

A STUDY IN SLAVS, STRIKES, AND UNIONS: THE ANTHRACITE STRIKE OF 1897

BY VICTOR R. GREENE*

ABOUT a half-century ago a controversy raged in print over the effect that the incoming hordes of Slavic immigrants were having on this country's economic life.¹ These East European groups arrived in ever-increasing numbers after 1880, and their unfamiliar language, their strange, peasant origins, and their clannish habits worried American natives and the English-speaking nationalities. They wondered whether the "Hungarian" new-comer would weaken this nation's moral fiber and retard its cherished tradition of economic growth and progress. Partisans of the new alien, such as Edward Steiner and Isaac Hourwich, thought not.² Restrictionist forces had less faith in the stranger.³

Crowding into America's industrial centers in shanties and slums, and wallowing in a generally poor and unhealthy environment, the foreigners seemed to threaten the American standard of living. Labor leaders reacted especially adversely to what they believed was the new immigrants' demoralization of the union movement. Introduced as strikebreakers, ignorant of the American tongue, numbering a host of separate nationalities, and working

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¹"Slavs," "East Europeans," and "Hungarians" in this article will refer actually to the various Balto-Slavic nationalities: Poles, Slovaks, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians or Ruthenians. The terms used are those of contemporary journalists and writers. For some clarification of that inaccuracy in the anthracite region, see Peter Roberts, "The Slavs in Anthracite Coal Communities," *Charities and the Commons*, XIII (December 3, 1904), 216.

²See Edward Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: Revell, 1906), p. 311, and *passim*; and Isaac Hourwich, *Immigration and Labor* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1912), pp. 1-39, and *passim*.

³Perhaps the best statement of their view is in the findings of the Dillingham Immigration Commission, U. S. Senate, 61st Cong., 3d Sess., Document No. 783, *Brief Statement of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Immigration Commission* (Washington, D. C., 1911); and the volume by two experts on the panel, Jeremiah W. Jenks and W. Jett Lauck, *The Immigration Problem* (3d edition, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1913).

at the lowest wages, these groups, unionists believed, could hardly be organized to better their lot.⁴

Industrial Pennsylvania at the turn of the century attracted the unskilled Slavic masses like a magnet.⁵ Thus an analysis of labor unrest in the state helps explain the relationship between the newcomer and unionism. The story of one anthracite strike in particular, that of 1897, shows clearly the attitude of immigrants toward their jobs, their employers, and labor organization. But even more significantly, the event could throw light upon a more universal characteristic—the general feeling of Slavs at the workplace as part of their cultural pattern here in America.

In the later 1800's, to earn the bread they sought, the Slavic newcomers rushed quickly into the three hard coal mining districts of eastern Pennsylvania: Wyoming in the north around Scranton; Lehigh in the center about Hazleton; and Schuylkill in the south surrounding Pottsville. The last decades of the nineteenth century saw the population composition of the anthracite region shift markedly from two per cent Slavic in 1880 to forty-six per cent in 1900.⁶

⁴ The statement of a labor expert is typical. See John Commons in House of Representatives, 56th Cong., 1st Sess., Document No. 184, *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration* (Washington, 1901), XV, 312.

⁵ That the basic motivation of most Slavic peasants for emigrating was economic is undeniable. The Poles entitled their post-1870 mass movement, the "za chlebem (for bread)" exodus. See Karol Wachtl, *Polonja w Ameryce* (Philadelphia: Wachtl, 1944), pp. 25, 55-70; the short story by Henrik Sienkiewicz in *Szkice Weglem i Inne Nowele* (Warszawa, 1952), pp. 97-170; Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow-Citizens* (New York: Charities, 1910), p. 50; Paul Fox, *The Poles in America* (New York: Doran, 1922), p. 42; William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group* (5 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918-20), V, 6; U. S. Senate, 61st Cong., 3d Sess., Document No. 748, *Reports of the Immigration Commission, Emigration Conditions in Europe* (Washington, 1911), p. 53; Joseph Wyrwal, *America's Polish Heritage* (Detroit: Endurance, 1961), pp. 77-105.

For Lithuanians in particular, see A. Kaupas, "The Lithuanians in America," *Charities and the Commons*, XIII (December 3, 1904), 232; for Slovaks, Kenneth D. Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York: Doran, 1922), p. 45; and Peter P. Yurchak, *The Slovaks: Their History and Traditions* (Whiting, Indiana: Obrana, 1946), p. 157; and for Ukrainians, Julius Bachinsky, *Ukrainian Immigration in the United States (in Ukrainian)* (Lviv, Galicia, 1914), I, 16; and Wasyl Halich, *Ukrainians in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 13.

⁶ Frank Julian Warne, *The Slav Invasion and the Mine Workers* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1904), pp. 58-59. The author was later a census official. See his *The Immigrant Invasion* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1913).

Such a rapid demographic transformation was bound to produce ethnic antagonisms on the part of the older, Anglo-Saxon mine-workers.⁷ Thus, in 1889 Pennsylvania passed a law limiting the Slavic influx. It required future miners to pass an examination *in English* for state certification.⁸ This discrimination against non-English-speaking mineworkers along with other pressures agitated the Lehigh Slavs especially.

A later reason for their dissatisfaction was the poor economic condition of the industry in the next decade. The depression of the 1890's came early to the coalfields and affected the districts severely. Overproduction had constantly plagued the operators, who in the last years of the century cut back their output, working time, and wages.⁹ As the hard times became chronic, church leaders and newspapers complained of the lack of work and even starvation.¹⁰ The governor himself finally took action and appointed a legislative investigation committee. It reported that the cries for relief were genuine.¹¹

Another grievance among immigrant mineworkers arose early in 1897, when the state legislature again attempted to discourage the employment of Slavs. Demands for another restrictive measure came not only from the nativist Anglo-Saxons but also from a new source, the fledgling union in the area, the United Mine Workers of America.

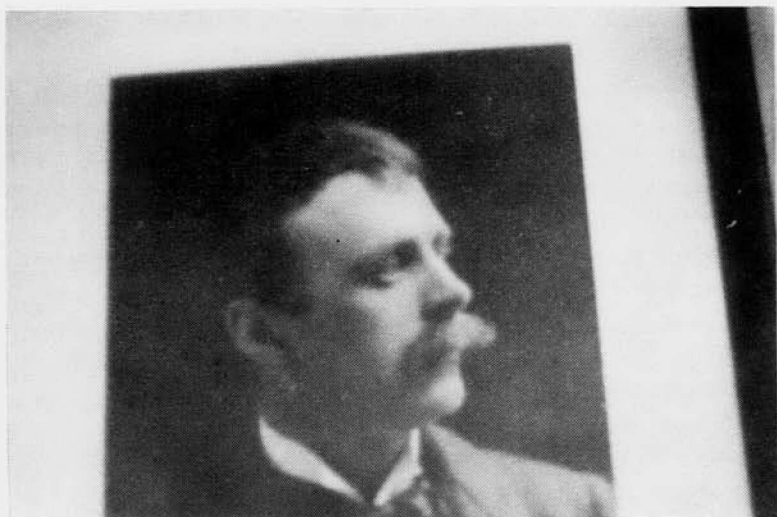
⁷ "Anglo-Saxons" here will represent Americans, British, and the occasional German nationalities in the hard coal region.

⁸ This later was known as the Gallagher law and remained in force throughout the 1890's. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *The Legislative Record for the Session of 1889*, II, 1527-1529, 1548, 1647-1648; 1897, Vol. I, Part II, 1236. For the motives of the law's proponents, see *The Pilot* (Boston), April 25, 1885, p. 8; Henry George, "Labor in Pennsylvania," *North American Review*, CCCLVII (October, 1886), 361-363; Alexander Trachtenberg, *The History of Legislation for the Protection of Coal Miners in Pennsylvania, 1824-1915* (New York: International, 1942), p. 135; *Industrial Commission . . . Immigration*, XV, 417-419; *The Philadelphia Record*, August 2, 1888, p. 1; *Industrial Commission . . . Mining*, XII, 655; and George Stevenson, *Reflections of an Anthracite Engineer* (New York, 1931), pp. 36-43.

⁹ George O. Virtue, "The Anthracite Laborers," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor*, No. 13 (November, 1897), 758; *Industrial Commission . . . Immigration*, XV, 394-395.

¹⁰ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), March 29, 1890, p. 9; *The Press* (Philadelphia), April 8, 1894, p. 1.

¹¹ *The Legislative Record for . . . 1897*, II, 2668. The state never published the hearings, but excerpts are in the *Daily News-Dealer* (Wilkes-Barre), May 6, 1897, p. 1; and *The Scranton Republican*, May 14, p. 5.



JOHN FAHY

Courtesy, Mr. Michael Kosik, Dupont, Pa.

John Fahy, the UMW leader in anthracite, had entered the fields three years previously, in 1894, to organize the men. Since then he had made slow but steady progress both with natives and immigrants, though only in Schuylkill.¹² But the locals' slow growth, insufficient funds, and probably the anti-immigrant arguments convinced him late in 1896 to give up organizing and shift his efforts to political actions.¹³ At the head of a three-man labor committee, he pressured the legislature and the governor to extend miner certification and sign another anti-immigrant measure, the Campbell Act. This new law taxed those companies employing adult male aliens three cents a day per alien. The union leader praised the passing of the measure in June, 1897, but felt that the tax should have been higher.¹⁴ As future events were to show, the companies' deducting the levy from the Slavs' wages greatly

¹² *United Mine Workers' Journal* (hereafter *UMWJ*), January 15, 1940, p. 21; June 14, 1894, p. 8; July 18, 1895, p. 5; December 20, 1894, p. 2; February 5, 1895, p. 2; Frank Julian Warne, "Organized Labor in the Anthracite Coal Fields," *The Outlook*, LXXI (May 24, 1902), 4; J. O. Sirvydas, *Biographical Sketches, 1875-1935* (Cleveland: Spaudas Dirvos, 1941), p. 197.

¹³ *UMWJ*, October 22, 1896, p. 1; November 5, p. 1; December 3, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, July 1, 1897, p. 1; August 12, p. 1.

antagonized the foreigners. Fahy meanwhile remained in Harrisburg to urge more such legislation. He was not to remain there long, however, for the discontented immigrants were soon to summon him back to his former duty—organizing in the field.

The final and immediate cause for the strike of 1897 explains why it took place in Lehigh alone. The northern, Wyoming companies apparently were able to pay and deal with their mine-workers satisfactorily in the later 1890's.¹⁵ So, too, were the companies in the Schuylkill area in the south. There, the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company had almost monopolized the coalfield. And this large corporation had a tradition of generally amicable employee relations.¹⁶ For example, while the men had lost the last general strike in 1888, the Reading had then magnanimously lowered the price of powder, a major expense of the miners. And even more noteworthy for the immigrant was the Reading's later decision to refuse to comply with the Campbell alien tax law.¹⁷

On the other hand, the Lehigh operators were small, individual, independent, and competing fiercely for the trade. Producers such as Markle, Coxe, and Pardee regarded their 1887-1888 triumph as decisive and acted paternalistically toward their workers. Such well-known evils as payroll deductions for company homes, company stores, and company doctors flourished longest in this area.¹⁸ Thus, one might conclude that the whims of an arbitrary foreman in Lehigh would produce a more violent outburst from mineworkers there. And so it happened late in the summer of 1897.

People around Hazleton often said that Gomer Jones, the new divisional superintendent of the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre (L and

¹⁵ *Public Ledger*, September 17, 1897, p. 9.

¹⁶ An exception might be President Franklin B. Gowen's attack on the Workmen's Benevolent Association in the summer of 1875. But even before then, Gowen had not been especially antagonistic to the union. See Marvin Schlegel, *Ruler of the Reading: The Life of Franklin B. Gowen, 1836-1889* (Harrisburg: Archives, 1947), pp. 62-64, 170; Clifton K. Yearley, *Enterprise and Anthracite: Economics and Democracy in Schuylkill County, 1820-1875* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 190.

¹⁷ Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Industry* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), p. 202; *Public Ledger*, September 3, 1897, p. 1; *Ashland* (Pa.) *Advocate*, September 13, p. 3.

¹⁸ See especially *Industrial Commission . . . Mining*, XII, 141-143; and Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities* (New York: Macmillan, 1904), pp. 122-124, 127-128, 215.

WB) mines on the South Side, took his job seriously. He had replaced two easy-going foremen and had gained a reputation as a strict taskmaster, especially with the "slow-moving" Slav.¹⁹ As Jones himself put it: "I came to restore discipline. . . . The [former] superintendents associated with the men [and] drank with them. . . . Now I cannot do that. I'm not a drinking man, and I've never made it a practice to hobnob with the men." His policy was strictly business. "When I give orders, I expect them to be obeyed. . . . I dismissed a good many men—about 80 I think."²⁰ On August 12 he notified the Slavic and Italian mule-drivers at Honey Brook that thereafter they would obtain and leave their animals at a more distant location. Realizing that this new rule meant extra work without extra pay, thirty-five "foreign" drivers struck immediately and posted pickets to bar the approach to the workplace.²¹ A short time later Superintendent Jones came out and threatened the marching strikers with an axe handle. But the mob which had gathered assaulted the boss, who with the aid of a friend soon withdrew.

The dissatisfaction spread quickly, so that four days later 350 drivers and sympathizers forced out 3,000 additional L and WB mineworkers.²² That evening foreigners held a mass meeting at nearby McAdoo. After selecting a Slovak to preside, the group formulated grievances to be presented to the company's head superintendent, Elmer Lawall. They demanded primarily a wage increase and Jones's removal for his "tyrannical methods of ruling."²³

Later a miners' committee returned from a management conference with a company promise to negotiate *after* the men returned to work. The English-speaking element readily agreed, but the more numerous immigrants angrily rejected the terms of resumption.²⁴ Finally, Superintendent Lawall brought the men back by assenting to the wage raise, throwing out the ruling re-

¹⁹ This was his judgment of the Slav. *Pottsville Republican*, September 11, p. 1.

²⁰ *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 15, p. 2; *Wilkes-Barre Times*, August 27, p. 8.

²¹ *The Daily Standard* (Hazleton), August 16, p. 1; *Public Ledger*, August 17, p. 1.

²² *Wilkes-Barre Times*, August 16, p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, August 17, p. 1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, August 20, p. 1; *Public Ledger*, August 20, p. 9.

locating the mules, and promising to investigate Jones's conduct.²⁵

Soon, however, Slavs elsewhere, at the nearby Van Wickle Company, took their cue from the L and WB malcontents. These alien mineworkers objected to a recent pay cut, the effects of the Campbell law, and the unfair pay discrimination between the English- and non-English-speaking employees.²⁶ As a reporter now noted, "The foreign element are the chief aggressors," and the unrest grew in earnest.²⁷

Immigrant strikers marched over to Coleraine and Beaver Meadow and forced fellow-countrymen there to stop work and join them.²⁸ Back at the Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre workings, the men struck again, since the company had not fired Jones.²⁹ When these original strikers forced the local Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company colliery and five other operations to stop, the total idle grew to 5,000.³⁰ A *Wilkes-Barre Times* dispatch cried hysterically that the revolt of the pauper labor was at hand: "Thousand of foreigners have begun a reign of terror, . . . a howling mob without aim or leader."³¹

By the beginning of September, it was obvious that the more moderate Anglo-Saxon mineworkers could not keep the immigrants contained. Van Wickle did bring his men back on September 5, offering a wage increase. Under the pressure of foreigners, Thomas Duffy, head of the L and WB employees' committee, desperately pleaded with Superintendent Lawall to follow suit: "If you cannot give the . . . Van Wickle advance, committee will no longer exist. Answer at once." The company replied calmly that it would forward the request to higher officials.³²

²⁵ *Ibid.*, August 23, p. 9; *Wilkes-Barre Times*, August 17, p. 1; August 21, p. 1.

²⁶ *Freeland (Pa.) Tribune*, August 30, p. 1; *The Daily Standard*, August 28, p. 1; *The Mauch Chunk (Pa.) Democrat*, September 4, p. 4.

²⁷ *The Daily Standard*, August 28, p. 1.

²⁸ *Wilkes-Barre Times*, August 28, p. 1; *Public Ledger*, August 28, p. 11; *The Daily Standard*, August 28, p. 1; August 30, p. 1; *Pottsville Republican*, August 28, p. 1; August 30, p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, September 11, p. 1, stated that the company was unlikely to remove Jones at all. It did not want to make it appear that it was yielding to employee dictation.

³⁰ *Public Ledger*, September 3, p. 1.

³¹ *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 2, pp. 1, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, September 6, p. 1; *The Daily Standard*, September 7, p. 1. For a superb example of Duffy's predicament, see the description of a typical immigrant demonstration in *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 4, p. 1.

Other immigrant-led demonstrations, violence, and demands took place before the 8th of the month at the Silver Brook Company, Hazel Mines, and the Ebervale Company.³³

Finally, just at this time the forces of law and order asserted themselves. The sheriffs of three counties, James Martin of Luzerne, Setzer of Carbon, and Alexander Scott of Schuylkill, gathered in Hazleton along with 500 deputies, 300 Pinkerton detectives, and a host of coal company guards. While they were not able to deter the continuing marches on operating collieries, they did frustrate several demonstrations after they had begun.³⁴ One confrontation of immigrants and deputies led to horrifying bloodshed, the tragic Lattimer massacre, in which a score of Slavs were killed and twice that number wounded.

Pardee's Lattimer workings on Hazleton's North Side had continued in operation all through the skirmishes. Harwood, the location of a nearby, struck colliery, contained mostly Polish, Lithuanian, and Slovak families who hoped to bring Lattimer into line with the others.³⁵ When some Lattimer Slavs went to Harwood and pleaded with two Hungarian leaders to help close their workings, the inhabitants had their chance.³⁶ At noon the next day, September 10, 500 immigrant strikers, marching behind an American flag, set out from Harwood for the seven-mile trek to the Pardee operation.

The news of the trooping East Europeans reached Sheriff Martin, who with about a hundred armed deputies rushed to the Hazleton outskirts to cut off the moving file. After the groups met, a brief, violent scuffle ensued as the marchers refused to disperse. They defiantly continued on to their destination. Angered, the sheriff and his men boarded trolleys for the edge of Lattimer, where they again blocked the road and the Slavs' line of march. When the immigrant marchers arrived, the sheriff once again

³³ *Ibid.*, September 8, p. 1; *Evening Herald* (Shenandoah, Pa.), September 8, p. 1.

³⁴ *The Daily Standard*, September 9, p. 1; September 10, p. 1.

³⁵ *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 7, p. 1.

³⁶ Affidavit of John Eagler, Proceeding Held by the Order of the Imperial and Royal Consulate at Philadelphia in Hazleton, Pa., September 16, in Austria, *Notes of Ambassador Ladislaus Hengelmüller von Hengervai*, July 1, 1897-June 30, 1900, Volume 12, at the National Archives, Washington.

demanded that they disperse. No one is certain of the following events, except that Martin either fell or was pushed to the side of the road. The deputies then fired point blank at the strikers. Some Slavs fell in their tracks, while others began fleeing in all directions for cover.³⁷

When the shooting had subsided, townspeople ran up to minister to the cries of the wounded and dying. The exact casualty toll is in doubt, but it did reach at least nineteen dead and thirty-nine wounded. The nationalities of the fallen were twenty-six Poles, twenty Slovaks, and five Lithuanians.³⁸

The news of the calamity, spreading quickly to Hazleton and the neighboring communities, upset all groups, both native and foreign. The Anglo-Saxons feared retaliation from the "Huns," especially when later that night a mob ransacked Gomer Jones's home at Audenried. Town leaders demanded and received state protection.³⁹ Governor Daniel H. Hastings sent in the Third Brigade of the State Militia under General John P. S. Gobin, who arrived the next morning, September 11.⁴⁰ "The English-speaking people [were] overjoyed, for now they can retire for the night with the assurance that all will be well."⁴¹

Of course, the event shocked the immigrants even more profoundly. The Rev. Richard Aust of Hazleton's Polish St. Stanislaus Church rushed to the field of carnage, offering his religious assistance to the fallen. Later, the priest comforted the wailing wives and children at the city hospital and morgue. On Sunday

³⁷ For the best eyewitness descriptions, see *Pottsville Republican*, September 13, p. 3; and *The Pilot*, September 18, p. 1.

³⁸ The exact nationalities of the others are unknown, but they were undoubtedly also East Europeans. One deputy was wounded in the fray, probably accidentally by his companions. The casualty list is my estimate, a reconciliation from Fr. Jonas Zilius, *Lietuviai Amerikoje* (Plymouth, Pa., 1899), p. 60; Konstantin Culen, "Lattimerská Játka," *Kalendar Jednota* (1938), p. 50; Edward Pinkowski, *Lattimer Massacre* (Philadelphia: Sunshine, 1950), p. 15; *Tevyne*, II (October, 1897), p. 311; and Henry Palmer, *Fifty Years at the Bar and in Politics* (Williamsport, Pa.: Snyder and Peisthof, 1913), p. 268.

³⁹ *Pottsville Republican*, September 13, p. 3; *Straß* (Scranton), October 16, p. 1; *UMWJ*, September 30, p. 8; "The Lattimer Massacre taken from *The* (Hazleton) *Sentinel*, September 11, 1897," pp. 13-14, typescript in the Hazleton Public Library.

⁴⁰ *Message of Daniel H. Hastings, Governor of Pennsylvania to the General Assembly, January 3, 1899* (Harrisburg, 1899), p. 24.

⁴¹ *Pottsville Republican*, September 13, p. 1.

Wilkes-Barre Times.

WILKES-BARRE, PA.
SATURDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 11, 1897.
PRICE TWO CENTS.

LAST EDITION!

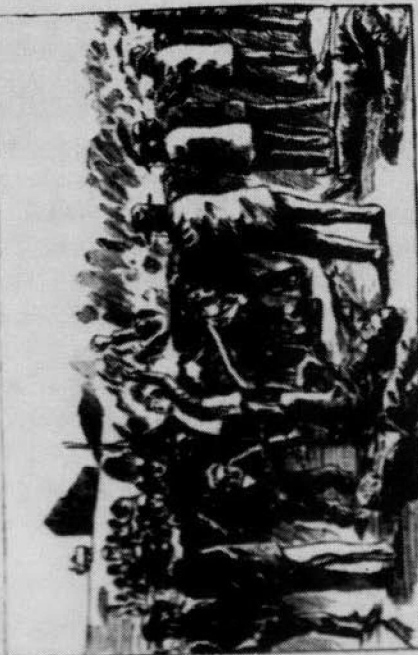
BLOODY CRISIS AT HAZLETON

Fatal Clash Between the
Strikers and Deputies
of Sheriff Martin.

THE SHERIFF ASSAULTED BY A STRIKER
WHO WAS UP THE DEPUTIES FIRED
INTO THE GROUP AND THE
OTHERS NO LONGER.

TWENTY OR MORE ARE DEAD.

Shooting Men Killed Instantly About Forty
Were Wounded or Lost Injured, and of That
Number Almost All the Sheriff Martin
Fought Men Who He Says the Order
is to kill and to kill anyone says that the
and that he has killed his last three half a
dozen. There are four and three are
also killed. The men were shot and
and are now killed at Hazleton. The
lastest intelligence from the men of Hazleton
the day.



SCENE OF YESTERDAY'S CONFLICT.



Graves of
Three Victims



and Monday the Slavic and Italian nationalities together poured out their bereavement in spectacular funeral demonstrations.⁴²

Shock turned to outraged indignation toward Sheriff Martin and his deputies as the news reached immigrant groups throughout the mining region and even beyond. The fact that the strikers had carried no arms, not even clubs, while the deputies had used their weapons indiscriminately, aroused the foreigners greatly. In their response, perhaps never before did Slavic-American society react with such unanimity.

In the hard coal region the immigrant newspapers led the outcry. The Ukrainian *Svoboda* of Mt. Carmel called the affair, "clear, illegal murder," and the organ of the recently-formed Polish National Catholic Church, *Straż*, demanded that a new workingmen's party arise to remedy the injustice.⁴³ At multi-national, immigrant meetings in Hazleton, Shenandoah, Mt. Carmel, Scranton, Duryea, Shamokin, Nanticoke, and elsewhere, thousands gathered to censure the hated deputies and pledge aid to the victims' dependents.⁴⁴

At the national level, too, conventions of East Europeans voiced their sympathy. The Polish National Alliance, the Lithuanian Alliance, the Polish-Lithuanian League of New York, a Russian labor society in Philadelphia, a meeting of Slavic journalists in Cleveland, and Baltimore, Chicago, and Connecticut Lithuanians all expressed their outrage and offered thousands of dollars in financial assistance.⁴⁵ The Imperial Austrian Govern-

⁴² Like many other nationalities, the Slavs spend disproportionate sums on such ceremonials for the dead. Helen Stankiewicz Zand, "Polish American Folkways," *Polish American Studies*, III (July-December, 1960), pp. 100-104; S. P. Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old* (New York: Harper, 1921), p. 26. The funeral pageants are magnificently recounted in *Public Ledger*, September 13, p. 1; September 14, p. 9; *The Times*, September 14, p. 1; and Pinkowski, *Lattimer Massacre*, pp. 22-26.

⁴³ *Svoboda*, September 16, p. 4; *Straż*, September 18, p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Straż*, September 18, p. 4; September 25, p. 1; October 2, p. 2; *Svoboda*, September 16, p. 4; *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 13, p. 2; September 14, p. 2; September 28, p. 2; *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 17, p. 6; *The Daily Miners' Journal* (Pottsville, Pa.), September 18, p. 1; Oscar Jewell Harvey and Ernest Gray Smith, *A History of Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania* (6 vols., Wilkes-Barre: Raeder, 1909-1930), VI, 524; *Tevyne*, II (October, 1897), 314; *Scranton Times*, September 16, p. 3; September 20, pp. 3, 4; *The Weekly Star* (Plymouth, Pa., September 16, p. 1.

⁴⁵ *Straż*, September 18, p. 1; *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 13, p. 5; *The Daily Standard*, September 17, p. 1; *Tevyne*, II (October, 1897), 314; *New York Times*, September 13, p. 5; Cullen, pp. 54-55.

ment even made the affair an international incident, demanding compensation, but to no avail.⁴⁶ However, the Ambassador did aid a local anthracite committee under Father Aust to prosecute Sheriff Martin and his men for murder. But the state grossly mishandled the case, and the court later freed the defendants.⁴⁷

The strike meanwhile had continued to grow even further, for now Slavs added the memory of martyrs to their causes for dissatisfaction. The 1,500 Lattimer men quit at once, and on the 12th they elected a Polish, Slovak, and Italian delegation to present demands to Pardee.⁴⁸ By the 14th, the number idle reached its peak: about 11,000 were out, and fifteen mines of Coxe Brothers, Lehigh Valley, Lehigh and Wilkes-Barre, Van Wickle, and Pardee were shut down.⁴⁹ A simple company directive to its muledrivers had indeed precipitated a storm.

However, by mid-September the dispute had spent itself. All during the violence, the immigrants' religious leaders had urged the demonstrators to use restraint or face the prospect of a dreadful calamity.⁵⁰ Such entreaties now took effect. Also, when all the operators except the stubborn Coxe Brothers agreed to readjust their pay scales, the inevitable back-to-work movement began on the 16th.⁵¹

But Slavic resistance did not melt away easily, for a complication arose as immigrant mineworkers returned to their places. An indomitable group of brawny, Slavic women, so-called

⁴⁶ Austria, *Notes*, September 28, p. 3; December 30; *ibid.*, Letters to John Sherman, January 28, 1898, March 30, April 26; Palmer, *Fifty Years*, pp. 189, 209, 268, 274. A London paper commented wryly with an eye on another international crisis brewing: "There is no reason for America to fight Spain after all. An outlet for her fighting energy is provided by the indiscreet vigor of a Pennsylvania Sheriff." *The Daily Mail*, quoted in *Public Ledger*, September 14, p. 9.

⁴⁷ See especially Palmer, *Fifty Years*, pp. 60-274; and *Pottsville Republican*, February 4, 7, 9, 10, 15-17, 25-26, March 2, 9, 1898, all on page 1. Palmer was Martin's attorney.

⁴⁸ *New York Times*, September 12, p. 1; *New York Daily Tribune*, September 12, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, September 14, p. 1; September 15, p. 1; *New York Times*, September 14, p. 1; September 15, p. 3; *Pottsville Republican*, September 15, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *The Daily Miners' Journal*, September 18, p. 1.

⁵¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, September 14, p. 1; *The Daily Miners' Journal*, September 20, p. 1; *Pottsville Republican*, September 15, p. 1; September 20, p. 1; Charles B. Spahr, "America's Working People: The Coal-Miners of Pennsylvania," *The Outlook*, LII (August 5, 1899), 810.

"amazons," led the bitter-enders. On September 16 and 17, one "Big Mary" Septek and a "wild band" of men, women, and children armed with clubs, rolling pins, and pokers frightened workers from their places at several South Side operations.⁵² The lady firebrand resumed her leadership of the group on the 18th, but this time at Lattimer they met a menacing force of Gobin's troops. The soldiers in formation plus a cold drizzle overcame the determination of the women, who reluctantly withdrew.⁵³ These unfeminine displays disgusted *The Wilkes-Barre Times* editor, who blamed the immigrant fairer sex for such a disgrace: "The appearance of women . . . in [the] strike is a novelty of a not very pleasing nature. Those who have made themselves so conspicuous the past week in . . . the Hazleton region were the wives, mothers, and sisters of the Hungarian . . . strikers. They were the ones who had participated in the ill-advised and unwomanly demonstrations." Continuing, the paper lamented the passing of better times "when our mines were manned by English-speaking men . . . [for then] such scenes would have been impossible in [labor] troubles." And it concluded for its Anglo-Saxon audience: "This is only another forcible illustration of the great change . . . in these . . . regions since the importation of cheap European labor commenced."⁵⁴

It soon became obvious that the strength of Slavic womanhood could not hold back the inevitable. Militiamen in force now guarded the returning L and WB workers, and at Cranberry and Crystal Ridge other nationalities outvoted the resistant Poles. Every colliery had resumed operations by September 28, and the last troops returned to their stations a week later.

But the Slav reviewing the strike could still regard the dispute as a victory. Not only did the companies grant him pay increases, but the courts also did away with another of the provocations. They declared the alien tax law, the Campbell Act, unconstitu-

⁵² Pinkowski, *Lattimer Massacre*, p. 27; Jay Hambridge, "An Artist's Impression of the Colliery Region," *The Century Illustrated Magazine*, LV (April, 1898), 825-826; *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 17, p. 1; September 18, p. 1; *New York World*, September 17, p. 3; *The Daily Miners' Journal*, September 17, p. 1; September 18, p. 2.

⁵³ *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 21, p. 1; *New York World*, September 21, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *The Wilkes-Barre Record*, September 22, p. 1.

tional.⁵⁵

The results of the entire six weeks incident had more than the obvious significance, that of showing the spontaneous, grass roots ability of the Slavs to strike. It also established a union, the United Mine Workers, securely in the Lehigh district.

John Fahy, the UMW organizer, had watched the growing disturbances enthusiastically from Harrisburg. But he did not leave the state capital until mid-August. It was then that Gomer Jones's employees at McAdoo begged Fahy in a message to come back to the field and begin planting locals. He readily agreed, and the labor leader was overwhelmed by the reception. Since all who wished to hear him could not get into Mehalchick's Hall, they moved the meeting to a nearby baseball field where over 1,000 listened to his address.⁵⁶ In two days Fahy had established six locals with over 700 members, and within a week he had enrolled double that number.⁵⁷ After advising the men how to negotiate with the L and WB Company, the organizer returned to Harrisburg.

But the striking foreigners refused to tolerate his absence long. Employees at the Van Wickle mines and some at Beaver Meadow and Silver Mine telegraphed Fahy several times to return and continue his organizing duties.⁵⁸ When he returned this time, journalists agreed that he never was so busy.⁵⁹

By the following January the greatly-enlarged union membership in anthracite must have pleased Fahy. For that accomplishment he could not only congratulate himself on his efforts but especially the Slavs for their enthusiasm. At the UMW's national convention in Columbus, Ohio, he offered a glowing report: Thomas Duffy of the L and WB employees' committee now was presiding over the new subdistrict 6 of Anthracite District 1. And the new branch numbered thirty-five locals. Later the subdistrict grew so that in June, 1898, it became a separate district

⁵⁵ *The Buffalo Express* in *UMWJ*, September 30, p. 8. However, the exact status of the law still remained in some confusion. *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 30, p. 2; *Ashland Advocate*, September 17, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *Ashland Advocate*, August 19, p. 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, August 21, p. 1; *Pottsville Republican*, September 13, p. 1.

⁵⁸ The mineworkers sent seven telegrams, a registered, and a first class letter. *Pottsville Republican*, September 13, p. 1; *The Sentinel*, September 2, quoted in *UMWJ*, November 18, p. 1.

⁵⁹ *The Daily Standard*, September 4, p. 1; September 6, p. 1; *Wilkes-Barre Times*, September 3, p. 1.

of its own, No. 7, also under Duffy.⁶⁰ Unionism had won a good foothold in the hard coal industry.

In reviewing the development of this Lehigh dispute, one can easily understand the nationality response to the labor unrest. Above all, the fact is clear that the entire upheaval from mid-August through September was the result of Slavic immigrant dissatisfaction, not that of Americans or Anglo-Saxons. The initial friction at Honey Brook involved East Europeans, and it was their impetus which maintained the resistance. Apparently they had had enough of pay discrimination, compulsory deductions, and arbitrary supervisors. And despite the lack of any apparent, unifying organization, they walked off their jobs. Brandishing their clubs and proclaiming their rights behind an American flag, the Slavs did recognize and react to what they believed was injustice, even without the help of their Irish, Welsh, or English co-workers. One paper said that the more reticent English-speaking groups did not begin interesting themselves in the dispute until after mid-September.⁶¹

In addition to the protest's ethnic tone, the situation assumed an ironic twist in relation to restriction and unionism. The immigrant group was calling an organizer to recruit them into the movement while at the very moment he was lobbying for their restriction. It appeared that in 1897 Fahy was attempting to bar the entrance of a rank and file who were ripest for union membership. At any rate, it was clearly Slavic dissatisfaction which planted unionism in Lehigh.

When one looks into the future, the restoration of the UMW in the field at this time assumes even more importance. For similar and continuing immigrant grievances contributed greatly to later anthracite troubles. And these disputes were to establish labor organization throughout the whole industry. Another strike in 1899 in Wyoming, the six weeks' general anthracite strike in 1900, and a repetition of that industrywide dispute for

⁶⁰ It has remained as No. 7 to the present. *UMWJ*, January 13, 1898, p. 4; January 20, p. 5; February 3, p. 5; June 2, p. 2. See also "Proceedings of the Ninth Annual Convention of the United Mine Workers of America Held at Columbus, Ohio, January Eleventh, 1898," p. 35, copy at UMW headquarters, Washington; and *Revised Anthracite Mine Laws of Pennsylvania and Award of the Arbitration Commission to the United Mine Workers of America* (Scranton, 1903), p. 3.

⁶¹ *Pottsville Republican*, September 17, p. 1. See also *ibid.*, August 30, p. 1.

five months in 1902, all indicate the predominant determination of the East European, rather than the Anglo-Saxon community. Slavic resistance was to prove essential in advancing the aims of anthracite unionism. For the 1902 strike established a precedent-setting example of industrial grievance machinery, the 1903 Anthracite Board of Conciliation.⁶² The Slavic Lehigh outburst of 1897 was the first step in this achievement.

But the activity of the East European peoples in 1897 represents still another important feature, an aspect of the nature of their society. Observers will note the quick unanimity and communication of their reaction. Almost immediately after the L and WB incident, the protest spread in a rapid chain reaction to the other Slavic neighborhoods. Despite the multitude of national groups, Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, and Ukrainians, all East Europeans acted as one. Contact within that "Hungarian" society must have been close and effective, much more so than that of the more individualistic and diffused Anglo-Saxons. One will remember that the Lattimer tragedy came after immigrant messengers begged countrymen for a demonstration. And the aftermath rallied the sympathy of all Slavdom.

Not only was the protest an economic one of an international character, but in addition it was a thoroughly social one, intranationally. The participants were more than just the male breadwinners. Others in the group participated as well, women and children. "Big Mary" and her amazons were only the more dramatic and noteworthy manifestations of this character. Strike reaction, then, to the Slavs meant the whole family, not just the workers.

A final aspect of American Slavdom's compact nature was its treatment of scabs. The immigrant society in crisis coalesced to the extent not only of ostracizing such dissenters but indeed of intimidating and assaulting them, whether fellow-countrymen or not. The foreigners' marches on working collieries and property depredations attempted to purge the labor force into submitting unanimously to the community will. Scabs of any nationality dreaded the approaching file of Hungarian workmen, women, and

⁶² See my "The Attitude of Slavic Communities to the Unionization of the Anthracite Industry Before 1903," doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1963, Chapter XV.

children. In Lehigh that fear did not abate until after the troops had arrived and most operators had granted strikers' demands.

Thus, rather than condemning the new pauper labor for being unorganizable, labor leaders should have noted more closely the character of Slavic-American industrial society. The dirty, overcrowded settlements to which the immigrants flocked were communities which as social units offered a potential opportunity to unionism, rather than a threat to its existence. Certainly, as John Fahy and the UMW discovered to their surprise, when once aggrieved by employers' injustice, the immigrants would strike and with a discipline and militancy unknown in English-speaking circles. Therefore, noting the Slavs' tightly-knit communal attachments, the labor movement as a whole could have enlisted them as a group rather than as individuals as was the custom. The success of the UMW in anthracite might have pointed a way.

Nevertheless, labor leaders continued to demand immigration restriction, and in the 1920's Congress granted their wish. But one student, William M. Leiserson, cognizant of the United Mine Workers' experience, saw the relevant defect in American union policy. Labor's inability or refusal to organize the unskilled was not a failing of any nationality group, but rather the deficiency of union recruiting and organizing techniques. The responsibility of the movement, Leiserson said, was to educate workers of all kinds, whatever their skill, sex, *or nationality*. If labor officials fail to do this, "it is easy to blame the 'foreigners,' if they happen to be the people involved."⁶³

Labor leaders then and perhaps now tend to overlook the fact that the work force is a part of America's pluralistic society. In the past, rather than trying to limit the numbers of component ethnic groups, for their own benefit unions should have accepted this country's heterogeneity. They should have conformed their tactics to the cultural habits of those that they wished to attract. Even today, by refusing to recognize the more self-conscious minorities, mass associations will stagnate, never to expand with the growing rank and file.

⁶³ William M. Leiserson, *Adjusting Immigrant and Industry* (New York: Harper, 1924), p. 227.