The Coral Episode of the Coal Strike of 1919

A NUMBER OF HISTORIANS HAVE RECOUNTED and analyzed the key developments of the national coal strike of 1919. David Montgomery’s *The Fall of the House of Labor* devotes considerable attention to coal miners and the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Of particular interest is Montgomery’s description of the miners’ determination to follow World War I with social reconstruction. This effort led to virtually continuous strikes until 1923 and internal battles within the union over ideology and leadership. In Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine’s authoritative biography of John L. Lewis, the strike serves as the final step in Lewis’s path from obscurity to the presidency of the UMWA. The year-long strike at Coral, Pennsylvania, which ended in defeat for the miners, confirms Montgomery’s depiction of the divisions within the leadership of the union and the persistence of labor struggles from the coal strike of 1919 into the early 1920s. The Coral strike also provides a contrast with the more cautious national approach of Lewis.¹ Lewis terminated the national coal strike within six weeks at the behest of a federal judge and President Woodrow Wilson, but at Coral a determined group of coal miners, with backing from their union, struggled against an unyielding employer and politicians who had invoked the threat of radicalism to justify their suppression of strikes, workers, and unions. As the struggle escalated, the workers struck. The strikers suffered eviction from their homes, whereupon they built a tent colony. But in the end, the superior resources of the employers and a sweeping injunction issued against the strikers by a local judge led to the Coral strikers’ defeat. The Coral episode offers a revealing glimpse into the internal dynamics of the UMWA. John Brophy, the president of District 2 which included Coral, and a rising rival of Lewis within the national organization, sent men and money to organize the unorga-

nized, a concern which he would exhibit again in the coal strike of 1922. The differences between Brophy and Lewis over the degree of democracy which should prevail within the UMWA triggered a growing antagonism which climaxed in Lewis's defeating Brophy for the presidency of the UMWA in 1926.

The labor conflict at Coral grew out of the events of the World War I era. Wartime conditions placed a high priority on the production of items crucial to the war effort. National mobilization involved gaining the support of workers as well as management. Workers exercised more leverage than usual as the numbers of industrial workers and miners dwindled during a time of interrupted immigration and increasing recruitment by military forces. Woodrow Wilson realized that he had to offer tangible gains to the workers in order to enhance their production and patriotism. He responded to the challenge posed by worker morale by advocating higher wages, improved working conditions, and unionization. Wilson openly embraced the American Federation of Labor and its president Samuel Gompers, whom he regarded as a comrade in arms. In his speeches, he praised the patriotism of "responsible" labor leaders and workers. Wilson couched his statement of national war aims in an appealing rhetoric that spoke of making the world "safe for democracy." Such words inspired workers who transposed the fight for democracy from the battlefields of France to the factories and mines of the United States. Their definition of democracy went beyond the ballot box to "industrial democracy," a concept they associated with unionization.

In addition to these general developments, several changes produced by the war era had important direct effects on coal miners of Indiana County, Pennsylvania. The unionized miners operated under the direction of John Brophy, a newly elected and dynamic district president. His efforts contributed to the growth of District 2, whose ranks expanded by almost 10,000 to total more than 45,000 by 1919. Brophy advanced an ambitious program for the UMWA which included proposals for the nationalization of the mines, a shorter work week, and higher wages. In 1918, amid wartime conditions, coal operators obtained rising profits, but union members' pleas for wage increases went unheeded by Fuel Administrator Harry Garfield and President Wilson. The UMWA leadership and its membership, although resentful about this decision, decided against striking during wartime. The end of the war increased the distress of the coal miners,
who experienced declining income and a rising cost of living. These conditions convinced the union leadership to demand higher wages and shorter hours as well as nationalization of the mines. The rejection of these demands by the coal operators led to a nationwide coal stoppage on November 1, 1919.²

The work stoppage added to the turbulence of a tumultuous year, which included the Seattle general strike, May Day confrontations, and the national steel strike. Faced by powerful and intransigent employers, workers looked to President Wilson and public opinion in a search for allies. Wilson, however, had lost interest in their cause as he focused his attention on the fight to win ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. In the battle for the support of public opinion, the Americanism issue became the dominant theme. Workers invoked Americanism to justify higher wages and unionization. They reintroduced the theme of working-class republicanism—an outlook which emphasized popular rights in the political and economic spheres—and they offered industrial democracy as a rationale for unionization. In the angry postwar mood fed by the Red Scare, employers countered this initiative by identifying striking immigrant workers and their labor leaders with subversion and Bolshevism and by claiming the open shop as “the American Plan.”³

This confrontation spread beyond urban sites into more isolated areas, including Coral, a small town located seven miles south of Indiana. Labor strife wracked the region around Coral. District 2 organizers supported steel workers in Johnstown, unionized Indiana County miners joined the national coal strike, and Coral miners struck for union recognition. Employers viewed the Coral strike as sufficiently important to mobilize a supportive judge, a friendly sheriff, and the Bolshevism issue in their offensive against the Coral miners. District leaders also saw the importance of this struggle as they dispatched organizers and other aid to the strikers. This mobilization of opposing camps in a small, relatively isolated community shows the perva-

siveness of what Nell Irvin Painter has identified as “conflicts between the forces of restoration and resistance to the old ways, in relations between . . . workers and employers.”

Coral was settled as part of the industrialization process which had reached Indiana County in the 1890s. A combination of capital, coal lands, and railroad lines transformed the area as the acquisitions of extensive coal lands by Joseph Wharton led to the establishment of Coral in 1902. The community grew quickly with the erection of houses, a company store, a railroad siding, and numerous coke ovens. By late 1903, 300 coke ovens and 150 company houses stood at the location. The local press hailed the prosperity of the town and the employment which it generated. After 1910, however, the effects of a major fire and declining markets produced problems for the community. These developments led Joseph Wharton to seek a purchaser for his property. In 1916 he sold his interest in the company to the Potter Coal and Coke Company in a transaction which involved 1,500 acres of coal lands. At this point, 295 men, including many Italian and eastern European immigrants and their children, worked at the coal mines and coke oven.

The Coral strike began on April 1, 1919, when 350 miners struck after the company refused to recognize the UMWA—an issue basic to much of the labor unrest in the coal fields. District 2 officials soon became involved in the dispute. They informed other miners about the strike and requested that they remain away from Coral. By late April the conflict intensified as Dominick Gelotte, a District 2 organizer, reported the eviction of fifteen strikers. He declared that they had no place to stay, but families of the other strikers were taking care of them. Peter Ferrara, a District 2 leader from Indiana who took a particular interest in the events at Coral, issued a statement to inform the public and raise its consciousness about the dispute. He described the evictions as a scare tactic to force the miners to work under

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5 *Indiana Evening Gazette* (hereafter, *Gazette*), Nov. 7, Dec. 1, 15, 1979; Clarence Stephenson, *175th Anniversary Issue, Indiana County History* Vol. 3 (Indiana, 1979), 383-84. The Coral work force included many miners of Italian and eastern European background but few, if any, blacks.
This photo of Walston, near Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, was taken at the turn of the century and portrays the appearance of countless company-owned mining towns across the soft-coal regions of the state. Double-frame dwellings, housing a family on each side, crown the top of the hill, while in the center, a hotel, common to coal towns, hosted mine superintendents and visiting company officials. On the photo's right, the tipple steam power plant and stockpile are visible. Courtesy of Special Collections, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
oppressive conditions, and he praised the miners for their role in winning the war against the Kaiser. He then asked his readers a pertinent question: Was it fair, in a democratic country, for a corporation to force a worker to choose between occupying a company house and suffering from starvation? He closed his statement with a call for government aid and a warning that this situation fostered Bolshevism, reminding his readers that workers would do anything necessary to provide bread and butter for their children.6

These sentiments reflected many of the dominant themes of “working-class republicanism.” This outlook, which recognized that workers

6 *Johnstown Democrat*, April 21, 1919; *Gazette*, April 21, 1919.
operated in a variety of contexts, including their place as citizens of the nation, focused on achieving full political and economic democracy for all producers and workers. Working-class republicanism had gained widespread support from workers in the nineteenth century. As classes rigidified and wealth concentrated in the twentieth century, the doctrine lost some of its appeal and underwent some revisions, but it still attracted support from workers. Workers at least echoed its rhetoric. For example, striking steelworkers in 1919 condemned the efforts of steel companies who engaged "in un-American efforts to impose the iron will of the autocrat upon their employees." Many wage-earning workers had a deep fear of dependence and saw solidarity and unions as a necessity, especially when employers threatened their homes as well as their livelihoods. 

Company officials countered the UMWA position with their version of the issues involved in the labor conflict. They stated that the mines had been closed for repairs, and that 95 percent of the workers were ready to return to work as soon as the repairs were completed; that union statements misled the miners; that the company had evicted only two families; and that wage rates at Coral exceeded the union rate by 15 percent. They further asserted that the miners needed protection against the Bolsheviks who were terrorizing the industrial sections of the Coral area. A UMWA official responded to these accusations by disputing the company's position on several issues, including the issue of the wage rate. He also denied that the UMWA was a Bolshevik organization, depicting it as a standard-bearer of democracy, justice, liberty, and collective bargaining.

In late April and early May, the Bolshevik issue captured local and national attention. Mayor Ole Hanson of Seattle, Washington, became a hero to many Americans as his emotional rhetoric catalyzed and mirrored escalating fears about the future of the republic. Patriotic societies such as the National Security League, the American Defense Society, and the National Civic Federation provided rallying points for Americans unnerved about labor unrest and domestic radicalism. Tension peaked around May Day. Some fearful Americans anticipated

8 *Gazette*, April 22, 23, 26, 1919.
disorder provoked by radicals, but the radicals suffered from the violence rather than provoked it. The contagion spread beyond urban centers and entered Indiana County, which experienced several "scare"s in April. In one case, authorities suspected Bolsheviks as perpetrators of an attempt to wreck a tipple. In a more bizarre incident, they feared foul play in the following innocent episode. A foreigner was spotted near a power plant where he was seemingly making a careful inspection of the company's bridge and crossover. After completing this activity, he disappeared. An investigation was undertaken which led to the conclusion that he was "picking dandelion roots from which to concoct a savory salad." In a more serious vein, authorities in Indiana County held several mass meetings to promote law and order in the face of alleged threats from Bolsheviks.9

Major J.A. Crossman of Indiana began these activities on April 22 at the Indiana County Court House where an overflow audience reaffirmed its patriotism and voiced its opposition to Bolshevik meetings. The meeting also produced more concrete results. An American Defensive Association was formed to protect the flag and to preserve law and order. Several hundred men assumed positions as deputy sheriffs to aid Sheriff Harry Boggs in the performance of his duties. A second mass meeting on April 25 featured speakers, patriotic songs, and a message of support from Punxsutawney. Advertisements in local newspapers intensified the emotional level created by the mass meetings. These ads condemned Bolshevism as treason and called on patriots to stamp it out. Local authorities took additional "precautionary measures" as May 1 neared. They requested aid from the state police and received a Greensburg unit under Captain Price. Sheriff Boggs issued a proclamation which forbade mass meetings, demonstrations, and parades. More specifically, he prohibited Bolsheviks and Socialists from marching in Homer City, the focal point of confrontation between "radicals" and "patriots." The local press hailed both the effectiveness and the wisdom of these moves designed to avert May Day demonstrations. The newspapers heaped praise on the state police, the Home Defense Association, and local and state authorities. From their perspective, these authorities not only forestalled May Day

9 Murray, Red Scare, 8; Painter, Standing at Armageddon, 346-47, 358-59; Saltsburg Press, May 1, 1919; Gazette, April 21, 1919.
demonstrations but prevented Bolshevism from gaining a foothold in Indiana County. But within a week of the abortive demonstration, the local press lost interest in the Bolshevism issue, except for occasional coverage of the strange case of D.A. Palmer. Palmer, a leading Black Lick merchant and a key Indiana County socialist, was arrested in Homer City on May 1 for attacking a state trooper and refusing to remove his favorite red flower.\(^\text{10}\)

Several incidents linked the countywide "red scare" and the labor dispute in Coral, although both UMWA officials and local "patriotic speakers" denied this connection. The UMWA opposed any "red" demonstration on May Day, and John Brophy issued a circular declaring that this type of activity would produce several undesirable effects, including broadening the definition of sedition and increasing the powers of the state police. Speakers at "patriotic gatherings" prior to May 1 disclaimed any intention of interfering with the lawful activities of the UMWA. Nevertheless, the local "red scare" heightened suspicion about protests and protesters, and it distracted attention from the issues that had led to the Coral strike. More directly, Mayor Crossman referred to an earlier parade from Homer City to Coral in which some protesters had carried a flag draped in red banners. As several women who grew up in Coral later recalled, during the course of the strike townspeople and company personnel had called the strikers "Bolsheviks."\(^\text{11}\)

In June and July the struggle entered a new phase as both sides sought reinforcements to strengthen their positions. John Brophy, the president of District 2, increased his involvement in the dispute. He communicated with Warren Pippin, a Fuel Administration official, describing the situation at Coral, including the evictions, and asking him to use his efforts to restrain the eviction process and to arrange a conference to get a satisfactory settlement. Brophy also apprised the national union leaders about the Coral situation and appealed for

\(^{10}\) *Indiana Weekly Messenger* (hereafter, *Messenger*), April 24, May 1, 8, June 5, 19, 1919; interview with Mrs. Beatrice London and Mrs. Ruth Buckshaw, conducted by Eileen Cooper and Beth O'Leary, Oct. 13, 1987 (interview in possession of the authors).

\(^{11}\) *Messenger*, April 24, May 1, 1919; *Gazette*, April 29, May 1, 1919; London and Buckshaw Interview; Lindo Brigman, "Charges Preferred Against You," Coral Folder, District 2 United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Papers (Indiana University of Pennsylvania Archives).
their aid. He talked to John L. Lewis in June and July, and Lewis recommended that Brophy discuss the matter with the National Executive Board and request money from them. Brophy followed this suggestion and appeared before the Board concerning the Coral situation. Lewis also suggested using Rembrandt Peale, a coal operator, as an intermediary between the UMWA and the Potter Coal Company. Brophy approved of this suggestion, and Lewis responded by arranging for Warren Pippin to confer with Peale. Pippin, who played an important role at this stage, also met with Brophy in Pittsburgh and with a party in Altoona, who he thought might bring pressure on the company. Brophy discussed the issue with several other UMWA leaders in his ongoing efforts to try to resolve the Coral situation.12

Peter Ferrara continued his efforts on several fronts as he attempted to meet with the operators and tried to mobilize UMWA support and public backing for the Coral strikers. While the operators refused his request for a meeting and for recognition of the union, he had more success in getting press coverage for his assessment of the Coral conflict. The United Mine Workers Journal issue of May 1 carried a brief article written by Ferrara in which he attributed the strike to the company's failure to recognize the union and to sign a scale agreement. In mid June he used the Indiana Evening Gazette as a platform for his viewpoint. He depicted both the Coral coal miners and the U.S. soldiers in Europe as engaged in struggles for liberty and democracy and drew parallels between the strike and World War I. According to Ferrara, the justice of their cause failed to protect coal miners from false accusations, as company supporters called them "Bolsheviks." In reality, Ferrara declared, the company assumed the autocratic posture of the Kaiser in asserting its right to pay the workers whatever it pleased. He then raised the issue of fairness and justice in another context. He asserted that coal miners as well as doctors and operators had a right to organize. This statement ended with a request to the federal government to assure justice to the miners and their families who faced evictions, armed police, and replacement workers.13

12 John Brophy, "Diaries, 1917-42," June 12, July 8, 10, 11, 27, 28, 1919 (Catholic University of America); John Brophy to Warren Pippin, May 29; Warren Pippin to Brophy, July 10; Brophy to John L. Lewis, July 19; Lewis to Brophy, July 24; Pippin to Brophy, Aug. 1, 1919, all in Coral Folder, District 2 UMWA Papers.
13 United Mine Workers Journal, May 1, 1919.
The company pursued a different strategy as it sought to reverse its declining production and to withstand pressure from strikers and union organizers. One report estimated that company production had dropped from twenty cars per day in 1918 to two cars per day in July 1919. It sought judicial remedies in the courtroom of Judge Jonathan Langham, a former Indiana County Republican party chairman and congressman. The court heard testimony that harassment and threats by strikers had reduced the labor force from 250 to 142 and interfered with the activities of the workers and the conduct of the company's business affairs. In addition to general activities in promotion of the strike, the indictment for harassment and threats issued by Judge Langham charged Ferrara with a specific threat against C.E. Hallar, acting president of the Potter Coal Company—namely, that Ferrara threatened to "bring in organizers, establish a camp and torment him for a long time if he did not sign the scale." Judge Langham responded to this testimony by issuing a broad injunction on July 3, forbidding strikers from assembling in areas adjacent to the work site, going to the homes of employees, and annoying employees.14

In late July Langham penalized strikers who violated his order against interfering with and intimidating workers who wanted to continue working at the Potter Coal Company. He charged Tony Bebir, the acknowledged strike leader, and sixteen other defendants with contempt of court for their parades and demonstrations, which Langham thought violated his injunction. He sentenced them to jail, with no set date for release. They spent from July 22 to July 28 in jail, whereupon Langham released them with stipulations concerning their future conduct. He prohibited them from picketing on public highways, entrances to company property, and residences of employees. The defendants retained the right to go to the post office, but Lang-

14 Warren Pippin to John Brophy, Aug. 1, 1919, Coral Folder, District 2 UMWA Papers. Judge Jonathan Langham's posture in labor disputes can be gleaned from an article in the Messenger (Dec. 11, 1919) in which he denied the naturalization applications of striking coal miners because he considered their refusal to work to have been inappropriate conduct. See also his rulings in labor disputes of the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Rossiter injunction of 1927, which Carl I. Meyerhuber describes in Less Than Forever: The Rise and Decline of Union Solidarity in Western Pennsylvania, 1914-1948 (Selinsgrove, 1987), 82, 85, 87. There is a copy of the injunction in the Coral Folder, District 2 UMWA Papers; see also Indiana County Court of Common Pleas, Equity Docket Book, No. 4, 8, 86-88.
ham’s order forbade them from congregating at the site in such force as to be intimidating.\textsuperscript{15}

The Coral Post Office became a center of contention in the course of the strike. Lindo Brigman, a post office inspector, charged R.E. Mikesell, the Coral postmaster, with a series of offenses of sufficient seriousness to justify his removal if he failed to offer a satisfactory response to the charges. In essence, Brigman alleged that the postmaster had acted in an unpatriotic manner by defending the conduct of “Bolshevik agitators” in Coral, characterizing the red color as the working man standing up for his rights, and permitting the “Bolshevik element” to use the post office as a meeting place for “plotting their poisonous and destructive schemes.” More pertinent to the contents of Judge Langham’s order, he accused the postmaster of allowing the “Bolshevik element” to gather at the post office and to sneer at loyal Americans who came there to do postal business. Brigman’s accusations against Mikesell led to the postmaster’s removal and elicited a response from Ferrara. Ferrara wrote to Secretary of Labor William Wilson, denying the allegation that the miners were Bolsheviks and that Mikesell had violated his oath or the duties of his office. Ferrara explained Mikesell’s removal as the outcome of pressure on Inspector Brigman brought by the Potter Coal and Coke Company and from company propaganda designed to humiliate the postmaster and harm the local union in Coral.\textsuperscript{16}

While the Bolshevik issue and the enforcement of the injunction generated much emotional response and captured public attention, John Brophy and the District 2 organizers continued their more mundane activities to resolve the Coral situation. In August Brophy met Warren Pippin again and dispatched two organizers to Coral. He sent instructions to Max Laskoski, one of the two organizers, about handling the situation. Brophy told Laskoski to encourage the strikers and to acquaint workers in the adjoining area with the trouble in Coral. He reiterated his intention to maintain the tent colony and to make


\textsuperscript{16} Brigman, “Charges Preferred Against You”; Peter Ferrara to W.B. Wilson, Oct. 13, 1919, RG 174, Box 90, “Communist Activities, 1918-26” (National Archives).
the strike effective. Late August brought news of strikebreakers and the threat they represented to the continuation of the strike. Laskoski wrote to Brophy that although the miners’ morale continued at a high level, problems loomed for the strikers because of the intransigence of the company and its ability to recruit strikebreakers in nearby Westmoreland County. Deteriorating weather conditions also threatened the strikers’ resolve, as did the strikers’ increasing need for money from the union to buy clothes and shoes for their families. A month later an even more pessimistic report reached Brophy. P.H. Egan, another organizer, opined that the fight was lost because changing weather made tent living increasingly unfeasible and because high wages induced more workers to take jobs in Coral.17

The tent colony carried symbolic value for the strikers and the union. It polarized town residents and provided a rallying point for the UMWA. Local residents often cautioned their children to stay at home and to keep away from the tents. The United Mine Workers Journal issue of August 1 contained a picture of the tent colony and an article about the Coral dispute. The coverage included a statement of approval of the actions of district officials by the National Executive Board, a description of the efforts to make families comfortable by flooring the tents and decorating them with pictures, and an order by national officials of the union to ship fifty tents from Ludlow, Colorado, to Coral. The shipment of the tents involved a coordinated effort by three leading UMWA officials. Brophy made the request to John L. Lewis, and Lewis notified George O. Johnson, head of District 5 in Colorado, who indicated his compliance with the directive in a telegram to Lewis. The shipment of the tents provided tangible aid and represented a major symbolic action linking the tent colonies of Ludlow and Coral. Ludlow, the site of a major UMWA strike in 1913-1914—at which the state militia riddled the miners’ tents with bullets and caused the deaths of eleven children and two women—

17 Peter Ferrara to John Brophy, July 8, 10; Brophy to John L. Lewis, July 19; Lewis to John Brophy, July 24; Warren Pippin to Brophy, July 25, Aug. 1; Brophy to Pippin, July 26, Aug. 7; Brophy to Ferrara, Aug. 5; Brophy to Max Laskoski, Aug. 5; P.H. Egan and Max Laskoski to Brophy, Aug. 27, Sept. 22; James Mack to Brophy, Aug. 28, 1919, all in Coral Folder, District 2 UMWA Papers.
had already entered the annals of labor martyrdom as the site of the
"Ludlow Massacre."\(^{18}\)

By September the attention of the leaders and members of the
UMWA shifted to the national picture as the operators refused to
accept changes in the contract while the union presented demands for
higher wages, shorter hours, and nationalization of the mines. This
platform emerged from a meeting in May and a Cleveland convention
in September. Delegates at the Cleveland meeting also set a strike
date of November 1 if the owners failed to comply with their demands.
In the interim, District 2 held its own convention in Johnstown in
late October. There delegates heard Brophy discuss the strike in Coral.
He said that in spite of injunctions, evictions, and arrests, the men
were firmly holding out. Delegate Ferrara provided a more detailed
report, noting both the support of the strike by the convention and the
relief paid to the miners by the District Executive Board. At this point,
the tone of his presentation shifted as he described the plight of the
strikers' families in which 185 children faced the trauma of owning
no shoes as the start of the school year neared. Some nearby locals
responded to this initial crisis through an assessment that raised $265.
The District Executive Board next displayed its responsiveness to the
emergency. It authorized Ferrara, a district board member, to buy
shoes for the children; he complied with their request. A new crisis
arose when the wives of the miners also lacked shoes. He informed
the delegates of this situation, and the convention responded by passing
a resolution to donate $500 to the wives of Coral miners for the
purchase of shoes. Delegate Ferrara ended the discussion of the Coral
issue with a request for old clothes for men and women. He noted
that he and his wife had sent their old clothes to Coral.\(^{19}\)

On November 1, 1919, about 400,000 rank-and-file UMWA min-
ers struck nationwide. In Indiana County not a man at the organized
mines appeared for work, and some of the unorganized miners also
struck. At the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company, the dominant

\(^{18}\) London and Buckshaw Interview; *United Mine Workers Journal*, Aug. 1, 1919; John
Brophy to Warren Pippin, May 29; Brophy to John L. Lewis, June 19; Lewis to Brophy,
June 19 and 21, 1919, all in Coral Folder, District 2 UMWA Papers.

\(^{19}\) *Gazette*, Oct. 22, 1919; *Proceedings of the Twenty-seventh Consecutive and Fourth Biennial
producer in the county, all mines closed, and 4,500 miners walked out. At the Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company, another major producer, almost all miners struck. Independent and non-union mines, however, continued operation.

The press reported that conditions remained quiet and orderly in the county. Sheriff Boggs issued a proclamation prohibiting any gatherings that posed a threat to property and public order. Within a week the scene shifted to the national level as President Wilson denounced the strike and called for a revocation of the strike call. More threatening was an injunction issued against the strike by federal District Court Judge A.B. Anderson. In his ruling he described the strike as illegal because the war had not officially ended. He cited union leaders for contempt and called for an end to the strike. Virtually all miners stayed home. The strike issue dominated the convention in Indianapolis, which began on November 10. While delegates and many district leaders, including John Brophy, wanted to hold fast, its new national leader, John L. Lewis, stated that he could not fight his government and decided to comply with the injunction and cancel the strike order. In District 2 Brophy made no effort to get the miners back to work. There the strikers followed the lead of local leadership over Lewis's call for a return to work.20

The strike dragged on into December, with unionized miners standing firm and negotiations at an impasse. The federal government intensified pressure on the miners with the threat of the Wilson administration to deploy troops to reopen the mines, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's anti-radical and anti-labor campaign, and federal court contempt citations against union officials. At this point Lewis increased his efforts to get miners to accept a proposal for a 4 percent wage increase and the appointment of an investigatory commission to continue an exploration of the wage issue. The Executive Board concurred. The UMWA issued an official circular, signed by Lewis, Brophy, and other officials, which called on the miners to return to work. Indiana County miners received these instructions by December 11, and Brophy anticipated a speedy return to work. But according to a December 20 newspaper article, several thousand miners in District

20 Indiana Democrat, Nov. 5, Dec. 24, 1919; United Mine Workers Journal, Nov. 15, 1919; Brophy, "Memoir," 381-86; Messenger, Nov. 6, 1919.
remained on strike, and an article on December 24 reported that miners at the Lucerne Works had not yet returned to work. Delegates to a reconvened UMWA convention in Columbus, Ohio, in January 1920, heard charges from more militant rank-and-file leaders that John L. Lewis had abandoned the union’s program. The overwhelming majority of the delegates, however, accepted the accord and gave Lewis credit for the wage increase proposed by the federal investigatory commission. Coal miners also applauded the $7.50 daily base wage negotiated for the Central Competitive Field in the summer of 1920. In his autobiography, Brophy offered a different outlook. He pinpointed the commission and the wildcat strikes as key elements in these results and assigned credit to the miners for any accomplishments.

The government-industry alliance which played a major role in the outcome of the national strike had its counterpart in Indiana County. Sheriff Boggs, for example, offered to aid any Clymer miners who decided to return to work. Initiative also came from the other side of the alliance, as revealed in the papers of B.M. Clark, president of the Rochester and Pittsburgh Coal Company. Several letters illustrate Clark’s access to prominent public officials. In one letter he described the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania as a personal friend. In another letter he discussed a plan to start a mine in the midst of the strike and noted that “even if it produces a row I would be content with that because we then can secure United States Government soldiers.” In a particularly revealing letter he disclosed his influence with the state’s leading public official:

Governor Sproul as a result of my trip to Harrisburg last Friday has already placed a small detachment of State Constabulary at Indiana which will patrol the various mining districts in that section. This detachment will be increased as rapidly as possible. The State Constabulary force is pretty well tied up with the steel strike but the Governor has perfected plans for putting in reserve forces very promptly. Confidentially the state authorities have already in their possession a large amount of firearms to meet any necessity that may arise. This last fact should not be repeated.

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21 Gazette, Dec. 11, 12, 20, 1919; Democrat, Dec. 24, 1919; Brophy, A Miner’s Life, 144.
The events of the national coal strike overshadowed the Coral conflict, but the miners continued to receive aid. In the first eight months of their strike, $368.80 was collected in assessments along with $117.56 in donations. Although the local press and the *United Mine Workers Journal* offered no coverage of specific developments in Coral after November, the leaders and organizers continued to aid the Coral strikers. Still, their efforts failed to relieve the growing financial burdens on the miners and their families. In late January John Brophy received a letter from Coral strikers who requested information about making a collection in behalf of the members of Local Union 4471 in Coral and their families. They noted the high cost of living and the need of many fellows for clothing and asked permission to send a couple of men into other districts to request aid. In his reply Brophy declared that he could not act on the request until he received the recommendations of a special committee he had sent to Coral to look at the situation and to compile a report. The committee's report called for a continuation of the strike and for generally greater cooperation—among the organizers, between the organizers and Peter Ferrara, and between Ferrara and Brophy. Their supplemental report recommended that copies of the reports sent by organizers should also be sent to the local member of the District Executive Board, Peter Ferrara. In addition to these internal difficulties, the union and the strikers faced other problems. As revealed by Max Laskoski in a report submitted to Brophy in early March, many men from Homer City and Lucerne, small communities located near Coral, had gone to Coral to work, and several families from Lucerne had moved to Coral. Laskoski talked to the miners and asked them to stop working in Coral, but they refused his request and informed him that they were pleased with their situation, particularly working five and six days a week and getting good weight for their cars. In late March Brophy informed Ferrara that he would send organizers to help in the work at Coral, even if they could spend only a few days at a time. As a result of this initiative, four organizers devoted some time to the Coral struggle. However, after hearing the report of a committee sent to Coral to investigate and to make recommendations, the District Executive Board at its meeting of April 23 voted to discontinue the strike. It also decided that strikers should be placed in jobs elsewhere as soon as arrangements could be made.23

23 Report of Richard Gilbert, July 1, 1919-Feb. 29, 1920, "District 2, Officers' Annual Reports 1919-1920," Box 4, Coral Folder; Steve Chungo to John Brophy, Jan. 29; Brophy
This decision ended a major episode, but the struggle for working-class republicanism and a viable union continued for Coral miners and their families. The next important clash came in the coal strike of 1922. Although Coral played a less prominent role in this conflict than it had in 1919, a representative of the Coral miners signed a resolution passed by delegates to a special convention of Territory 6 of District 2. Its signers addressed their document to both Governor Sproul and President Warren G. Harding. They condemned the president for guaranteeing to the coal operators the protection of the National Guard and federal troops even if the operators decided to operate their mines under what the strikers deemed "an un-American standard of living." They attacked Sproul for mobilizing the National Guard and placing it in mining sections to intimidate and coerce and to break the miners' strike. In their opinion, this action was unconstitutional and against such American principles as liberty and justice. They vowed to stand in solidarity in their lawful and peaceful strike for union recognition. This statement contains the major themes of nineteenth-century, working-class republicanism, but it deviates from this approach in one important particular: no longer did workers view the government as a neutral agency acting to safeguard the interests of all people.\(^{24}\)

Evidence of governmental bias came from local developments as well as state and federal officials. Judge Langham continued his tenure on the county court and his rulings in behalf of the coal operators. His sweeping injunctions plagued the union and the miners. This situation climaxed in the coal strike of 1927, when Langham issued his infamous "Rossiter injunction," which included hymn-singing in his prohibition of activities by strikers. The combination of their own power and wealth plus aid from their allies produced another victory for the coal operators.\(^{25}\)

The Coral conflict and the subsequent labor battles of the 1920s pitted two unyielding foes in a battle for high stakes. The use of the

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\(^{24}\) Gazette, July 31, 1922; Schneider, "The Citizen Strike," 64.

\(^{25}\) Meyerhuber, Less Than Forever, 83.
recently catalogued papers of District 2 permits us to develop a more focused perspective on both the struggles between the operators and the miners and the role of John Brophy as a district leader. In addition, the sufferings of the miners and their families become more immediate and the power of the operators becomes more vivid as we see them dominating the public discourse by invoking the specter of Bolshevism to discredit the claims of the workers in behalf of labor republicanism and industrial democracy. The Coral situation also provided a dress rehearsal for the 1920s. Within the United Mine Workers several district leaders with rank-and-file support, particularly John Brophy, advocated a more militant program than did John L. Lewis. As conditions in the coal industry deteriorated, the Coral strike scenario was repeated across western Pennsylvania. In these confrontations politicians joined the fray on the side of the operators, and judges imitated Judge Langham by issuing blanket injunctions. The Coral strike of 1919 thus had been a prelude to a decade of defeat in the coal fields.

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