The Pennsylvania Anthracite Strike of 1922

While the bituminous coal strike and the walkout of the railway shopmen attracted much of the attention of the nation during the summer of 1922, an equally significant industrial dispute erupted in the anthracite coal fields of Pennsylvania.\footnote{Anthracite coal belongs to Pennsylvania; only insignificant quantities are buried in Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico and Virginia. The five anthracite counties are Lackawanna, Luzerne, Carbon, Schuylkill and Northumberland, all in northeastern Pennsylvania. In 1922 the total area of workable hard coal beds covered only 484 square miles an area about 1,000 times smaller than the size of the bituminous coal fields of the United States.} There, a 163-day strike caused a tremendous domestic heating fuel shortage in the Middle Atlantic and northeastern states and created havoc with the economy of the anthracite region itself. Because of the inroads made by substitute fuels during the dispute, the strike threatened the very survival of the hard coal business. And, despite their determined efforts, the miners gained no tangible benefits.

For the anthracite miner increased compensation for his sweat and toil was the first priority. Low wages earned under harsh conditions resulted in a frustrating picture of poverty and despair. The average anthracite worker earned from $1,400 to $1,600 annually, about $200 to $400 short of what the United Mine Workers of America (U.M.W.) estimated to be the minimum required to maintain a family of five.\footnote{W. Jett Lauck, “Earnings of Anthracite Mine Workers,” typed report, 1922, 4742, Box 193, W. Jett Lauck Papers, Alderman Library, University of Virginia; Lauck, “Amount Necessary For A Living Wage With Special Reference to the Anthracite Mining Region,” typed report, 1922, p. 1-10, Box 193, \textit{ibid.}}

The industry was also beset by other problems. The anthracite consumer had grown accustomed to using anthracite as a cheap efficient source of heat, but now he found himself at the mercy of a business combination which was intent on charging all that the market would bear. The retail price of anthracite had doubled to

more than $15.00 per ton since 1913.\textsuperscript{3} The consumer saw no relief in sight. The anthracite business was completely unregulated. It answered to no one.

Negotiations between the representatives of the anthracite mine workers and the operators, which commenced on March 15, 1922, immediately reached an impasse. The operators, blaming labor costs for the rising price of anthracite, called for a sharp 21 1/2 per cent wage reduction. Predictably, the anthracite miners refused to accede to such a drastic slashing of wages. Undoubtedly, they would have rejected such a repugnant proposition even if the operators had proved statistically that a lower pay scale was a necessity for the survival of the industry. But the coal companies never offered any conclusive evidence to support their thesis. If they had any specific figures, they kept them to themselves.\textsuperscript{4}

Secondly, the operators refused to accept the check-off plan whereby union dues would be automatically deducted from the miners' salary. From the miners' point of view opposition to the check-off meant opposition to the union itself. The check-off would not have cost the coal companies one extra penny. It would have permitted easier dues collection for the U.M.W. and thereby aided the union in controlling its membership. Unfortunately, cooperation with the workers or their union on this issue to help insure the


\textsuperscript{4} During the strike the anthracite operators employed a propaganda barrage painting the miner as the culprit for the high price of coal. Bulletins published by the General Policies Committee of the Anthracite Operators portrayed the miners as prosperous. General Policies Committee of Anthracite Operators, \textit{Anthracite Bulletins}, Lauck Papers, Box 192. They made no mention of profits. Expediently ignored was the diversion of coal company profits to the controlling anthracite railroads or their coal sales companies. As the \textit{New York World} observed on May 26, 1922, "The price of anthracite is certainly too high, but labor is only one item in the cost to the purchaser... The profits in mining, handling, transportation and retailing hard coal have been carefully obscured..." Box 425, \textit{ibid.}
industry's vitality was not even remotely considered desirable or necessary. The operators mustered all their energy to combat the union, but ultimately it was at their own expense. Unaccustomed to market competition, they failed to perceive that constant labor disruptions would hasten a confrontation with their stiffest competition yet. Now, every time anthracite coal left a vacuum in the eastern fuel market, gas, oil, and electric heating made substantial intrusions. These more efficient fuels would have usurped the market eventually, but the anthracite industry allowed these new competitors to win almost by default. By failing to make concessions even on this noneconomic issue and by forcing strikes in search of power and profits, the operators soon compromised their own lucrative income.

Finally, the anthracite owners chose to challenge collective bargaining itself. They suggested that the next contract run for four years, but that wages be negotiated annually. If a joint committee of owners and U.M.W. officials could not agree on a wage solution each year, the operators proposed that the final decision automatically fall to arbitration. The operators knew that the U.M.W. would steadfastly refuse to substitute a determination of wages by a third party for genuine collective bargaining.5

Confronted by this wage reduction challenge from management, the U.M.W. decided to take the offensive; it demanded a 20 per cent increase. But, in taking this posture, the mine workers carefully emphasized that their wage demands were extremely moderate. All the miner coveted, wrote U.M.W. economic consultant W. Jett Lauck, was a living commensurate with the hazards of the occupation.6 "When the mine workers ask for a living wage," U.M.W. Vice-President Philip Murray explained, "they are not asking for anything unusual or extreme. They are simply asking for what should be regarded as the industrial birth right of every American. . . ."7

The crux of the U.M.W. counterattack disputed the operator proposition that lower wages would mean reduced prices for the consumer. On the contrary, the miners protested that labor costs constituted only a small fraction of the retail price of coal. In order to restore sanity again to hard coal prices, the consumer must attack the high profits of the anthracite combine, including excessive freight rates, that portion of the profit accruing to coal sales companies through camouflaged and hidden transactions, and the royalties paid to holders of coal lands by the remaining independent operators. The U.M.W. claimed that reduced wages would save the purchaser 27½ cents per ton. This meant a reduction to the customer in New York City of only about 2 per cent. The U.M.W. would not sit idly by and permit the operators to benefit the consumer of coal by exploiting the mine workers, while at the same time they held securely to their exorbitant and concealed profits. The miners were unwilling to sacrifice the fundamental interests of themselves and their families to the anthracite monopoly. Their rates of pay were inadequate. They should be increased by at least 20 per cent.

To support their contentions, the U.M.W. demanded a thorough investigation of anthracite profits and the costs of production by the Federal Trade Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission. If such an examination were undertaken, Philip Murray insisted, it would demonstrate that labor costs were "a great deal smaller than those shown by the operators." If profiteering were stopped, the U.M.W. Vice-President concluded, wages could be advanced and prices reduced to the consumer, at the same time. There would be no arbitration of wages by a third party without a complete probe into production costs and profits. For their part, the operators favored arbitration with no examination of anthracite finances. Obviously, there was no meeting of the minds. Since they were not urged to take action by the executive branch of the federal

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8 Lauck, "Relation Between Labor Costs and Prices of Anthracite Coal," typed report, 1922, Box 193, ibid.
9 The United Mine Workers recommended that the Federal Trade Commission investigate all agencies selling anthracite coal. The Interstate Commerce Commission would probe into freight rates. "Joint Recommendation For Reducing the Price of Anthracite Coal," April, 1922, Box 194, ibid.
government, the Federal Trade Commission and the Interstate Commerce Commission did nothing.

With the difference between each party over wages amounting to more than 40 per cent, the diametrically opposed positions could not be reconciled. The split between the two sides remained a gaping chasm. Neither would compromise. During all the meetings there was little real communication. Each side spoke on widely opposing levels. Their words passed each other by. The union concerned itself with the concrete issues of wages, the check-off, the eight-hour day and an investigation into anthracite profits. The operators refused to compromise on any of these questions and urged the union to accept the principle of arbitration to settle disputes. The operators would not discuss concrete issues without the acceptance of the principle of arbitration, and the miners refused to consent to such a proposition. The specific clashed with the abstract. Settlement became impossible.

The negotiations thus frustrated, silence descended on the mines. On April 1, 1922, production in the anthracite and bituminous mines ceased simultaneously. Six hundred thousand men stopped work. Thus commenced the first simultaneous walkout of anthracite and bituminous workers in the United States. But it must be remembered that anthracite and bituminous coal mining were two distinct and separate industries. The former was a natural monopoly with union representation at every colliery, but the latter was an overdeveloped industry characterized by chaos, wasteful competition, and many nonunion mines. Both strikes would have to be settled separately. Each became an endurance contest. In the soft coal industry the operators strove to destroy the union by replacing national bargaining with local contracts. In the anthracite fields, wages, the check-off, and high price of hard coal were the fundamental issues. Unfortunately, as the April 1 contract termination deadline approached, the administration of President Warren G. Harding failed to evidence much concern over the anticipated turmoil in the coal fields. The government attitude was one of "hands-off." 11

10 Typed statement by Philip Murray, May 18, 1922, Box 195, ibid.
On July 1 the stoppage became a formal strike by approval of 99 1/2 per cent of the voting membership of the anthracite miners. Peace was no nearer in the anthracite industry than on April 1 when production originally terminated. John L. Lewis, the embattled President of the United Mine Workers, continued to maintain that the hard coal miners were resolved that there should be no backward step. Exuding confidence, he insisted that they would not "be beguiled into any situation that will mean a lowering of their standard of living." He characterized the hard coal miners as "stalwart union men who are waging the most effective struggle in their history." For American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers this battle was part of the continuing fight for justice against the autocratic employers whose chief aim was profit. "The men who go down in the earth to dig the coal that fires the furnaces of the nation and warms its homes," Gompers wrote, "shall not be crucified on the altar of greed! The whole strength of our great humanitarian movement is mobilized against that brutal project."

Unlike the bituminous strike which witnessed the tragic killing of nineteen strikebreakers and two strikers in the infamous Herrin, Illinois, massacre, the anthracite suspension saw little violence. The primary reason for the relative calm in the hard coal territory was that management made no attempt at strikebreaking. A Pennsylvania State Miners' Certificate Law passed in 1897 effectively prevented strikebreaking by requiring that coal could only be dug in anthracite mines by licensed miners who needed two years experience before they could obtain a certificate of efficiency. In essence, these were the contract miners numbering about forty or fifty thousand men. The other one hundred thousand mine workers could not work unless the certificate miners supervised the digging

13 Open letter from John L. Lewis to the Anthracite Mine Workers, May 25, 1922, Box 192, Lauck Papers.
14 Samuel Gompers, "Miners' Cause Just," American Federationist, XXIX (April, 1922), 279.
16 Pennsylvania Laws (1897), No. 225.
of the coal. This two-year experience requirement made the importation of strikebreakers impossible. And the certificate miners in the region stood by the union.

The only major disturbance reported during the anthracite suspension erupted three miles west of Wilkes-Barre in the little town of Luzerne. There, a crowd of two hundred stoned sixty firemen who had been permitted to maintain the property at the East Boston colliery. The mob charged that the firemen were operating the coal washery connected with the mine. Several shots rang out during the fracas. A few men received cuts and bruises, but fortunately nobody suffered serious injury. The protesting crowd successfully turned away every one of the firemen. The next morning a squad of twenty deputy sheriffs surrounded the colliery, but the strikers made no attack on the sixty maintenance men who reported for duty. There was no disorder of any sort. After learning that the firemen were producing no coal in the washery and breakers at the colliery, the spirit of unrest among the strikers in Luzerne subsided.17

Fear of violence was more prevalent than its reality. Some of the citizens of the region, exaggerating the power of the Industrial Workers of the World, became nervous after hearing reports that the I.W.W. had flooded northeastern Pennsylvania with radical propaganda. State troopers patrolled the strike area and found the miners orderly. No sign of friction developed anywhere.18 The I.W.W. posters denouncing the conservative U.M.W. leaders and urging the strikers to join "one big union" had little appeal. The miners proved to be not as concerned with the solidification of unity among the working class as with obtaining a higher standard of living for themselves.

As coal stocks diminished, public concern in the anthracite consuming states became pronounced. Pressure on the federal government to take some definitive action began to mount. The extremely pro-administration Washington Post sounded the most sensible note in an April 6 editorial: "All sides to this controversy would

profit by an early settlement and all may lose heavily if they prolong their struggle."\(^{19}\) But no one listened. The strike dragged on.

On April 1 Senator William Borah of Idaho warned that, unless the coal industry reorganized itself in the public interest, he might favor trying the experiment of public ownership.\(^{20}\) Three days later on the Senate floor he reiterated that the government would not stand by and remain helpless. We "are not going to consent to a recurring catastrophe, which happens about once a year," he declared, "all of the expense of which is finally borne by the public."\(^{21}\)

_Outlook_ magazine demanded regulation in order to avoid nationalization. It urged President Harding to follow the example of Theodore Roosevelt in the anthracite strike of 1902 and plan to use force if necessary.\(^{22}\) "If the coal operators cannot manage their business better," argued the _Washington Times_, "the Government should make them, as the Roosevelt Coal Commission did."\(^{23}\)

The _Washington Post_ abandoned the moderate approach it had counseled during the strike's early days. While it still stood against government operation of the mines, it acknowledged that a continued stalemate would leave no other alternative.\(^{24}\) One of its editorials warned that "if a coal famine should occur it is possible that nothing short of temporary government control and operation of the business will satisfy the people's demand."\(^{25}\) By mid-August the paper urged haste in settling the anthracite strike even if it meant some kind of public involvement. Patience was now a luxury. The menace of a fuel famine for the coming winter was becoming a grim reality.\(^{26}\) The Philadelphia _Public Ledger_, after the strike's third month, admonished the government to take the initiative. The miners and operators were so tightly deadlocked that the paper felt the government had no choice but to intervene on behalf of the public interest.\(^{27}\)

\(^{19}\) _Washington Post_, Apr. 6, 1922, 6.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., Apr. 2, 1922, 5.
\(^{21}\) _Congressional Record_, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., Apr. 4, 1922, XLXII, Part 4, 4957.
\(^{22}\) "Uncle Sam's Coal Industry," _Outlook_, Apr. 5, 1922, Box 197, Lauck Papers.
\(^{23}\) _Washington Times_, July 7, 1922, Box 425, ibid.
\(^{24}\) _Washington Post_, June 10, 1922, 4.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., June 13, 1922, 6.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., Aug. 18, 1922, 6.
\(^{27}\) Reprint of an editorial from the _Public Ledger_, found in _Washington Post_, June 29, 1922, 6.
Massachusetts Senator David Walsh constantly reminded the Senate that an anthracite shortage would mean particular hardship for New England. He argued that the people of the northeast would denounce the government if it did not do something to stop what he termed a terrible tragedy.\textsuperscript{28} Walsh pleaded that for the sake of the Massachusetts householder resumption of the mining of anthracite coal had to be commenced without delay.\textsuperscript{29}

New York, and particularly New York City, also feared an anthracite shortage. Congressman Meyer Landon, a New York City Socialist, asked the government to declare the mines to be vested with a public interest and to place them under its control.\textsuperscript{30} “It is becoming more and more apparent,” he later declared, “that the private and unrestrained ownership of public necessities . . . is injurious to society. Public control of the natural resources, with their ultimate national ownership and their democratic control, is inevitable.”\textsuperscript{31}

By the end of July Dr. George Otis Smith, director of the United States Geological Survey, estimated a 30,000,000-ton shortage of hard coal for the coming winter. The mines had to be open the entire year to produce enough domestic coal.\textsuperscript{32} No matter when the strike terminated, the anthracite shortage would be acute. The suspension had already lasted too long. By August Rhode Island towns were entirely out of anthracite and the fuel was even reported scarce in Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{33} For the first time public officials began to talk about the necessity of using substitute fuels. In addressing the state legislature, the Republican Governor of New York, Nathan L. Miller, remarked that, “Oil, gas and electricity should be substituted for anthracite whenever possible and people should equip themselves with the facilities to use them.”\textsuperscript{34} The New York State Fuel Distributor also urged the use of fuel substitutes to meet the

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Congressional Record}, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 8, 1922, XLXII, Part 8, 8375, 8376, 8380.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, July 15, 1922, Part 10, 10295.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibid.}, May 2, 1922, Part 6, 6219.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, Aug. 29, 1922, Part 12, 11936.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Washington Post}, July 31, 1922, 3.
\textsuperscript{33} \textit{New York Times}, Aug. 4, 1922, 2; Aug. 5, 1922, 2.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Congressional Record}, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., Sept. 7, 1922, XLXII, Part 12, 12221.

During the anthracite strike New York State formed its own Coal Commission which advocated the use of substitute fuels. \textit{New York Times}, Aug. 11, 1922, 2.
anthracite shortage.\textsuperscript{35} Thus, the first challenge to the anthracite fuel market came out of necessity.\textsuperscript{36} In the long run the employment of cheaper and more efficient domestic heating fuels would benefit the consumer. Eventually he would be freed from his dependence on anthracite. But with the new substitutes still expensive and not yet immediately available, many people suffered through long cold winters.

The Harding Administration's hope that the miners and the operators would soon tire of their struggle in both the bituminous and anthracite fields never materialized. On May 18 the anthracite operators again repeated their demand for a wage cut and a long term contract with the wage scale subject to yearly arbitration. According to the operators' General Policies Committee, the granting of a 20 per cent pay increase to the miners would place an additional burden of $170,000,000 annually on the industry.\textsuperscript{37} The union again rejected management's proposals. For the U.M.W. the principle of a living wage was not negotiable.\textsuperscript{38}

By the summer the strike deadlock finally pushed a reluctant administration into action. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover had already been meeting since May 31 in Washington with the nonunion bituminous operators in what proved to be an unsuccessful attempt to persuade them to hold down their prices voluntarily during the strike.\textsuperscript{39} At the end of June President Harding for the

\textsuperscript{35} New York Times, Sept. 30, 1922, 15.
\textsuperscript{36} Even before the 1922 strike, New York businessmen formed the Anthracite Coal Consumers' Association to attempt to secure lower prices by urging lower freight rates and the curbing of excess profits. New York Times, Feb. 5, 1922, 16; Mar. 21, 1922, 21.
\textsuperscript{37} Anthracite Bureau of Information, "The Anthracite Operators' Reply to the Miners' Demands," May 18, 1922, Box 192, Lauck Papers. Lauck in a penciled note written in the margin of the operators' May 18 statement disputed their contention that a 20 per cent wage increase would place a $170,000,000 annual burden on the industry. Lauck estimated that the raise would mean $1.00 per day for 150,000 men. Based on a work year of 270 days, the added wage would cost the owners $40,500,000 per year.
\textsuperscript{38} United Mine Workers Press Release, "Reply to the Operators," May 26, 1922, Box 194, ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} The meetings between Hoover and the coal operators during the first part of June formulated a voluntary price control agreement based, according to Hoover, "solely upon moral forces and good will." Herbert Hoover, "Remarks Before the Coal Operators," May 31, 1922, Box 199, ibid. In a letter addressed to Senator William Borah on August 18, Hoover admitted that the voluntary plan had failed. He now favored legislation to restrain the exorbitant prices of coal. Hoover to Borah, Aug. 18, 1922, Box 199, ibid.
first time publicly expressed his concern over the coal suspension. The strikes had already dragged on for three months. He announced that Secretary of Labor James J. Davis had arranged a White House conference with John L. Lewis and both the soft and hard coal operators. Unfortunately, this intervention by the government, even had it resulted in an immediate settlement, came too late to avert serious hardships in the anthracite consuming regions during the approaching winter.

The White House meetings of July 1, 1922, produced no positive results. The stalemate persisted. Harding himself did not help to alleviate the situation. Unlike former President Theodore Roosevelt, he refused to use the muscle of his office to pressure the disputing parties. Instead, he opened the talks by assuring all sides that he would not resort to the use of compulsion but would rely solely on moral persuasion. He stressed the importance of protecting the public interest, but he told the operators that the “government has no desire to intrude itself into the field of your activities.” He warned that a failure on their part to settle this dispute would mean that the power of public opinion would see to it that the industry did not bring discomfort to the masses.\(^\text{40}\) He did not define what he meant by public opinion, nor did he explain how it would enforce its will. Apparently this vague threat of invoking public opinion did not impress the disputants.

Nine days later President Harding formally reversed his announced “hands-off” policy and issued his own plan for settlement. He proposed that the miners return to work under the old contract while the present dispute was decided by arbitration. In addition, he announced his intention of creating a Federal Coal Commission to investigate every aspect of the coal industry.\(^\text{41}\) The President’s peace plan offered nothing really new. The arbitration plan was identical to the proposals of the anthracite operators. The call for a coal commission to examine the industry was certainly not original. Senators Joseph S. Frelinghuysen of New Jersey and William M. Calder of New York had urged the formation of such a panel in

\(^{40}\) *Washington Post*, July 2, 1922, 5; July 4, 1922, 6.

the aftermath of an anthracite wildcat strike in 1920. Even as the strike commenced, the House Committee on Labor was hearing testimony on a bill introduced by Indiana Congressman Oscar E. Bland to establish a coal inquiry board. Presidential support of such an investigation, however, coupled with the crisis situation, might force Congress to finally agree to such an idea.

The anthracite operators accepted the President's plan. As expected, it did not satisfy the mine workers' union. The U.M.W. signified its accord with the projected investigation of the anthracite industry, but it again maintained an unwillingness to accept arbitration over wages. During the spring months the primary issue in the anthracite strike had been wages. Now this question became completely submerged by the arbitration controversy. W. Jett Lauck, in memos to John L. Lewis, advised the U.M.W. President not to agree to a wage reduction or arbitration. His note to Lewis dated July 8 demonstrated that the U.M.W. demand for a wage increase was now simply a smoke screen. Lauck told Lewis that if he could secure a new short-term contract based on the old March, 1922, wage rate he could look forward to higher wage rates in the future due to anticipated inflation. He warned that, "it would never do . . . to agree to arbitrate wages as an arbitration board, whatever the facts might be, would undoubtedly reduce wages." The United Mine Workers officially rejected the Harding plan on July 15. The union reminded the President that it did not oppose the principle of arbitration, but that it would not arbitrate the three basic rights of complete union recognition—the check-off, the eight-hour day, and the living wage. As Lauck concisely stated, the U.M.W. rejected a 17 per cent wage increase and submitted the issue to compulsory arbitration before a presidentially appointed Anthracite Coal Commission. While most of the testimony before that panel seemed to justify a pay increase of 27 per cent, the Commission in its final report approved the 17 per cent originally rejected by the union. Shocked and disappointed, many miners walked out of the pits in early September before reluctantly agreeing to a new contract. At the Commission hearings the U.M.W. had charged the coal companies with profiteering. In the aftermath, Congressional attempts to pass legislation to provide for the gathering of facts as to production costs and distribution of anthracite gained little support. See Harold Kenneth Kanarek, "Progressivism in Crisis: The United Mine Workers and the Anthracite Coal Industry During the 1920's" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1972), 33-101.

42 During the contract negotiations in the summer of 1920 the U.M.W. rejected a 17 per cent wage increase and submitted the issue to compulsory arbitration before a presidentially appointed Anthracite Coal Commission. While most of the testimony before that panel seemed to justify a pay increase of 27 per cent, the Commission in its final report approved the 17 per cent originally rejected by the union. Shocked and disappointed, many miners walked out of the pits in early September before reluctantly agreeing to a new contract. At the Commission hearings the U.M.W. had charged the coal companies with profiteering. In the aftermath, Congressional attempts to pass legislation to provide for the gathering of facts as to production costs and distribution of anthracite gained little support. See Harold Kenneth Kanarek, "Progressivism in Crisis: The United Mine Workers and the Anthracite Coal Industry During the 1920's" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1972), 33-101.

43 Gadsby, "The Coal Strikes," 945.

44 Memo from Lauck to John L. Lewis, July 8, 1922, Box 200, Lauck Papers.

45 United Mine Workers Press Release, July 15, 1922, Box 200, ibid.
"Arbitration without the preliminary recognition of basic rights is a vain and futile proposal."  

To the Washington Post the miners’ refusal to accept the President’s peace plan meant that they bore the onus for the continuance of the coal strike. "In the case of the anthracite miners," declared the paper, "this rejection coming, as it does, on the heels of the operators’ acceptance, saddles them with the responsibility outright. . . ." Secretary of Labor Davis, who arranged the first meeting between Harding and Lewis, expressed his extreme annoyance with the U.M.W. President in a letter which for some reason he never sent. Davis emotionally decried Lewis for refusing to compromise like a reasonable man. He accused the U.M.W. President of indulging in the trick of a demagogue by appealing to prejudice and pouring oil on the flames of passion. "When disagreement has arisen between men," he wrote, "I know of no way for adjusting the difficulty except on the principle of give and take. Both sides must yield something. You have stubbornly and autocratically refused to consider such a possibility."  

Only with the approach of winter and the exhaustion of both sides was there hope that the deadlock might crack. In the anthracite region itself the situation was becoming desperate. The striking miners lived from hand to mouth on odd jobs and charity. The entire territory suffered from a sharp business depression. Unable to sit by and watch their region deteriorate further, the mayors of Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Carbondale, Hazleton and Pittston called on President Harding, the operators, and the miners in an unsuccessful attempt to have the wage negotiations reopened. Nothing seemed to work. Both sides still remained poles apart.  

The mounting coal shortage caused Harding during the last week of July to appoint the short-lived voluntary President’s Fuel Distribution Committee. Its duties were to establish voluntary

46 Lauck, "Conflict or Arbitration," n.d., typed statement, Box 252, ibid.  
price agreements among nonunion operators and to administer transportation priorities for public institutions and vital industries. The functions of the committee would terminate after the settlement of both the bituminous and anthracite strikes. In the bituminous fields an August 15 agreement between the union and representatives of 20 per cent of the soft coal fields extended the old contract until April 1, 1923. By September most of the union soft coal mines were in full operation. But the anthracite strike persisted. A winter of hardship for citizens of the northeast was inevitable.

The anthracite strike continued until September 2. Throughout the sweltering days of August the bickering over the arbitration principle prevented settlement. After negotiations again collapsed on August 22 the Administration in Washington encouraged rumors that it was considering a take-over of the anthracite mines. Finally, Senators David A. Reed and George W. Pepper of Pennsylvania intervened with a compromise proposal. Their plan provided for the dropping of the thorny arbitration dispute pending the anticipated investigation of the anthracite industry by an official U. S. agency and the extension of the old wage contract until August 31, 1923. Essentially they asked for the postponement of discussion of all substantive issues until some future date. Both sides, exhausted from the summer battle and fearing government seizure of the mines, agreed to the compromise. They signed an agreement extending the old contract on September 11.

The United States Congress drifted through the summer of crisis without offering any feasible solution to the strike problem. Unwilling to place the responsibility on themselves, Congressmen preferred to shift the onus for a resolution of the dispute completely

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60 The committee members were: Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, chairman; Harry Daugherty, Attorney General; Albert Fall, Secretary of the Interior; Commissioner Clyde B. Atchison of the Interstate Commerce Commission; and Henry Spencer, designated as Federal Fuel Distributor for the Committee. National Archives and Record Service, “Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Federal Fuel Distributor,” a revision of Preliminary Checklist 13, revised by Genevieve S. O’Brian, September, 1965, Record Group 89, Washington Record Center, Suitland, Md.

61 Murray, The Harding Era, 258.

62 Ibid., 259; Walsh, The United Mine Workers of America as an Economic and Social Force ..., 145.


64 Murray, The Harding Era, 253.
onto the shoulders of the President. "I believe," stated Wisconsin Representative Edward E. Browne, "that our President should follow the precedent set by his great predecessor, Roosevelt, and compel the coal operators to operate their coal mines or the Government of the United States [should] operate them itself." Representative Edwin D. Ricketts of Ohio recognized that workers unionized in order to protect themselves from the organizations of capital. "Justice and fair dealing to the laboring men of this country," he observed, "would go far toward eliminating forever any such thing as a strike." But despite his concern for justice, Congressman Ricketts offered no specific methods to his colleagues for achieving such a goal.

Since 1919 proposals for an investigation of the coal industry had made their way to the halls of Congress. Now, under the gun of an emergency, Senator William Borah introduced another fact-finding bill on July 19. The grave situation facing the nation caused President Harding to support the measure before Congress. In an address to a joint session of that body on August 18, he asked the legislators to "create a commission to make a searching investigation into the whole coal industry." To cope with the immediate fuel shortage he urged Congress to create the temporary office of Federal Fuel Distributor with the authority to control the distribution of coal.

Introduced in the Senate by Albert B. Cummins and in the House by Samuel E. Winslow, the President's Fuel Distribution Bill passed with little trouble. Signed by Harding on September 22, the Cummins-Winslow Act charged the Federal Fuel Administration with control over the apportionment of coal until statutory limitation terminated the agency on September 21, 1923. Upon the recommendation of Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover, Harding

56 Ibid., Apr. 7, 1922, 5195.
58 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., Aug. 18, 1922, XL XII, Part 11, 11538.
59 Ibid.
appointed Conrad E. Spens, Vice-President of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, as the Federal Fuel Distributor.\textsuperscript{61}

Senator Joseph Frelinghuysen feared that the coal lobby might defeat the other leg of the Harding plan, the creation of an investigative commission, as it had done in earlier years. Overwhelming public pressure coupled with executive support, however, pushed the coal inquiry bill through the House in two days and through the Senate after a token debate. Also signed by President Harding on September 22, the Borah-Winslow Act created a United States Coal Commission to investigate the entire coal industry and issue separate reports on bituminous and anthracite mining.\textsuperscript{62}

John L. Lewis hailed the settlement of the 163-day anthracite strike as a tremendous victory. In that the wage scale had been maintained without reduction, he was correct. The rank-and-file miners felt they had made a good fight and they were thankful for a settlement before the approaching winter. Only a handful protested against the new contract, importuning the union to fight on for complete victory. Samuel Gompers congratulated the U.M.W. President for his union's achievement. "The lesson that is found in the miners' strike," wrote Gompers, "is that unity, solidarity and a righteous cause are invincible."\textsuperscript{63}

But in reality, this strike made all sides losers. Besides the creation of a United States Coal Commission, its concrete achievements were negligible. The fundamental issues of wages, the check-off, profits and hard coal prices were no closer to settlement than they had

\textsuperscript{61} National Archives and Record Service, "Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Federal Fuel Distributor," Record Group 89.

\textsuperscript{62} In the Senate, Senator Walter E. Edge, Republican of New Jersey, offered an amendment to allow the President to take over the mines in times of emergency. In order not to complicate the debate, Senator Borah prevailed upon Edge to withdraw his amendment and introduce it as a separate bill. In this form Senator Edge's proposal died in committee. \textit{Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 2nd Sess., Aug. 25, 1922, XLXII, Part 12, 11770, 11771.} The coal commission bill passed the House 219 to 55, Aug. 23, 1922, Part 11, 11720, 11721, \textit{ibid}. The Senate approved the bill by voice vote with only 49 Senators in attendance. Sept. 8, 1922, Part 12, 12251, \textit{ibid}.

been in March. The problems plaguing the anthracite industry remained. For the anthracite using public, jubilation hardly comprised the appropriate response. An acute hard coal shortage characterized the post-strike period. Necessity forced domestic users to seek other fuels. The long summer strike opened the door for the industry’s collapse. Any more production disruptions would finish the job.

During the winter of 1922–1923, under a formula worked out by the Federal Fuel Distributor, anthracite-consuming states were forced to sustain a 40 per cent reduction in their normal supply of hard coal. It became the duty of the Federal Fuel Distributor to see that states obtained their prorated share of production and to urge the use of other fuels as a means of compensating for the lack of anthracite.

Many communities suffered because of this shortage of hard coal throughout the winter of 1922–1923. Massachusetts Representative Allen T. Treadway declared in February, 1923, that “the fuel situation in western Massachusetts has reached a very acute stage.” The local fuel distributor of Harwich, Massachusetts, described the situation in his town as deplorable. “We have been forced to deplete our forests at an alarming rate,” he stated, “in order to prevent actual distress . . . .” He went on to implore Congress to do something to alleviate the situation.

Another local fuel distributor in Massachusetts suggested that the railroads curtail passenger trains and use all locomotives to rush coal cars to their destinations. Unfortunately, in the case of anthracite, the problem was not one of transportation, but a lack of coal itself. A Boston citizen described the personal anxiety and dissatisfaction caused by the coal shortage in a letter to Senator David Walsh. “I have always been a conservative,” he wrote, “but I fear if there isn’t some relief from the present condition of things many others, including myself will be following Bill Haywood and [Eugene] Debs, whom I always thought insane. Now I think different.”

64 National Archives and Record Service, “Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Federal Fuel Distributor,” Record Group 89.
66 Ibid., Feb. 9, 1923, 3291.
67 Ibid., Feb. 19, 1923, 3932.
68 Ibid., Feb. 9, 1923, 3293.
property of Newark, New Jersey, in a letter to Senator William Borah compared the lines of people waiting for hours with pails and bags to purchase a bushel of coal at the rate of $20 per ton with the bread lines that used to wait outside of New York City’s east-side soup houses during the panic of 1896. “In these coal lines, however,” he noted, “you find rich and poor alike. Why do they stand for hours waiting for a bushel of coal? Because they must have heat in their homes...”

Despite the continued urgency of coal problems there was a lull in Congress of proposals for legislative remedies. The immediate strike crisis had passed and the legislators seemed content to delay any further measures until completion of the investigation of the United States Coal Commission. The Senate did pass a resolution introduced by Senator Walsh requesting information from the Interstate Commerce Commission concerning the feasibility of an embargo on anthracite coal shipments to foreign countries, particularly Canada. The I.C.C. concluded, after investigation, that placing an embargo on hard coal shipped to Canada would mean only an inconsequential increase to the United States domestic fuel supply. In the immediate aftermath of the strike Congress took no other action.

The country preferred to tread water while the United States Coal Commission undertook the most massive and ambitious examination of the coal industry ever attempted. Tragically, after an exhaustive study Congress completely ignored the Commission’s recommendation for limited government regulation which would have forced the operators to submit annual financial reports and

69 Letter to Senator William Borah from Charles P. Gillen of the Department of Parks and Public Property, Newark, N. J., Feb. 8, 1923, William Borah Papers, Box 226, Library of Congress. In addition to a coal shortage, much of the anthracite shipped contained a high percentage of impurities. Senator David Walsh of Massachusetts introduced to Congress a report by the U. S. Bureau of Mines which claimed that the anthracite offered for sale contained a higher amount of ash than was represented by the coal sellers. Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 4th Sess., Mar. 1, 1923, XLIXIV, Part 5, 4952-4953. The State Fuel Administrator from Wisconsin complained that the “cars of coal from the anthracite fields are carrying a greater percentage of impurities than ever before—slate, bone clinker, and refuse. . . .” P. H. Pressentin, Wisconsin State Fuel Administrator, to Senator David Walsh, Jan. 25, 1923, Records of the Federal Fuel Distributor, Entry 24, National Archives. 70 Congressional Record, 67th Cong., 4th Sess., Feb. 28, 1923, XLXIV, Part 4, 4827.
required the federal licensing of interstate coal shippers.\textsuperscript{71} Nothing was done. The identical problems which caused the disastrous strike of 1922 persisted. Due to exorbitant prices and the inroads made by substitute fuels the anthracite industry was on the brink of extinction. Neither the coal companies nor the U.M.W. seemed to perceive this reality. Cooperation and the avoidance of a work stoppage was mandatory if the hard coal business was to get back on its feet. Sadly for the hard coal region of Pennsylvania, it never gave itself an opportunity. A short work stoppage in 1923 and a protracted 170-day strike during the winter of 1925–1926 over the identical issues that had been unsuccessfully resolved in 1922 finished the anthracite industry.\textsuperscript{72} Oil, gas, and electricity usurped the hard coal market by default. Anthracite production dropped steadily after 1926 and could never be recouped.\textsuperscript{73}

In 1922 it was not too late for the anthracite industry to attempt to revitalize itself. The strike of 1922 should have demonstrated that anthracite could not remain an unregulated monopoly. The owners themselves should have seen that gouging the public could not last indefinitely. But nowhere was there a will to act. The operators concentrated their efforts on weakening the union, poverty denied the U.M.W. the luxury of thinking beyond increased wages, and in the halls of Congress and the White House everyone ignored the problem. The anthracite strike of 1922 was a major step in a chronicle of industrial failure.

\textit{George Mason University} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{Harold K. Kanarek}


\textsuperscript{73} Production dropped from the average of 90 million tons annually to 79 million in 1927, 74 million in 1928, 71 million in 1929 and 68 million in 1930. Walsh, \textit{The United Mine Workers of America As An Economic and Social Force ...}, 173.