# *Pennsylvania Coal and Politics: The Anthracite Strike of 1925-1926*

In September, 1925, the third hard coal strike in four years halted work in the anthracite fields of northeastern Pennsylvania. Coming on the heels of work stoppages in 1922 and 1923, this five-month suspension of mining dealt a crippling blow to a once-dynamic industry. In common with the earlier strikes, it originated in the hostility between the well-organized United Mine Workers of America and the small group of operators who controlled most of the coal fields. In this strike, as in the other two, the union sought higher wages and the checkoff, wherein it could maintain a tighter and more unified membership, while the owners resisted wage demands, called for increased efficiency of production, and assailed the checkoff as an arbitrary extension of monopolistic union power. The 1925–1926 dispute, in common with its predecessors, laid bare the crisis in the hard coal industry, revealing the monopoly, profiteering, and inefficiency that were leading many consumers to adopt substitute fuels and to abandon the once-essential anthracite.[1]

To many contemporary observers, the most arresting similarity in the three strikes lay in their involvement with Pennsylvania and national Republican politics. Anthracite was a domestic heating fuel, which, however it had declined in importance in recent years, had an enormous importance in the heavily populated northeastern part of the country. Whenever strike rumors circulated and miners left their jobs, hundreds of thousands of homeowners and tenants shuddered

[1] The most useful descriptions of the troubles of the anthracite industry were written during the 1920's. See A. T. Shurick, *The Coal Industry* (Boston, 1924), 207–275, *passim.*; United States Coal Commission, *Report* (Washington, 1925), Part 2; "Wage Agreements in the Anthracite Industry," n.d., in United States Coal Commission Records, Record Group 68, Drawer 43, National Archives; and Jules I. Bogen, *The Anthracite Railroads: A Study in American Railroad Enterprise* (New York, 1927). Tze-Kang Hsiang, "Competition of Substitute Fuels in the Anthracite Industry" (unpublished thesis, Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, 1947) is helpful on its subject, though marred by errors.

at the prospect of a coalless winter. Fear of discomfort and apprehension over cold and illness were quickly translated into political concern. Newspapers, politicians, and unhappy citizens clamored for governmental intervention to settle the disputes and keep the furnaces glowing, while political figures close to the scene weighed the advantages and disadvantages of action or silence.

The 1922 strike found George Wharton Pepper, recently appointed to the Senate seat left vacant by the death of Boies Penrose, in the middle of his campaign for the unexpired four years remaining in the term. President Warren G. Harding, deeply involved in the concurrent soft coal and railroad strikes that racked the country that summer, called on the Philadelphia lawyer to serve as a mediator. During August and September Pepper, with the help of his senatorial colleague from Pennsylvania, David A. Reed, conferred with UMW and operator officials, hammering out a compromise settlement, and seeing his efforts rewarded by the termination of the strike along the lines he had been suggesting. Pepper's role in the strike settlement won for him much acclaim and publicity, which were invaluable to the political newcomer in his first political campaign, and which provided at least some cheer in a national administration that had been damaged by its handling of the other two strikes.[2]

The 1923 strike had even deeper political ramifications. Occurring just as Calvin Coolidge was assuming the presidency, this dispute created a political controversy that pitted the new Chief Executive against Gifford Pinchot, the progressive Republican Governor of Pennsylvania, a representative of the shattered liberal wing of the party. The spotlight of public attention shifted back and forth between Harrisburg and Washington, as a fretful public demanded vigorous governmental action to prevent a coal shortage. When Pinchot, who had national political ambitions, arranged a settlement, it appeared that he had stolen a march on the apparently vacillating President. For a time Pinchot's presidential hopes flourished. But a coal price increase and Coolidge's shrewd ability to handle himself quickly dissolved the Governor's hopes, and December, 1923, found the President firmly in control of the party while his erstwhile rival

2 Robert H. Zieger, "Senator George Wharton Pepper and Labor Issues in the 1920s," *Labor History*, IX (1968), 166–170.

tried fruitlessly to work with the unco-operative governors of neighboring states to achieve a permanent solution to the anthracite problem.[3]

Pinchot's settlement had at least allowed two years of labor peace, whatever the cost to the coal consumer and to his own political fortunes. Nineteen-twenty-four was a year of hope in the coal industry, for the two-year contract arranged by Pinchot insured against a hard coal strike, while in February the unionized bituminous coal miners and the operators signed the Jacksonville Agreement, providing for a three-year soft coal contract.[4]

In 1925, however, the coal crisis came to a head. The Jacksonville Agreement began to break down and the United Mine Workers lost ground rapidly throughout the soft coal regions of western Pennsylvania and the Middle West. In July negotiations between the anthracite miners and the operators regarding the contract due to expire on August 31 started but quickly became tangled in the usual acrimony and distrust. While the UMW was the bargaining agent for both the bituminous coal and anthracite miners, the labor contracts and negotiations were entirely separate. Still, members of the Coolidge administration feared that John L. Lewis, increasingly bitter over the refusal of the administration to endorse his view of the Jacksonville Agreement, would lead the anthracite miners out on strike as a means of protesting. While the UMW chief disavowed this purpose, he and his aides did indicate that they would not welcome any federal mediation efforts in the hard coal negotiation until he got satisfaction from the government regarding the Jacksonville Agreement.[5]

[3] Robert H. Zieger, "Pinchot and Coolidge: The Politics of the 1923 Anthracite Crisis," *Journal of American History*, LII (1965), 556–581.

[4] For the Jacksonville Agreement, see United States Department of Commerce, *Twelfth Annual Report of the Secretary of Commerce* (1924), 12–14; *United Mine Workers Journal*, Mar. 1, 1924; and Edmond Beame, "The Jacksonville Agreement," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, VIII (1955), 195–203.

[5] The administration's apprehension over a possible linking of the soft and hard coal difficulties stemmed from a much publicized telegram sent to administration officials by Van A. Bittner, chief UMW official in northern West Virginia, on July 21, 1925. Bittner criticized the administration for not moving against operators who were violating the Jacksonville Agreement and declared that the union might retaliate with "a general strike" unless it gained governmental support in the bituminous coal regions. Bittner telegram to Hoover, July 21, 1925, Hoover Papers, Box 347, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa; *New York Times*, July 22, 1925. Lewis eventually disavowed Bittner's angry remarks, but

Public attention focused on the anthracite situation. The soft coal controversy remained largely a war of words through 1925 and 1926, but in the hard coal region a contract was about to expire and, reported Hugh Kerwin, Director of the United States Conciliation Service, another strike was likely. While Kerwin thought that a work suspension would be brief and that existing hard coal supplies would be adequate, other members of the administration feared that the anthracite dispute might become inextricably bound up with the Jacksonville Agreement controversy. Moreover, hard coal heated millions of homes and drew millions of dollars from consumers; a third strike in the space of four years, no matter how brief, would have unavoidable economic repercussions and political overtones. Thus, throughout July press reports from Swampscott, Massachusetts, where the President was vacationing, predicted vigorous and far reaching federal action to head off this crisis. While the President was careful not to commit himself, the *New York Times* emphasized that his election victory in 1924 had given him prestige and power that had not been his in the summer of 1923. While the President had few formal powers in labor matters and while he would be reluctant to intervene, the *Times* reported, if a strike seemed likely "it is thought by those who know him well that he will tell the miners and operators that the Government has mapped a program which will be of a revolutionary nature."[6]

Still, Coolidge was not a man to be rushed into drastic action. As the prospect of a strike grew, he became the target of innumerable suggestions, ranging from the offer of a New York citizen to perform an astrological analysis of the controversy to the suggestion of Judson Welliver, one of his personal aides, that he embark upon an attack on the UMW. But Robe Carl White, Acting Secretary of Labor, James J. Davis, the Secretary of Labor, and Herbert Hoover, the Secretary

---

Secretary of Labor James J. Davis reported that "He contends that the government cannot come into the anthracite negotiations unless it can come in with clean hands by publicly disapproving the action of the bituminous operators who have set aside or violated the . . . [Jacksonville] agreement." James J. Davis, "Article on the Possibility of Suspension of Operations in Bituminous Coal Fields . . . ," Sept. 8, 1925, James J. Davis Papers, Box 41, Library of Congress.

[6] Hugh L. Kerwin to Everett Sanders, July 6, 1925, Calvin Coolidge Papers, File 175, Library of Congress; T. L. Lewis to Calvin Coolidge, July 17, 1925, *ibid.; New York Times*, July 18, 19, 21, 25, and 27, 1925. The quote is from the July 19 issue.

of Commerce, all counseled restraint and nonintervention. "I am firmly convinced," wrote Davis on August 26, "at this moment that a suspension in the anthracite fields on September first cannot be avoided, and it is my opinion that there is no possible way in which the Government can be helpful. . . ." After a visit to the President, Hoover issued a statement that emphasized the fundamental soundness of the economy and declared that "There is no reason for America to be panic-stricken at any industrial retardment." The President's own statements to the press were confined to urging the miners and operators to come to terms and to suggesting to coal consumers that they begin to prepare to use substitute fuels.[7]

In addition to his cautious nature and the advice of his most knowledgeable subordinates, the President had powerful political reasons for remaining aloof from the strike. A major political conflict was shaping up in the heavily Republican Keystone State, for in 1926 Senator Pepper would face re-election. Victory in the general election would be no problem in this GOP citadel, but it became increasingly evident that Governor Pinchot, frustrated in his presidential ambitions yet still seeking a national office, would challenge Pepper in the Republican senatorial primary in the spring of 1926. Pepper had been a solid administration supporter, while Pinchot and Coolidge had clashed in 1923 and differed sharply in temperament and ideology. Still, Coolidge would not openly intervene in Pennsylvania GOP politics, especially since there was a possibility of the Vare and Mellon machines advancing candidates.[8]

The hard coal strike, which would directly affect the state's economy as well as the health and comfort of its inhabitants, became a major issue in the early discussion of the 1926 senatorial contest. Pepper, after all, had been the hero of the 1922 hard coal settlement, while Pinchot had settled the 1923 strike. By 1925 neither man welcomed the role of labor mediator, but each had to be concerned about the activities of the other. If the national administration moved

[7] For the offer of occult help, see Arthur W. Brooks to Coolidge, Aug. 7, 1925, while Welliver's views and Coolidge's rejection of them are revealed in Welliver to Sanders, Aug. 8, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 175. For the advice of the cabinet officials, see White to Sanders, Aug. 1 and 5, 1925, *ibid.*, Davis to Coolidge, Aug. 26, 1925, *ibid.*, File 15; and statement by Herbert Hoover, Aug. 10, 1925, Hoover Papers, Box 347.

[8] For the political implications of the strike, see T. L. Lewis to Coolidge, July 17, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 175, and *New York Times*, July 25, 1925.

vigorously and settled the dispute, Pepper, as a proadministration incumbent, would gain a powerful advantage. If, however, Coolidge refused to act, as seemed likely, Pinchot might repeat his 1923 *coup* and, if he could prevent a price increase, he would gather labor and consumer support. During the summer Pepper conferred with Coolidge at Swampscott, biding his time. On August 1, Senator Reed, his colleague in the Senate, privately urged him to move to effect a settlement before his rival could gain control of the situation, but Pepper hesitated, perhaps because inaction seemed judicious, perhaps because of reluctance to outpace the national administration. For his part Pinchot was equally reluctant to become directly involved. His intervention in 1923 had not, on balance, helped him politically and he knew that the mine operators were adamantly against his entry into the dispute. Pinchot's advisors, reported the Acting Secretary of Labor, "are opposed to his participation in the anthracite controversy."[9]

After the strike began on September 1, the political caldron boiled even more furiously. "Pepper and Pinchot are watching each other like two hawks," remarked a mineworker official on September 4, "waiting to see which one shows signs of making the first move." With the long-awaited strike a reality and with the continued passiveness of the Federal Government, a reporter asserted in September that "The Senatorial race is now an appendage of the anthracite strike."[10]

Regardless of political machinations, the Coolidge administration was faced with a major labor and consumer problem. When the strike began, the Department of Commerce prepared a memorandum that projected the probable course of the strike. A remarkably accurate forecast, the memorandum described four stages through which the dispute would pass. At the end of the first month there would be no shortages of hard coal, although there doubtless would be some speculation and hence price increases. Small shortages accompanied by sharp price increases and the adoption of substitute fuels would occur after the second month. By the end of November there would be a

[9] *Ibid.*, Aug. 3, 1925; Reed to Pepper, Aug. 1, 1925, George Wharton Pepper Papers, Box 70, Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania; White to Sanders, Aug. 5, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 175.

[10] These comments are in *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1925.

fifteen-per-cent shortage and "strong pressure for Federal intervention." The turn of the year would witness a thirty-per-cent shortage, considerable suffering, and runaway profiteering. "The peak of the situation will follow by this time," the memorandum declared and, it predicted, there would be a settlement toward the end of January, 1926.[11]

The only miscalculation in the memorandum was its judgment on agitation for federal intervention. Almost from the start of the strike the administration came under attack for failure to act. Of course, Democrats from eastern states led the assault. On September 13, Democratic Governor George Silzer of New Jersey lashed out at the President, while on September 25 Brooklyn Congressman Emanuel Celler warned Coolidge that "Now the crisis only impends" but soon the poor people in his district would be desperate for fuel. Legislative machinery, which could not even start until Congress convened in December, "is too cumbersome for heroic or speedy remedies," the young Democrat declared. Other urban Democrats joined in urging presidential leadership and on November 16 eight New York congressmen made public a telegram to the President, accusing the administration of bad faith and urging prompt intervention. "The country has been led to expect your intervention," they wired Coolidge. "We therefore respectfully ask you forthwith to use your good offices and great power to bring the warring factions together. . . . The poor in Brooklyn and elsewhere," the statement continued, "are begging piteously for coal withheld because of extortionate prices. . . ." In January, 1926, Congressman Sol Bloom, another New York Democrat, reported people dying of pneumonia and influenza in overcrowded, ill-heated hospitals as a result of the coal shortage. Bloom urged executive action "in behalf of the sick and suffering people of the entire country. . . ."[12]

The capstone of the Democratic effort to place responsibility for ending the strike upon Coolidge was a resolution introduced on

11 Department of Commerce memorandum, September, 1925, in Hoover Papers, Box 347.

12 The various Democratic efforts to place responsibility upon the President are revealed in *New York Times*, Sept. 13, 1925; Emanuel Celler to Coolidge, Sept. 25, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 175; telegram from Congressmen George W. Lindsay, Thomas H. Cullen, Loring M. Black, Jr., Andrew J. Somers, John F. Quayle, William E. Cleary, David J. O'Connell, and Celler to Coolidge, Nov. 16, 1925, *ibid.*; Congressman Sol Bloom to Coolidge, Jan. 19, 1926, *ibid.*

January 15, 1926, by Senator Royal Copeland of New York. This statement and another introduced on January 20 called upon the President "to take whatever steps are necessary and proper to bring about a resumption of anthracite coal mining." For three and a half weeks Copeland and other Democrats sought adoption of these resolutions, arguing that the coal crisis was solvable only through presidential intervention and that Coolidge "could settle [the strike] . . . in two hours if he would set himself to it." Republicans replied that the Copeland Resolution was simply a political device aimed at embarrassing the administration without suggesting means of settlement or granting the President powers sufficient to the task. The Republican majority effectively blocked action, with Senators Reed and Pepper pressing the administration's case. After terming the refusal of the Senate to act "a crime against humanity," in February the New York Democrat all but admitted defeat, declaring that "there is nothing for me to do but to subside, knowing that the Republicans continue to be unwilling to [aid] . . . those who are suffering. . . ." Yet his maneuver did have the effect of casting the GOP in a negative light and of publicizing the President's inaction.[13]

Despite their public defense of the administration, Republicans also sought presidential action. On October 12, GOP Congressman Walter W. Magee of New York declared to Coolidge that the Federal Government alone could stop the strike and that it "will be fully justified in exerting its power . . . to bring about the resumption of mining. . . ." Progressive Senator George W. Norris urged at least temporary federal seizure of the mines. Eastern Republicans faced a difficult problem. They knew that the lack of coal and the high prices hurt the party, but they also were aware that public criticism or even complaint could embarrass the President and perhaps ultimately hurt themselves. This dilemma produced a rather plaintive note in some GOP statements. Late in December, for example, a New York City local Republican organization petitioned its congressman, noting that expensive but inferior substitute coal imported from England "is smoking up everything in New York. The women," its

[13] Copeland's resolutions are contained in U.S. *Congressional Record*, LXVII, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., 1926, 2179, 2432. The debate can be followed in *ibid.*, 2179–2181, 2432–2433, 3081, 3091, 3287, 3343, 3526, 3800. For newspaper coverage of the debate over the Copeland resolution, see *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 17, 20, 21, and Feb. 4, 5, 7, 1926.

remonstrance continued, "are compelled to remove their wash from the roofs on account of the dust. . . ." Late in the strike, an unhappy New Jersey Republican congressman, facing political difficulty because of the length and severity of the strike, yet unwaveringly loyal to Coolidge, reported that "Public opinion in my District seems to require that the coal strike be settled." Hastily reassuring the President that "in no way do I intend to embarrass the administration by joining the opposition," Stewart Appleby, the perplexed legislator, begged Coolidge "If you have any words of good cheer as to when the strike will probably be settled . . . I would be pleased to have any information. . . ." Pennsylvania Republican Congressman G. Franklin Brumm, who represented an anthracite district, was more outspoken than most of his party colleagues, urging the President to act promptly, even to the point of seizing the mines. Other GOP members of the Pennsylvania delegation, however, were less bold, and balanced words of concern about the strike with words of praise for Coolidge's restraint.[14]

Neither partisan criticism, reports of suffering, nor the dilemmas of his own supporters impelled the President to act aggressively. Mediators from the Conciliation Service were on the job and Coolidge and other administration officials kept in close touch with the strike situation.[15] But the President's personal response was to forego drastic action, at least until a full-fledged disaster arose. He felt that if a premature initiative on his part failed, settlement would be retarded; and such a move would be likely to fail because the miners and operators would still be bitterly divided and the Presi-

[14] Walter W. Magee to Sanders, Oct. 12, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 175; Norris to Murray King, Dec. 26, 1925, George W. Norris Papers, Box 5, Tray 1, Library of Congress; petition and letter from 22d Assembly District Republican Organization to Sol Bloom, Dec. 29, 1925, U.S House of Representatives Records, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., Memorials, etc. to House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, Record Group 233, National Archives; Stewart Appleby to Sanders, Feb. 9, 1926, Coolidge Papers, File 175; Sanders to James J. Davis, Feb. 10, 1926, *ibid.;* speech of Congressman G. Franklin Brumm, Feb. 10, 1926, *Congressional Record,* LXVII, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., 1926, 3727–3728. See also former Governor of New Jersey Edward C. Stokes to Coolidge, Jan. 22, 1926, Coolidge Papers, File 175.

[15] U.S. Department of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report* (1926), 28–30. John J. Leary, Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter on labor affairs, kept Hoover closely informed of the situation in a number of highly detailed and perceptive letters between December, 1925, and February, 1926. Hoover, who received dispatches from regular government channels also, called Leary's letters "the most helpful advice I receive on the situation." These letters are in the Hoover Papers, Box 357.

dent, without formal powers, would have to rely upon the force of public opinion, which, in the absence of genuine crisis, would probably be divided.[16]

In December, however, as the strike entered its fourth month, the President did take a more vigorous step. In his annual message to Congress of December 8, he discussed the chaotic conditions in both the soft and hard coal industries. Advancing no radical proposals, he did tell Congress that "Authority should be lodged with the President and the Departments of Commerce and Labor, giving them power to deal with an emergency." These powers would enable the government to pursue fact-finding efforts, to make public the facts, to distribute coal, and to encourage arbitration. Coolidge also asked Congress to act favorably upon the recommendations of the United States Coal Commission, which had been made public in 1923 and which called for the creation of a permanent fact-gathering public body for the coal industry.[17]

Very likely the enactment of these recommendations would have done little to settle the current strike. But they did at least constitute a definite program. Throughout the next two months Coolidge and his aides replied to critics of the President's inaction by pointing to these recommendations and to Congress' failure to act upon them. Democrats criticized the proposals on the grounds that they were irrelevant to the present crisis and by declaring that what was needed was swift executive initiative, not fact-finding. But the Coolidge people were equally adamant about refusing to shoulder responsibility until Congress granted the President the powers he had asked for. Thus, on February 9, Edward T. Clark, a presidential secretary, noted that "The coal strike drags on and on, but the President has no power whatsoever in the matter and has refused to take the responsibility of intervention without any power."[18]

16 *New York Times*, Aug. 6, 12, Nov. 3, 1925.

17 *Annual Message of the President to the Congress of the United States* (Dec. 8, 1925). For the Coal Commission's recommendations, which formed the basis for Coolidge's remarks, see its *Report*, Part 1, 259–270.

18 Senator Copeland, for example, urged Coolidge to "do what Theodore Roosevelt did" in the anthracite strike of 1902, while Republicans in Congress claimed that the test of their opponents' sincerity regarding presidential action was their willingness to give Coolidge the tools he was asking for. See *Congressional Record*, LXVII, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., 1926, 2433 for Copeland's remark, while Senator Pepper defended the President in *ibid.*, 2186. Clark's statement is contained in his letter to Capt. J. W. Flanigan, Feb. 9, 1926, Edward T. Clark Papers, Box 5, Library of Congress.

Even more unobtrusive than Coolidge in the strike was Senator Pepper. Although newspaper reports in the summer had recalled his role in the 1922 strike and had reported that he was considering an initiative, if only to head off one by Governor Pinchot, the Senator said little throughout the long strike. In January he spoke in favor of Coolidge's policy and in February he served as a spokesman for Pennsylvania Republican congressmen who wanted their names linked to actions designed to reach a settlement, but otherwise Pepper remained discreetly aloof. An occasional newspaper editorial criticized him for this stance, but most public comment centered on the President and the Governor.[19]

If Coolidge and Pepper could afford inaction, neither Pinchot nor the citizens and public figures of the anthracite towns of northeastern Pennsylvania could. Throughout the five months that the strike lasted, almost all of the initiatives for settlement came from these sources. Anthracite communities such as Scranton and Wilkes-Barre were in difficult straits. The economy of the entire region depended upon hard coal mining, but the labor troubles of the 1920's together with the development of substitute fuels were slashing anthracite demand. A survey taken in New York in 1923 revealed that fuel oil was annually displacing approximately 200,000 tons of hard coal in that city, while other estimates indicated that the situation was even worse in the New England markets. Anthracite production declined from a peak of 100 million tons in 1917 to 88 million tons in 1924, and was to fall to 70 million tons in 1930, with the combination of substitute fuels and chronic labor unrest, which gave enormous impetus to the adoption of fuel oil and soft coal, being the crucial factors.[20] Thus, on November 12, 1925, the Scranton Chamber of Commerce ap-

[19] For Pepper's remarks in the Senate, see *Congressional Record*, LXVII, 69 Cong., 1 Sess., 1926, 2179–2181, 2186, 2567, while his efforts in behalf of the Pennsylvania GOP congressional delegation are described in a letter from Everett Sanders to James J. Davis, Feb. 10, 1926, Coolidge Papers, File 175. A *New York Times* editorial of Sept, 16, 1925, criticized the Senator, noting that "In times past . . . Pepper took a leading part in negotiations . . . [but] today he is notably absent. . . ."

[20] These figures are from Shurick, *The Coal Industry*, 275; Hsiang, "Competition of Substitute Fuels in the Anthracite Industry," 1–3, 88; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, 1789–1945* (1949), 142–144. See also U.S. Coal Commission, *Report*, Part 1, 1–62, and O. E. Kiessling and H. L. Bennit, "Pennsylvania Anthracite in 1928," excerpt from U.S. Geological Survey *Mineral Resources in the United States, 1928* (Washington, 1929), Part 2, 1–9, copy in Legislative Reference Files, American Federation of Labor Papers, Box 2, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

pealed to miners and operators to set aside their differences and to protect their businesses and jobs by resuming mining immediately. "This great industry," declared the Chamber of Commerce report, "is . . . facing a grave crisis. . . ." From September until the end of the strike in early February, mayors, civic groups, and newspapers from the hard-hit area sought repeatedly to arrange conferences and bring the UMW and operators to a settlement but none of these efforts availed.[21]

The situation was equally dire for Pinchot. Each day of the strike weakened the state's economy and his own political prospects. He was convinced that the onus of the dispute rested squarely on the operators, whom he later called "hard boiled monopolists," but this attitude and his support for union demands in 1923 made the operators wary of his efforts. During the early weeks of the strike he met several times with Lewis and William W. Inglis, representing the operators, but he hoped that events would force the President's hand and compel federal action. Finally, late in November, he called a general miner-operator conference to convene on November 28. On November 27 he had informed the President of his intention, declaring that "It is evident that executive action . . . offers the only prospect of prompt relief." However, the operators were still suspicious and declined to attend. Nonetheless, he advanced a compromise plan which envisioned a five-year contract, no wage or price increase, a compromise on the checkoff, and the creation of a miner-operator board which would hear grievances and maintain a study of the industry with a view to adjusting wage rates automatically to changes in productivity. The mineworkers accepted this plan, but once again the operators flatly rejected it.[22]

[21] "Report of the Committee Appointed by the Scranton Chamber of Commerce on the Anthracite Coal Strike," Nov. 13, 1925, Pepper Papers, Box 28.

[22] For Pinchot's efforts, see Department of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 29; undated memorandum entitled "Anthracite Strike," *ca.* March, 1926, in U.S. Conciliation Service Records, Record Group 280, File 170/3918–7, National Archives; and M. Nelson McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot: Forester-Politician* (Princeton, 1960), 310–311. McGeary quotes Pinchot's criticism of the operators on p. 311. The Governor's remarks to Coolidge are in his letter to the President of Nov. 27, 1925, Coolidge Papers, File 285, while his settlement plans are described in his letter to his brother Amos R. E. Pinchot, Nov. 29, 1925, Amos R. E. Pinchot Papers, Box 48, Library of Congress; *New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1925. The UMW's acceptance of Pinchot's plan is revealed in *UMW Journal*, Dec. 1, 1925, while the operators' rejection is contained in William W. Inglis, chairman of the Anthracite Operators' Negotiation Committee, to Pinchot, Nov. 30, 1925, reprinted in *ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1925.

On December 12, Pinchot called a special session of the Pennsylvania legislature. Union figures saw this move as an opportunity to introduce a sweeping coal code that would guarantee the union's demands. UMW economic consultant W. Jett Lauck supplied Pinchot with draft proposals and fresh ideas. On January 9, Lauck felt hopeful enough about some of the proposals that he had sent to Pinchot to declare that "It begins to look to me as though history [will] . . . again repeat itself and that Harrisburg [will] . . . again be the terminus." Almost to the end of the strike Lauck and UMW vice-president Philip Murray pressed the Governor to introduce a comprehensive hard coal code into the state legislature, hoping to bend public opinion against the operators, who would either have to accept the code or be responsible for the continuation of the strike. Lauck reported to Lewis that he had written about this approach to Pinchot, "and I hope the Governor will have the courage to go forward with it. . . ." Despite Lauck's hopes and the Governor's wishes, however, the legislature produced little more than a resolution memorializing President Coolidge to intervene in the strike.[23] As little came from the Governor's intense efforts as was produced by Coolidge's restraint.

The long, dreary strike dragged on through January. The mining regions were hard hit and soup kitchens did a thriving business in Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Hazleton, and other anthracite cities. One reporter noted that "the Eastern cities are enshrouded in an unaccustomed pall of soft coal smoke." Coal prices shot up and thousands of residents converted their heating apparatus for other fuels. The strike was helping to turn a once bustling region into a series of ghost towns. And still there seemed no hope of settlement.[24]

Late in January, as the Department of Commerce memorandum had predicted, efforts toward a settlement quickened. James J. Davis, working in conjunction with the Conciliation Service, de-

[23] Memorandum, "Anthracite Strike," *ca.* March, 1926, Conciliation Service Records, File 170/3918–7. For Lauck's and Murray's dealings with Pinchot, see Lauck to John L. Lewis, Jan. 9 and Feb. 5, 1926, and to Murray, Jan. 30, 1926, W. Jett Lauck Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. The efforts of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives are described in David Williams of the Pennsylvania State Department of Labor and Industry to Hugh Kerwin, Feb. 9, 1926, Conciliation Service Records, File 170/3075.

[24] "Why the Anthracite Strike Must Go On," *Literary Digest*, LXXXVIII (Jan. 23, 1926), 5–7.

veloped a plan wherein William C. Sproul, former governor of Pennsylvania, would meet the disputants and urge them to settle. On January 20, as the former governor was about to meet Lewis in Philadelphia, the Scranton *Times* introduced a different plan, setting back the Davis-Sproul initiative and focusing attention again on the northeastern corner of the state. A week later, on January 26 and 27, Lewis and the hard coal operators resumed their discussions with Sproul, who urged the miners to modify their insistence upon the checkoff and the operators to drop their demand for binding arbitration of future disagreements.[25]

During the next two weeks there was endless speculation and rumor about what was happening. Neither the Scranton *Times* proposal nor the Sproul conferences seemed to be getting anywhere, but talk of settlement continued. Finally, on February 11 and 12 the full delegations of the Anthracite Operators' Conference and the Miners' Scale Committee assembled in Philadelphia, meeting respectively in the Ritz-Carlton and Bellevue-Stratford hotels. Although secrecy surrounded these gatherings, observers knew that an agreement was near because these bodies would congregate only for such an event. In the anthracite regions, miners and their families prepared to celebrate and to resume work, while public officials began to gird themselves for the struggle to keep coal prices down.[26]

On February 12, the miners and operators announced an agreement. Coming at the end of 165 days of strike and an even longer period of negotiation, it was a curiously unspectacular document. The most difficult issues had been the UMW's demand for the checkoff and the anthracite operators' insistence upon binding arbitration. The final agreement skirted both of these issues. For example, while it said nothing about the checkoff, it pledged both miners and owners to "cooperation and efficiency," which the UMW leaders declared meant the institution of the checkoff ("cooperation") in return for greater productivity ("efficiency"). As for arbitration, the agreement called for a contract with existing wages to last until August 31, 1930, but it also provided for a complex system of periodic review and adjustment. Once a year, either side could request a contract adjustment. If direct negotiations did not produce a new agreement within

25 Department of Labor, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 28–29.
26 *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 13, 1926.

thirty days, a special two-man board would be created to deal with the unresolved issues. The miners would choose one of these two men from a list of three submitted by the operators, who would choose one from a similar group advanced by the miners. This special board was obligated to study the problems scientifically and impartially and to render a "decision" within ninety days. If the two-man board became deadlocked, they were to choose a third member, whose vote was to be decisive. From the operators' standpoint, this machinery was tantamount to arbitration, but the UMW made reservations about its willingness to accept binding decisions in matters such as wages and basic working conditions. Thus, the "longest and most costly" anthracite strike, which had caused incalculable misery and suffering and which had contributed mightily to the decline of an entire part of the state and an important industry, was settled by an ambiguous compromise.[27]

It was a disappointing conclusion to such a painful and costly affair. Wrote Herbert Hoover at the time of the settlement, "It has been a deplorable business from every angle. . . ." To the Secretary of Commerce, who worked tirelessly throughout the 1920's to find answers to the "labor problem," it was "especially depressing as indicating that we have not yet reached a stage of civilization where we can settle such primary things as this."[28]

Still, the strike was over.[29] Celebrations swept through the mining towns and negotiators who had been grim faced and silent now issued ebullient statements. Lewis described the settlement as "The dawn of a new era," while Inglis, speaking for the operators, declared that "We are all very well pleased."[30]

The end of the strike did not terminate rumor and speculation. Now discussion centered on responsibility for the final negotiations. "What did Governor Pinchot, Secretary of Labor Davis and former Governor Sproul have to do with the negotiations?" asked a reporter. Observers and newsmen asked if Coolidge had exerted last minute

27 The text of the agreement appears in *ibid.*, Feb. 12. Ever optimistic, the *UMW Journal* of Feb. 15, 1926, headlined that the "Anthracite Strike Comes to an End; Miners Win Tremendous Victory. . . ."

28 Hoover to J. P. Jackson, Feb. 12, 1926, Hoover Papers, Box 347.

29 The agreement was ratified by the UMW Tri-District convention on Feb. 17 by a vote of 698 to 2. *New York Times*, Feb. 17, 1926.

30 Lewis and Inglis are quoted in *ibid.*, Feb. 13, 1926.

pressure, or if perhaps the miners and operators had simply realized that the costly deadlock could no longer be tolerated. Credit for settling the dispute was variously awarded to Davis, Coolidge, Sproul, Pinchot, and the Democratic Party. Newspaper reports emphasized the role of the Secretary of Labor, while Lewis singled out for praise "The high courage and unselfish devotion . . . which has been demonstrated by the Hon. Gifford Pinchot. . . ." Democratic Congressmen Loring Black and Meyer Jacobstein of New York declared that it was the Copeland Resolution that finally impelled Coolidge to exert his influence, while Republicans claimed that it was the steadfast refusal of the President to intervene and tamper with delicate negotiations that proved decisive. Coolidge refused to admit to any role, nor would he even acknowledge that his silence was an important factor. Davis was content to affirm to the President that "the parties themselves settled the matter within the industry which was in accordance with your wishes." Perhaps a trifle irritated at all of the post-settlement speculation, Davis declared to the press that "I am more concerned with the happiness and comfort of the 800,000 people in the anthracite region . . . than I am in who shall get the credit. . . ."[31]

Ironically, in view of the rampant political speculation that had attended the strike from the outset, the hero of the 1926 agreement was none of these public figures. The key role in settling the important differences and in getting both parties to compromise belonged to Richard F. Grant, president of the Susquehanna Colleries Company and vice-president of the Cleveland-based M. A. Hanna Company. Grant, who had in 1924 and 1925 been president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, entered the scene early in February. Convinced that political figures could only retard settlement and that the operators and miners had reached an impasse, Grant conferred with Inglis and Lewis and moved back and forth between the two parties, arranging compromises and tightening the wording of

[31] The discussion over credit for settlement can be traced in a series of front and second page stories on the strike in *ibid.*, Feb. 12–14, 1926. For Republican praise of the President, see Congressman Edmund N. Carpenter of Pennsylvania to Coolidge, Feb. 15, 1926, Coolidge Papers, File 175, while Davis' comments are contained in Davis to Coolidge, Feb. 13, 1926, *ibid.*, and the Secretary of Labor's "Statement on Strike Settlement," Feb. 13, 1926, James J. Davis Papers, Box 42.

the agreement. Through three sleepless nights, the businessman had kept the disputants from breaking off negotiations. When asked by newspapermen whether he had written the final terms, Grant replied "Pshaw! I could have written a better agreement." He did, however, acknowledge that he had been the sole link between Lewis and the anthracite operators. Thus, a strike which had from its earliest rumblings been filled with political implications was settled largely through the efforts of a nonpolitical figure, indeed a man who declared that "These champions of the people accomplish nothing except to confuse everything and everybody and prolong the strike."[32]

Yet even Grant ultimately injected a political note. A Republican, he was a strong supporter of Coolidge and had in 1924 been in charge of local arrangements at the GOP national convention in Cleveland. In his statement to the press Grant criticized by implication the congressional Democrats and Pinchot. The Democrats unfortunately had sought to mount public opinion to force Coolidge's hand, while, Grant said sarcastically, in the final negotiations he feared only "that some great friend of the people would have a heartbreak and start loving out loud and spoil the party." But for the President he had only praise, hailing "the great common sense and wisdom of President Coolidge." The President had resisted pressure to act and had refused to allow politics to bend his determination to have the disputants settle the strike. Grant's praise was echoed in newspapers, even those that had previously deplored presidential inaction.[33] As was so often the case in his remarkably successful political career, Coolidge emerged with the laurels, with his calm and deliberate inaction standing in sharp contrast to the hectic, but ultimately unproductive, efforts of Governor Pinchot and the Democrats.

Neither Pinchot nor Pepper, the other political figures involved, fared so well. True to the rumors in 1925, they battled for the Repub-

32 Grant's role is described in *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1926, which account also includes his personal comments. See also "The Coal Strike Won by the Public," *Literary Digest*, LXXXVIII (Feb. 27, 1926), 5–6, and Ralph M. Easley, executive director of the National Civic Federation, to Grant, Feb. 13, 1926, National Civic Federation Papers, Box 65, New York Public Library.

33 Grant's comments are in *New York Times*, Feb. 13, 1926. Said the *Times*, which had earlier criticized the inaction of the administration, "Beyond question the turning point . . . came when President Coolidge put the politicians of the Senate in their place" and refused to be stampeded into unwise action. *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1926.

lican nomination for Pepper's seat in the Senate, but a third candidate, Congressman William S. Vare of Philadelphia, also entered the field and swept to victory in the spring primary. With the mines back in operation, the 1925–1926 strike played little part in the contest. Pinchot received considerable labor support, but the key issues were prohibition and machine politics. Pinchot's adamant dry stand hurt him in the urban areas, while Vare's enormous financial backing enabled him to wage a campaign that neither of his rivals could match. Throughout the bitter primary little attention was paid to labor or the recent strike, while lengthy discussions of law enforcement and campaign financing claimed public attention.[34]

As for the anthracite industry itself, the costly strike dealt it a disastrous blow. Both the number of employees and consumption of hard coal continued their decline. The contract period agreed upon in 1926 was heralded as a means of reversing this trend, but in the strike-free and largely prosperous period from 1927–1929 consumption steadily declined, averaging 73,400,000 net tons per year. With the Depression, consumption of hard coal fell drastically, reaching a forty-eight-year low in 1938.[35]

When the 1926 settlement was announced, Pennsylvanians voiced optimism. Pinchot predicted that the agreement "Will restore prosperity to the anthracite region," while the Scranton *Republican* declared that "our joy for the miners and our anticipation of their future prosperity are boundless." But the recurrent labor difficulties, climaxed by a strike lasting more than five months, had led many thousands of consumers to abandon hard coal and to adopt other fuels. Asserted the *Literary Digest*, "The coal strike [was] won by the

34 The 1926 primary is discussed in William Hingston, "Gifford Pinchot, 1922–1927" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1962), 295–319. Vare won the November election but was denied his seat by the Senate because of financial irregularities in his campaign. As late as 1930, responsibility for the strike settlement cropped up in political affairs. One Wilkes-Barre resident urged a congressional investigation of the issue because Gifford Pinchot, waging a campaign for Governor, "claims he settled it without being challenged to prove it." Telegram from Leonard F. Comiskey to William Green, president of the AFL, Oct. 9, 1930, Legislative Reference Files, AFL Papers, Box 2.

35 These figures are from *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 142–144. Kiessling and Bennit, "Pennsylvania Anthracite in 1928," 4–5, noted that "Since the 1925–1926 strike, both the production and the consumpton of Pennsylvania anthracite have declined," despite the fact that 1927 was free of strikes.

Public," for consumers had learned a lesson and had achieved "independence of anthracite by learning to use such substitutes as coke, soft coal, gas, and oil."[36] If labor troubles had arrived too early to affect substantially the political fortunes of Pepper and Pinchot in 1926, labor peace came too late to rescue the troubled anthracite regions.

*Wisconsin State University*
*at Stevens Point* ROBERT H. ZIEGER

[36] "The Coal Strike Won by the Public," 5–7.