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The Buena Vista Affair 1874-1875

MUCH has been written in recent years about the general relationship between the so-called "new" immigrants and the post-Civil War industrial and labor scene, but little is known about the economic and social conditions that shaped the entrepreneurial decision to utilize these immigrants, and even less is known about the community response to southern European workers before 1880.[1] The first widespread use of Italian laborers in the bituminous coal mines—as armed strikebreakers—took place in 1874 near Pittsburgh, and led to a set of events sufficiently dramatic and violent to reveal a great deal about industrial and social relations in the Gilded Age, attitudes toward industrial and social change in small industrial towns, and attitudes toward "new" immigrants.[2]

[1] See, for examples, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land. Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, 1955), 12–34; Charlotte Erickson, *American Industry and the European Immigrant, 1860–1885* (Cambridge, 1957), 88–122; Maldwyn Allen Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1960), 207–246; Edward Fenton, "Italians in the Labor Movement," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVI (1959), 133–148. The author read portions of this paper before the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society in Pittsburgh on Mar. 5, 1963, and is indebted to Prof. Samuel P. Hays, chairman of the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh, for making that possible.

[2] Brief mention of this event is found in Higham, 48; Erickson, 111–112; Anna Rochester, *Labor and Coal* (New York, 1931), 170. Not one of these accounts is accurate in the brief de-

A strike against the coal operators who owned pits along the Pan Handle—the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis Railroad—fifteen miles southwest of Pittsburgh, first brought large numbers of Italians to the western Pennsylvania bituminous coal mines. The twelve Pan Handle mines employed between 1,700 and 1,800 men and boys in "good times," but in the summer of 1874, after a very slow winter when wages fell and miners worked about two or three days a week, 1,300 Pan Handle miners struck for higher wages. Some left the region for other areas as distant as Illinois. The rest stubbornly complained about low wages—lower than the Monongahela River miners and the other Pittsburgh railroad miners—and about deductions from their wages for such items as powder, light, and the repair of tools.

Although the regional Miners' Benevolent and Protective Association of Western Pennsylvania supported the strikers, by early September some men had returned to work for less than the four cents a bushel demanded. Anxious to benefit from the reviving fall trade after nearly a year of severe economic depression, the operators offered those still out a one-year contract with a sliding scale pegging wages to the market price for coal. But the contract also included a clause permitting the operators to withhold ten per cent of the monthly wage as "a guarantee of faithful performance." The strikers offered to return at three and a half cents a bushel, but rejected the contract.[3] In September, therefore, the operators made a bold decision and raised a large sum of money to "perfect plans for the employment of foreign labor, particularly Swedes." However, Swedish and other Scandinavian workers from Chicago had been used without success that summer to break a strike of central Illinois coal diggers. That fact, among others, may have convinced the owners to send William P. Rend and two other operators to New York City to

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tails that it presents. The only extensive secondary account of the Buena Vista affair is found in George McNeill, ed., *The Labor Movement: The Problem of To-day* (New York, 1891), 259. Written by John McBride, a trade unionist and leader of the coal miners, the description contains at least six major factual errors and entirely misreads the events.

[3] George W. Thurston, *Pittsburgh and Allegheny in the Centennial Year* (Pittsburgh, 1876), 146–147; *Workingman's Advocate*, Jan. 24, Apr. 11, May 16 and 30, June 6, 1874; *Chicago Times*, Sept. 26, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 1 and 2, 1874; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 2 and 3, 1874.

contract for new workers with the New York Italian Labor Company. The *Pittsburgh Leader* called their decision the "firmest blow" ever struck against the miners and their union.[4]

The coal operators had good reasons for their decision. In the spring of 1874, unskilled Italian laborers had been used to weaken important and powerful New York building trades unions. Poor, rural immigrants, the Italians lived "piled together like sardines in a box" and worked mainly as rag pickers and street cleaners.[5] Popular stereotypes hindered their adjustment to urban industrial life. A New York Board of Health Sanitary Inspector and physician found them of "passionate dispositions" and, "as a rule, filthy beyond the power of one to imagine." He believed that their "mental condition somewhat corresponds to their physical" condition.[6] Another New Yorker found the Italian "a born workman as well as artist, . . . fruitful in invention, facile in manipulation, patient in toil, . . . economical beyond our comprehension, simple in his tastes, limited in his wants." Italians were "exempt in a marvelous degree from hereditary complaints."[7] The *New York Tribune* and the *New York Times* encouraged the employment of these poor Italians. The *Tribune* advised employers that their "mode of life" permitted the Italians to work for low wages, and that "men of other nationalities, Irish, German, and native-born" would "not work for the same wages."[8] The *Times*, finding the Italians the most "industrious and sober nationality" in New York, urged employers to hire them "and do away with strikes" because Italians were "willing to work," "accustomed to low wages," and not in "such intimate contact with [the] trades-unions . . . as the Irish and German laborers."[9] Two non-Italians, civil engineers and contractors, founded the New York Italian Labor Company in April, 1874. It claimed 2,700 members, and its Italian superintendent, Frederick Guscetti, told the public that "As peaceable and industrious men, we claim the right to put

[4] *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Sept. 9, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 24, 1874.

[5] *New York Toiler*, Aug. 22, 1874. See also *New York Sun*, July 6, 1874.

[6] Sanitary Inspector Roger S. Tracy, M. D., New York, May 1, 1874, to Dr. Walter Day, Sanitary Superintendent, Board of Health of the City of New York, *Fourth Annual Report, May 1, 1873 to April 30, 1874* (New York, 1874), 96–97.

[7] C. E. Lester, May 25, 1874, to the editor, *New York Tribune*, May 28, 1874.

[8] *Ibid.*, May 25, 1874.

[9] *New York Times*, June 25, 1874.

such price upon our labor as may seem to us best." The company held power of attorney over the Italian workers, contracted particular jobs, provided transportation, supplied the "gangs" with "simple food," and retained a day's wages from each monthly pay check as its commission. Guscetti insisted that the company was started to protect the Italians from their Irish "adversaries," and his employers promised to free capitalists from labor unions and their "ignorant and irresponsible dictation." The *Times* believed that "the Irish malcontents among the laborers can do little injury to the Italians and the authorities will protect employers in their rights."[10]

The *Times* was only partly right. Frequent conflicts between Irish and native-born workers and their Italian competitors did take place. On May 12, for example, the two groups fought in the New York streets, and James Donovan, an Irish worker, died.[11] "It is a regular thing," complained a leader of the Italians, "for car-drivers to strike Italian laborers on the head with car-hooks as they pass where the men are working. . . ."[12] In June, Italians replaced striking Irish hod carriers. The union men scuffled with the Italians and on one day injured thirteen of them. Police action the next day narrowly averted a serious riot. The police arrested several Irish workers, and squads of armed officers guarded the Italians as they went to and from work.[13]

Despite these troubles, the New York Italian Labor Company got off to a good start. Powerful daily newspapers applauded it, and the police protected its men. The Harris Troop of Light Cavalry, a New York National Guard unit, agreed to form an association "to discountenance strikes and especially to afford protection to the Italian laborers . . . against the unwarranted attacks of Irish workmen."[14] The contractors, not surprisingly, brushed aside critics, such as the *Coopers' New Monthly*, which called the Italians "poor strangers, unacquainted with the laws and customs and language of the country" and thus "the dupes of unprincipled money sharks" and "tools to victimize and oppress other workingmen." The trade

10 Frederick Guscetti, June 22, 1874, to the editor, *New York Sun*, June 26, 1874, and *New York Tribune*, June 24, 1874; *New York World*, July 23, 1874; *New York Times*, June 25, 1874.

11 *New York Tribune*, May 4 and 26, 1874.

12 *Ibid.*, May 26, 1874.

13 *New York Sun*, June 10, 1874; *New York Times*, June 10, 1874.

14 Resolution enclosed in F. Guscetti to the editor, *New York Sun*, June 26, 1874.

union journal explained: "We do not hold the poor Italians responsible or blame them for this state of things—far from it. Too many of us do, we admit. . . . These poor fellows must live. . . . No! . . . The detestable scoundrels who import them, who grind their blood and bones and sinews, . . . they are GUILTY."[15] Such arguments hardly impressed the New York Italian Labor Company and it advertised its services in *Iron Age*.[16] The *Chicago Times* printed its card.[17] When Wilkes-Barre ironworkers struck, the contractors offered to send Italians.[18] By the end of July, it had contracted men to Brookline, Massachusetts, to lay pipes, and to Little Falls, New York, to double-track the New York Central Railroad.[19] The firm's energetic and apparently successful start no doubt impressed the Pittsburgh coal operators. When William Rend and his two associates arrived in New York, they made hasty arrangements for more than two hundred Italians, led by foreman Guscetti, to work in the Pan Handle mines.

News of the coming of the Italians to the Pittsburgh mines leaked out two weeks before they arrived. *Frank Cowan's Paper*, a western Pennsylvania weekly that supported the industrial interests, applauded the Pan Handle mine owners: "If they want labor, they may buy it in whatsoever market they please. It were a sorry country indeed if this were not the case." Nevertheless, *Cowan's Paper* warned of the "inefficiency of [the] local police" should the "Irish, Welsh, and English" miners be prejudiced against the "olive-skinned children of Italy," even though the Italians, unlike "the yellow sons of China," were "full blooded 'white men.' " The weekly "awaited with keen interest . . . the result of this new departure."[20]

A large crowd, including many miners and a few Pittsburgh Italians, gathered in Union Depot on the evening of September 23 when about two hundred Italians, led by Guscetti and accompanied by Rend and the other operators, together with William Griffin, an

15 *Coopers' New Monthly*, I (July, 1874), 13.

16 *Iron Age* (Aug. 20, 1874), 9. See also Wellington and Stephens, Civil Engineers and Contractors, New York Italian Labor Company, June 26, 1874, to the editor, *New York Times*, June 29, 1874.

17 *Chicago Times*, June 25, 1874.

18 *Iron Age* (Aug. 20, 1874), 9.

19 *New York World*, July 23, 1874.

20 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Sept. 9, 1874.

officer of the New York contracting firm, arrived in Pittsburgh. Police waited there, too, in case of trouble. But the Italians, shunted quickly onto the Pan Handle track and taken to Emigrant's Depot, avoided the crowd. Five or six Italians deserted their comrades and applied for lodging at the Central Police Station, but the rest had no apparent qualms about their work and, after being fed and given arms and ammunition, left for the mines at four in the morning. Specially sworn deputies accompanied them. The Italians went mostly to the Pittsburgh National Coal Company mines at Noblestown, the Huntsman, Miller and Company Fort Pitt mines, and the Laurel Hill, McDonald Station, and Walnut Hill mines owned by Rend.[21]

Excessively blunt, the Pan Handle operators gave clear reasons for the coming of the Italians. They spoke of the "war between capital and labor," and said the "fondness" of local miners for strikes "brought these swarthy foreigners amongst us." Questioned by a *Pittsburgh Gazette* reporter as to what would happen if the Italians failed, Rend explained: "We are determined to put an end to strikes, and if the Italians fail we intend to import Swedes to do the work for us, and if they do not meet our expectations then we shall bring in a lot of negroes from the South."[22] Other operators said that the Italians "gave satisfaction" in New York, "taking the place of discontented Irishmen." The operators had few doubts and told the public that the Italians' "muscles are inured to toil. . . . In a short time, they will make first-class miners."[23] Rend expected even more: "We calculate on about one-fourth [more] work from them than from American miners. . . . They understand there is a strike here, and the sentiment among them is to work and to fight if necessary. . . . Each will have a musket and will be able to defend himself if called on to do so."[24] Warning the strikers against violence, the operators said they had full co-operation from the local police; General Albert L. Pearson, head of the Pittsburgh National Guard, had orders to call out the militia "at a moment's notice." They also made it known

21 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 24, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 24, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 23 and 24, 1874.

22 "Interview with W. P. Rend," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 24, 1874.

23 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 24, 1874.

24 "Interview with W. P. Rend," *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 24, 1874.

that "private detectives" worked "among the miners, spying out their movements."[25]

If the picture of the Italians painted for Pittsburgh residents by New York contractor William Griffin was even partially accurate, neither the police nor the militia were needed. Claiming he had 3,000 men under contract and access to as many as 10,000, Griffin explained the Pan Handle contract:

> Our contract with the workmen is of a co-operative character. They are furnished with food and clothes and will make from $200 to $300 per year. We are bound to keep them all the time, whether they work or not. Our contract with the operators is simply for three cents [a bushel]. We would accept no sliding scale—nothing of the kind. We take all the risks off the laborers, and, of course, if we get steady employment we make something by it.

Asked, "Are they willing to work?", he replied: "They are, indeed. There is a most unreasonable prejudice against them on account of their so-called laziness. . . . They can work all the time; even if they cannot make more than five cents a day they are bound to be busy." He then sketched a violent picture of their character:

> These Italians are desperate enough and well enough armed to make it very warm indeed. They will know how to use their arms. . . . They are disposed to work as I told you, and to be peaceable; but they are not cowards and when aroused will be perfect desperadoes. Many of them were brigands in Italy. Many of them belonged to the Papal Army. Take them away from their arms and they would be of no account, but they are adepts in the use of all kinds of arms, and are particularly skillful with their peculiar knives. You observe the shape of them—like a pruning hook. . . .[26]

Pittsburgh miners, much less the citizenry at large, no doubt had too little experience and contact with Italians, much less armed Italians, to challenge Griffin's observations. Griffin probably figured that by sketching such a fearful picture of his men he could frighten off the miners and their supporters.

Even though the Pan Handle miners expressed anger over the Italians and several minor disturbances occurred, the Italians, at first, worked successfully. "The men in the mines work with their arms beside them ready for any emergency," wrote the *Pittsburgh*

25 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 24, 1874.

26 "Interview with William S. Griffin," *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 25, 1874, reprinted in *Workingman's Advocate*, Oct. 3–10, 1874.

Gazette a few days after the Italians started work, "while about a dozen sentries mount guard at the mouth of the pits."[27] Only three disturbances took place. The night after the Italians arrived, nine frame houses at the Fort Pitt mines burned to the ground, and three nights later six more buildings were set on fire.[28] Another night, four shots were fired into the home of Charles McDonald, superintendent of the National Coal Company, whose brother Alexander led the British Miners' National Association and represented Staffordshire in the House of Commons in 1872. No one was injured, but the company offered a $250 reward for information about the shooting.[29] Disorder also occurred at Rend's mines. The day the Italians arrived, Rend addressed a peaceful crowd of three to four hundred strikers and warned against violence toward the armed Italians. All that day, the old miners taunted the Italians, and that night stray shots were fired. Rend ordered the old miners to disperse. According to Guscetti, an Italian mistook Rend for a striker and fired three volleys at him. "Certainly if this son of Italy had been even a decently good shot," a reporter wryly observed, "Mr. Rend's obituary would have been published to-day." The next night, Rend charged that two volleys of shots awakened the sleeping Italians who responded each time. Again, no injuries were reported.[30]

The press blamed these outbursts on the strikers.[31] And the operators charged that the "Mollies"—a reference to the "Molly Maguires" in the eastern anthracite coal fields—"dog them constantly, . . . destroy their property, and, if the opportunity for successful attack offers, . . . take advantage of it."[32] The miners told another story. John Siney, president of the Miners' National Association, in Pittsburgh at the time, said the fires were started by "other parties for a purpose"—by the employers or their "hirelings"

27 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 28, 1874.

28 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 25 and 28, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 25, 1874; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 26 and 29, 1874.

29 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 30, 1874; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 30, 1874; Andrew Roy, *A History of the Coal Miners of the United States* (Columbus, 1906), 31–38; Comparator to the editor, *Workingman's Advocate*, Oct. 3–10, 1874.

30 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 26, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 25 and 26, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 26, 1874; *Chicago Times*, Sept. 26, 1874.

31 See, for examples, the editorials in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Sept. 25 and 26, 1874.

32 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 30, 1874.

to create ill feeling against the strikers.[33] The miners denied shooting at the Italians and told the public, "We repudiate with indignation the charges that we, or any of our friends, had any part in or knowledge of the destruction of property that has taken place."[34] Except for these three outbursts, and it is impossible to say who caused them, the transition to Italian labor was effected with relative ease.

Within a week after the Italians arrived, little news came from the Pan Handle except that which praised the new workers. The operators expressed satisfaction with the new men. Two river mine operators wished them success, but worried about the expense of using a "race" that was "one of the laziest on earth."[35] Asked if the experiment had succeeded, a Pan Handle operator replied, "Certainly. . . . Not only because the men can work, but because the fact that we can bring men here to do . . . work will stop these strikes forever."[36] Celebrating the ease with which the Italians had come in, the Pittsburgh *American Manufacturer* explained: "The 'Romans' appear as willing to fight as to eat and . . . they are well armed. The strikers have adopted that discretion which is the better part of valor."[37]

Criticism of the operators and the armed Italians came mainly from the strikers and other workers and their leaders. Contractor Griffin, explained the Chicago *Workingman's Advocate*, was little more than a "libel on humanity . . . engaged in the laudable task of collecting the scum and outlaws of Europe . . . a creature utterly devoid of any principle or honor or manhood."[38] The Miners' National Association attacked the operators, and its president, John Siney, accused Rend of pitting one nationality against another.[39] In

33 *Ibid.*, Sept. 28–30, 1874. See also *National Labor Tribune* (Pittsburgh), n. d., printed in *ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1874.

34 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 30, 1874.

35 "Interview with J. H. Bigley and William Oliver," *ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1874.

36 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Oct. 2, 1874.

37 *American Manufacturer* (Pittsburgh, Oct. 1, 1874), 3.

38 *Workingman's Advocate*, Oct. 3–10, 1874.

39 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 28–30, 1874. At the second annual convention of the Miners' National Association held in Cleveland late in October, 1874, the following resolution was offered and, according to the official minutes, "received amid the suppressed laughter of all the delegates present": "The operators of the country in a number of instances have seen fit to supplant their workingmen for the crime of having asked their own with armed banditti and lazzaroni from the slums of the large cities. . . . The government, both State and National,

Pittsburgh, John Davis, an editor of the *National Labor Tribune*, first hoped the Italians would join the strikers after they learned of their role and "side with their American brethren . . . against [the] usurpation of capital."[40] But when the Italians showed little interest in trade unions, the *Labor Tribune* shifted its approach and urged that the Italians be shipped out of the country and the operators using Italian laborers be "blacklisted" by the miners. "The worst feature of this Italian question," said the *Tribune*, "is that they are gathered out of the slums and alleys of New York. They are cut-throats and rag-gatherers. They never worked and they never will."[41] The strikers agreed. Reminding the operators and the public that they had asked for four cents and had come down to three and a half, a price they felt the market could bear, the miners explained:

> The answer to this proposition was the importation of a large number of the most ignorant and barbarous classes to be found in the great cities. This outrage was further aggravated by putting arms in their hands to the immediate peril of the citizens. . . . We are justified in believing that this action was taken for the purpose of bringing about a collision by subjecting our people to outrages too grievous to be borne in order to deprive us of the sympathies of the public. . . .

The strikers offered to arbitrate the dispute, but received no answer from the Pan Handle operators.[42]

One month after the Italians arrived, events at the Pan Handle mines took a turn that without doubt disappointed the operators, pleased the old miners, and disillusioned and angered the Italians. It was learned that Griffin's company had failed. Rend fired fifty-six of the one hundred and twenty-six Italians at the Laurel Hill mines;

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in having permitted this said banditti and lazzaroni to carry deadly firearms in a time of profound peace has practically admitted the right of every American citizen to the same. We recommend the members of the several miners' associations throughout the country to immediately provide themselves with a full supply of the best breech-loading rifles which the country affords." *Miners' National Record*, I (November, 1874), 5–6. The resolution was buried in a committee, and, according to the *Iron Molders' Journal*, "never heard of," but the Associated Press "telegraphed all over the country that the convention had recommended the miners everywhere to arm themselves." *Iron Molders' Journal* (December, 1874), 136–137. This resolution has been misinterpreted in Anthony Bimba, *The Molly Maguires* (New York, 1932), 71.

40 "Interview with John Davis," *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 24, 1874.

41 "To Meet the Italians," *National Labor Tribune*, n. d., reprinted in *ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1874.

42 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Sept. 30, 1874.

all but thirty of the Italians at the National Coal Company mines quit rather than work for three cents a bushel. According to one report, these men struck for wages due them, and fifty Fort Pitt miners struck for five cents a bushel. Some Italians complained they had earned no more than ten dollars in cash at Rend's mines. The National Coal Company paid each departing Italian five dollars. Clothing promised had not been forthcoming, and many wore ragged and filthy garments.[43] A large number of embittered Italians left the mines for Pittsburgh and gathered in Union Depot where they met with Frederick Guscetti, their old superintendent who was now employed at the mines of Charles Armstrong in Westmoreland County, and complained about wages due them. Guscetti and five of his countrymen went to the Pittsburgh mayor to ask for relief and transportation back to New York, but they were sent to a minor official who answered Guscetti's request that the city "take care of our men" by sharply commenting, "The city will take the men to the lock-up if they won't leave the Union Depot."[44] The *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* observed only that the Italians had ways and manners "as peculiar . . . and fully as vain as any Mongoloid immortalized by Bret Harte." *Frank Cowan's Paper*, on the other hand, said the Italians had suffered "the fate of a defenseless minority" because such "odium" had been cast upon them by the miners that the operators were "only too glad to get rid of them . . . leaving the Italians unpaid for their labor, disgusted with their treatment on all sides."[45] Overjoyed, a Pittsburgh labor weekly insisted the operators were "getting the worst of it" and "indeed 'drew an elephant' when they bargained for these men."[46] An unidentified Pittsburgh newspaper hopefully concluded that "the end of the Italian experiment is evidently drawing nigh."[47] But the very same newspapers that told of the difficulties of the Pan Handle operators also reported brief but ominous details about conflict between

43 *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1874; unidentified Pittsburgh newspaper, printed in *Iron Molders' Journal* (November, 1874), 147; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1874.

44 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Oct. 27, 1874.

45 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.

46 *American Working People* (Pittsburgh?), n. d., reprinted in *Miners' National Record*, I (November, 1874), 9.

47 Unidentified Pittsburgh newspaper, reprinted in *Iron Molders' Journal* (November, 1874), 147.

Italian workers and local miners and citizens at the Armstrong mines on the border between Allegheny and Westmoreland counties.[48]

A well-respected operator, Charles Armstrong had lived in Pittsburgh many years, and was highly thought of by fellow operators and other local business leaders. Armstrong, although not the largest coal operator in Westmoreland County since the Westmoreland Coal Company and the Pennsylvania Gas Coal Company each employed more than eight hundred men, had holdings totaling two hundred and ninety-nine acres and mines producing 2,400,000 bushels a year and employing two hundred and seventy-five men.[49] Armstrong had one group of mines at Osceola and another at Armstrong Station on the Pittsburgh, Washington and Baltimore Railroad (the Connellsville line) about twenty-six miles southeast of Pittsburgh. At the western tip of Westmoreland County, the Armstrong Station mines fronted on the Youghiogheny River which separated that county from Allegheny County. Across the river on the Allegheny side, about a quarter of a mile below the mine works, was the town of Buena Vista, and people, including working miners, moved freely between the town and the mines. Armstrong worked his men hard. General A. L. Pearson found Armstrong "a very active, energetic businessman." "I think," Pearson observed, "he is a persistent man. When he undertakes a thing he likes to go through with [it]. That kind of a man when out on the right track will, undoubtedly, do a great deal of good and when on the wrong track will, of course, do a great deal of harm."[50]

The 1873 depression severely affected Armstrong and the other Westmoreland coal operators. They all complained of falling prices, and correspondingly cut wages and hours. They also criticized the power of the Miners' Benevolent and Protective Association of Western Pennsylvania and the attractiveness of the recently established Miners' National Association which founded a branch in Buena Vista. Union leaders, they argued, "make a virtue out of rebellion and defy sound judgment."[51] Soon after the depression started, the Westmoreland Coal Company ordered its men to sign a

48 See, for example, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1874.

49 Thurston, *Pittsburgh and Allegheny in the Centennial Year*, 153–154.

50 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 25, 1875.

51 S. to the editor, *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Sept. 19, 1874. See also *ibid.*, May 9, 1874.

contract agreeing to leave company-owned houses on four days' notice. If they refused, the sheriff could evict them and, if necessary, sell their furniture to defray expenses. Westmoreland union miners complained that such a contract was "unjust, harsh, and contrary to the spirit and meaning of the laws of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania."[52] Plum Creek miners had to leave ten per cent of their monthly wage with the operator to guarantee "good behavior."[53] In the summer of 1874, employees of the Waverley Coal and Coke Company slowed down production when denied a wage increase. The discontented miners were evicted from their houses, and Judge Thomas Mellon represented the operators in a case against eight miners charged with "conspiracy."[54]

Charles Armstrong, then, was not alone in his troubles. He and his men had had many disagreements, and the depression intensified these disputes. Armstrong ordered his men to sign a contract that withheld ten per cent of their wages each month "as a security for the faithful performance of this Agreement." Money was also withheld for "rent, on store account[s], for blacksmithing, or otherwise." Wages were not fixed, but were governed by the market price for Connellsville coal. Miners had to give sixty days' notice, but Armstrong retained the right to break the contract "at once, without such notice, upon any breach of terms" by the miners, in which case the company "retain[ed], absolutely, the ten per centum of the wages kept back."[55] In mid-October, 1874, Armstrong and his men parted

52 *Workingman's Advocate* (Feb. 7, 1874), 53; *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Feb. 4, 1874.

54 Miners at the Waverley Coal and Coke Company accepted a wage cut in June, 1874, and signed a contract agreeing to give sixty days' notice, allowing the company to withhold part of their wages, and promising to give over immediate possession of company-owned houses if they quit work. On Aug. 12, the men asked for a wage increase but were turned down. They slowed down work. The operators closed the mines and on Aug. 17 ordered the men to vacate their houses. The men were dispossessed. Those who stayed on had to sign a new contract and agree to forego cash wages for store pay. Six weeks later, little had improved. Two Pittsburgh policemen guarded the mines, and the company swore out twelve warrants against miners for "conspiracy." Pittsburgh and West Newton constables arrested eight men, and an embittered miner complained: "How our liberty is curtailed. . . . The men naturally ask the question: 'Is there no such thing as justice for a poor man?' And the answer is 'No!' To get justice you must have money!" But the operators had troubles, too. Twelve witnesses appeared against the miners and not one could say he had been "intimidated." H. W., Smith's Mill, Westmoreland County, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Sept. 24 and Oct. 1, 1874.

55 In the fall of 1873, Armstrong's men struck because they were paid in notes instead of cash. *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Nov. 12, 1873. The contract described in the text is printed in the *National Labor Tribune*, Jan. 1, 1876.

ways. On October 12, he cut wages to seventy cents a ton (three and a half cents a bushel). He complained that his men struck too often, were "too bossy," and interfered with his right to measure and weigh coal. Six days later, Armstrong notified two of the spokesmen for his men that it was too expensive to weigh coal at the top of the hill near his mines and went on:

> I am determined to weigh it only at the foot of the place. You will therefore ascertain from them [*the miners*] what price they will dig for over a ¾ inch screen. I only want to work for the price that will enable me to compete with other coal merchants. I want a decisive reply to-morrow evening. I hope we will have no difficulty in this matter. . . . Now, miners, do not blame me hereafter if you force me to seek justice. As I am determined to take immediate measures.[56]

The miners rejected Armstrong's terms and offered a compromise, but Armstrong remained firm and fired his men on October 19.[57] At the Osceola pits, he ordered the miners to vacate rented houses on fifteen days' notice and, with the approval of Governor John Hartranft, appointed six loyal men as "special police" to guard the property and have the power "to make any arrest in any part of the county."[58] The Armstrong Station miners then learned that Italians would replace them, for Armstrong had hired Frederick Guscetti to round up dissatisfied Pan Handle miners. Armstrong had also purchased sixty muskets and rented another sixty as well as revolver and musket cartridges from the Pittsburgh Great Western Gun Works. On another day, he visited the deputy surveyor of the Pittsburgh Port to ask to borrow two cannons for protection.[59] Armstrong meant to discipline his labor force once and for all and do away with troublesome meddlers and agitators.

On October 26, one hundred and four armed Italians headed by Guscetti left Pittsburgh by rail for Armstrong Station. According to one report, they fired rifles from the train. Soon, the number of Italians totaled one hundred and seventy-three. Some dug coal and others, heavily armed and aided by a Westmoreland deputy sheriff and four special policemen, patrolled the property.[60] From the start,

56 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 1 and 14, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, June 10, 1875.
57 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 1, 1874.
58 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1874.
59 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 22, 1875; *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.
60 George Thompson, Nov. 12, 1874, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 14, 1874.

there was trouble. The Italians and the residents, especially the old miners, of Buena Vista and areas nearby feared the worst from each other. The Italians complained that they would be attacked by the "old miners," and Buena Vista residents saw no need for armed men in a peaceful community. A contemporary, who otherwise sympathized with the Italians, perceptively explained the root of the trouble:

> With an imprudence and a hardihood, without excuse or palliation, the Italians were furnished with muskets and ammunition on the pretense of providing them with the means of protecting themselves. This was looked upon as a menace and a threat by not only the old miners but by almost the entire community, and complaints and counter-threats were heard on all sides.[61]

A local correspondent reported to the *Pittsburgh Gazette:*

> The old miners, many of whom were born and reared in this neighborhood feel wrathful at the treatment they have received. . . . The residents of this place [*Buena Vista and Osceola*] sympathize with the miners, and encourage them in their hostility to the "Armed Brigands" as they call the Italians.[62]

Neither group understood the other.

Local residents, especially those in Buena Vista, condemned the armed Italians and accused them of firing regularly into their town. They told of uninhabited houses facing the river and of frightened women and children. When a boy disappeared for a day, they first blamed the Italians. As early as October 30, a Buena Vista resident said Italian sentries stopped persons going to social gatherings. For a mile along the railroad on Armstrong's property, he explained, "there is nothing but guns and bayonets to be seen and [the] yelling of these drunken people to be heard." "The people" in Buena Vista, he reported, "are keeping themselves inside their houses as much as possible."[63]

The fact that the Italians were armed exercised the local citizens more than anything else. This was the worst "act of clear disregard of law and order" in the region's history, said one citizen who de-

61 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.

62 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Oct. 31, 1874.

63 A. G. C., Buena Vista, n. d., to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Oct. 30, 1874.

manded that "the people in that neighborhood, regardless of their occupation, should take steps to have the operators and their hirelings indicted and put under bonds for riot."[64] Why, asked another critic of Armstrong, had armed men been sent to the area? No rioting had occurred. Armstrong had given "insult to his miners and to all citizens of our community." The writer told of "Italian sentinels" stopping local residents on public roads and again asked: "What does it mean that our citizens are arrested on our public roads and taken to their august tribunals by such ignorant invaders as these? Is it not an insult to the American people?"[65] "The Romans, it seems," added a Westmoreland weekly, *The Pennsylvania Argus*, "have done little else than fire not only upon the old miners, but upon every one who comes within range of one of their guns." Charles Abercrombie, a Buena Vista resident, urged that Guscetti debate him in public, and attacked local authorities for not jailing the Italians.[66] Other Buena Vista citizens drew up and circulated a petition to Governor Hartranft which demanded the removal of the Italians. "It will be signed by citizens for miles around," one observer said.[67] The *Argus* applauded talk that the Westmoreland sheriff planned to ask Hartranft for militia to put down the Italians, and three prominent Buena Vista residents visited General Pearson and demanded that the Pittsburgh officer call out the militia to protect the citizens from the Italians.[68]

Guscetti defended the use of armed sentries and blamed the Buena Vista residents and the old miners for all the trouble. He accused them of "suffering from Italophoby." Four days after the Italians arrived, he wrote to the *Pittsburgh Leader* that each was "provided with rifle, bayonet, and revolver, with plenty of ammunition" because "a conflict with the old hands" was expected. He charged that persons on the Allegheny side fired rifle and musket shots each night at the Italians. "Insulting language," he added, "was the only kind of civilities we received from the old miners, and their wives, with a few exceptions." He claimed efforts were made to burn Armstrong's

64 A Citizen to the editor, *ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1874.

65 G. Thompson, Nov. 12, 1874, to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1874.

66 *Pennsylvania Argus* (Greensburg), Nov. 4, 1874; Charles Abercrombie, Buena Vista, Nov. 5, 1874, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 10, 1874.

67 A. G. C., Buena Vista, to the editor, *ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1874.

68 *Ibid.*, Oct. 31, 1874.

houses and shops, and charged that engineers and firemen on the night freight trains "blow cinders and throw out burning coals on the lumber and houses to set them on fire." To prevent arson, Guscetti insisted, "I feel compelled to . . . give them [*the Italians*] orders to challenge every passer[by] and keep him in full view until outside of our limits." He made other complaints, too. When an Italian fell and accidently shot himself, a Buena Vista physician refused to cross the river to attend him, so a Pittsburgh surgeon had to be called. "We came here," Guscetti insisted, "to dig coal and make peaceably an honest living, and not to fight, and lose our lives, and shoot others for nothing." He urged those whom he charged with firing at the Italians in the night to "come out 'like men' and not hide among women" and be met "face to face." "Little justice," Guscetti concluded, "can we expect from the town."[69]

Armstrong complained, too, and asked for militia to protect the Italians, but no troops came.[70] He kept the Italians armed. A Westmoreland deputy sheriff, Levi Cline, who patrolled Armstrong Station, reported the troubles of the Italian laborers to Alonzo Viti, the Italian vice-consul in Philadelphia, and Viti asked Governor Hartranft for protection.[71] Except for occasional shots in the night, however, all remained quiet on the Yough until the week end of November 7.

Although no serious outbreak took place, much excitement swept the area that week end. According to rumors, between two and three thousand miners planned to descend on the Italians and force their surrender, or wipe them out.[72] Allegheny Sheriff John T. Hare sent several special deputies to uncover the facts about the shootings and arrest the troublemakers. Frank Cowan, the newspaper publisher and vigorous supporter of Guscetti's men, accompanied them. On the night of the seventh, several volleys were fired and at midnight the miners raised a red light on a hill above Buena Vista to frighten the

69 F. Guscetti, Armstrong Station, Oct. 30, 1874, to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 4, 1874.

70 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 25, 1875.

71 Levi Cline, Oct. 31, 1874, to Sheriff Alexander Kilgore; John T. Hare, Oct. 31, 1874, to Kilgore to Cline; Alonzo Viti, Philadelphia, Nov. 2, 1874, to Cline; Cline, Nov. 2, 1874, for Kilgore to Viti; Viti, Nov. 3, 1874, to Cline; Cline, Nov. 4 and 7, 1874, to Viti; Viti, Nov. 7, 1874, to Cline. All of these telegrams are reprinted in *Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 4, 1875.

72 Frank Cowan, Pittsburgh, Nov. 10, 1874, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 11, 1874. See also *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Nov. 2, 1874.

Italians. Fearing an attack, Guscetti's men armed themselves and fired into the dark. "My wife," Guscetti wrote the next day of the eighteen-year-old local girl he had married three days earlier, ". . . and her sister, Miss [Nellie] Brown, and two Italian women helped to load and cap our colts." The Italians even fired a homemade cannon—an old car wheel stuffed with blasting powder—to frighten the miners and their supporters.[73] No one was injured during these shootings, but anxiety spread far and wide.

Cowan warmly defended the Italians as "the only people . . . who had the courage and the unity . . . to take the place of striking miners." At the same time, he attacked the miners and accused the Allegheny deputies of not protecting "a band of strangers, in a strange land but one that boasts of civilization and enlightenment." Cowan asked: "Is the law of this land at such discount that it cannot protect a household containing women and children against the pitiful incursion of a few straggling miners who feel themselves outraged that *other* foreigners have taken their places in the pits?"[74] Cowan's weekly especially condemned an Allegheny deputy named Stubbs and mocked him, "Stubbs—the Butt End of Humanity—As the Name Would Indicate."[75] Guscetti joined Cowan in condemning the deputies for not taking his advice and jailing the Buena Vista troublemakers. He vented his anger and frustration in a letter to the *Pittsburgh Leader:*

> If they don't want us to work, why don't they come over here in the daylight or night—we don't have their armament. All we ask is if we must fight for our mine, let us have a good hand-to-hand conflict for a day or a night. We shall try to make it as short and pleasant as possible and then let it be decided once and for all.[76]

Guscetti and Cowan, along with Armstrong, had good reason to attack local law enforcement agencies. The Westmoreland sheriff offered them little support, and the Allegheny deputies told Sheriff

[73] F. Guscetti, Nov. 7, 1874, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 14 (?), 1874; G. Thompson, Nov. 12, 1874, to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1874; F. Cowan to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1874; *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1874.

[74] F. Cowan to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1874.

[75] *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Nov. 14, 1874.

[76] F. Guscetti to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 12 and 14, 1874.

Hare and the Pittsburgh newspapers that shooting came only from the Westmoreland side, that the Italians fired at Buena Vista, and that the shots fired at the Italians came from behind Armstrong Station (that is, from within Westmoreland County). More than this, according to a Pittsburgh newspaper, "the deputies state what, of course, is natural that the sympathies of the people of the surrounding country are altogether with the striking miners."[77] The Allegheny sheriff told Westmoreland Sheriff Alex Kilgore that unless he disarmed the Italians, he would take the matter to the governor. Kilgore agreed to disarm the Italians first, "holding the impression that were they to have no arms they would not be troubled by the miners."[78] What followed is unclear. Westmoreland Judge P. J. Logan appointed two deputies to guard the Armstrong mines and told Armstrong to remove his "armed pickets."[79] Armstrong told Sheriff Hare that his men were disarmed, but a resident nearby said otherwise and on November 18 the *Pennsylvania Argus* reported: "Sheriff Kilgore . . . has served written notice on Armstrong to disarm the Italians. This has been done, but only their muskets have been taken away. They still have their *side arms*. The Sheriff left yesterday again for Buena Vista . . . [and] will disarm them for good or he will invoke the aid of the Governor."[80] Although there remains some question about the actions of the local law officers, one fact is certain: after this intervention by the Allegheny and Westmoreland police, quiet fell over Buena Vista and Armstrong Station. The last press report from that region before November 30 appeared in the *Argus*, a Westmoreland weekly, and concluded interestingly, "It is a pity that so many good men are thrown out of employment."[81]

On Saturday night, November 28, shooting started again. Each side blamed the other for the renewal of violence. An Italian miner

[77] F. Cowan to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 11, 1874; *ibid.*, Nov. 10 and 13, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Nov. 10, 12, and 13, 1874.

[78] *Ibid.*, Nov. 13, 1874.

[79] *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 13, 1874; G. Thompson, Nov. 12, 1874, to the editor, *ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1874.

[80] *Pennsylvania Argus*, Nov. 18, 1874.

[81] Study of the *Pittsburgh Leader*, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, and the *Pittsburgh Chronicle* reveals no single report on the Armstrong-Italian-Buena Vista crisis between Nov. 15 and Nov. 29, 1874.

was wounded in the fray, and a series of events began unfolding that led to violence, tragedy, and death. According to *Frank Cowan's Paper*, the Italians, distressed because of their wounded countryman, grew angry: "Their threats of vengeance were, it can be supposed, loud and dire. And it is not to be doubted that some of the most desperate among them gave utterance to shooting down the people on the other side of the river."[82] Guscetti admitted that his men broke into Armstrong's storehouse and took twenty-eight stands of revolver ammunition to load their side arms.

What occurred the next morning, Sunday, November 29, will probably always remain a confused and contradictory story. The evidence is entirely conflicting; only one fact is agreed on: at nine o'clock in the morning as few as five or as many as thirty armed Italians crossed the Youghiogheny River on a flatboat, disembarked, and marched toward Buena Vista. Guscetti said his men went to get a doctor to care for the wounded Italian and carried arms only for self-protection. When they arrived in Buena Vista, five armed residents standing behind the schoolhouse fired at them with Spencer rifles. Without returning a single shot, the Italians fled in disorder. Some swam across the river, unable to join those who made it back by boat. Guscetti ordered his men to open fire from the opposite bank to cover the escaping Italians. Buena Vista residents told another story. As the Italians entered the town, the Sabbath bell rang to call people to church. Suddenly, the Italians fired a volley of shots, and rumors spread that they planned to burn the town. Women and children fled. The Italians hooted and yelled. A force of citizens formed, five of whom shot at the Italians and drove them back across the river.[83]

The Italian retreat ended by eleven o'clock, but the day's troubles had only started. Firing continued from both sides of the river through the early afternoon. Telegrams to Allegheny Sheriff Hare warned of further gun play and urged protection by the police. One telegram read: "All the miners in the district are arming and on their

82 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.

83 *Ibid.*; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30, 1874; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Nov. 30, 1874; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Nov. 30, 1874. The account in the *Leader* relates both sides of the "story," while *Frank Cowan's Paper* is the fullest if not the fairest treatment.

way to the firing. I expect to see a terrible time tonight. I see squads of armed men on their way."[84] Hare raised a posse of nine men, notified General Pearson to ready the Pittsburgh militia, and left on a special train for Buena Vista. The posse arrived at 6:30 P.M., but the shooting had ended; at about two in the afternoon, Guscetti had ordered his men to stop firing and reserve their ammunition for the night. In the meantime, between two and three hundred citizens, including some farmers and other nonminers, gathered in Buena Vista. At four o'clock, heavy firing resumed from the Allegheny side as a cover for between seventy-five and one hundred armed men who crossed the river out of sight of the Italians and ascended a hill behind Armstrong's mines thereby surrounding the Italians. According to one report, they carried an American flag. Guscetti sent seven men to guard the hill, but it was too late and they were driven back. The Italians were now being fired upon from the front and the rear, and a number of them fell wounded. At length, Guscetti, "his case . . . hopeless," ordered his nephew to prepare a flag of truce, and "a towel tacked to a stick" was hung from the upstairs window of his home. Guscetti and his young wife then walked from the house with another white flag and ascended the hill to surrender. He asked only the privilege of allowing his men to keep their arms until they could be given to a military officer, or an officer of the law.

But the firing continued from the Allegheny side of the river and from some Italians near the mine tipple. Buena Vista citizens ordered their supporters to stop shooting, and Guscetti sent twenty-one-year-old Ambrozia Fuccei to the tipple to tell the Italians to cease firing. Young Fuccei was shot and killed as he returned from the hill. According to *Frank Cowan's Paper*, the shooting ended when Mrs. Guscetti and her younger sister walked into the open "with the silent tongue of their sex, thus endangered and unprotected, [and] appealed by their presence to the humanity of the mob so forcibly that the firing was instantly ended, and the carnage was over." A sheet fastened to a gun lengthened by a bayonet and a stick and hung from the top of Guscetti's house told the "thousands of nearby

[84] John Guffey and P. S. Todd to Sheriff [Hare], Shaner's Corner, 1:30 P.M., and Thomas Moore to Sheriff [Hare], 1:45 P.M., telegrams printed in *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Nov. 30, 1874.

residents clustered on hillsides and tops within sight of the battle" that it had ended with the defeat of the Italians.

And possibly in the whole throng there was not a soul in sympathy with the outraged foreigners so widespread and so deadly was the feeling of animosity against them. The cheering that rang out in the welkin, the exultant shout of victory when the surrender of the Italians became known, was heard for a mile and more around.

It remained only for Armstrong's barn to be burned to the ground and for the Allegheny posse to arrive. Three Italians—Fuccei, Rancigio La Vechi, and Guiseppe Raimondo—were dead, and eight other Italians were wounded. No other casualties were reported. Sheriff Hare left four deputies in Buena Vista for the night, telegraphed General Pearson, who waited in Pittsburgh with the armed Washington Infantry and the Heath Zouaves, "to take his nightcap and go to bed, for all was quiet on the Yough," and returned to Pittsburgh. The dead were gathered and boxed, and the wounded cared for, although a doctor did not come until the following morning. Guscetti and his men spent their last night in Armstrong Station. "Hopes of the success of Italian mining labor," noted the *Pittsburgh Gazette* the next day, "at least so far as Armstrong is concerned, must in a measure be dashed to the ground by the affair of yesterday.[85]

The next day, before the Italians left, Squire Caleb Greenawalt, a justice of the peace in nearby Shaner's Station and a witness to the violent outburst, convened six Westmoreland residents as a coroner's jury to hold an inquest in Armstrong's store. Guscetti and two other Italians identified the victims, and Guscetti bitterly concluded, "We came armed to protect ourselves and did it to the best of our ability."[86] The coroner's jury faced a difficult task in explaining the deaths. The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, for example, observed:

It is said that a large number of farmers and residents in the vicinity of Buena Vista, who are by no means directly interested in the welfare of the miners, assisted in firing on the Italians. . . . It is thought by many that those who may be summoned as witnesses may be so prejudiced as to be unable to give a fair and impartial statement of the facts concerned with the conflict.[87]

85 For full details on these events, see the references cited in Note 83.

86 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1874.

87 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 1, 1874.

Interestingly, no miners or old Armstrong employees were called to the inquest, but two Buena Vista residents strongly defended the old miners as peaceful men. The coroner's jury, made up of local residents, simply identified the dead men and made no comments on the causes of the violence.[88]

That same day, November 30, amid rumors that another attack would come if the Italians stayed on, Guscetti, his wife and sister-in-law, and his men surrendered their arms to a Westmoreland deputy, demanded but did not entirely get three months of wages from Armstrong, and left with all their bedding, furniture, clothing, and utensils for Pittsburgh. They took the dead and wounded with them and later buried their dead countrymen in a McKeesport Catholic cemetery.[89] "When the train left," Jasper, a Buena Vista citizen, wrote, "a great shout went up from both sides of the river, hats and handkerchiefs were waived [*sic*], and there was general rejoicing."[90] Some of the Italians stayed with Italian families in Pittsburgh, but most of them took lodgings over the Adams Express Company in the Emigrant Depot.[91] Guscetti rallied support for them. He justified arming them and insisted that only in this way could Italians get work. "In vindication of our defeat," he defiantly wrote the *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, "I will safely state that our assailants would have found us prepared for their reception if they had come an hour later. Under cover . . . I can assure you positively that the Italians would still be digging and fighting."[92]

Reaction to the Buena Vista affair was intense on all sides. Outside the region, the *Philadelphia Bulletin* vigorously condemned the killings: "Nothing more atrocious than this has been charged against the Southern Ku-Klux. . . . The outrage is more infamous than any to which Americans or Englishmen have been subjected in the streets of Pekin or Hong Kong."[93] Governor Hartranft demanded information about their role from the Allegheny and Westmoreland sheriffs,

88 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1874; *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.

89 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1874; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 1, 1874.

90 Jasper, Buena Vista, Dec. 1, 1874, to the editor, *Pittsburgh Leader*, Dec. 2, 1874.

91 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 1, 1874.

92 F. Guscetti to the editor, *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Dec. 18, 1874. Guscetti cited the resolution discussed in Note 39 as "proof" that the miners favored violence even though the Miners' National Association did not consider the resolution.

93 *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, n. d., reprinted in *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 12, 1874.

and there was even talk of impeaching the Westmoreland sheriff.[94] Hartranft sharply criticized Allegheny and Westmoreland law enforcement in his January, 1875, message to the Pennsylvania legislature.[95]

Perhaps the governor reacted to pressure from the Washington Italian Embassy and the Philadelphia Italian consulate, for both groups pressed the Pennsylvania government and even the federal authorities to act "with severest justice" against those who killed the Italian miners.[96] Alonzo Viti, the Philadelphia vice-consul, demanded action from Hartranft and from the Westmoreland and Allegheny authorities. Although the Westmoreland sheriff sent him no information on the shootings, the Pittsburgh mayor offered him co-operation.[97] A Washington embassy official wrote Guscetti: "At least the living victims can proceed to go before the courts and ask for justice which cannot be denied them."[98] In mid-January, 1875, Viti visited Pittsburgh to press for action. He talked with Armstrong and Guscetti, as well as with the judge of the Allegheny Quarter Sessions Court and with the Allegheny district attorney. Learning that an Allegheny grand jury had been impanelled to review the facts, Viti left Pittsburgh "feeling highly gratified with the efforts . . . being put forth for the arrest of the guilty parties."[99]

94 Gov. J. F. Hartranft, Dec. 18, 1874, Harrisburg, to Sheriff J. Hare, Allegheny County, printed in *Pittsburgh Leader*, Dec. 26, 1874.

95 "Papers of the Governors," *Pennsylvania Archives, Fourth Series*, IX (1871–1883), 426–428. Hartranft reported that the "unfortunate and prolonged conflict" between the Italians and the resident miners which resulted in the death of "four" (not three) Italians was a "sad illustration of the fatal consequences of a want of decision and energy when a spirit of lawlessness or disposition to riot discover themselves." Even though there was trouble for weeks, Hartranft went on, ". . . inquiry fails to reveal the fact that a single warrant was issued for the arrest of any of the parties implicated. There is nothing to show any efficient interference on the part of the local authorities to check these unlawful proceedings, and there is no record that any regular or official investigation of these troubles was had, until loss of life made it necessary. I feel confident that prompt action on the part of the authorities in the vicinity would have speedily terminated, if not entirely prevented, the disturbance."

96 L. Corpi, Washington, Italian Embassy, Dec. 11, 1874, to F. Guscetti, printed in *Pittsburgh Leader*, Dec. 13, 1874.

97 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Dec. 7, 1874; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Dec. 6, 1874.

98 L. Corpi to F. Guscetti, printed in *ibid.*, Dec. 13, 1874.

99 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1875. See also *Pittsburgh Post*, Jan. 19, 1875, for a somewhat different description of Viti's reaction. According to the *Gazette*, Viti corresponded with Governor Hartranft. An attempt by the writer to locate this correspondence has not been successful. Dr. Frank B. Evans, former archivist and chief of the Division of Public Records of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, was unable to find any correspondence between the governor and Viti. Evans to the author, Mar. 19, 1963.

Bitter criticism of the miners and the Buena Vista citizens came from the western Pennsylvania operators and their supporters. *Frank Cowan's Paper* warned that "every business interest . . . of southwestern Pennsylvania" was jeopardized by these "murderous outrages . . . for that which strikes at life kills business and prostrates industry."[100] The *Pittsburgh Leader* feared that the "retiring Italians . . . will tell a pretty story . . . in the Italian newspapers of the treatment they received in this 'Land of the free and the home of the brave,' " and went on:

> . . . In this community, at least, emigrants from Southern Europe have no rights which those from Northern Europe are bound to respect. They have been taught in a way they will not forget that in this part of the country "might makes right." . . . But the blood of the murdered foreigners—will it not cry to Heaven against our people, if they let the crime go unpunished? . . . This successful riot . . . is the greatest assault on free labor that has ever been perpetrated in Western Pennsylvania. It is the triumph of force over right. The "Molly Maguires" of the Eastern mines, the KuKlux of the South, have committed many crimes, but these have been generally secret or isolated. . . . The word will go forth that nobody who does not belong to particular nationalities, or to particular cliques, is free to work in Western Pennsylvania. . . . Where will it stop?

The Chinese would be chased next, and then "the darkies—the 'nigger question'—may be brought up again, and the African laborers in our midst . . . driven forth to return where they belong." Those who attacked the Italians held "narrow and most un-American ideas."[101] *Frank Cowan's Paper* headlined the Buena Vista tragedy: "SUNDAY SLAUGHTER. THE BLACKEST PAGE IN THE HISTORY OF WESTMORELAND. . . . THE COURT OF KING COAL POLLUTED WITH BLOOD." "Sunday fun in Westmoreland County," it bitterly complained, is "butchering Italians."[102]

The failure of local and state authorities to protect the Italians especially exercised the critics of the miners. The *Leader* admitted that Guscetti's "foolish boasting" intensified "prejudice" against the Italians, but went on: "The county and state authorities should have interfered here, and if the Italians needed protection, as we certainly

100 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 19, 1874.
101 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 1874.
102 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 1874.

think they did, a detachment of militia should have escorted them . . . and remained as long as seemed necessary to keep peace. This was the first mistake."[103] J. H. Johnston, head of the Pittsburgh Great Western Gun Works, sent Guscetti and his wife revolvers as gifts, and blamed the whole trouble on the failure of "proper authorities" to protect "you and your rights because they are afraid of the political influences of the old miners at the next state election."[104] Action was urged against the miners and the Buena Vista citizens. *Frank Cowan's Paper* led the cry for "justice" and condemned the Westmoreland coroner's jury for not finding the guilty parties:

> Hunting and fishing on Sunday are interdicted with severe penalties in Pennsylvania; an exception, however, is made when the game is a poor Italian miner. . . . Is the boast of the United States, in its Declaration of Independence, but a bait to beguile foreigners into a slaughter-pen? . . . Is it true that human blood is cheaper in Westmoreland county than whiskey? . . . Had a petty horse-thief broken jail in either county, a reward of several hundred dollars would have been offered immediately . . . but when murder is committed in broad daylight by a mob, some one of whom doubtless known to some guiltless man, not a dollar is offered!—nothing done, in fact, but to file away the silly findings of a coroner's jury in *articulo mortis*.

The paper then urged a $20,000 reward for the apprehension of the "murderous Molly Maguires."[105] Unless "justice" was done, chimed in the *American Manufacturer*, a Pittsburgh iron and steel trade journal, "violence" would spread throughout western Pennsylvania.[106]

Reaction to the death of the Italians was not entirely critical of the miners. Some newspapers, otherwise unsympathetic to the miners, found fault with Armstrong's arming of the Italians. While not objecting to "foreign labor," the *Pittsburgh Post* nevertheless opposed "standing armies, native or otherwise," and insisted that "the State can protect its citizens."[107] The *McKeesport Times* found that the arming of the Italians was "construed by the striking miners to be a standing menace and an insult to our laws," and even caused

103 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Dec. 1, 1874.
104 J. H. Johnston to F. Guscetti printed in *ibid.*, Dec. 3, 1874.
105 *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 5, 12, 19 and 26, 1874.
106 *American Manufacturer* (Dec. 24, 1874), 3; (Dec. 31, 1874) 3.
107 *Pittsburgh Post*, Dec. 1, 1874.

farmers and nonminers to support the "evil disposed strikers."[108] "This people," wrote the German *Freiheit's Freund* of the Italians, "are not all guilty for they were brought here without knowing what they were to do."[109]

The miners and their supporters blamed all the trouble on Armstrong's decision to import armed Italians. "The cooler-headed citizens," said a Buena Vista resident, "lay the blame at Mr. Armstrong's door; others blame it all upon the 'bloody furriners,' pronounced with the broadest kind of a brogue."[110] A worker, otherwise unidentified, took exception with the *Leader* and said Armstrong easily could have gotten new men, but instead armed Italians—"an outrageous insult to the old men."[111] The *National Labor Tribune* bristled with indignation and anger in an editorial entitled "TAKE CARE," for it saw the coming of armed Italians as an attack on the entire status of local workers:

> It is an outrage on our citizens to have foreigners set down among them armed to the teeth. . . . The man who brought them here should first suffer. He is the prime cause of the death of the Italians. . . . Had they come as other men come, with no arms, and had they gone quietly to work, no trouble would have followed. But they had arms, and they must show that they were above the law, and they have suffered the penalty.
>
> These Italians have no right to travel in armed bands over the country on the pretext of seeking work, and working only when and where Americans refuse to work.
>
> Let them scatter and go where they can sell their labor as others do. . . . If they were engaged in a lawful calling, why carry arms? The very fact that they are armed shows that they feel they are doing wrong and fear to go as other men go. . . .
>
> Our American Labor does not fear Italian competition. But they do propose to break down attempts of employers to intimidate them, by force of arms, into submission. . . . The workingmen of this country are as strong as the government, and do not propose to back down in this matter. They pay our taxes. Their labor has made the wealth of the nation. Their blood has cemented the Union. Their muscle has reared its industries. When Italians are found here, armed, they may expect death. They deserve nothing else, and unless we mistake the spirit of American workingmen

108 *McKeesport Times*, n. d., reprinted in *Frank Cowan's Paper*, Dec. 12, 1874.
109 *Freiheit's Freund*, n. d., reprinted in *Pittsburgh Leader*, Nov. 30, 1874.
110 Jasper, Buena Vista, to the editor, *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1874.
111 Unidentified letter to the editor, *ibid.*

they will find their reward. We have no apology to offer, no regrets to express. This country is our own. . . . This is a free country, but it is not free for men to do what they cannot do without going about in armed bodies. . . .[112]

The armed Italians symbolized that quality of dependence that the *Labor Tribune* and other post-bellum labor and reform journals most deeply feared and resented. Thus, a West Elizabeth, Pennsylvania, coal miner, complaining that his employer gave only store money, remarked: "Compulsory measures will not do in an enlightened republic. It may do for Italians."[113]

Efforts to secure justice and to punish those guilty of wrongdoing, if not of the actual murder of the Italians, revealed much about popular attitudes toward industrialism and toward the role and the status of workers and employers after the Civil War. The Allegheny County grand jury met first, released its findings in late January, 1875, after taking testimony on all sides, and concluded that "prompt and energetic measures were not used to quell the disturbances and arrest the aggressor[s]." It found "both citizens and Italians . . . indignant at the inaction" of Allegheny and Westmoreland law officers. But the grand jury offered no presentment on the causes of the difficulty or on the perpetrators of the violence. It significantly complained, "Among the citizens, we find a most lamentable forgetfulness of names and [a] failure to identify persons or else a remarkable indifference toward those who were among and around them" on November 29. The Allegheny grand jury indicted no one.[114]

Soon after, in early February, Westmoreland Judge Logan convened a second grand jury. Logan criticized the findings of the December coroner's jury and said it had erred in seeking only those who fired the fatal shots. "This may serve to explain their want of success," he explained, and in sweeping instructions he ordered the Westmoreland jury "to go beyond this":

It is not essential that you be able to instance precisely and definitely the immediate author of any guilty act before any persons can be charged with crime. But on the contrary if you find a number, however great the multitude, acting together . . . in the pursuit of a common criminal purpose,

112 "TAKE CARE," *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 19, 1874.

113 Rebecca, West Elizabeth, Dec. 13, 1874, to the editor, *ibid.*

114 "Report of the Allegheny Grand Jury," *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Jan. 29, 1875.

to wit discharging loaded guns against the persons of the Italians aggressively, then they were all guilty of their death and when you have found any of them you have found a criminal although you may not be able to fix definitely the individuals who fired the identical shots which carried with them death to the unfortunate three. . . .

Logan's charge to the grand jury included sentiments strikingly similar to the editorials that supported the Italians and attacked the miners. No "individual class or nationality," Logan told the jury, should suffer from the "disastrous rule of might against lawful right," for "our laws mean the protection of the laborer in his independent daily pursuit at rates satisfactory to himself and [his] employer."[115] Fearful of Logan's intent, the *Labor Tribune* warned its readers: "The old slave driver who caused the arms to be placed in the hands of this pauper mob is still at large, and the people who did what the government should have done, are now to be set on by the officers of the law. Well—if such is the law, we had better know it."[116]

But neither Logan nor the *Labor Tribune* was prepared for the action of the Westmoreland grand jury. After hearing sixty-one witnesses during two weeks, the jury, by a single vote, presented the court with a stunning indictment:

. . . The Grand Jury . . . do present as the result of our investigation, that C. H. Armstrong and Frederick Guscetti are guilty, as accessories before the fact, to the death of Ambrozia Fuccei, Guiseppe Raimondo, and Rancigio La Vechi. . . . The said Grand Jury [finds them] . . . the prime movers, instigators, aiders, and abettors of all the firing and disturbance that brought about the death of the said named persons, in this: That they . . . procured a large number of men, armed with certain dangerous weapons. . . .

The jury charge then repeated in detail the events leading up to the fatal November day. Throughout, it was stressed that the Italians were aggressively armed and had "terrified" the "good citizens" of Buena Vista. The local residents were entirely vindicated.[117] A week

115 *Ibid.*, Feb. 2, 1875; *Frank Cowan's Paper*, May 8, 1875.

116 *National Labor Tribune*, Feb. 6, 1875.

117 "Presentment of Westmoreland County Grand Jury," Feb. 20, 1875, John Young, foreman, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 24, 1875. See also *Pittsburgh Post*, Feb. 25, 1875.

later, Armstrong and Guscetti were indicted. A Pittsburgh coal operator posted bail for Guscetti, and he and Armstrong were freed pending their trial in May.[118]

The unexpected indictment struck the Italians and their supporters as lightning from a clear sky. Guscetti complained bitterly that the jury called only two Italian witnesses and was prejudiced against his countrymen.[119] Thirty-five Pittsburgh Italians, including some who had worked for Guscetti, petitioned Vice-Consul Viti in Philadelphia:

> . . . The effect of the presentment is to exclude the Italians from working in masses or singly in the State. It is an unparalleled insult to the Italian people, and our kingdom. . . . Those who furnished aid to the "good citizens" are free, while Mr. Fred. Guscetti, who disarmed us, is to be arrested. . . . Is this all the justice we can obtain in this State? . . . We ask of you the protection which international law entitles us to and [is] guaranteed to us in our passports. . . .[120]

An Italian miner, Guisepp Pianella, pleaded separately with Viti: "Please come quick to Pittsburgh. Although the papers and public opinion favors [*sic*] the Italians, still the action of the Westmoreland County Court has terribly shocked and terrified our countrymen. . . . See that justice is done. You have the power, and you cannot allow our innocent countrymen to rot in prison. . . ."[121] The Italians were not alone in their complaint. A few wealthy Pittsburgh businessmen offered Guscetti financial aid.[122] The *Pittsburgh Gazette* described him as "a gentleman of very superior intelligence."[123]

The indictment elated the *Labor Tribune* and those who feared the Italians and hated Armstrong. A *Labor Tribune* editorial entitled "JUSTICE TRIUMPHANT" called the grand jury members "Americans

118 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Feb. 25, 1875; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Feb. 27, 1875; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Mar. 1, 1875.

119 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Feb. 25, 1875.

120 "Petition signed by 35 Italian Residents of Pittsburgh to Alonzo Viti, Philadelphia," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 25, 1875.

121 Guisepp Pianella, Pittsburgh, Feb. 25, 1875, to Hon. A. Viti, Philadelphia, *ibid.*, Feb. 27, 1875. Michael Pecci, one of the two Italian witnesses, was also indicted by the Westmoreland grand jury, but no information has been found to explain the cause of his indictment or what subsequently happened to him.

122 *Pittsburgh Leader*, Feb. 25, 1875.

123 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, Feb. 27, 1875.

and liberty loving citizens" who knew "little common law but were blessed with common sense."

> Well done, citizens of Westmoreland County, you have struck at the root of the matter. . . . Should we allow Americans to introduce armed slaves in our very midst? No! By the blood of a million dead heroes, no! . . . The Buena Vista matter has shown about how far people can be pushed before taking the law in their own hands. It is well enough to know what these limits are.[124]

Then the paper mocked those who criticized the indictment.[125]

Displeased with the grand jury's findings, Judge Logan refused to discharge it. Learning that Caleb Greenawalt, a witness to the November 29 shootings and the convener of the coroner's jury, had claimed illness when subpoenaed, Logan ordered the grand jury to "repair to his residence." Greenawalt testified "with great reluctance," and his evidence led to other witnesses and a second indictment. Four miners—James Boone, Frederick L. Douglass, Ford Thompson, and John W. Watson—were indicted for participating in the violence that led to the death of the three Italians.[126] There were now two indictments. Guscetti's lawyers sought to squash his indictment and complained to no avail that Guscetti and his wife had been forced to incriminate themselves before the grand jury. Arguing against the dismissal of the indictment, the Westmoreland district attorney said the Commonwealth would prove that Armstrong and Guscetti "inaugurated the assembling of an armed mob . . . almost equal to a standing army, made up of people, most of whom were ignorant of the language and customs of the country," who had conducted "a reign of terror" against "peaceful citizens."[127]

The trials started on May 10 in Greensburg, the Westmoreland county seat. Judge Logan presided. Visitors crowded the town and together with residents packed the courtroom. For weeks before, miners and others sympathetic to them had contributed money to the Buena Vista Fund to aid the four miners.[128] The Westmoreland

124 "JUSTICE TRIUMPHANT," *National Labor Tribune*, Feb. 27, 1875.

125 "IS IT POSSIBLE?" *ibid.*

126 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Mar. 1, 1875; *Pittsburgh Leader*, Mar. 2, 1875. The author has not located a copy of this grand jury indictment.

127 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Mar. 22, 1875.

128 *National Labor Tribune*, Apr. 24, May 8, and Aug. 21, 1875.

district attorney and Frank Cowan represented the Commonwealth, and Cowan's son and another lawyer defended the miners. Several Pittsburgh lawyers and John Latta, a Philadelphia lawyer who was then lieutenant governor and who in 1876 would be appointed state adjutant general, represented Armstrong and Guscetti. Latta and his colleagues again unsuccessfully tried to quash the indictments, and they failed to secure a change of venue to Allegheny County because of the "inflamed state of mind" of the Westmoreland citizenry. The court, however, agreed to try the miners separately from Guscetti and Armstrong.[129]

On May 14, the four miners went to trial for murder in three separate instances. The Commonwealth urged the jury to decide "whether men could burn and destroy property, and commit murder, without being made to suffer the penalty prescribed by the law" and promised to show that the four men attacked the Italians. The four miners pleaded not guilty. Most significantly, few prosecution witnesses supported the Commonwealth's case. Time and again they failed to identify the four miners and heaped blame and abuse on Armstrong and the Italians. Only a few examples of the *prosecution* testimony, as reported in the press, need be cited:

Question: Are you working for Mr. Armstrong now?
Squire Greenawalt: No sir—ee. (Laughter) I thought these Italians were dangerous and kept away from them; the first day they were there when I went out to see what was the matter with the mules they cocked their pistols right in my face, and I kept in the house. I have heard them challenge people on the streets and ask them where they were going.

John Paisley (who lived in Armstrong's barn): I do not know the prisoners at the bar and never saw them before. I do not know the men I saw there that day.

Rush Shaner: I know all the prisoners, but saw none of the prisoners except Watson that day and only saw him about seven o'clock in the morning before the affair occurred.

Thomas Moore (merchant, coal and whiskey dealer): I do not know the parties who shot; on my way home I met a great many men I did not know.

Frank Patterson: I saw the men on the streets of Buena Vista with arms, but many of them I did not know; I might mention many citizens whom I saw

129 *Pittsburgh Leader*, May 11, 12, 13 and 15, 1875; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 11 and 12, 1875.

on the streets but could not identify any citizens of Buena Vista. I saw one man with a Spencer rifle, and through curiosity asked to look at it, but cannot recall the name of the man . . . [Watson] thought as I and the rest did, I suppose, that [they] were tired of this Italian business.

A Buena Vista woman, Margaret Brown, said only that the "Italians in passing her house made faces at her, and one of them pointed a weapon at her." Another prosecution witness recalled that a Westmoreland deputy described the Italians as "desperate men," a dozen of whom were "sea pirates." Two Italians testified for the prosecution, but it is not clear that they identified the four defendants.[130]

Defense lawyer J. J. Hazlett told the court that the four men were innocent because they had acted in "self-defense." "The entire community of Buena Vista" was on trial, he insisted, explaining that "a peaceful valley had been turned into a battlefield by a body of armed Italians." Self-defense, therefore, "rendered it necessary to pursue the course which people adopted as a last resort." Defense witnesses included three Allegheny deputy sheriffs who swore that during the time they visited Buena Vista all the firing came from the Italians. Another deputy told of the distribution of arms and ammunition to the Italians. And so it went.[131]

In his charge to the jury, Judge Logan warned its members not to allow "fear, passion, or pity" to interfere with "justice" and instructed them to return one of four verdicts: guilty of murder in the first degree, guilty of murder in the second degree, voluntary manslaughter, or not guilty. "It is not necessary to find the identical persons who fired the fatal shot," Logan explained; if they simply formed part of the crowd, thereby "encouraging and abetting the act," they were guilty. The jury retired at 4:30 P.M. and returned at 10:30 the next morning. In a crowded courtroom, it announced the verdict—not guilty. The four defendants were discharged.[132] Overjoyed, the *Labor Tribune* nevertheless warned:

. . . The alleged rioters are now free by the voice of their fellow-citizens. The result is in a measure the subject of congratulation. But the spirit of the law itself is against us, the sympathies of the Courts . . . are opposed to

130 *Ibid.*, May 14, 15, 17 and 19, 1875; *Pittsburgh Leader*, May 15 and 17, 1875.
131 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 19, 1875.
132 *Ibid.*, May 20, 1875.

the industrial liberty which we demand. The system of law under which we live was given birth to in the feudal age when might, and not right, was the law. The importation of Italians or any other class of labor is right under law, but it is a violation of a higher law that is not to be found on our statute books. . . . The trial at Greensburg has not established any principle, or rooted out any legal prejudice, nor placed Labor on any better foundation. . . . The spirit of our Judiciary system is foul. The very groundwork of society needs readjusting.

The *Labor Tribune* feared that "we may have more Buena Vistas yet, and they may not end as this one has."[133]

The trial of Guscetti and Armstrong began on May 21. Although a new jury was chosen, defense counsel complained that it contained only local residents. Prosecution witnesses, including Buena Vista residents, told of the arming of the Italians and of their firing on the town. The defense countered by insisting that Armstrong and Guscetti armed the Italians in self-defense—the same argument used in behalf of the four miners. Numerous witnesses supported Armstrong and Guscetti. General Pearson and Sheriff Hare told of Armstrong's efforts to get police and military protection. Other defense witnesses described the Italians as victims of the local citizenry. Several Pittsburgh business leaders and industrialists, including the president of the Pittsburgh Bolt Company, testified that Armstrong had a fine reputation. Judge Logan warned the jury of the complexity of the case: the evidence offered had to show that the two defendants were "instigating, promoting, and advising the doing of . . . particular . . . acts of a criminal character." The jury had to decide whether Armstrong and Guscetti armed the Italians to protect human life and property or to spread "alarm and terror" among a "peaceable people." Armstrong and Guscetti, Logan concluded, could be found guilty of "aggravated riot," guilty of "simple riot," or innocent. After ten hours of deliberation, the jury concluded that they were guilty—guilty of "aggravated riot," the most serious offense.[134]

133 *National Labor Tribune*, May 29, 1875.

134 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 21, 25, 27 and 28, June 7, 9, 10 and 11, 1875; *Pittsburgh Leader*, May 22 and 29, June 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1875; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, 1875. Judge Logan's charge to the jury is found in *Commonwealth* v. *Armstrong and Guscetti* (1875), *Legal Intelligencer*, XXXII, 275. See also *Philadelphia Reports* (1875), 656–660. I am indebted to Mr. B. J. Halevy, Acting Law Librarian, State University of New York at Buffalo, for locating this citation for me.

Western Pennsylvania coal operators and industrialists were, no doubt, shaken by the conviction of Armstrong and Guscetti. Could an operator of a business enterprise no longer "protect" his property? What did the law mean? But the jury's findings surely did not surprise Westmoreland residents. The local jury identified itself with the community and defined "justice" in terms of the local citizenry. Given the experience of the jurors, both Armstrong and Guscetti were aliens and foreigners. Yet even the *Pittsburgh Chronicle* upheld the verdict: Armstrong was the "employer" and "his orders and example could not fail to exert an effect such as no jury claiming to 'common sense' could ignore." At any rate, the *Chronicle* insisted, Armstrong and Guscetti had "had all the safeguards the law provides, and it does not appear that any undue influences were brought to bear upon either judge or jury."[135] The *Labor Tribune* saw only vindication and concluded: "Thank Heaven for the sweet drop of the Almighty's justice."[136]

Found innocent of the charge of murder, the four miners faced a second indictment for "riot" and came to trial in September, 1875. A supporter warned other miners: "Should a conviction be the result this time, I am confident the commonwealth would hunt those of you who persisted in preserving nature's first law, until her mighty arm would crush each of you beneath its stroke."[137] But, once again, a Westmoreland jury, although ordering the four men to pay court costs totaling $600, found the men innocent. The jury had acted nobly and "vindicated" the miners, wrote the *Labor Tribune*, in spite of Logan, "the mean narrow minded judge, and his rotten law."[138]

One matter remained unsettled: Judge Logan refrained from passing sentence on Armstrong and Guscetti. Months passed, and the *Iron Molders' Journal* complained: "They are running around the country, and the judge refuses to sentence them because, forsooth, one of them is an employer."[139] Miners languished in Pennsylvania jails for violating "conspiracy" laws, observed the

135 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, May 28, 1875.

136 *National Labor Tribune*, May 29, 1875.

137 W. D. L., Pittsburgh, Aug. 27, to the editor, *ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1875.

138 *Ibid.*, Sept. 25, 1875; C. Abercrombie, Suters, Oct. 25, 1875, to the miners of the Connellsville Rd., *ibid.*, Oct. 30, 1875.

139 *Iron Molders' Journal* (July 1875), 358.

Miners' National Record, but Armstrong and Guscetti, "convicted criminals," remained free.[140] In mid-November, nearly seven months after the trial, the *Labor Tribune* addressed Judge Logan: "Election is now over! Logan had better call Charley Armstrong and Guscetti up and let them off scot free, for that is what they always intended to do. Complete the farce!"[141] Logan ordered the two to appear for sentencing on December 11, and the *Labor Tribune* demanded once again:

> Will this man Logan do his duty or will he disgrace the judicial ermine by the imposition of a paltry sentence, because the criminal is a rich man? Can money bribe justice? Wait and see. . . . Let Armstrong taste the law that has been meted out on poor men. Let us see whether there is one sort of justice for a poor man, and another sort for a rich man.[142]

Logan did not disappoint the *Tribune*. He fined Armstrong *five dollars* and closed the case. No record has been found of Guscetti's punishment. The *Tribune* added a final caustic comment about Logan, "the five dollar fellow," and Armstrong. "Both," insisted the labor weekly, "ought to be tied in a sack with a snake, a monkey, and a pole cat, and shipped to Greenland."[143]

The Buena Vista affair was closed. But it left scars on the labor scene in western Pennsylvania, and, from a broader view, epitomized the changing national industrial and social scene. Of interest in the immediate aftermath of the violence is the fate of the Italians brought to the Pittsburgh mines from New York. The day after the shooting, some of the Italians left for Coalburg, Ohio, near Youngstown, but local miners gave them five hours' notice to leave, and, according to the *Pittsburgh Chronicle*, "this they did without furnishing material for any coroner's inquest."[144] A week or so later, a larger number went to Knoxville to work on the Cincinnati Southern Railroad, while still others planned to settle in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, where a Pittsburgh industrialist had a charcoal enterprise.[145] The rest apparently stayed on in Pittsburgh for the winter

140 *Miners' National Record*, II (December, 1875), 23.
141 *National Labor Tribune*, Nov. 13, 1875.
142 "TARDY JUSTICE," *ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1875.
143 *Ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1876.
144 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Dec. 9, 1874; *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 19, 1874.
145 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Dec. 9, 1874.

months. In March, 1875, some Italians successfully replaced strikers at Negley and Company's Grant Works on the Pan Handle. Negley had posted bail for Guscetti.[146] Later that month, sixty Italians left Pittsburgh for the Barr Robins mines at Midway Station.[147] But that was all. No record of Guscetti's men has been found after March, 1875.

Actually, the violence that accompanied the coming of the Italians to Pittsburgh, coupled with the failure of local law officers and courts to uphold and support them, probably convinced the coal operators, and others, too, of the great risk involved in importing Italian labor from eastern cities. Careful search turns up only three efforts to use Italian workers in coal mines in the four years following the Buena Vista affair. And all took place in the spring of 1875. Coal and coke miners working for Henry Clay Frick in Broadford, Pennsylvania, quit work after a wage cut and the company went to New York to "seek Italians." There is further evidence that Italians worked for Frick two years later.[148] Encouraged by the Philadelphia Italian consulate, more than forty Italians joined other Philadelphia workers and accompanied special armed private police to the Pennsylvania Clearfield County mines during an especially bitter strike in May, 1875.[149] In the same months, some Italians—along with Swedes, Negroes, and Germans—went into the Mahoning Valley during a protracted dispute between the Miners' National Association and the northern Ohio coal operators. But this time the Italians sided with the strikers, which led a Mahoning Valley miner to write: "The Italians in this valley are as firm as a 'brick' and are willing to stand for their rights as long as they can get anything to eat. . . . The Italians told [the operators] . . . that they had "blacklegged" once, not understanding it, but would not do so any more."[150]

Perhaps the continued severity of the depression weakened the miners and their unions so greatly that Italian labor became unnecessary. But the hardship caused by the depression also led to severe

146 *Ibid.*, Mar. 6, 1875.

147 *Engineering and Mining Journal* (Mar. 20, 1875), 187, reprinted from *Pittsburgh Commercial*, Mar. 15, 1875.

148 *Workingman's Advocate*, June 26, 1875; *National Labor Tribune*, Apr. 7, 1877.

149 *Philadelphia Times*, May 12, 1875; *National Labor Tribune*, May 22, 1875; John J. Malony, Houtzdale, Pa., May 26, 1875, to the editor, *ibid.*, June 5, 1875.

150 Robin Hood, May 24, 1875, Youngstown, Ohio, to the editor, *ibid.*, May 29, 1875.

and extended disputes between miners and operators. The sparing use of Italians during these difficulties may or may not have resulted directly from the Buena Vista affair. Coal operators may have concluded that Italian contract labor was too risky. The example of Charles Armstrong could have discouraged them, for in seeking to solve a specific problem Armstrong brought upon himself grave difficulties and suffered enormously. It is quite possible, therefore, that, in the short run, the Buena Vista affair narrowed employment opportunities for immigrant Italians and reinforced the hostile stereotype of the "typical" Italian among native-born and north European workers.

Yet if the western Pennsylvania miners celebrated their victory over Armstrong and the Italians, it was a small gain. If the owners smarted over the humiliation of one of their own, it was a small defeat. The drift of the times—especially the severe economic depression which lasted another four years until 1878—strengthened the operators and weakened the miners. During these years, the Pan Handle and Connellsville operators used efficient and systematic means to control and discipline the miners. But they used methods not nearly as dramatic as the bringing in of armed Italians. That effort had been a costly and a humiliating failure. Instead, the operators recognized the advantage that could be gained from the prolonged depression.

Miners and other nineteenth-century workers feared nothing so much as losing their jobs. Whole seasons went by when men worked only two or three days a week, and too often not at all. The shortage of work over so extended a period intensified the dependence of the miners on their employers and thereby took from them what little bargaining power they had held. Moreover, it effectively weakened, if not entirely destroyed, the Miners' Benevolent and Protective Association of Western Pennsylvania. More and more, operators strengthened their bargaining power in this period of adversity by compelling the few miners who did work to live in company-owned houses and to buy in company-owned stores and to sign contracts that voluntarily surrendered wages withheld if they joined a union or were "inefficient" in less militant ways.

Events on the Pan Handle between 1875 and 1877 illustrate these developments. In July, 1875, twenty-five of Rend's men, ordered up

from the pits with their tools and told to deal only in the company store or leave the firm, accepted the store. "The way times are," explained a Rend miner, "the men thought it best to take a book and deal till they can take a fresh cut for a fresh deal."[151] Although the miners complained that twelve of the fourteen Pan Handle firms used dishonest weights, they feared asking for a checkweighman in the fall of 1875. "A terrorism has been created and not a man dare[s] speak," a miner complained. "They are being robbed and dare not stop it."[152] In December, 1875, twenty-eight miners at the Mansfield Coal and Coke Company (the largest Pan Handle mine) met to elect a delegate to a county union convention and were immediately fired. There were few protests.[153] A month later, the miners struck for a wage increase and the operators hired a detective to ferret out the strike leaders and prevent "violence."[154] Pan Handle miners struck again for more than five months in 1877 for better wages and a checkweighman. This time, the Fort Pitt Coal Company evicted strikers from its houses, and the Oak Ridge Coal Company closed its store to all strikers.[155]

It was much the same on the Connellsville Road. Armstrong's mines stayed closed a few months after the crisis, and the *Labor Tribune* cheered: "Armstrong is still idle cursed by the blood of the Italians. Let us all keep away."[156] Armstrong reopened his mines soon afterward, but by October, 1875, was hiring only men who rented one of his houses. "Some who have their houses across the river," noted an observer, "rent just to get work."[157] After Judge Logan let him off with the light fine, the *Labor Tribune* complained that Armstrong began "to pour out his vengeance on his men."[158] In January, 1876, Armstrong's men walked out because of an iron-clad

151 Unidentified letter, McDonald's Station, July, 1875, to the editor, *ibid.*, July 24, 1875.

152 *Ibid.*, Sept. 18, 1875; *Miners' National Record*, II (November, 1875), 15.

153 Unidentified letter, Mansfield, Allegheny County, to the editor, *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 11, 1875.

154 *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, Jan. 6 and Feb. 5, 1876.

155 *National Labor Tribune*, Jan. 13 and 20, Feb. 10, Mar. 17, 24 and 31, Apr. 14, 21, and 28, June 2 and 9, 1877; Ward Marchant, Oak Ridge Mine, n. d., to the editor, *Labor Standard* (New York), Apr. 14, 1877.

156 *National Labor Tribune*, Feb. 6, 1875.

157 *Ibid.*, Oct. 2, 1875.

158 *Ibid.*, Jan. 8, 1876.

contract.[159] That summer, however, they won higher wages without striking.[160] In January, 1877, Connellsville miners asked for better pay, a checkweighman, and an agreement that no man dig more than fifty bushels a day—an effort to lessen unemployment and spread work. But the Westmoreland Coal Company fired those of its seven hundred men who made these demands *if* they lived in non-company-owned houses.[161] In the spring, the miners struck again and admitted defeat after nine weeks.[162] A miner complained bitterly of the life of Connellsville coal diggers:

> Their condition is one of unmitigated serfdom. Life is scarcely worth having under such circumstances. . . . They suffer from the engrafted old world aristocratic tyranny. They are the slaves of anti-Republican corporations. In all directions, these corporations usurped the authority and perpetuated the tyrannies once confined to the despotisms of Europe. . . . Within the past three years we have been crippled so unscrupulously that today we are barely able to hold body and soul together. . . . Gentlemen, beware! Hunger knows no wrong.[163]

But hungry men are not powerful. Herein lay the weakness of the Connellsville and Pan Handle miners. The combination of sadness and anger together with the deep sense of betrayal and anxiety expressed by this miner suggests that after almost three additional years of severe economic deprivation the miners found little satisfaction from the memory of how they had thwarted efforts to introduce Italians and of the "justice" rendered by their neighbors when the courts freed the miners and convicted Guscetti and Armstrong.

How significant was the Buena Vista affair? And how important to the affair was the fact that the imported miners were armed Italians? Answers to these and related questions must be speculative, but a study of similar industrial and social crises in 1874 and 1875 reveals that common attitudes and behavior patterns were shared by each crisis and each region. The context was invariably the same: an industrial dispute encouraged the owner of a mine, a mill, or a railroad

159 *Ibid.*, Jan. 1, 1876.

160 *Ibid.*, Jan. 27, 1877.

161 *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, 1877.

162 Committee, Armstrong's, Apr. 30, 1877, to the editor, *ibid.*, May 5, 1877; *ibid.*, June 9, 1877.

163 X., Moore's, Yough., Nov. 20, 1876, to the editor, *ibid.*, Dec. 2, 1876.

to seek new workers. In most instances, men from outside the region were brought in in large numbers and under contract. Their ethnic origin differed. Some came armed; others carried no weapons. In central Illinois, Scandinavian workers from Chicago went to the coal fields, and armed Pinkerton police accompanied them. Armed English-speaking ironworkers from Pittsburgh and a number of eastern cities sought the jobs of strikers in the Ohio Valley. Armed Negroes flooded the Hocking Valley during a dispute between coal miners and Ohio operators. Two hundred "special police" from New York and New Jersey went to Susquehanna Depot, Pennsylvania, to guard the Erie Railroad repair shops during labor troubles. In each of these instances, as in Buena Vista and Westmoreland County in 1874 and 1875, support for the displaced workers came in one form or another from nonworkers, including law officers, politicians, and substantial nonindustrial property owners. If these examples are typical—and numerous others can be cited—then the general significance of the Buena Vista affair becomes clear. The fact that Armstrong gave his men guns, and the fact that these men were strange foreigners, remain important considerations. But the use of armed Italians was merely a spark that ignited an already smouldering fire. The spark ignited a feeling of deep discontent that drew sustenance from the particular social structure and ideology common to small industrial towns in this area.[164]

Much of the early history of industrialization is the story of the painful fashion in which an older way of life was discarded for a new one. The usual picture drawn of these years portrays the absolute power of the employer over his workers and emphasizes his ability to manipulate the local order to his advantage. What happened to Charles Armstrong and the Italians belies this oversimplified picture. Small industrial towns were not entirely dominated by the rising industrial entrepreneur. Charles Armstrong was not popular with the Westmoreland and Buena Vista citizenry whatever his

164 Herbert G. Gutman: "The Worker's Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age," in H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal* (Syracuse, 1963), 38–68; "The Braidwood Lockout of 1874," Illinois State Historical Society *Journal*, LIII (1960), 5–28; "An Iron Workers' Strike in the Ohio Valley," *The Ohio Historical Quarterly*, LVIII (1959), 353–370; "Reconstruction in Ohio: Negroes in the Hocking Valley Coal Mines in 1873 and 1874," *Labor History*, III (1962), 243–264; "Trouble on the Railroads in 1873–1874: Prelude to the 1877 Crisis," *ibid.*, II (1961), 215–235.

reputation in Pittsburgh. What explains the behavior of the Buena Vista citizens? In the small industrial towns, residents grasped the reality of the new industrialism because they could see and feel it at all times. They saw more than the end result of industrial production; they witnessed the making of goods and did not merely marvel at the finished product. Ideology, therefore, was much less important than experience in such an environment. Moral judgments often drew upon direct experience. More than this, and in the midst of the new industrial enterprise with its norms rationalized by "natural" economic and social "laws," the people often clung to an older and more humane set of values. Finally, residents of small towns lived and worked together in a community and therefore shared local or regional values. For all of these reasons, such persons often resented sharp and dramatic changes in a traditional way of life—and especially distrusted intrusions from the outside. In cutting costs and seeking a disciplined labor force, the employer frequently faced a hostile local community composed of members of all social classes *if* he acted in a manner that threatened the stability of the community itself. The Buena Vista affair illustrated this dynamic. Charles Armstrong was an innovator who disrupted a community, and the Italians, strangers in every sense of the word, only intensified the degree of alienation between Armstrong and the community. Those who criticized Armstrong invariably accepted the concept of private property and the gospel of hard work and thrift, but they were not yet ready to sacrifice local and regional ties or feelings of fellowship toward their neighbors. And when employers such as Armstrong made necessary, if unwise, decisions to protect what they thought to be their economic well-being, they faced a hostile and aroused local citizenry.

The Buena Vista affair is not a pleasant story, and yet it cannot be blotted out because it reveals so much. During the last half of the nineteenth century, the nation went through a deep crisis as it sought to adjust values derived from a commercial and an agrarian world to the harsh realities and problems of urban and industrial America. Historians study and seek to explain the manner in which a society changes. Part of that story can be told objectively: it can be measured in bushels of coal, tons of pig iron and steel, yards of cloth, and miles of railroad track. Another whole dimension is not so easily

measured but is equally important. It studies the subjective responses to change and especially the response of people to the new power generated by industrial technology and industrial necessity. It studies the response of people to the new set of dependent relationships and the loss of local autonomy characteristic of an early industrializing society. Only the careful study of local industrial and social history can define adequately and accurately the subjective response to industrial and social change in the United States. And the Buena Vista affair in 1874 and 1875 is but one example of that response.

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