

## *Discord in Utopia: The Ellsworth Strike of 1904*

AT THE TURN OF THE century the United Mine Workers (UMW) succeeded in organizing workers in the bituminous fields of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, but some companies were able to prevent unionization.<sup>1</sup> Companies that employed paternalism and strict domination of the miners were especially effective against the union. James William Ellsworth, owner of one such company, was a staunch anti-union man, who utilized paternalism in his recently constructed "model" mining town. Ellsworth hoped to keep the workers content and prevent unionization by providing nearly ideal living conditions. The Ellsworth Company's labor relations offer an instructive example of the advantages and limitations of paternalism as a method of controlling labor and maximizing profits. This article will focus on James Ellsworth's methods, the workers' responses, and the struggle over unionization.

Immediately after the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902, in which the union made significant gains, the UMW began a drive to organize non-union bituminous mines in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup> One of the targeted mines belonged to independent operator Ellsworth.

The Ellsworths, a distinguished family which included Chief Justice Oliver Ellsworth among its ancestors, traced their Congregational heritage back to early colonial Connecticut. In the 1820s one family

<sup>1</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America: A History*, 3rd ed. (Northbrook, Illinois, 1966), 188-193. Some works concerning the UMW in this period are: Morton Baratz, *The Union and the Coal Industry* (New Haven, 1955); McAlister Coleman, *Men and Coal* (New York, 1943); Albert Hinricks, *The United Mine Workers of America and the Non-Union Coal Fields* (New York, 1923); David J. McDonald and Edward A. Lynch, *Coal and Unionism: A History of the American Miners' Unions* (Silver Springs, Maryland, 1939); Frank Julian Warne, *The Coal-Mine Workers: A Study in Labor Organization* (New York, 1905); Andrew Roy, *A History of the Coal Miners of the United States: From the Development of the Mines to the Close of the Anthracite Strike of 1902* (Columbus, Ohio, 1905); Chris Evans, *A History of the United Mine Workers of America, 1860-1900* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1918).

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Cornell, *The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902* (Washington, D.C., 1957), 38; Robert Wiebe, "The Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902: a Record of Confusion," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 48 (September 1961), 227-251.

of Ellsworths moved to Hudson, Ohio and established a mercantile business. Each succeeding generation inherited the family firm and James W., born October 13, 1849, was groomed as the next store proprietor. He attended the local public schools and Western Reserve College's preparatory academy, but he deferred college to pursue a business career.<sup>3</sup> His business pursuits, however, took him away from the family store. In 1868 Ellsworth moved to the flourishing city of Cleveland to work as a financial clerk for the wholesale drug firm of Berbower, Hall and Company. After one year of service, he realized the monetary instability of the company and resigned.<sup>4</sup> He sought his fortune in booming Chicago and obtained employment with Ames and Company, coal merchants. He remained with this company for several years and even received "an interest" in the business, but in 1878 decided to open his own coal mercantile firm — Ellsworth and Company.<sup>5</sup>

Ellsworth's Chicago business grew as the city rebuilt after the 1871 fire. Selling principally to the burgeoning railroads, he amassed a minor fortune and earned the reputation of meeting any company's demands promptly.<sup>6</sup> By the 1890s he was a prominent distributor, selling anthracite and Connellsville bituminous coal.<sup>7</sup> In an effort to maximize profits and eliminate dependence on coal mining companies, Ellsworth planned to expand his enterprise vertically and operate his own mines. In 1898 he began a search for purchasable coal rights in eastern Washington County, Pennsylvania, near the famous Connellsville region. Renowned for its excellent coking coal, the Connellsville was being mined out. The district operators expanded into neighboring regions, hoping this new coal was of similar quality. Having conducted business transactions with these operators, Ellsworth was aware of this expansion and saw an opportunity to get involved.

<sup>3</sup> James William Ellsworth, *The Ellsworth Family, I: James William Ellsworth: His Life and Ancestry* (New York, 1931), 3, 9, 13-14. Late in life Ellsworth wrote some reminiscences. This book contains his unedited memoirs and some family history.

<sup>4</sup> *Cleveland Leader City Directory for 1868-69* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1868), 109, 153; Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 16; *Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago, 1878-79* (Chicago, 1879), 363.

<sup>6</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 33-36.

<sup>7</sup> "1877 Business Card," Folder 1, Box 1, James William Ellsworth Papers, Western Reserve Academy Library Archives, Hudson, Ohio. There are no documents or papers relating to this strike in the collection.

Ellsworth selected a picturesque location along Pigeon Creek, about eleven miles from the Monongahela River. He ordered test holes drilled throughout the property to find the coal bed's depth and the composition of overlying strata.<sup>8</sup> The coal quality and the seam thickness were carefully studied to insure that there was a good marketable product. "After using the greatest discrimination and care" in scrutinizing the property, Ellsworth purchased nearly 13,000 acres of coal rights and some surface land from the local farmers for approximately thirty dollars an acre.<sup>9</sup> Mining and auxiliary equipment was quickly moved onto the land in the winter of 1899.<sup>10</sup> Spring and summer brought a beehive of activity to the tranquil valley: two shafts were dropped to the coal; a railroad from Monongahela City was started; and a brickworks, quarry, and lumberyard were created to produce needed materials.<sup>11</sup> In January 1900, two additional shafts were started about three miles west of the original mine. The shafts were numbered one, two, three, and four for identification.<sup>12</sup> Five more shafts were proposed but were never constructed.<sup>13</sup> In the spring workers reached an eight-foot vein and extracted the first carloads of coal.<sup>14</sup>

Because of the rural and isolated area which Ellsworth purchased, he was compelled to become a community developer. He was well-equipped to create a new town. He had served on Chicago's South Park Commission for nine years and helped to develop many of the city's parks.<sup>15</sup> He knew the importance of open spaces for confined workers and he made efforts to provide park and recreational areas. He also served on the executive board of the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 and observed the impact that a well-organized and

<sup>8</sup> "Bentleyville News," *Monongahela Valley Republican*, December 8, 1898, (hereafter cited as *MVR*); "Bentleyville News," *MVR*, February 16, 1899; "Bentleyville News," *MVR*, March 16, 1899.

<sup>9</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 28; "Bentleyville Coal Boom," *MVR*, March 2, 1899; "The Bentleyville Boom," *MVR*, July 13, 1899; "Bentleyville's Boom," *The Washington Reporter*, January 11, 1899, (hereafter cited as *WR*); U.S. Washington, Pennsylvania, Washington County Courthouse, Deed Book, vol. 227, pp. 1-65, John Simpson to James W. Ellsworth, July 6, 1899.

<sup>10</sup> "To Develop More Coal Lands," *WR*, February 27, 1899; "More Developments," *MVR*, March 2, 1899.

<sup>11</sup> "A New City," *Akron Beacon Journal*, August 29, 1899; "A New Coal Mining Town," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1899; "Bentleyville Briefs," *MVR*, July 13, 1899; "Pigeon Creek Road," *WR*, September 23, 1899.

<sup>12</sup> "Eight Foot Vein," *WR*, January 30, 1900.

<sup>13</sup> "Ellsworth, Model Mining Settlement," *Washington Observer*, June 10, 1903, (hereafter cited as *WO*). The original two mine shafts are still used today.

<sup>14</sup> "First Coal Shipped," *MVR*, May 10, 1900; "The River Front," *WR*, May 16, 1900.

<sup>15</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, s.v. "James W. Ellsworth."

beautiful city had on people.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, George Pullman, founder of the "model" industrial town of Pullman, Illinois, was his frequent dinner guest. The two men had common business interests (railroads) and spent many hours talking after dinner.<sup>17</sup> Ellsworth undoubtedly learned about Pullman's town in these meetings and perhaps even visited it. When the community was nearly decimated in the Pullman strike of 1894, Ellsworth, like many businessmen, blamed the union for the destruction. Ellsworth drew heavily on his Chicago experience to lay the groundwork for his town which he named after himself.

Throughout 1899 hundreds of people poured into the Pigeon Creek valley in search of work at the new mines. Many were Poles, Russians, and Italians along with some Welsh and a few Americans. Rents in the nearby town of Bentleyville rose astronomically. Those unable to acquire adequate housing either camped out or lived in temporary company huts.<sup>18</sup> Once the preliminary construction work neared completion, Ellsworth turned his attention to developing a well-planned community.<sup>19</sup> "The intention," he told a group of Chicago businessmen, "is to provide every benefit with which an employee can be supplied. On the other hand, the cost of producing coal must be made as low as it can be made legitimately."<sup>20</sup> Within this constraint, he would furnish his workers with everything he thought they needed to live happy and comfortable lives. If paternalism meant reducing profits, the employees would have to wait.

In December 1899 Ellsworth laid out the town. He planned for a population of about 2000 people; however, the number of inhabitants rarely exceeded 1500 because of the limited amount of company housing.<sup>21</sup> The company began surveying lots near the shafts and started construction of permanent miner homes. The community was designed

<sup>16</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 37-40. For more information on the Columbian Exposition see: David F. Burg, *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1976); Reid Badger, *The Great American Fair* (Chicago, 1979).

<sup>17</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 43-44, 47-51. For more information on the "model" industrial town see: Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York, 1967).

<sup>18</sup> "Pigeon Creek Road, WR, September 23, 1899; "New Coal Field Opened," The Pittsburgh Times, May 9, 1900.

<sup>19</sup> "Postoffice at Ellsworth," WR, April 17, 1901.

<sup>20</sup> "Ellsworth to be Model Town on Pigeon Run," *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*, September 15, 1899, (hereafter cited as PD).

<sup>21</sup> "Big Boom at Scenery Hill," WO, March 1, 1903; "Ellsworth, Model Mining Settlement," WO, June 10, 1903.

to attract and keep good workers.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, brick, English-cottage-type houses were built on the hills around the mine. Each ethnic group dominated a particular "patch," or row of homes. Consequently, the town was segregated into nationalistic clusters. Each house had enough land for a vegetable garden, a few trees, and a yard. The nominal rent of \$6.50 to \$9.00 a month applied toward the purchase price and the cost was kept low that many could own a home if they worked for the company long enough.<sup>23</sup> Because of the town's attractiveness and modest rents, the demand for housing always exceeded the supply and a number of workers were compelled to reside in the smaller neighboring towns.<sup>24</sup> Ellsworth became a legal community when it was incorporated as a Pennsylvania borough on August 20, 1900.<sup>25</sup>

Ellsworth's paternalism dominated every aspect of the new town. Near the shafts a large baseball field and playground were maintained for the miner's benefit. Schools provided manual training as well as formal education for miners and their children.<sup>26</sup> Any worker could use the public library, hotel, and modern doctor's office Ellsworth provided. The company store, usually the nemesis of a miner, operated on a cash basis, with reasonable prices, and workers were not required to shop there. The company also purchased musical instruments and distributed them among the workers. Several ethnic orchestras entertained town residents on Saturday nights. The two major holidays of the year, Christmas and Independence Day, best exemplified the paternalistic attitude. Ellsworth "took an interest" in Christmas, "seeing that the children celebrated with Christmas trees" and presents. Games and a large company picnic accompanied the celebration of the Fourth of July. The owner was overjoyed at the response to his attempt to keep the workers comfortable and happy. As he said later, it "was encouraging to my efforts. Surely it was profitable ground to cultivate . . . ."<sup>27</sup> The use of the word "profitable" showed the owner's satisfaction.

<sup>22</sup> "Busy Bentleyville," *WR*, December 6, 1899; "A New Coal Mining Town," *The New York Times*, September 16, 1899.

<sup>23</sup> "Ellsworth, Model Mining Settlement," *WO*, June 10, 1903; Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 32.

<sup>24</sup> "Scenery Hill," *WO*, March 7, 1903.

<sup>25</sup> Forrest Earle, *The History of Washington County* (Chicago, 1926), I, 735.

<sup>26</sup> "Ellsworth, Model Mining Settlement," *WO*, June 10, 1903.

<sup>27</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 32.

Ellsworth's tolerance even extended to alcohol. Local option prohibited the sale of alcohol in the mining town, but liquor dealers in Pittsburgh frequently shipped illegal whiskey and beer to the miners. When drunkenness and absenteeism became rampant, Ellsworth persuaded three county judges to suspend prohibition and allow the coal company to operate saloons.<sup>28</sup> Two company "tap rooms," decorated like Old English pubs, sold the "best beer obtainable" for three cents a glass.<sup>29</sup> To restrict consumption, the saloons were open from five until nine o'clock in the evening. This maneuver solved the alcohol-related work problems and kept the workers happy, but it also increased company control over the miners. As Ellsworth boasted: "It worked out beautifully; there was no drunkenness or disorderly conduct, and a more orderly community was not to be found in the country. It was a complete and unqualified success."<sup>30</sup>

Although Ellsworth was genuinely interested in the welfare of his workers, he had other reasons for his paternalism. By keeping his workers content, there would be no reason to join the UMW. He wanted labor to cooperate with management rather than to resort "to coercion and to destruction of property with torch and dynamite when arbitrary demands are refused."<sup>31</sup> His workers, then, must be cooperative, and a union might not acquiesce to his demands. Another motivation for his fatherly attitude was the deplorable mine conditions. Trapped within the coal were large quantities of methane gas (fire-damp, the miners called it), and this gas escaped when the coal was mined. Poor ventilation allowed the gas to collect in the empty cavities of the mine. An electrical spark or explosive charge used in dislodging the coal could ignite the gas and result in a serious explosion. In 1900 and 1901 the Ellsworth mines had numerous explosions, with the loss of several lives.<sup>32</sup> John Dawson, a fire boss at the mines, commented on working conditions: "Few mines are free from gas, but I have never seen the like of Ellsworth. I have seen the men burn it out of

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>29</sup> "Ellsworth, Model Mining Settlement," *WO*, June 10, 1903.

<sup>30</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 30.

<sup>31</sup> "Ellsworth to be Model Town on Pigeon Run," *PD*, September 15, 1899.

<sup>32</sup> "Explosion at Bentleyville," *WR*, June 12, 1900; "Serious Mine Accident," *WR*, November 20, 1900; "Ellsworth Mine Very Unlucky," *WR*, March 23, 1901; "Fearful Explosion," *MVR*, November 22, 1900; "Another Explosion," *MVR*, December 20, 1900; "Fire Almost Out," *MVR*, December 27, 1900.

their rooms when they thought it was not around. The tongues of many-colored flames crept along the walls like snakes." While burning was a common and not too dangerous a practice in many mines, Dawson said, "it made my blood run cold there when I knew that it might send us all to eternity any moment. There is enough gas around the Ellsworth mine to blow the whole district out of sight."<sup>33</sup> Patrick Dolan, Pittsburgh district president of the UMW, stated after visiting the mine in an attempt to organize the men: "It is not the first 'Hoodooed' [bewitched] mine I have seen, but it is certainly the worst one. There was not an American digger in it . . . nor one who could speak English."<sup>34</sup>

The idealistic paternal community began to sour in 1902. Dolan's organizational effort in March 1901 caused shockwaves within the company. This initial unionization endeavor (the operation was still insignificant when the first drive to unionize the bituminous workers in Pennsylvania was occurring) was not strong and failed. It did, however, test the strength of the company. As the general Anthracite Strike drew to a close and the miners appeared to make substantial gains, Ellsworth braced for a unionization drive. The coal company hand-picked and paid for the town's first police force. All pro-company men, the eighteen coal and iron police officers were selected from the company's supervisory personnel. Their duties were to patrol the town and prevent union activities.<sup>35</sup> Every stranger was under close surveillance and any attempt to discuss organization with the miners resulted in forceful expulsion.<sup>36</sup> Ellsworth had acquired overtones of a police state.

In the midst of this hostile environment, Uriah Bellingham, district vice-president of the UMW, went to Ellsworth at the behest of some workers. As he stepped off the train, two company policemen accosted him and asked his purpose in coming to the borough. When Bellingham refused to state his intentions, they arrested and handcuffed him. They led him to the company office, and after a lengthy discussion, in which Bellingham denied grounds for the arrest, the police escorted the union organizer to the town limits. He was released and

<sup>33</sup> "Ellsworth Mine Very Unlucky," *WR*, March 23, 1901.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> "Yough-Mon Policemen," *WO*, March 25, 1902.

<sup>36</sup> "Mine Officers Held for Court," *WO*, April 14, 1902.

told to "make himself scarce about the Ellsworth diggin's."<sup>37</sup> The next day he entered a suit for false arrest and assault and battery against the two officers. One month later he won his court case. The penalty, however, was a farce; the two policemen were fined five dollars each, plus court costs.<sup>38</sup>

The company reacted to Bellingham's presence with fear and reprisals against the known union sympathizers. Twenty men were forcefully evicted from their houses because they favored the formation of a union and openly criticized Bellingham's arrest.<sup>39</sup> John Calligan, one of the fired miners, told a newspaper reporter that "the Ellsworth people [the company] were determined to prevent the unionizing of their employees and would resort to the most extreme measures to carry out their purpose." He added that "there was much feeling among the miners over the arrest and treatment of Bellingham by the Ellsworth officers."<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the summer and fall of 1902 animosity grew. While there were no major episodes to trigger a strike, the company maneuvered to obtain further dominance over the workers. On the day after Christmas, 1902, the company store, previously a voluntary cash operation, became a credit store. Company scrip, instead of money, was issued to the miners as payment, and was redeemable only at company-owned establishments. Moreover, the company made it mandatory for all residents of Ellsworth to shop in the store.<sup>41</sup> Although there was no open criticism of this action (fear of eviction probably prevented any public comments), the increased company control insured increased hatred.

In October 1903, several Welsh miners boldly attacked the coal company. These miners alleged that a firm in Pontypridd, South Wales, working for the James W. Ellsworth Coal Company, offered "glittering inducements" to go to the United States and work in Ellsworth.<sup>42</sup> This was clearly a violation of the contract labor law of

<sup>37</sup> "Arrest At Ellsworth," *MVR*, April 3, 1902; "Will Sue for Damages," *MVR*, April 10, 1902; "Mine Officers Held for Court," *WO*, April 14, 1902.

<sup>38</sup> "Bellingham Wins Case," *MVR*, May 15, 1902.

<sup>39</sup> "Fight at Ellsworth," *MVR*, April 10, 1902.

<sup>40</sup> "Mine Officers Held for Court," *WO*, April 14, 1902.

<sup>41</sup> "Bentleyville," *WO*, December 26, 1902.

<sup>42</sup> "Welshminers Cause Suits," *WO*, December 4, 1903; U.S., National Archives, Record Group 85, "Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service," James R. Garfield, Secretary of the Department of Commerce and Labor to the Commissioner of Immigration, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 30, 1903.



1885, which prohibited prepayment for transportation or assisting foreign emigrants under contract for labor or service.<sup>43</sup> Once at work the new immigrants found the situation not as favorable as previously depicted. The UMW became aware of the company scheme to import miners when the Welsh miners sought other employment. A union investigation led to Ellsworth's testifying before Department of Justice officials. He emphatically denied that his company lured miners from Wales and welcomed a thorough government investigation, which he said "would result in acquittal without the case being taken into court."<sup>44</sup> Following an investigation, United States District Attorney James S. Young filed praecipes for fifteen suits against the coal company. The case never got to court because many of the Welsh miners returned to Wales and could not testify against the company. Ellsworth was exonerated.<sup>45</sup> The coal operator referred to the whole affair as "simply a little temporary annoyance."<sup>46</sup>

During the fall and winter of 1903, conditions grew worse. When area wide coal orders decreased significantly, the Ellsworth company slowed production in December and drastically reduced the number of miner-work days. In early January, the mines shut down. Adding to the misery of no work, the winter was bitterly cold.<sup>47</sup> "Poverty Stalks in the Homes of Coal Diggers," headlined the *Pittsburgh Leader* in reference to the plight of all area coal miners.<sup>48</sup> The residents of Ellsworth were no exception; they were desperate for work. Euphoria filled the air when the company reopened the mines on February 1.

On that day, an order to reduce wages came from the main office in Cleveland. Word spread rapidly among the men after superintendent A. J. King posted the notice. The miners dropped their tools and came to the surface to confirm the rumors.<sup>49</sup> They found their wages slashed eighteen percent, fully forty percent below rates in other area mines. Ellsworth drivers before the notice received \$2.25 a day

<sup>43</sup> U.S., *Statutes at Large*, XXIII, chapter 164, 332-335.

<sup>44</sup> Another Emphatic Denial," *MVR*, October 29, 1903; "The Ellsworth Company Deny Violation of Law," *WO*, October 24, 1903.

<sup>45</sup> "The Ellsworth Company Deny Violation of Law," *WO*, October 24, 1903; *The United Mine Worker's Journal*, October 15, 1903, 8. The UMW publication did not mention this strike. U.S., National Archives, Record Group 60, "General Records of the Department of Justice," John W. Dunkee, U.S. District Attorney to William H. Moody, Attorney General, May 6, 1905.

<sup>46</sup> "Welshminers Cause Suits," *WO*, December 4, 1903.

<sup>47</sup> "Cold Wave Due Here Today," *The Pittsburgh Leader*, January 23, 1904, (hereafter cited as *PL*).

<sup>48</sup> "Poverty Stalks in Homes of Coal Diggers," *PL*, February 3, 1904.

<sup>49</sup> "Miners at Scenery Hill Go Out on a Strike," *WO*, February 2, 1904.

for ten hours work, while area union drivers got \$2.56 a day for eight hours work.<sup>50</sup> In an orderly meeting of all the miners, the men adamantly refused to work for reduced wages. Nearly 1500 men walked off their jobs.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the miners' leaders attempted a conference with superintendent King to discuss differences, but he stubbornly rejected their pleas. He did, however, issue a company statement in a newspaper interview: "The wages of the men were reduced in order to cut expenses, so that we can mine coal at a profit. The men, if they work for us, must come to our terms. If they refuse, then we will import other men to take their places."<sup>52</sup> The company that had seemed so concerned with the welfare of its workers had become callous.

On February 4, three days after the walkout, the workers called upon the UMW for assistance. Andrew Davidson and Henry O'Neill, members of the Pittsburgh district executive board, held a meeting around a blacksmith shop near shafts three and four. About seven hundred miners attended. Five interpreters conveyed the message to the different ethnic miners. Another meeting was called shortly after the first ended because many foreign miners did not understand the purpose of the original gathering. Once convinced the organization was for their betterment, the miners joined the UMW. Similar meetings were held near shafts one and two for those who could not attend at the other location. Virtually all the Ellsworth miners were organized that night.<sup>53</sup>

Acting upon orders from James W. Ellsworth, who remained in Cleveland throughout the strike, the company took the initiative while the men organized. Eviction notices were posted on forty strikers' homes. Company officials declared that the "mines will not be run union," and promised more eviction notices if the present situation did not end. Responding to the threatened expulsions, the Union Holiness Association, a religious organization which operated the

<sup>50</sup> "As Result of Strike Ellsworth Mines are completely Tied Up," *WO*, February 5, 1904.

<sup>51</sup> "Miners at Scenery Hill Go Out on a Strike," *WO*, February 2, 1904.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> "As Result of Strike Ellsworth Mines are Completely Tied Up," *WO*, February 5, 1904. The traditional animosities between ethnic miner groups were suppressed in this strike and the UMW had very little trouble organizing the men. Ethnic problems, similar to those in the Anthracite fields, resurfaced several months after the strike. For more on the ethnic conflicts in the hard coal areas see: Michael Novak, *The Guns of Lattimer* (New York, 1978); Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike* (South Bend, Indiana, 1968).

annual Bentleyville camp meeting, offered their buildings and supplies to the miners. Although the local newspapers and much of the surrounding populace were sympathetic to the striking miners, the local nature of the strike and the isolation of Ellsworth negated any further outside assistance. Many miners sensed a long strike and sought employment in other mines.<sup>54</sup> Some went to assist at the Harwick mine, scene of a serious explosion, while the UMW helped others get new jobs.

On Friday morning, February 5, the miners submitted a work proposition to the company. They would return to their jobs under conditions and wages as they existed before the mines closed, but only if they would receive the union scale of wages after April 3.<sup>55</sup> Ellsworth immediately rejected the offer and reaffirmed the company position: no recognition of either the union or any demands of the striking miners. Moreover, he reiterated the threat to import strikebreakers. (Very few men remained on the job after the miners were organized. Only the ventilation and pump operators worked, and many of them were substitute company men.) Knowing this threat might result in trouble, company men and the coal and iron police force were armed with Winchester rifles to guard the mines day and night.<sup>56</sup>

Following the rejection of their proposition, the miners began intimidating those still working or those in sympathy with management. The mine blasters often carried surplus blasting powder home at the end of the work day and had built up a small stockpile of explosives, which they refused to turn over to the company. Knowledgeable in its application, the workers prepared to use dynamite as a coercive weapon. An Italian watchman had his life threatened if he did not quit work. To emphasize their position, the miners fired revolvers into the air and discharged a blast of dynamite. The watchman and several others left their jobs.<sup>57</sup> In another incident, a blacksmith was told not to

<sup>54</sup> "Request Men to Go to Work," *The Pittsburgh Post*, February 9, 1904, "As Result of Strike Ellsworth Mines are Completely Tied Up," *WO*, February 5, 1904

<sup>55</sup> April 3 was selected because by that date the UMW's central competitive district conference would have met. One of the points to be discussed and voted on was the acceptance of an area wide wage reduction for union miners

<sup>56</sup> "The Ellsworth Coal Company Rejected Miner's Overtures," *WO*, February 6, 1904, "Dynamite Used by Ellsworth Miners," *PD*, February 7, 1904, "Armed Men Guard Mine," *PL*, February 7, 1904

<sup>57</sup> "Armed Men Guard Mine," *PL*, February 7, 1904, "Dynamite Used by Ellsworth Miners," *PD*, February 7, 1904

return to work. When he stepped out of his shop, miners opened fire on him. Only by seeking cover did he escape death.<sup>58</sup> Sporadic explosions and the crack of firearms continued to interrupt the silence of day and night. Although these disturbances did not damage the mines, several explosions were close enough to cause the company concern.<sup>59</sup>

Ellsworth realized his perilous situation. One well-placed dynamite charge could destroy his entire operation. He decided to take no action that might further incite the miners, and quietly measured the strength of the new union, hoping to find a weakness. As a result, the men were paid as scheduled. The company fully expected a demonstration of union strength or a robbery of the pay wagon. Therefore, it was heavily guarded. The miners lined up in an orderly fashion and received their payment. There was no trouble.<sup>60</sup>

On February 8, Ellsworth issued a plea to the miners:

We hereby appeal to our employees who are now idle to return to their work. We know that there are a great many men who desire to work, who have earned good wages in the past and can do so again. You are aware that the slack run during the past two or three months has been the first one in our history. You have always had good, steady work and good wages in the past.

He asked the men to "look at the matter in a proper way and go to work for your own best interests and welfare of your families."<sup>61</sup> He did not mention the major point of contention, the union, but tried to justify the recent wage reductions. The miners remained steadfast in their position despite these overtures.<sup>62</sup>

Ellsworth's appeal was an attempt to undermine a planned union meeting on February 9. Before leaving Pittsburgh to address the Ellsworth miners, Patrick Dolan received instruction from UMW national president John Mitchell. Dolan advised the men not to work for reduced wages and promised that no union miners in Pennsylvania would load Ellsworth Coal Company railroad cars in a sympathy boycott. He urged the assembled miners to maintain peace at all costs

<sup>58</sup> "Ellsworth People Appeal to Their Men to Return to Work," *WO*, February 9, 1904.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> "Ellsworth Strike Situation Very Serious," *WO*, February 8, 1904.

<sup>61</sup> "Ellsworth People Appeal to Their Men to Return to Work," *WO*, February, 9, 1904.

<sup>62</sup> "Ellsworth Miners Firm in Demand," *PD*, February 9, 1904.

and allow those men operating the mine pumps to continue working. "You have formed a strong organization," he declared "and you are now backed by a greater organization. You will get your demands by remaining firm."<sup>63</sup> This meeting created tremendous enthusiasm and renewed the sagging determination of the men.

The company countered this mass meeting by serving eviction notices to the new union's leaders.<sup>64</sup> The men had ten days to leave town or face the wrath of the company police. Constable Fred Kuntz openly stated: "If the men served do not leave the mines we will place them under arrest. We have a sufficiently large force to place every striker here under arrest if necessary."<sup>65</sup> Following this threat superintendent King said the company would not change the wage scale, but all the men, "except the union officers," could return to work. The ploy failed. Instead of undercutting union leadership, this further united the miners.

Since the walkout the company had threatened to introduce strike-breakers. The workers responded by scrutinizing every train "to see if imported miners were coming to take the strikers' places." The miners promised ruthless slaughter and property destruction if non-union men were brought to Ellsworth. With the model mining town teetering on the brink of possible destruction, Ellsworth prudently declared that no strikebreakers would be hired. He thought "it well to let the men thoroughly consider the matter before taking any action." Then to appeal to the workers' sentiments, he added: "The men here have acted the part of gentlemen in this matter and we wish to deal with them fairly."<sup>66</sup> Ellsworth had softened his position considerably.

As the strike neared the end of the second week, both sides appeared firm in their position and both continued maneuvering for an advantage. In a protracted struggle of attrition, the side which could hold out the longest would win. The district union officers advised all the miners, except those operating the pumps, to seek employment at other works.<sup>67</sup> The non-union mines of the Charleroi Coal Company filled

<sup>63</sup> "A Big Mass Meeting of Strikers," *WO*, February 10, 1904.

<sup>64</sup> Local union president Thomas Quinn, vice-president A.J. Payne, treasurer John Roadway, corresponding secretary Richard Roadway, and their families received notices. "Notices off Eviction Served on Miners," *PD*, February 11, 1904.

<sup>65</sup> "Dynamite Used by Ellsworth Miners," *PD*, February 7, 1904.

<sup>66</sup> "Notices of Eviction Served on Miners," *PD*, February 11, 1904.

<sup>67</sup> "No Excitement at Scenery Hill," *WO*, February 12, 1904.

"a large number" of Ellsworth's coal orders, thereby avoiding the union boycott.<sup>68</sup> While this stand-off hurt both parties, Ellsworth's business was disintegrating. Each day the mines were inoperative during the spring rush of coal orders lost the owner profitable sales and jeopardized money invested in the mines and previous lucrative markets. Ellsworth also had a \$4.5 million mortgage on the mines with the Union Trust Company of Pittsburgh and the first payments were due in 1906.<sup>69</sup> Certainly this indebtedness combined with the loss of income induced Ellsworth to reconsider his anti-union position. Moreover, Ellsworth, who built a career on prompt delivery of coal, viewed the actions of the union as devastating his reputation and his enterprise. He began searching for an honorable solution to the dispute.

The first indication of this new tack was the company's failure to evict families when their notices expired. Even the new union officers were not removed. The company realized the evictions would only create more animosity which could possibly lead to violence at the mines and ultimately to their destruction. Also eviction was thought to be ineffective because the miners could live in the Union Holiness Association's cottages.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, the UMW could find work for the miners should the strike become lengthy. The union had cornered the independent coal company. Ellsworth faced the choice between the potential destruction of his entire business or the acceptance of organized workers.

As the strike began its third week, Ellsworth yielded to persistent calls for a meeting with the union. On Saturday night, February 20, UMW district officers sat down with superintendent King to discuss union demands.<sup>71</sup> As a result of this all-night meeting, the "mining and dead work scale of the Pittsburgh district was adopted."<sup>72</sup> The only point of disagreement was the category of the mine — thick or thin veined. Work in a thin vein paid more because the coal was difficult to remove; whereas, payment for work in a thick vein was

<sup>68</sup> "Strike at Ellsworth Works is Settled," *WO*, February 23, 1904.

<sup>69</sup> U.S., Washington, Pennsylvania, Washington County Courthouse, Mortgage Book, LVIII, 1-73; LXVI, 1-73, 604, 609; LXXVI, 45.

<sup>70</sup> "No Excitement at Scenery Hill," *WO*, February 12, 1904.

<sup>71</sup> "Miners Win Fight," *PD*, February 23, 1904; "Strike at Ellsworth Works is Settled," *WO*, February 23, 1904. Most of the UMW district board of executives represented the unionized men. They included: Patrick Dolan, Uriah Bellingham, William Dodd, and two men named Little and Fisher.

<sup>72</sup> "Strike at Ellsworth Works is Settled," *WO*, February 23, 1904.

less because it was easier to mine the coal. The company said the veins were thick, the union thin. A compromise was reached: the company would pay thick vein wages until an investigation proved otherwise.<sup>73</sup>

The contract provided the union district scale on all classes of work, and an eight-hour work day instead of ten. On Sunday morning the remaining six hundred miners ratified the agreement. Superintendent King issued a company explanation:

It became necessary for us to meet our orders for coal and we decided that the only thing left for us to do was to accede to the demands of the men. All the men formerly employed by us are at liberty to return to their positions. The leaders of the strike have nearly all gone to work, and if the rest do not, it will not be our fault.<sup>74</sup>

The men returned to the mines the same day, ending the twenty-two day old strike.<sup>75</sup> Within a week, forty railroad carloads of coal a day left Ellsworth.<sup>76</sup>

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Ellsworth created the model mining town to provide an ideal worker setting and to produce cheap coal. He appears to have been sincere in his use of paternalism in Ellsworth. He had earlier demonstrated responsible paternalism in Chicago with his elaboration of the park system and his support of cultural events, such as art exhibits, expositions, and public concerts. Following his retirement in 1907, he was again paternalistic when he implemented a plan to make Hudson, Ohio a "model community."<sup>77</sup> As the fear of unionization deteriorated the mining utopia, friction between the company and miners grew. Ellsworth's continued anti-union position further promoted animosity.

<sup>73</sup> "Miners Win Fight," *PD*, February 23, 1904. No investigation was ever reported.

<sup>74</sup> "Strike at Ellsworth Works is Settled," *WO*, February 23, 1904.

<sup>75</sup> "Strike at Ellsworth Works is Settled," *WO*, February 23, 1904; "Miners Win Fight," *PD*, February 23, 1904; "Ellsworth Strike is Settled," *The Pittsburgh Post*, February 23, 1904.

<sup>76</sup> "Bentleyville," *WO*, March 1, 1904.

<sup>77</sup> He proposed to purchase and build water, sewer, and electrical plants for his hometown provided the citizens agreed to his stipulations. All the requirements were for the town's benefit and they were quickly approved. Ellsworth then constructed the "modern improvements for Hudson." *Hudson Independent*, November 3, 1907.

It was, however, the wage reduction after the long slack period that provided the needed impetus for a unionization strike. Ironically, when Ellsworth abandoned paternalism for pure profits, he brought about what he most feared.

Although the refusal to recognize the union was a bona fide company position, the threat to import strikebreakers was little more than a bluff. The coal company was a small independent operation competing against larger organizations for sales. Ellsworth needed coal mined as much as the men needed work. The union officials knew the company could not import non-union men because their workers would respond with violence and destruction of property. As long as the UMW provided support for the miners, they could wait for the company to acquiesce. Moreover, this was the first strike in the Ellsworth company, but the UMW was well-versed in strike techniques. The union took control of the situation from the very beginning, and it was only a question of when the company would agree to union demands.

Ellsworth wrote in his memoirs twenty years after the strike that "many of the men thought that they were better off working under a Union. [sic] This I had resisted for three years, but at last decided that if they wanted to be organized, I would give them their choice."<sup>78</sup> Actually the workers made Ellsworth choose between a destroyed company town and bankruptcy or a unionized operation.

The Ellsworth strike had more than ordinary local significance. It was in the vanguard of a large-scale unionization effort in the Pittsburgh district. The entire organizing force of the UMW was placed at the disposal of district officials shortly after Ellsworth settled. The organizers prepared to unionize some of the largest coal producers in the area, the United States Steel Corporation and the Henry Clay Frick operations in the Connellsville region.<sup>79</sup>

The success of this unionization drive depended on whether union miners in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois would accept their operators' demands for a slight pay cut. This owner demand arose when the non-union operators — like Ellsworth — made "sweeping reductions," which undercut union mines.<sup>80</sup> In the central competitive district conference of 1904, the miners agreed to

<sup>78</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 32.

<sup>79</sup> "Miners Win Fight," *PD*, February 23, 1904.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*



a reduction of their wages.<sup>81</sup> Although the UMW lost some of the previously gained advantages, the concession helped increase union enrollment and also smoothed operator-union relations.

The James W. Ellsworth Coal Company accepted the union remarkably well after the bitter contest. There were very few later conflicts between the company and union. Indeed, they often worked together to improve mine technology and working conditions.<sup>82</sup> They even united to overrule the state mine inspector, who had refused to permit the use of electricity in the mines.<sup>83</sup>

Nearly three years after the strike, Ellsworth sold the entire operation to the Lackawanna Steel Company. He cited the instability of the Theodore Roosevelt administration as his reason for selling out. Actually, he was getting old and very tired of the operation and wanted to retire to a quiet life. Ellsworth's only stated regret was that "if I had been let alone it [the town] would have borne great fruit."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Warne, *The Coal-Mine Workers*, 182-183.

<sup>82</sup> "Labor Difficulties at Ellsworth are Settled," *WO*, March 3, 1905; "Men at Ellsworth to Return to Work," *WO*, March 3, 1905.

<sup>83</sup> "Hearing in Ellsworth Case," *WO*, January 26, 1906; "Ellsworth Company May Use Electricity in its Mines," *WO*, February 3, 1906.

<sup>84</sup> Ellsworth, *Life and Ancestry*, 32.