²² He also indicated that UMW Secretary-Treasurer, Thomas Kennedy, from the hard coal town of Hazleton, had been warned at the Cincinnati convention that there was widespread opposition to a dues increase in the anthracite region, and there "was going to be trouble" if an extra fifty cents dues were imposed. Schraeder attempted to oppose the increase in dues at the convention, but "I dare say I stood in front of a dead microphone for a half hour and was not recognized."²³ This, of course, was not a unique method in handling union "trouble-makers."

James W. Hennihan, head of a District One local, recounted to the WLB a story about a group of miners who came to his house Christmas Eve protesting the dues increase, pointing out the extra burden this deduction would impose. They "shoved so many due bills in my mouth," commented Hennihan, "that I couldn't taste my Christmas dinner."²⁴ Another local leader indicated the intensity of the anger of the miners and their deeply held conviction that the anthracite miners should not "work unless the 50 cent dues increase is lifted."²⁵

As late as January 18, 1943, editorials in the anthracite region commented upon the "bitter . . . dispute over dues," and how the issue had immobilized hard coal production.²⁶ Again, there

²¹ *Ibid.*; detailed accounts of anthracite testimony is also carried in the *New York Times*, January 16, 1943.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ The speaker, Philip Chesney of Nanticoke, stated that local officials were actually powerless because of the intensity of coal miner anger at the grass roots.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, January 18, 1943.

is absolutely no indication that the primacy of the dues issue was open to question. What was happening in the anthracite districts was, as the strike continued, more complicated, and additional grievances were being aired. "Evidence of this tendency was the \$2 a day wage increase" demand which originated in Hazleton after the strike was in progress.²⁷ Eventually the wage increase demand became as fixed in the public mind as the question of the dues increase. This is particularly true since John L. Lewis and the UMW officials adopted the \$2 increase as a slogan for wage bargaining in the contract disputes of March and April. Similarly, by mid-January area newspapers indicated a rash of new demands which encompassed such items as general working conditions and new safety precautions.²⁸ As the strike continued, new issues emerged, although the dues increase remained paramount.

Having established the connection between the dues issue and the wildcat strike, it now becomes necessary to shift the focus to the anthracite workers and their relationship to the two key figures in the 1943 strikes, John L. Lewis and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. At the outset it should be noted that both men were under tremendous pressure to end the anthracite walkout. Wartime emotions ran high, resulting in intense public reaction to such work stoppage.²⁹ Samplings of editorial and cartoon reactions to the January events indicate the widespread anger directed against the miners and their boss and the equally adamant demands that Roosevelt stop the strike.³⁰ Both men by the very nature of their respective positions had to respond to these demands, although their perspectives were quite different. Lewis had to please a vocal pressure group whose open rebellion might hamper his leadership position in the UMW, while

²⁷ *UMW Journal*, January 15, 1943. Local Union 1376 in the Hazleton area had voiced strong official demands for a wage increase as early as December 5, 1942.

²⁸ *Pottsville Republican*, January 20, 1943; also see separate accounts in the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, January 18, 19, 1943.

²⁹ For an excellent discussion of the emotionalism of the strike issue and public reaction see Paul Eliel, "Some Problems of Organized Labor in a War Economy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 220 (March, 1942), 116-124.

³⁰ C. H. Goodman to Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 20, 1943; Congressman Joseph E. Talbot to Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 12, 1943; and David I. Walsh and Margaret C. Smith to Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 12, 1943; OFF, 407-B, 1941-1943, Box 28, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL).

Roosevelt had to persuade the nation he could handle this mobilization crisis just as he had the others which confronted his administration.

A complicating factor for both Lewis and Roosevelt when dealing with the anthracite strike was their knowledge that northeastern Pennsylvania was one of the few economically depressed areas in the United States in World War II.³¹ Indeed the wartime economic boom had bypassed the anthracite regions, resulting in the downward spiral of its economy—a trend which had started in the latter part of the 1920s and continued into the cold war period. Statistics relating to the anthracite counties during the war years indicate a steady decline in regional income, coal production, and employment opportunities.³² For either man to have dealt callously with the situation could have backfired if enough facts about the situation leaked to Congress or the public.

In retrospect Lewis's position was the more difficult. Lewis's political fortunes had declined sharply since his confrontation with Franklin Roosevelt in the 1940 election.³³ Lewis had in rapid succession abdicated the CIO presidency, fallen out with his chosen successor, Philip Murray, and been humiliated by his former colleagues when they denied him representation on various committees organized to deal with mobilization in World War II. Still as colorful as ever, and self-described master of his coal mines, Lewis nevertheless found little consolation in reliving the glorious victories of the past. Despite his success in the 1941 captive coal mines episode, Lewis's over-all record gives every indication that the master had lost his touch. Thus, the anthracite challenge was a serious matter.

The anthracite miners had a tradition of violence dating back to the Molly Maguires. On several occasions striking miners faced regional coal and iron police such as in the anthracite strike of 1902. Conditions of industrial danger in the deep mines

³¹ Byron Fairchild and Jonathan Grossman, *The Army and Industrial Manpower: U. S. Army in World War II* (Washington, D. C., 1959), 104-105.

³² A compilation of revealing statistics can be found in the Scranton Chamber of Commerce Bulletin, *100 Years of Service* (Scranton, 1967); United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Population Studies: Series PC-57, Nos. 46 and 55* (Washington, D. C., 1951).

³³ For a discussion of the Lewis-Roosevelt fissure see C. K. McFarland, *Roosevelt, Lewis and the New Deal, 1933-1940* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1970).

created a fatalistic attitude among these men which, upon provocation, could burst into open hostility. Thomas Kennedy's remark that coal miners would just as soon throw a soldier down a mine shaft as any other strike breaker was readily acknowledged by anthracite observers.³⁴ Moreover, in the anthracite walkout of January it seems more than likely that a significant number of strikers would just as soon have dealt with John L. Lewis in similar fashion. Lewis was evidently aware of this fact, and his fears were not unfounded.

Lewis had received numerous challenges from Pennsylvania anthracite. The most recent, and the one whose bitter memories still haunt the hard coal area, concerned the ill-fated dual union movement whose brief existence brought considerable violence and dissension into the northeastern corner of Pennsylvania.³⁵ Thomas Maloney's United Anthracite Miners of Pennsylvania flourished from 1933 through 1935, vigorously attacking Lewis's integrity and leadership. Lewis could not handle the situation. The dual union movement resulted in unsolved murder, dynamiting, and such intense rivalry that finally the government intervened, placing an injunction against the UAWP.³⁶ The memory of these events was fresh in the minds of Lewis and many anthracite workers. One of the most outspoken leaders of the wild-

³⁴ Note analysis of Albert A. Blum, *Drafted or Deferred: Practices Past and Present* (Ann Arbor, 1967), 201. Paul McNutt, chairman of the War Manpower Commission, exhibited considerable verbal reluctance to commit the government to any action which might involve the take-over of the anthracite mines. See *New York Times*, January 20, 1943.

³⁵ The dual union movement is covered in considerable detail in the *New York Times* and *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 1931-1935. For some analysis of the movement see, J. B. S. Hardman, "How to Break a Union," *New Republic*, October 21, 1931. Hardman remarked, "The anthracite miners' districts, till recently considered the stronghold of the national administration, are no longer safe for Mr. Lewis." The same point is made by Tom Tippet, "The Miners Fight Their Leaders," *American Mercury*, XXXII (June, 1934), 129-137. Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years* (Baltimore, 1966), 389, briefly touches upon this problem and some of the resentments of the hard coal region.

³⁶ Thomas Maloney was the leader of the rival union, the United Anthracite Workers of Pennsylvania. Although popular in the hard coal region, a federal injunction issued by Judge Gorman, head of the Anthracite Conciliation Board, enabled Lewis to destroy Maloney's opposition. *New York Times*, October 20, 1934, discusses this facet of the dual union movement. For a statistical evaluation of anthracite economic difficulties see United States, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Mines, Coal Division, "Anthracite Coal Tables," *Salient Statistics in Anthracite* (Washington, D. C., 1933); Walter A. Glasglow, *Report of the Department of Mines of Pennsylvania: (Part I)—Anthracite* (Harrisburg, 1933).

cat strike of 1943 cautioned the strikers not to make demands for a dual union.³⁷ Most assuredly John L. Lewis concurred in that position. Neither the UMW leaders, nor the anthracite workers wanted to relive those frustrating and violent years. If Pennsylvania anthracite must do battle with Lewis, it would be done within the UMW. Partially due to anthracite's coolness toward his leadership, Lewis increasingly turned union affairs in the hard coal region to "native son" Thomas Kennedy. Indeed, Lewis had last visited northeastern Pennsylvania in 1926—a fact well-known to the coal miners.³⁸

Kennedy showed considerable concern over the general economic condition of northeastern Pennsylvania, and in the early stages of the war he decided to contact President Roosevelt about the situation. He advised the president about the area's widespread economic difficulties and inquired about the possibilities of bringing new industries into the anthracite region.³⁹ After reviewing Kennedy's letter, the president immediately contacted War Production Board Chairman, Donald Nelson. "It is a fact," stated the chief executive, "that for twenty-five or thirty years I have been deeply concerned by the pitiful situation among anthracite miners. Production and employment are far below what they used to be—even in good years."⁴⁰ Roosevelt noted that since the population refused to move away, the government would have to attempt to bring war industries to the mining areas. Nelson promptly investigated the situation and concurred with Kennedy's assessment of the terrible economic conditions in the anthracite districts. He observed that although northeastern Pennsylvania had fine potential and offered substantial untapped manpower resources, the lack of plant sites and proper training programs for either labor or management would prevent any attempt to bring war industries into the region in the immediate future.⁴¹ President Roosevelt promised

³⁷ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 18, 1943.

³⁸ *Scranton Times*, March 1, 1943, notes the long absence of Lewis. The expanded role of Kennedy is indicated in both the *UMW Journal* and *Anthracite Tri-District News*. The FDRL indicates that the overwhelming majority of correspondence with President Roosevelt from 1942-1945 concerning the anthracite districts was written by Kennedy.

³⁹ Thomas P. Kennedy to Franklin D. Roosevelt, April 16, 1942, OFF, 174, Box 6, FDRL.

⁴⁰ President Roosevelt, memo to Nelson, April 22, 1942, *ibid.*

⁴¹ Nelson to Roosevelt, May 6, 1942, *ibid.*

Kennedy that new industries would be started in the anthracite region, and he kept his word.⁴² Later in the war a few projects were undertaken, but these had little impact upon the unemployment or depressed conditions of the area. Possibly the wild-cat anthracite strikers sensed or were aware of the president's concern for their plight. Frequently, editorials and newspaper articles comment upon the esteem the anthracite regions had for President Roosevelt.⁴³ One strike spokesman reiterated how important it was for the press to convey to the nation, anthracite's deep admiration for Roosevelt and their concern that the strike "not embarrass" him.⁴⁴

This attitude is in marked contrast to the anger directed at John L. Lewis. Articles published in the *Tri-District News*, the *UMWJ*, and statements made by district union officials, particularly Michael Kosik, president of District One, belie the rancor expressed toward Lewis at the grass roots level.⁴⁵ Yet the miners' expressed-feelings have been ignored because it has been assumed that Lewis and the miners were actually in league, conspiring to destroy wage controls. One of the best illustrations of the type of attitude which much of the nation had toward the anthracite strike was expressed some months after the wage controversy had spread throughout the entire coal industry. "Lewis may insist," so the argument went, that the strikes are spontaneous, "but everybody knows that he is responsible."⁴⁶ A better perspective of hard coal attitudes can be gleaned by examining the testimony anthracite representatives presented to the War Labor Board in mid-January, 1943. Miner spontaneity and any allusions about a Lewis-hard coal conspiracy are quickly dispelled by the comments made by hard coal miner representatives.

One of the most recurring themes in the WLB testimony centers upon Lewis's refusal to come into the hard coal regions and deal directly with the strike. Van Bittner, CIO representative on the WLB, pressed Lewis about his failure to travel to north-

⁴² Roosevelt to Kennedy, May 6, 1942, *ibid.*

⁴³ For instance see editorials in the *Pottsville Republican*, January 21, 1943, and *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 22, 1943.

⁴⁴ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 22, 1943.

⁴⁵ *Anthracite Tri-District News*, January 22, 1943, "To Men Who Defy Orders," is an excellent illustration of the distortion of the grass roots attitudes by district officials.

⁴⁶ *San Francisco News*, April 28, 1943.

eastern Pennsylvania.⁴⁷ Lewis responded to Bittner's inquiries by stating that he desired to avoid any additional negative publicity for the hard coal regions, and he did not want his presence to "inflame the situation."⁴⁸ When his statement was greeted with snickers, Lewis characteristically responded, "If there are any sneerers about my not being there let him get up now or let him forever hold his peace." At that point a "red-faced miner jumped to his feet and shouted, 'That's what I wanted to ask him.'"⁴⁹ The unidentified speaker wanted to address Lewis, but WLB Chairman, William Davis, refused to recognize the understandably irate miner.

The strikers had frequently voiced their opinion that the wildcat strike was not "big enough to require Lewis's attention," indicating their reaction to what they considered the UMW head's condescending attitude.⁵⁰ Wartime conditions and the nation's demand for patriotism did not dispell long-held anthracite attitudes toward Lewis. At the same time the wildcat miners respected Lewis's influence and power, acknowledging that by challenging Lewis's leadership they might be inviting personal disaster. The president of one union local stated, "There is no use of us going back. As long as we got the bull by the horns, (the reference is to Lewis) we had better hang on to him or he'll get us."⁵¹

During the WLB hearings, as at the outset of the strike, the focal point for anthracite anger centered upon the dues issue. Donald Cummings, president of Lance Local 1174, commented that the strikers' attitudes were the most bitter he had experienced in twenty-two years of union activity. "The membership has got beyond control," stated Cummings, warning that if the dues question was not settled soon, there would be considerable violence in the hard coal regions.⁵² Joe Kijenski of Olyphant vigorously castigated Lewis's role in the dues dispute. Why, asked Kijenski, does Lewis want additional dues money? The miner answered his rhetorical query by stating that the \$6

⁴⁷ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, January 16, 1943.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 13, 1943. These sentiments were expressed in a meeting at Plymouth, Pa.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1943.

⁵² *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, January 16, 1943.

million in the UMW treasury had really become Lewis's own funds to do with as he chose.⁵² Kijenski charged that Lewis had spent over one-half million dollars on the Democratic party in 1936 and recently over one-quarter million dollars on Thomas Kennedy's unsuccessful bid for the governorship of Pennsylvania. "If I'm not mistaken," said Kijenski, Lewis "does anything he wants with it."⁵⁴

Lewis realized that his position as president of the UMW was being undermined by the anthracite insurrection. The amount of publicity his very vocal opposition received obviously further irritated the situation. The strike must end before insurmountable damage occurred. Consequently, by mid-January Lewis redoubled his efforts to bring the maverick strikers back into the fold. His approach utilized both a club and an olive branch in dealing with the unpredictable anthracite workers.

Lewis and his spokesmen in the hard coal region began accelerating their demands that the miners return to work.⁵⁵ Correspondence with President Roosevelt also reflects the intensity as well as the new direction of Lewis's approach.⁵⁶ Anthracite testimony before the WLB had angered Lewis, and his public statements registered during these hearings reflect the mine boss's decision to hit hard at this challenge to his leadership and UMW solidarity. Thomas Kennedy and local district leaders immediately began to propose that wildcat strikers be dropped from the rolls of the UMW, while Lewis primarily directed his vindictiveness at the anthracite strike leaders.⁵⁷

At the outset of the wildcat strike two special committees were formed to deal with coal miner grievances. The committee of twelve, consisting of six coal miner representatives and six coal operators, suggested methods for ending the strike but refused to become involved with the specifics of the strike.⁵⁸

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; also note comments in *New York Times*, January 16, 1943.

⁵⁵ Thomas Kennedy and Michael Kosik led the verbal assault upon the wildcat strike, although Joseph Kershetsky, president of District Nine, and Martin Brennan, provisional president of District Seven, for the first time, issued strong statements against the walkout.

⁵⁶ Lewis to Roosevelt, January 19, 1943; also see statement of Kennedy in letter to the president of the same date, OFF 407-B, 1941-1943, Box 28, FDRL.

⁵⁷ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, *Scranton Times* and the *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 15-19, 1943, acknowledges the apparent tactics of the UMW.

⁵⁸ *Wilkes-Barre Record*, January 12, 1943.

Lewis ignored this committee. It was the Tri-District Grievance Committee, headed by outspoken Andrew Yevchak, which directly challenged Lewis and provided the leadership necessary to solidify striker opposition to the UMW head. The grievance committee received the full brunt of Lewis's rhetorical and executive wrath. The UMW chieftain warned Yevchak and his "outlaw associates" that if their "unconstitutional and illegal" committee continued "in this mad enterprise," it would be held "to accountability under the laws of the union."⁵⁹ Yevchak, in particular, had hammered away at the dues issue and Lewis's irresponsible leadership. Anthracite newspapers were aware of Yevchak's significance in the battle between hard coal and the UMW. His presence at the WLB hearings undoubtedly irritated Lewis. After the hearings, when the WLB had ordered the miners to return to work, it was accepted in the hard coal regions that Lewis had won a "victory over the miners revolting against his leadership. . . ."⁶⁰ From subsequent events it would seem also that Lewis convinced Yevchak of the error of his ways.

Lewis always coupled his admonitions against the wildcat strikers with an equally vocal pledge to gain for the miners a significant wage increase when their contract ended April 30, 1943.⁶¹ It must have been a shock to many miners when Yevchak, upon returning to the hard coal regions after attending the WLB hearings in Washington, D. C., suddenly resigned his position as head of the grievance committee and recommended that the strikers go back to work.⁶² Despite cries of "selling out" and threats of physical violence to his person, Yevchak's position was realistic. Neither the WLB nor the president had shown any indication that they might intervene in this intra-union dispute on behalf of the anthracite region. Moreover, Lewis's role in this matter had been so distorted nationally that the anthracite versus Lewis confrontation was now interpreted as the strikers and Lewis versus the nation.⁶³ Yevchak told a meeting of the skeptical miners that although he had doubted Lewis in the past, he must recommend that they now back Lewis.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, January 15, 1943; another favorite target was Bernard Shirkness of Shenandoah, another outspoken opponent of Lewis.

⁶⁰ *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 16, 1943.

⁶¹ *Scranton Times*, January 16, 1943.

⁶² *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 17, 1943.

⁶³ See accounts recorded in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 14-19, 1943.

This recommendation was based upon Lewis's solemn assurance that he would get the anthracite workers "a substantial wage increase." "And when I say substantial," extolled Yevchak, "I mean more than \$2 a day. . . ." ⁶⁴

In spite of the logic of Yevchak's argument, the striking miners continued to exhibit their rebellious mood. One newspaper account indicated that the loudest applause of the evening was accorded to District 9 miner Robert Long when he began chortling Lewis's record. "If John Mitchell took a stand as John L. Lewis did in this situation," stated Long, "there would be no UMW organization." ⁶⁵ Eventually the dissidents gave in, although there were still those who cried out that it was preferable to work under soldiers rather than Lewis. ⁶⁶ Perhaps the intensity of anthracite feelings was best captured by grief-stricken Wilkes-Barre coal miner Oscar Servazgo when he was informed of the death of one of his sons in the Pacific theatre; "I ain't a traitor, damn 'em, I ain't a traitor. I'll stay out until hell freezes over . . . Dickie was fighting for one thing. I'm fighting for another, and they ain't so far apart." ⁶⁷

Despite such deep feelings, it was apparent that the strike must end. Lewis had won. This victory was not fashioned out of UMW threats, or because of anthracite admiration for Lewis, and it was not, as Alinsky maintains, because of Roosevelt's threats to "take the necessary steps to protect the security of the nation." ⁶⁸ Lewis had hit the "gut" issue. He promised to seek a wage increase which would offset increased costs of living, including the dues increase. As Joseph McCluskey, originator of the \$2 a day pay increase demand, argued when he defended Yevchak, the "key was Lewis's promise to gain a substantial pay increase." ⁶⁹ This, then, was the reason to support Lewis and

⁶⁴ *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 18, 1943.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Quoted in "John L. Lewis Fights a Strike," *Time*, January 25, 1943.

⁶⁸ Press release dated January 19, 1943, PPF, 3183, FDRL.

⁶⁹ *Hazleton Plain Speaker*, January 18, 1943; the President's threat to act if the miners did not return to work within 48 hours was interpreted much differently in the anthracite region than throughout the nation. For instance, an editorial in the *Pottsville Republican*, January 20, 1943, stated, "There is no law to compel the men to work, if they do not want to work. They can be drafted into the army under a work or fight regulation but that will not solve the coal question or end the strike." Similarly, the *Wilkes-Barre Record* editorial on January 23, 1943, stated the men did not

end the strike. In one sense the anthracite workers were victorious—they had definitely forced Lewis to be more aggressive in his efforts to gain increased wages.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of this entire episode was the failure of the press, Roosevelt, and the chief executive's official family to acknowledge efforts made by Lewis and Kennedy to end the strike. The reasons Lewis chose to stop the walkout were of little consequence in the total sphere of war-time mobilization. Roosevelt's decision to ignore UMW efforts to end the wildcat strike was interpreted as an unwarranted attack upon the union leader's integrity. President Roosevelt did possess a realistic grasp of the anthracite situation, and he had been advised of Lewis's problems with the striking miners. When prominent South Carolina Congressman Butler Hare wrote to the president protesting the activities of John L. Lewis and the striking anthracite miners, the chief executive responded with moderation and insight. The president noted that it was actually remarkable that strikers had caused only a loss of a fraction of one percent in the war effort. "As you know," stated Roosevelt, "a far larger loss is caused by the common cold; a far larger loss is caused by industrial accidents—yet those who have not acquired a sense of proportion always fail to mention simple facts like these."⁷⁰ Ultimately the intensity of public and political reaction pushed the president into the course of least resistance. The task of transferring public anger from the White House to an old antagonist, John L. Lewis, was much easier than the painstaking job of explaining the realities of the strike to an angered public.

As already indicated, Lewis's role in the anthracite strike was totally misinterpreted. A widely quoted *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial stated that the anthracite trouble was mainly due to one man, "the arrogant, dictatorial boss of the UMW." "Lewis," the editorial concluded, "has chosen to glower in the background, contemplating his power, doing nothing to help his

return to work "because of fear," noting "a deep seated indignation led them to engage in protest, if only to focus government attention on their grievances."

⁷⁰ Roosevelt to Butler, February 5, 1943; Roosevelt had reacted similarly in 1942 when Virginia Congressman David Satterfield had attacked labor. Roosevelt to Satterfield, March 10, 1942, OFF 407-B, 1941-1943, Box 28 and Box 3, FDRL.

countrymen.”⁷¹ Actually Lewis was thoroughly incapable of leading the miners in any direction other than that for higher wages; to have done otherwise would have been an invitation to destroy trade unionism in the hard coal mining industries. Lewis’s statement to the press two weeks after the end of the anthracite wildcat strike is quite understandable in the context of the anthracite attitudes toward his leadership, public reaction to the strike, and President Roosevelt’s failure to recognize UMW efforts to end the walkout. “I am heartily in sympathy with the demand of the anthracite mine workers for more money,” stated the now vitriolic mine chief. “And permit me to say,” continued Lewis, “that that demand isn’t confined to the anthracite mine workers. It is prevalent throughout the entire bituminous industry of this country.”⁷² Thus within less than a month John L. Lewis had turned a rebellion, which was in fact directed against his leadership, into a crusade for a \$2 a day wage increase.

Although most of the nation focused its attention upon the machinations of Lewis and Roosevelt in the weeks following the anthracite strike, the hard coal regions waited patiently to see what practical results would come from Lewis’s promises. Lewis realized the significance of the anthracite rebellion and understood the uneasiness of northeastern Pennsylvania. That is why he chose, after seventeen years’ absence, to visit and address the Tri-District Anthracite Convention held the first week in March, 1943. His political fences needed mending.

In the period from the end of the anthracite strike to the Tri-District Convention, local officials worked feverishly to gain support for the maligned union head. The success of their efforts is indicated by their ability to contain Lewis’s opponents at the time of his arrival. Reports abounded in the anthracite region about the staged welcome for Lewis. But none doubted a local newspaper report that Lewis’s decision to come to northeastern Pennsylvania was prompted by his desire “to regain some of the prestige he lost among the rank and file by remaining at his headquarters in Washington during the January *revolt against his leadership*.”⁷³ Lewis refused to be interviewed by local newspaper reporters, his only comments concerned the “tough line”

⁷¹ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 14, 1943.

⁷² Statement quoted from the *UMW Journal*, February 1, 1943.

⁷³ *Scranton Times*, March 1, 1943.

he planned to take on wage negotiations. When one enterprising reporter broached the dues question, Lewis declined to discuss the issue with a show of "considerable irritation."⁷⁴

The expected repercussions over the dues issue never developed. Two resolutions introduced at the Tri-District Convention to rescind the dues were sidetracked. The resolutions committee reported the dues resolutions to the floor and recommended that the convention non-concur and refer them to the international union. "The Committee's motions," stated a local report, "were carried by a perfunctory vote."⁷⁵ The intent of this action was to prevent any debate over the dues or Lewis's leadership. Later in the convention two dissidents gained the floor momentarily when the convention debated a resolution, subsequently passed, which condemned specified eastern newspapers for attacking John L. Lewis. Michael Kosik, when introducing the resolution proclaimed that "we want the world to know that the mine workers stand 100% in back of John L. Lewis."⁷⁶ James L. Lamb, of Tamaqua, interjected into the discussion his belief that it was alright for the convention to "vote against the press for saying things about Lewis," but he noted, "a few weeks ago when the 50 cent increase in dues was put into effect, thousands of men all over the area were saying the same things and when you get away from here they'll be saying them again."⁷⁷ Immediately another member of the convention stood up, voicing strong support for Lamb. With that the other delegates began to shout down the speaker. District UMW leaders did not want to reopen old wounds. Lewis and the convention concentrated upon demands for significant wage increases. Hopefully, they felt this tactic would prove more important to the anthracite miners than their negative feelings toward Lewis. Mitchell Pabis, a representative from Myles Slope Local No. 917, indicated the acceptability of this tactic when he succeeded in gaining the floor to address a few remarks directly to Lewis. Pabis told Lewis that "for years" it had been the feeling of men in the hard coal region that the leadership of the UMW was not giving proper attention to Pennsylvania

⁷⁴ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, March 3, 1943.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Scranton Times*, March 6, 1943.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

anthracite. Lewis could, he concluded, "clear up any question" of his loyalty to the region by getting for the miners the substantial wage increase he promised.⁷⁸

The wage increase demand now became the battle cry for the bituminous coal regions where wage contracts would end March 31, 1943; the anthracite contract ran out the end of April. Lewis continued to echo the anthracite demand for a \$2 a day increase in wages throughout the widely publicized coal strikes of 1943. The anthracite districts quickly receded into the background as Lewis, now in full control of events, directed the miners to strike or return to work at his command.

Throughout the nine months fight over coal and increased wages, editorials and news articles in the anthracite region frequently indicated the differences between the anthracite and bituminous coal areas. Indeed, a great deal of regional chauvinism was evidenced. A typical reaction to the events of 1943 can be found in a *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* editorial written in the summer. "Anthracite has been penalized," argued the writer, because it has been "regarded as the tail of the kite."⁷⁹ Local spokesmen acknowledged that the controversies affecting the anthracite region were actually "centered in Washington and the bituminous coal fields."⁸⁰ Even union officials echoed these feelings, pointing out that anthracite had been "lost in the shuffle."⁸¹ Major W. W. Inglis, president of the Glen Alden Coal Company and chairman of the Anthracite Operators Negotiating Committee, was the region's most outspoken critic of the treatment of Pennsylvania anthracite. He stated that the anthracite operators and union men "were not far apart" in their negotiations, but a settlement could not be reached in northeastern Pennsylvania since it was "widely understood" that a bituminous settlement had to be okayed first.⁸² However, it was recognized by most anthracite spokesmen that hard coal was not as significant nationally as bituminous. Anthracite coal was used pri-

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, March 4, 1943.

⁷⁹ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, June 23, 1943. Also see *Scranton Times* editorial, October 26, 1943; "The restraint of the anthracite mine workers is admirable . . . the self discipline of the anthracite mine workers commends itself to thinking people and to all who have an intelligent understanding of coal mining and mine workers as human beings."

⁸⁰ *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, June 23, 1943.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, June 21, 1943.

⁸² *Ibid.*

marily for heating homes, while bituminous coal kept the nation's large industrial plants in operation. Hugh Cavanaugh, one of the members of the Tri-District Grievance Committee, remarked about this same time that the men "were tired of being kicked around by the government, President Roosevelt and John L. Lewis."⁸³ The frustration and anger of anthracite coal miners had not appreciably changed from January to June, 1943.

Eventually, after the intervention of Solid Fuels Coordinator, Harold Ickes, and a series of verbal battles between Lewis and the WLB, an agreement was reached in early November, 1943. The agreement was in excess of the guidelines of the "little steel" formula, thus ending that phase of the government's control of wages. Setting aside the well-known story of shorter lunch periods and the behind-the-scenes activities of Lewis and Ickes, the pay increase amounted to an additional \$1.50 per day increase for the bituminous miners. Anthracite workers received an additional \$1.02 per day, with the promise that the issue of portal to portal pay, also won by bituminous, would be negotiated during the next contract sessions.⁸⁴

Thus Lewis had successfully faced and defeated the anthracite challenge to his leadership. In the context of clashing personalities and threatened violence of the 1943 coal strikes, the fundamental issues raised by the anthracite walkout were almost totally ignored. The public and government accorded to Lewis the role of indefectible and beloved champion of the nation's hard coal miners. This is an unfortunate myth which has far too long distorted the Lewis-anthracite relationship.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, June 28, 1943.

⁸⁴ The best assessment of the anthracite settlement is found in the *Scranton Times*, November 4, 6, 9, 1943.