

"You understand we are radical"

The United Mine Workers of America, District 18
and The One Big Union, 1919-1920

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Introduction

On 17-26 February 1919, the western Canadian section of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA), District 18, held their 16th Annual Convention. The convention took place under the shadow and influence of the international working-class revolt and the Bolshevik Revolution.¹ With delegates frequently calling for the "overthrow of the present system of profits," and denouncing a bureaucratically-run International headquarters, it was the UMWA-D18's most radical convention to date. As one delegate put it, "You understand we are radical."² The convention also revealed the men of District 18's desire to forge a unity with returning veterans in the name of class solidarity.³ The growth of class consciousness and political radicalism among the industrially-organised miners, while a product of long-standing traditions and immediate realities, was more noticeable shortly after the convention. This was the last convention held by District 18 before it left the UMWA and became one of the major units of the One Big Union (OBU).

The formation of the OBU took place within the context of the conclusion of World War I and the developing Canadian Red Scare.⁴ Even before it officially formed in June 1919, the OBU faced resistance from hostile opponents to the union's goals. For the new OBU miners, this opposition quickly took the shape of what the miners themselves termed the "Triple Alliance," which encompassed the coal operators, the UMWA International headquarters, and the Canadian federal

Footnotes

¹ Glenbow Museum Archives (GMA), United Mine Workers of America, District 18 fonds, M-2239-153, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 17-26 February 1919, 2.

² Ibid., 31, 136.

³ Ibid., 66-71.

⁴ Ian McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2008), 422-423.

government.⁵ Because of the combined efforts of these institutions, the miners were pressured out of the OBU and the union was swiftly crushed as a result. Though enjoying a meteoric rise, by 1922 the OBU was less than a shadow of its former self.⁶ As for the miners, they were forced back into the UMWA District 18 defeated, but angry.⁷

Working-class radicalism can be defined as "a commitment to social change and a design for modifying society which were based ultimately on a Marxian analysis of capitalism."⁸ The sources of working-class radicalism, though, have been a point of contention in Canadian labour history. Some historians have taken the point of view of western exceptionalism. This view holds that the source of workers' radicalism lies not in the existence of exploitative class relationships, but in living conditions that were unique to the west. These historians argue that western Canadian workers were radical in comparison to their conservative eastern Canadian counterparts because housing conditions were worse, workers were more exploited, and health and safety standards were weaker.⁹ The opposing point of view has argued that while these conditions did have a radicalising effect on workers, western exceptionalism fails to look at radicalism in a national and international framework; indeed working-class radicalism existed across Canada and in various other countries.¹⁰ Those who have disagreed with western exceptionalism have further argued that the very basis for the workers' living conditions, are the basic economic class relationships of capitalism. Thus, it is unequal class relations that explains the global upsurges in working-class radicalism in the post-WWI period.¹¹

David Bercuson's *Fools and Wise Men* is one of the foundational texts on western exceptionalism. In it, he correctly points to the role of anti-OBU forces, specifically the "Triple Alliance" of the federal government, mine operators, and the International union, as factors in the OBU's demise.¹² Yet Bercuson also argues that the OBU was syndicalist or semi-syndicalist; that it had a confused, ambiguous, and "fuzzy" programme; that it was based regionally in western Canada; and

⁵ *Calgary Herald*, 28 July 1919; *The Morning Albertan* 28 July 1919.

⁶ David J. Bercuson, "Western Labour Radicalism and the One Big Union: Myths and Realities," in *The Twenties In Western Canada: Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972*, ed. S. M. Trofimenkoff (Ottawa: National Museum of Man National Museums of Canada, 1972), 33.

⁷ Bruce Ramsay, *The Noble Cause: The Story of the United Miner Workers of America in Western Canada* (Calgary: District 18, United Mine Workers of America, 1990), 128-129.

⁸ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), vii.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-8, 12-17.

¹⁰ Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984): 12, 15.

¹¹ Larry Peterson, "The One Big Union in International Perspective: Revolutionary Industrial Unionism 1900-1925," *Labour/ Le Travailleur*, no. 7 (Spring 1981): 41.

¹² Bercuson, "Western Labour Radicalism," 33; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), 221.

finally, that the leadership failed to correct these weaknesses. Thus, the primary cause of the decline of the OBU was the OBU itself, and especially its leaders.¹³ These arguments have been used to show the lack of class consciousness and class cohesion on the part of workers, and the dangers of Marxian socialism.¹⁴ This paper disagrees with western exceptionalism and Bercuson's arguments for the OBU's weaknesses. Thus, it places itself in a different historiographical viewpoint and follows the arguments of Greg Kealey, Larry Peterson, and Gerald Friesen.

Against the argument that the radicalism of the Canadian working class during the late stage of WWI and the immediate post-war period enjoyed a real existence only in western Canada, Greg Kealey has described the national contours of the workers' revolt. In his article "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," Kealey analyses national strike data and witness testimony from the Royal Commission on Industrial Relations, known as the Mathers Commission, to show that radical sentiment and the high rate of strikes were not solely found in the West. Thus, the revolt was national in scope.¹⁵ Larry Peterson puts the OBU into a global perspective, arguing that the OBU was a part of an international working-class movement for revolutionary industrial unionism. Looking at similar movements in Germany, Canada, Great Britain, France, and the United States, Peterson argues that, with due regard to national differences, there was indeed an international movement for industrial unionism that was spearheaded by revolutionaries.¹⁶ The report of the 16th Annual Convention clearly demonstrates that the miners of District 18 saw themselves as part of a global class struggle.¹⁷ Gerald Friesen argues against Bercuson and others who have characterised OBU as syndicalist. According to Friesen, such a view of the OBU rests upon a "misunderstanding of the role of the Socialist Party of Canada in 1919." The Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) provided the leadership of the OBU and they did not abandon the project of building the party for an anti-political syndicalist dream.¹⁸ This was especially revealed by the growing emulation of the Bolsheviks by members of District 18, despite of their lack of knowledge of Russian events.¹⁹

¹³ David Jay Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked: Canada's One Big Union," in *Revolutionary Syndicalism: an International Perspective*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 221, 233.

¹⁴ David J. Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), 258-259, 262.

¹⁵ Kealey, "1919," 12-15, 16-21.

¹⁶ Peterson, "The One Big Union," 41-43.

¹⁷ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 74.

¹⁸ Gerald Friesen, "'YOURS IN REVOLT': The Socialist Party of Canada and the Western Canadian Labour Movement," *Labour/ Le Travailleur*, no. 1 (1976): 139-140, 145-146.

¹⁹ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 85.

I agree with David Bright's assumption that "class remains a fruitful tool of analysis."²⁰ This paper follows historian Bryan D. Palmer's definition of class because it explains quite clearly the objective and subjective aspects to class. He states that "classes, as structural entities, exist in capitalism and, as social and cultural expressions, are made, unmade, and remade in particular historical periods."²¹ Classes, then, are not only a part of the structure of capitalism, but also have a cultural dimension. Complicating this situation, Palmer asserts that different social distinctions such as race, ethnicity, gender and religion "do not obliterate class but mediate it and layer it in particular ways that historians need to explore."²² Hence, there is the possibility of these different social identities complicating or fragmenting class cohesion. I also agree with Marx and Engel's definition of the working-class. Specifically a group of people who do not own the means of production, who must consequently hire themselves out for wages.²³

Historians Tom Mitchell and James Naylor have drawn attention to the existence of a "class moment," which they analyse in the context of the Winnipeg General Strike. They have defined a "class moment" as a situation in which class temporarily supercedes "other social identities such as ethnicity and gender."²⁴ Even though the working class in Winnipeg was "hierarchically structured by ethnicity," in the upheaval of the general strike, "working-class unity across ethnic lines held quite solidly."²⁵ There were periods when workers decided to submerge different social distinctions to the distinction of class, but they were not obliterated. To be successful, both sides in this two-way process must have consented to unite. While one party may have initiated unity, the other side may have resisted identifying with the working class. When the miners of UMWA-D18 attempted to unite with returned veterans, they refused, because they characterised the miners as "aliens." The "class moment", being essentially a moment of unity, is likewise a process. A distinction should thus be made between when attempts at class unity were successful, for there is a danger to conflate the existence of the "class moment" with the consummation of unity itself. The dichotomy between successful and unsuccessful is not a proper criterion for the "class moment." "The class moment," as a situation in which class temporarily supercedes different social identities, thus has its own moments. We can discern an initial stage of attempt-

²⁰ David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 6.

²¹ Bryan D. Palmer, "Listening to History Rather than Historians: Reflections on Working Class History," in *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings*, 2nd ed., ed. David J. Bercuson and David Bright (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), 53.

²² *Ibid.*, 69.

²³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5, 9.

²⁴ Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, "The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm," in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 183.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 183-184.

ing to forge a unity and then either success or failure. Yet even if failure is the result, the very act of trying to bridge differences in the class reveals the existence of a "class moment." Even when failing to overcome intra- class divisions, the attempt itself shows the existence and salience of class as a factor in the lives of historical agents. This conceptualisation of the "class moment" as a process, then, allows us to better understand the functioning of class in peoples' lives, the interaction between the objective and subjective aspects of class, and thus the limits of class itself.

From 1917 to 1920, the miners of District 18 became more radical. This growth of radical class consciousness built on previous traditions of socialism and class struggle among the miners, which then combined with contemporary radicalising forces such as war-time conditions and the Russian Revolution to impel the miners of District 18 to further revolutionary development. This development culminated in secession from the UMWA and the formation of the OBU, an industrial union openly committed to overthrowing capitalism and instituting a soviet system of government in Canada. I will further argue that the formation of the OBU, with its radicalised class consciousness and class solidarity across ethnic lines, was an example of the "class moment."

The One Big Union revealed a number of aspects of a radicalisation of class consciousness including the desire for industrial unionism and an active opposition to craft unionism, both nationally and internationally. Another aspect was the increased call for overthrowing capitalism and the emulation of the Russian Revolution and Bolshevism as the miners understood them. There were also attempts to unite across ethnic divisions and between civilians and soldiers. These elements formed the class basis upon which the UMWA-D18 joined the OBU. The miners brought over 7,000 members to the OBU, which at its height had over 50,000 members, making the miners one of the OBU's biggest contingents. The formation of the OBU in turn strengthened that class basis and gave it a new impetus. However, backroom deals, obstruction, and terror on the part of their opponents forced the miners of UMWA-D18 out of the OBU. Thus, the miners did not choose to leave the OBU; they were pushed out and thus quickened the demise of the OBU.

I will also argue that the exit of the former miners of District 18 was symbolic of the strength of what I refer to as the "Quadruple Alliance," which includes the "Triple Alliance" and the press. Previous historiography has not focused on the role of the media in the fight against the OBU.²⁶ The media played a key role in developing the discourse of subversive "enemy aliens" and promoted the Red Scare in Canada. It was not only the coal operators who encouraged returned soldiers to deal with striking miners with violence; the press too, especially the *Calgary Herald*, fomented nativism, slandered the OBU, and applauded veteran

²⁶ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*; McCormack, *Reformers*; Bright, *The Limits of Labour*; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*; Peter Campbell, *Canadian Marxists and the Search for a Third Way* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

violence against striking miners.²⁷ Such actions created a climate which inhibited the growth of the OBU.

This paper is based on the United Mine Workers of America, District 18 fonds and some of the press of the period, especially the *Calgary Herald*. In analysing the role of the miners of District 18 in the OBU, I concentrated on the minutes to District 18's 16th Annual Convention. The strength of this source is that it reveals how the miners defined radicalism. Its limitation is that it is a record of a special occasion, and gives only a partial picture of how the miners expressed their radicalism on a day to day basis. The entire time that the miners were part of the OBU they were on strike. To investigate the strike and how it was represented in the press, I analysed press clippings collected by the miners; most are from the *Herald*. These reports provide a report of the actions of the "Quadruple Alliance" from the press' perspective. The press often distorted the actual events and attempted to turn their readers, especially veterans against the miners.

The first section of this paper provides a brief history of the UMWA in the United States, its entry into Alberta, where the majority of the membership of District 18 resided, and subsequently the formation of District 18. The traditions of socialist and radical class consciousness in both the UMWA and in the coal fields of Alberta provided the basis and predilection for a radical critique of capitalism among miners. The second section examines the influence of war-time economic conditions in radicalising the miners of District 18 and the influence of the Bolshevik Revolution. In addition to previous traditions, new contemporary factors impelled District 18 to an even more revolutionary outlook, and one with a definite internationalist character. The third section considers the influence and role of the UMWA-D18 in the formation of the OBU. Many of the political positions taken by the miners were reflected in the newly-formed OBU, and this founding was a part of the "class moment." Finally, I analyse the decline of the OBU and the return of the UMWA-D-18 to the International. The main factors leading to the demise of OBU in the coal fields of Alberta were the actions of the "Quadruple Alliance."

²⁷ *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

Chapter 1

The radical socialism of the miners of District 18 demonstrated in 1919 was based on a history of industrial union organising, class struggle, and Marxian socialism stretching back over thirty years. From the Knights of Labor, through the Western Federation of Miners, and down to the United Miner Workers of America, there was a continual thread of industrial unionism in the coalfields. These successive labour organisations also brought Marxian socialism, which in Canada came to dominate the workers movement in British Columbia. It is important to note that these labour unions were all founded in the United States. The miners of District 18 had always had an international aspect. This international tradition of political and economic radicalism formed the basis for the miners' decision to join the OBU as a radical response to war-time inflation, government repression, and the Russian Revolution.

The roots of the United Mine Workers of America were in the Knights of Labor. In 1869, a small group of garment workers, under the leadership of Uriah S. Stephens, met in a hall in Philadelphia and founded the Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labor.²⁸ The following year Stephens was elected as the first Grand Master Workman of the Knights. By 1873, there were eight local assemblies in Philadelphia, and by 1877 there were eleven district assemblies covering West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana. The Knights did not achieve their explosive growth until some of the more secretive aspects of the organisation were dropped. For example, no member or section of the Knights could make themselves or the name of the organisation known in public. The reason for such secrecy was to protect the organisation against anti-union employers, who refused to hire Knights. At the General Assembly at St. Louis in 1879, the future leader of the Knights, Terrence V. Powderly, moved that a district or local assembly be allowed to chose to make its name known publicly, but not that of other locals. It was not until 1881, when Powderly was the Grand Master Workman, that the name of the Order could be made public.²⁹

The Knights entered Canada in the early 1880s as the earliest labour organisation to go beyond the craft union practices of the time. Hamilton workers, who were also the centre of the nine-hour struggle in Canada, established the first locals. The Knights then established locals in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, Calgary, and as far west as Vancouver Island. Craft unions of the period organised only by specific trade and would not organise women or unskilled labourers. The Knights' goal was to organise men and women and organised skilled and unskilled labourers into either mixed or specific trade assemblies. The Knights also developed a critique of the developing monopoly capitalism, and argued that the

²⁸ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 121.

²⁹ Douglas R. Kennedy, *The Knights of Labor in Canada* (London: University of Western Ontario, 1956) 1, 12-13.

organisation of the working class should be global.³⁰ Thus, they broke with the mainstream of the labour movement which was dominated by craft unionism, and were early forerunners of industrial unionism. By the mid 1890s, the Knights were in decline and would not continue as an organised body into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, many Knights would continue to be active in such organisations as the Western Federation of Miners and socialist groups.³¹

The Knights were especially active among coal miners in western Canada and may have been the first organised body among the miners of British Columbia and Alberta. As early as 1883, the Knights organised miners in Nanaimo, but they were eventually defeated because employers, who opposed their goals, began to discriminate against all men who joined the Knights.³² Later, Calgary Local Assembly 9787 of the Knights of Labor attempted to set up an assembly of miners at Canmore in 1888. The Knights failed to do so and their efforts only affected a small minority of the miners. Allan Seager argues that because of employer discrimination and the Knights' small membership, "unionism exercised little power in the emergent coal industry."³³ Although the Knights were ultimately unsuccessful, they did lay a basis for the Western Federation of Miners' (WFM) drive to unionise western Canadian miners.

The Western Federation of Miners, the next union to organise miners in Alberta, was founded in 1893 by "metal miners in Butte, Montana" and they welcomed all miners, "including the coal diggers." This demonstrates the WFM's early commitment to industrial union organising.³⁴ In previous months there had been an open war between miners and mine owners, strikebreakers, and Pinkertons in Idaho. The miners won their strike, but the armed fight also ended with the entry of federal troops and the arrest of union members and sympathisers. While in prison, workers held discussions about the strike and its results. They concluded that "better organization and more complete unity...were essential for continued advances."³⁵ Some of these men traveled to Butte after being released to confer with miners there. Recognising the help that they had received from other unions

³⁰ Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1987), 57-59, 96-97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 168, 210.

³² Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 10.

³³ Allen Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: the Alberta Coal Miners, 1905-1945," PhD. diss., York University 1981, 202.

³⁴ Priscilla Long, *Where The Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 203.

³⁵ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States Volume II: From the Founding of the American Federation of Labor to the Emergence of American Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 232-234.

and the strength resulting from labor unity, several miners' unions held a conference to form a new miners' federation in Butte in May 1893.³⁶

When it moved into Canada, the WFM maintained organisational connections to its American counterpart. The Canadian WFM mirrored American developments and was intimately affected by the union's fortunes in the United States. In 1895, the WFM formed their first Canadian local in Rossland, B.C. and in 1897, the union made its first entry into Canadian coal mines in the Lethbridge area. From there, the WFM "rapidly expanded" over the next four years organising seven locals in British Columbia and Alberta.³⁷ During the late 1890s, the WFM found itself in a heated battle with the governor of Idaho, Frank Steunenberg, and mine owners, which Seager characterised as "a civil war in the Coeur d'Alenes."³⁸ This struggle led to a conflict between the union and the American Federation of Labor (AF of L), which resulted in the WFM's departure from the organisation and propelled the union towards socialism. The AF of L, unlike the Knights and the WFM, strictly adhered to organising along craft lines and opposed socialism and organising unskilled workers. At its 1902 convention, the WFM declared its support for the Socialist Party of America (SPA). The Canadian locals followed suit and supported the Socialist Party of British Columbia.³⁹ However, with harsh repression in the United States and legislation restricting organising in Canada, the WFM ceased organising in Alberta in 1903. The WFM began to concentrate on metal mines in British Columbia and pulled out of coal mines, inviting the UMWA, the next union to organise in the Alberta coal fields, to take over the abandoned areas. The Crow's Nest Valley District 7 then "seceded" from the WFM under the leadership of Frank Sherman and reorganised itself as District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America on 9 November 1903.⁴⁰

Like its predecessors, the United Mine Workers of America began in the United States. The UMWA was itself originally founded by the Knights of Labor and other miners' unions. Even though the Knights were in an overall decline in North America, new assemblies among miners continued to be formed in the United States; the miners also tried, unsuccessfully, in 1883 to create a national union.⁴¹ Other failed attempts at unity and factional splits continued, but by 1890, the miners had achieved a measure of unity amongst themselves.⁴² The miners' section of the Knights had pressed the central leadership repeatedly for the creation

³⁶ Ibid., 234.

³⁷ Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 17-19.

³⁸ 32. Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 202.

³⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 203; Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 27.

⁴¹ Joseph E. Finley, *The Corrupt Kingdom: The Rise and Fall of the United Mine Workers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 22-23.

⁴² Makoto Takamiya, *Union Organization and Militancy: Conclusions from a Study of the United Mine Workers of America 1940-1974* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1978), 20.

of a distinct miners' assembly and in May 1886 they formed the National Trade Assembly 135, a national Knights of Labor assembly of miners. The year before, the National Federation of Miners and Mine Laborers had been created. After repeated arguing over jurisdiction and organisational rivalry, the two bodies put aside their differences and united in January 1890 to create the United Mine Workers of America. The UMWA had the curious condition of being affiliated to both the Knights of Labor and its opponent, the AF of L. After the Knights ceased to exist, the UMWA became associated solely with the AF of L, eventually becoming its largest affiliated body.⁴³

The Knights of Labor's membership and activities were the starting point for the miners' radical tradition. The UMWA was a direct organisational outgrowth of the Knights of Labor in the United States, which began a tradition of industrial unionism and a critique of capitalism in the Alberta coal fields that would continue after its demise. Though the newly-formed UMWA was just as moderate as the AF of L, District 18, which would include the miners of BC and Alberta, had the previous radical traditions of its region. Seager notes that when the union went on strike in Lethbridge in 1906, many of the men who walked out had been there for twenty years before.⁴⁴ Even though the UMWA was more moderate than the preceding miners' union, people and conditions existed that would lead District 18 to continue the radical traditions of the miners.

From 1905 on, UMWA-D18 and its leader Frank Sherman became increasingly radical. In 1906, at the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC), Sherman seconded a resolution labeling the Liberal and Conservative parties as "merely committees of the capitalist class."⁴⁵ In the 1908 federal election Sherman ran as a Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) candidate in Calgary. At the last convention that he attended in February 1909, before his death, Sherman convinced delegates to agree to disaffiliate from the TLC, the Canadian counterpart to the AFL, and realign themselves with the WFM. Sherman also persuaded them to invite the Chinese and Japanese miners in the area to join the union. That same convention also passed a resolution on "public ownership and industrial democracy."⁴⁶ Sherman's secretary also happened to be Honoré Jaxon: a former member of the K of L, a former organiser for the WFM, a member of the Socialist Party of Canada, and also the former secretary for Louis Riel.⁴⁷ Jaxon's presence in District 18 demonstrates the continuity with the older radicalism of the Knights and the miners' strong support for the socialism of the SPC.

⁴³ Long, *Where The Sun Never Shines*, 148-151.

⁴⁴ Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 210.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 231, 236.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 237; Bright, *Limits of Labour*, 73; Donald B. Smith, *Honoré Jaxon: Prairie Visionary* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2008), 70-72, 76-77.

In December 1904, the Socialist Party of British Columbia united with other socialist organisations across Canada to form the Socialist Party of Canada. The SPC was an Marxian impossibilist party because it believed that the reform of capitalism was not feasible and that revolution was the only goal worth working for.⁴⁸ Though it was a national body, its largest bases of support were in British Columbia and Alberta, especially among the miners. In 1909, SPC member Charles O'Brien won a seat in the Alberta Provincial Legislature, gaining 555 votes or 37.83% of the total vote.⁴⁹ The SPC had nominated O'Brien to run in "Rocky Mountain, a miners' constituency." He was supported by District 18, because he focused on the difficult conditions that miners faced. The miners of UMWA-D18 considered O'Brien to be their "representative in the Alberta Legislature" because, as the only SPC MLA in Alberta, he promoted socialism and improved the condition of the miners.⁵⁰ O'Brien's comments in 1910, during the debate on the Great Waterways Railway Company, demonstrated his radical stand in the legislature. Commenting on the question of how much the government would pay to Great Waterways for a construction project, he remarked that his class did not care how much the government spent, "but when it has once been taken from us, and is in your possession, it matters not to us how you spend it or divide it among yourselves, our mission is to stop you from getting it."⁵¹ The SPC and O'Brien believed that the question of how much a government spent was a capitalist issue and not a working-class issue. Workers, according to the SPC, had no interest in managing capitalism, but only in overthrowing it. Thus, O'Brien consistently reminded the legislature that he was a member of the SPC, "whose mission it is to point out the inevitable ultimate collapse of this present commercial system, and to seek to establish in its place a system whereby the man who produces shall receive the full product of his toil."⁵² His language reflected the *Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada*, which was O'Brien's election literature along with the SPC's paper, *The Western Clarion*. The miners of District 18 thus wholeheartedly supported the anti-reformist socialism of the SPC.⁵³

District 18's radicalism was evident in its clash with the UMWA international leadership during a strike in 1909. In 1908, District 18 opposed the new contract with the Coal Operators Association, because according to Frank Sherman and the other officers of the union, it undermined their previous gains. The miners re-

⁴⁸ McCormack, *Reformers*, 54.

⁴⁹ Peter Newell, *The Impossibilists: A Brief Profile of the Socialist Party of Canada* (London: Athena Press, 2008), 371.

⁵⁰ McCormack, *Reformers*, 62, 64.

⁵¹ F. Blake, "The Proletarian in Politics: The Socialist Position As defended by C. M. O'Brien, M. L. A. in the Alberta Legislature, 1910," <<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/proletarian.in.politics.htm>> (accessed March 2009).

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

fused to sign the new deal because it did not include higher wages and an automatic dues check-off as the previous contract had.⁵⁴ The events that followed would presage the future conflicts about the founding of the One Big Union. The international president of the UMWA, Thomas Lewis, ordered D18 to accept the new contract. Sherman refused and declared that "if Lewis, or any of his other associates butt into this business it's the last of the International in Canada." Sherman used the word "International," to refer to the American leadership of the UMWA.⁵⁵ In response to District 18's declared independence, Lewis again ordered the union to follow his decision and sent to Alberta a member of the UMWA International Board "with the authority to act."⁵⁶ Sherman and the leadership were not moved and called an unsanctioned strike that was later denounced by the UMWA international leadership, which controlled the strike fund. Initially the miners support for the strike was strong, but with mine operators and the international leadership opposed to the strike, and with the lack of funds, support began to decline. Out of a membership of over 5,000, a minority of 253 dissidents in District 18 called on the leadership to follow Lewis' decisions. Based on the support of the majority, Jaxon and the new president of District 18, Robert Evans, shored up the support of the various locals. Based on the high level of support and militancy, Jaxon recommend secession from the UMWA. In the end, the federal government was called in to mediate through the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA). The strike ended and District 18 was compelled to sign the thoroughly unpopular contract.⁵⁷

When Sherman spoke of the end of the "International" in Canada, he did not imply a turn to a nationalist outlook and a break with all international connections. Sherman was an SPC member and had run as a candidate in the 1908 federal election. Thus he would have promoted the SPC's programme and *The Western Clarion* as election literature because all SPC candidates "were expected to take their stand in political campaigns," on the basis of the party's programme.⁵⁸ That programme affirmed the SPC's "allegiance to and support of the principles and program of the international revolutionary working class."⁵⁹ Also, the SPC never affiliated to the Socialist International as the Socialist Party of America had done. The SPC did not argue for reforms in its *Manifesto* and thus considered both the Second International and the SPA to be reformist organisations.⁶⁰ Sherman believed that the class struggle was global in scope and demanded unity. This was further demonstrated in his call for rejoining the WFM, an American-based organisation.

⁵⁴ Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 240.

⁵⁵ Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 67-68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁷ Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country," 240-242; Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 71-74.

⁵⁸ J. M. Milne, "History of the Socialist Party of Canada, 1973," <<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/historym.pdf>> (accessed April 2009).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Newell, *The Impossibilists*, 76.

When Sherman and Jaxon spoke of an end of the "International," they specifically meant an end to the influence and power of the international UMW leadership because of its bureaucratic, reformist outlook. This would not be the last time such sentiment would be voiced in District 18.

Radicalism and class consciousness, then, had a long history among the miners of western Canada. The Knights initiated organising all workers regardless of specific trade. The WFM and the UMWA continued this tradition of industrial unionism and sought to organise all waged workers in the industry. The Knights were also the earliest labour organisation in western Canada to develop a critique of capitalism and vision of a more harmonious future. Many former Knights went on to become members of other unions, such as the WFM and UMWA-D18, and socialist groups and parties where they continued to be critical of capitalism. It was this uncompromising socialism that found a large base of support in District 18. Between 1917 and 1920, this tradition of radicalism and class struggle would sharpen and merged with economic and political factors to produce a "class moment," when the working class revolted and revolution seemed to be in the air.

Chapter 2

The 22 August 1918 issue of the *District Ledger*, the official paper of UMWA-D18, featured an article on the question of a labour shortage in Canadian coal mines. A coal operator had recently charged that there were not enough labourers and that "Chinese coolies" should be brought in to make up the shortage. In reply to the charge, vice-president of District 18, Phillip M. Christophers, argued that there was no labour shortage. He argued that the real issue was that the miners' wages were too low and that the majority of their members were in a worse financial position than they had been in previous years. According to Christophers, "While the wages have risen, yet the cost of living has gone up out of all proportion to the increase in wages," and the men still faced constant layoffs.⁶¹ Christophers was not attacking Chinese labourers, but arguing that owners were using them to attempt to divide the workers and distract miners from the rising cost of living. The gap between wages and costs, and the concomitant rise in the cost of living, affected not only the miners of District 18, but all working-class people in Canada. These economic pressures combined with the influence of the Russian Revolution to radicalise sections of the working class in Canada and especially the miners. This increased radicalism built off of the miners' previous traditions of militant industrial unionism and socialism and impelled them towards the OBU as a revolutionary internationalist response to post-war conditions.

The years 1914-1915 were years of recession in Canada.⁶² The miners of District 18 were hit particularly hard because the majority of them worked for reduced hours and some worked only one day a week. The result was frequent demonstrations and protests against government inaction.⁶³ Yet the crisis in the mining industry had deeper structural causes, which were exacerbated by the economic downturn. According to David Bercuson, in 1914 Alberta mines alone "contributed more than 27 million percent of total Canadian production."⁶⁴ As a result, the industry suffered constantly from over-production, which meant that miners rarely worked steadily through the year. This changed with the outbreak of WWI. The demand for coal increased dramatically in order to "fuel troop and freight trains" and to "power the smelters." Coal production almost doubled and thousands of men made their way to the mines.⁶⁵ The war increased production in all sectors of the economy, as well as the demand for labour. Immigration also declined from more than 402,000 new immigrants in 1913 to about 48,000 in 1916. Combined with enlistment, this meant that "unemployment effectively

⁶¹ *District Ledger*, 22 August 1918.

⁶² J.C. Herbert Emery, Douglas O'ram, and Kenneth Norrie, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, Fourth Edition (United States: Thomson Nelson, 2008), 264.

⁶³ Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 90.

⁶⁴ David Jay Bercuson, "Introduction," in *Alberta's Coal Industry 1919*, ed. David Jay Bercuson (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1978), viii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, x.

ended by 1915; in much of the country, there was a serious shortage of workers by mid-war."⁶⁶ With the new opportunities for employment and the first flush of patriotism, class cleavages in Canada were put into temporary abeyance.⁶⁷

As in other countries, class harmony did not last throughout the war. Between 1916 and 1917, "rising inflation as well as the obvious wealth being acquired by some employers" resulted in increasing working-class anger.⁶⁸ Gregory Kealey's analysis of the Mathers Commission, shows that workers across Canada were upset by war-time conditions, which led more workers to believe that, in his words, "the capitalist system could not be reformed, it must be transformed. Production for profit must cease; production for use must begin."⁶⁹ High on workers' list of grievances were items such as "bad housing, runaway inflation, high food prices," and low wages.⁷⁰ These issues had a very real material basis. Kealey argues "real wage rates declined significantly during the First World War" and that a "national index compiled by Bertram and Percy shows a low of 85.5 in 1917 (1913 equals 100)."⁷¹ In response, workers raised the demand for the "conscription of wealth" and carried out a record amount of local and general strikes across the country.⁷²

The cost of living was an important issue in the coal industry. At the UMWA-D18's 16th Annual Convention, Frank Wheatley, Board Member for Sub-District #4 of District 18, reported the recent findings of the Cost of Living Commission. The commission itself had been set up by the "Order of the Director of Coal Operations, dated June 27th 1917" and "confirmed by Order-in-Council P.C. No. 2386, dated August 25th 1917."⁷³ The commission was made up of three people: a representative from the UMWA, the coal operators, and a member of the Canadian government who served as chairman. It investigated the prices of basic necessary expenditures for a family of five, such as food, coal, rent, and clothing in mining areas and in towns and cities like Calgary.⁷⁴ Its mandate was to "Inquire into the cost of living as to the increase or decrease thereof, and adjust the wage scale as may be found necessary by such increase or decrease."⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Emery, et. al., *A History*, 262.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁶⁹ Kealey, "1919," 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12, 14-15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷² Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, "The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada," in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 21-22; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 168.

⁷³ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 104.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

Wheatley submitted to the convention the commission's three reports for three successive periods. The commission found that the cost of living had increased for each successive period: 20 cents per day for the first period; 25 cents per day for the second; and 13 cents a day for the third.⁷⁶ The increase in costs should have translated into an increase in wages. Even the representative of the coal operators, W. McNeil, who argued that the average size of a family was not five, but less than three, agreed that wages should be increased to help workers cope with the increasing cost of living.⁷⁷ While the commission had been created in 1917, the following year Christophers had complained that wages were still not keeping up with the inflation. Wages did rise, but they did not match the increased cost of living. Another miner, W. Clapham, repeated the same charge in testimony to the Alberta Coal Mining Industry Commission of 1919. In response to Commissioner W. F. McNeil's question that "there were certain increases granted on account of the high cost of living. Are you aware of that?" W. Clapham, president of the Wayne Local of UMWA-D18 stated, "I can't see 'em."⁷⁸ As far as the miners were concerned, then, the federal government's attempt to deal with inflation was not working. The pressure of shrinking real wages and government inability to address the issue helped to feed the miners discontent with the state and the economic system.

Economic concerns were not the only factors to have a radicalising effect on the miners of District 18 and the broader working class. International political events deepened the miners' radicalism and inspired them with hope. On 25 October 1917, the Russian Bolsheviks won the majority of seats in the Second Congress of Soviets and toppled the Provisional Government; an ecstatic congress then voted the Bolsheviks to leadership of the congress Presidium.⁷⁹ The next day in the congress amidst applause and cheers, V.I. Lenin mounted the rostrum and declared "We shall now proceed to construct the Socialist order!"⁸⁰ Although John Reed's famous account of the Russian Revolution would not be published until 1919, scattered news of the events soon reached Canada.

The effect of that news on many workers was, according to Ian Angus, "electrifying...For generations Marxists had been talking about proletarian revolution: now one was actually taking place. Marxism had been raised from theory to practice."⁸¹ This feeling was strong among different labour and radical circles in Can-

⁷⁶ Ibid., 102; The three periods were from 1 December 1917 to 1 April 1918; from 1 April 1918 to August 1918; and from 1 August 1918 to 1 December 1918.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁸ David Jay Bercuson, ed., *Alberta's Coal Industry 1919* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1978), 112.

⁷⁹ Alexander Rabinowitch, "The Bolsheviks Come To Power," in *The Russian Revolution: the Essential Readings*, ed. Martin Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2001), 124-125, 131, 136.

⁸⁰ John Reed, *Ten Days That Shook the World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 129.

⁸¹ Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), 19.

ada, with "Labourites, social democrats, Wobblies, and socialists," heralding the Bolshevik Revolution as a new great event in history and many socialists began to emulate the Bolsheviks as they understood them. The word Bolshevik (or Bolshevikiki) itself became equated in the minds of both the political left and right in Canada as a symbol of true revolutionary intent.⁸² However, according to McCormack, Lenin's "theoretical work was virtually unknown in Canada."⁸³ The very first work by any Bolshevik leader "to be widely read in Canada was Leon Trotsky's *War and the International*," which had appeared in Canada in early 1918.⁸⁴ Radical workers, then, were uplifted by the revolutionary "good news," but only had a general and sometimes confused idea of what was happening in Russia and what the doctrines of Bolshevism were. This led to debates and splits within the political left.

As the largest group on the left in Canada, the Socialist Party of Canada was not immune to debates about Bolshevism. The 1 October 1919 issue of *Red Flag*, an SPC paper, featured an article replying to another piece in the *Western Clarion* on the topic of the Russian Revolution. In the *Red Flag* John Tyler took the author of the *Clarion* piece, F.S.F., to task for uncritically praising the Bolshevik application of the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat." Based on his understanding of the Russian situation Tyler asserted that "It is impossible to have Socialism in a country where small production is general as in the case of Russia" and thus "you cannot get Socialism by Dictatorship of the Proletariat."⁸⁵ Not all members of the SPC were enthusiastic about the Bolsheviks, but support for them was certainly broad enough in the party to lead to a positive endorsement of the Russian Revolution in the 1920 preface to the fifth edition of the SPC's *Manifesto*. The preface unambiguously stated that "The Russian Revolution has been carried through and the working class of Russia are masters of that country." It stated further that "It is a working class achievement and harbinger of the accomplishment possible when the workers take control of life."⁸⁶ Although the Russian Revolution sometimes provoked debate among radical workers, the majority were clearly inspired, motivated, and unified by the event. The miners of District 18, as one of the SPC's major bases of support, were also impressed and invigorated by Russian events.

The actions of the delegates to the UMWA-D18 16th Annual Convention demonstrated the growing influence of the Russian Revolution. On the first day of the convention Christophers gave his report as vice-president of District 18. He noted

⁸² McCormack, *Reformers*, 140-142; McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 422-423; Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 21.

⁸³ McCormack, *Reformers*, 140.

⁸⁴ Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 21.

⁸⁵ John Tyler, "Is it the Dictatorship of the Proletariat?" *Red Flag*, 1 October 1919 <<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/redflag.19191001.dictatorship.of.proletariat.htm>> (accessed March 2009).

⁸⁶ "Preface to the fifth edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada, 1920," <<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/manifesto.preface.1920.htm>> (accessed March 2009).

that "We have watched with utmost sympathy, fundamental changes in the system of government in some European countries...it may be well in shaping our future policy in this district to keep in mind what is happening in other parts of the world."⁸⁷ He went on to argue that the "Dominion and provincial governments" had no plans for reconstruction that would adequately deal with the unemployment problem. In his view, only a shortening of the hours of work could solve the problem, but this would only be accomplished by "the nationalization of all essential industries and the consequent overthrow of the present system of profits."⁸⁸

Christophers was not alone in his demands for radical economic transformation. In a discussion of the relationship between returning veterans and the labour movement, Board Member Alex Susnar claimed that the present system was "liable to collapse."⁸⁹ He speculated that change might come to Canada peacefully, but doubted that it could come "without bloodshed." He informed the delegates "I do know in Russia it did not come about" peacefully. To underline his argument he informed the convention that they should understand that they were radical.⁹⁰ While there was consensus on the need for change, there were delegates who disagreed that it had to come by using force. At one point Delegate Berford praised the Russian Revolution, but added that improvement could be achieved by evolution and not revolution, and that the workers needed only to pressure the government. In reply Delegate Cacchioni denied that evolution would not work; rather it had to be revolution, "the same as changed the old system of slavery of the Romans."⁹¹ In spite of these differences, though, no delegates expressed opposition to socialism or a lack of support for the Russian Revolution. Indeed, they had invited Joseph Knight, an SPC representative, to address the convention.⁹² Delegates approved of Knight's comment that,

it is for us to say the best for Bolshevism when they sneer it down and I say you only have to point your finger to Russia you here in Calgary, that it is a fact, it is a mighty achievement and by working hard among the fellow men that they would begin to realize that they must take similar steps themselves. [APPLAUSE]⁹³

⁸⁷ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 30.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁹¹ Ibid., 89.

⁹² Knight was later a member of the OBU Central Committee of five, a future OBU organiser for eastern Canada, and a Communist Party of Canada leader. He was also was the first official Canadian communist delegate to the Third Congress of the Comintern and the First Congress of the Profintern. See William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Great Britain: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 23, 33, 37, 44.

⁹³ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 145.

The miners of District 18 saw the Bolshevik experience as the height of radicalism and as a beacon. To refer to oneself as a partisan of that revolution was to show off one's revolutionary credentials; it became the new standard for who was really "radical." The revolution was also a new potent proof of the possibility of socialism succeeding. No longer did socialist workers need to limit themselves to discussing theoretical literature; they could now point to Russia where, as the SPC would argue, the Bolsheviks had successfully, "put down a dozen counter-revolutions of formidable character, which were strongly supported by foreign powers, have driven several foreign armies from their territories."⁹⁴ For the miners it was an empowering inspiration, because a new era in human civilisation seemed to be opening. Radical workers everywhere felt enthused and energised at the possibility for revolution. The influence of the Russian Revolution, then, combined with the miners' present anger at inflation and District 18's traditional radicalism, and brought their anger and radicalism to higher level.

Delegates expressed their union's international outlook not only by defending Bolshevism, but also by attacking the international UMWA leadership at the convention. They did so in terms that echoed Frank Sherman's opposition ten years previously at the time. At the time of the convention the UMWA leadership was promoting a policy that all members in North America should receive a copy of the *United Mine Workers Journal* and for that purpose a special fund had been created to finance it. Many delegates rose to denounce the paper in the strongest terms. One delegate called it a "patriotic rag" and Wheatley called it "a real capitalist paper...the dirtiest stinking rag that ever came into existence," adding that he no longer wanted to receive it.⁹⁵ Susnar charged that it was worse than the *Wall Street Journal* in its position on labour and, frustrated with the power of the international UMWA leadership's decisions over local matters, he declared "I say let the International go to hell! [APPLAUSE]"⁹⁶

Delegate McRoberts argued, though, that protesting at the "UMWA International convention wouldn't be much good, because it is run by an electric mind, it is run by a machine."⁹⁷ Susnar also complained that despite workers' efforts at improving the UMWA "the whole machine has again been elected."⁹⁸ Delegate Smith made clear what this "machine" was by describing his experience at previous UMWA International Conventions. In his opinion he could see no difference in the policy of the UMWA over the last ten years, because "It was a machine run clique from beginning to end; from International President to right down to the organiz-

⁹⁴ "Preface to the fifth edition of the Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada, 1920," <<http://www.worldsocialism.org/canada/manifesto.preface.1920.htm>> (accessed March 2009).

⁹⁵ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 117-123.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

ers...They were all workers of the clique."⁹⁹ The miners of District 18 clearly had an international outlook and a commitment to international solidarity and cooperation. Their problem was not international connections, it was the imposition of, in their view, a bureaucratic, class collaborationist leadership. To stress that District 18 was not nationalist in outlook, Delegate Potter stated "We don't want Canadian Labour politics or Canadian education, we want world wide spirit for everybody and we want that spirit all over the American Continent and Canada."¹⁰⁰

This spirit of international solidarity was one aspect of the "class moment" that occurred in Canada between roughly 1917 and 1920. National borders had not disappeared, but they were considered irrelevant in the long-term in the face of the world-wide rising of the working class. For District 18, the question of the international class struggle had become an important concern along with war-induced inflation. The growing gap between wages and the cost of living increased the miners' anger at the federal government and mine owners. Yet the miners saw their struggle against capitalism at home as part of an international struggle. They saw themselves as one national contingent among many. The miners' traditions of socialism and class struggle became infused with the new international and national factors. As the patriotism of the early war years waned, radical class consciousness and class cohesion increasingly came to the fore as determining factors in the Canadian working-class revolt and culminated in the formation of the OBU.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 127.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 127.

Chapter 3

At the end of World War I, war-time inflation, government repression, and the Russian Revolution moved hundreds of thousands of workers into mass strikes and revolutions across the capitalist world.¹⁰¹ The Canadian working class was no different. In the case of the miners of District 18, their traditional radicalism combined with their present concerns to place them in the forefront of the OBU. As such, many of the political positions of District 18, such as the need to subvert ethnic hierarchies within the working class, were reflected in the resolutions of the Western Labor Conference (WLC). The WLC, and the OBU that it created, were expressions of the "class moment" in Canada, which stretched from 1917 to 1920. With their preponderant influence in the OBU's outlook, and as its numerically largest contingent, District 18 was the backbone of the new organization

The One Big Union was created at the 13-15 March 1919 Western Labor Conference held in Calgary, Alberta. Approximately 250 delegates "representing the official trade-union bodies of Western Canada" attended the meeting.¹⁰² The impetus for the conference was a split in the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada (TLC) over various issues, including the Dominion government's decisions to introduce conscription. At the 1917 TLC convention in Ottawa, a significant radical minority opposed the TLC executive's acquiescence in the government's policy on conscription. While a majority of the radical delegates were from western Canada, many were from eastern provinces.¹⁰³ The split between radicals and conservatives came to a head at the 1918 TLC convention in Quebec.

However, the radical westerners and easterners were still in a minority and they repeatedly lost the vote on the resolutions that they presented. They also lost every election for executive positions. For example, TLC president James Watters, a socialist from British Columbia, was replaced by Tom Moore, a conservative from Ontario. Likewise, a motion to "release all conscientious objectors from prison was narrowly defeated 99 to 90."¹⁰⁴

In response to these losses, Dave Rees, socialist and member of District 18, formed a caucus of western delegates in order to plan a meeting of western radicals that would "coordinate and strengthen" their position before the next TLC convention. Since radicals were a minority in the TLC, they came to the conclusion "that the west should send more delegates" to national conventions.¹⁰⁵ The

¹⁰¹ Peterson, "The One Big Union," 63.

¹⁰² T. E. Julian, *Aims of the Strike Leaders as Set Forth in the Report of Proceedings of the Western Canada Labor Conference Held at Calgary, Alberta March 13, 14, 15, 1919* (Vancouver: s.n., 1919), 1; Norman Penner, "Introduction," in *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of the Winnipeg General Strike*, ed. Norman Penner (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1973), xiii.

¹⁰³ Kealey, "1919," 35-36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-38; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 68-69; Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked," 227.

¹⁰⁵ Kealey, "1919," 36; Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked," 227.

proposed meeting was preceded by the very radical Alberta Federation of Labor (AFL) Convention in Medicine Hat in January, the UMWA-D18 16th Annual Convention in February, and the British Columbia Federation of Labor Convention, which was also held in Calgary shortly before the WLC.¹⁰⁶ These meetings quickened the pace of class cohesion and radicalisation already under way by passing increasingly radical resolutions promoting revolution. When the WLC opened, improving the position of western radicals in the TLC was no longer on the agenda. Instead delegates seceded from the TLC and set up a new trade union centre, the One Big Union.

To some extent the WLC was a formal culmination of the ferment among the miners of District 18, as well as the broader working class. War-time conditions and the Russian Revolution informed the decisions at the conference. The desire for greater class solidarity and unity, and the demand for revolution were thus the major themes at the meeting.

The conference passed resolutions of a pronounced revolutionary character. Resolution No. 5 declared "that the system of industrial soviet control by selection of representatives from industries is more efficient and of greater political value than the present political system of government by selection from district." Delegates agreed that "This convention declares its full acceptance of the principle of 'Proletarian Dictatorship' as being absolute and efficient for the transformation of capitalist private property to communal wealth."¹⁰⁷ The description of the new Russian government, while close to actual events, shows a lack of knowledge on the complicated situation in Russia. Their description of the new Soviet government follows the language and conception of early American socialist Daniel De Leon's Socialist Industrial Unionism programme, one which he had been propounding even before he helped found the IWW in 1905. In De Leon's conception of revolution, the political party would lose all relevance upon gaining power and industrial unions would then take over the function of government.¹⁰⁸ E.T. Kingsley was the theoretician of the SPC, whose members formed the leadership of the WLC and the OBU. He was a former organiser of De Leon's Socialist Labor Party (SLP) in the United States. The SPC was a direct organisational descendent of the SLP. According to McCormack the Marxism that Kingsley taught in the SPC was De Leon's pre-1900 impossibilism. Kingsley's writing shaped the politics of the first and second generations of the SPC.¹⁰⁹ This explains the language used at the WLC, which has led more than one historian to incorrectly assert that the OBU was syndicalist, and consequently, apolitical and against all political parties¹¹⁰ The delegates at the convention revealed their in-

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 228-229.

¹⁰⁷ Julian, *Aims of the Strike Leaders*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel De Leon, *Fifteen Questions Answered by Daniel De Leon*, 13th ed. (New York: New York Labor News Company, 1961), 65-72.

¹⁰⁹ McCormack, *Reformers*, 26-27, 60-61.

¹¹⁰ Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked," 233; Bright, *Limit of Labour*, 154.

ternationalism by sending "fraternal greetings to the Russian Soviet Government, the Spartacans in Germany," and recognised the Bolsheviks as having "won first place in the history of the class struggle."¹¹¹

The resolutions passed at the WLC reflected radical workers' new understanding of politics and government. Echoing District 18's recent convention, Resolution No. 22, moved by a District 18 local, stated that the six hour day demand was "only of transitory importance" and that the goal was ownership of "all the tools and instruments of production by the toiling masses themselves."¹¹² Resolution No. 2 held that "in view of the foregoing, we place ourselves also on record as being opposed to the innocuity of labor leaders lobbying parliament for palliatives which do not palliate."¹¹³

This demonstrates again the influence and language of De Leon. More importantly though, this resolution led T.E. Julian, a Vancouver architect and publisher of a 1919 pamphlet that attacked the WLC, to inaccurately argue that the OBU was apolitical.¹¹⁴ In the 22 August 1918 issue of the *District Ledger*, an article detailed a recent meeting in Fernie featuring TLC president James Watters. Watters denounced profiteering and described the role of the TLC: "The field of the congress was legislative. It represented the entire body of organized labor in Canada in seeking for the passing of improved legislation or in the prevention of legislation being pursued which would be inimical to workers."¹¹⁵ The OBU was, therefore, not apolitical. Rather, the workers who joined the OBU were tired of lobbying to plead for help from the federal government that was unresponsive. The OBU was clearly advancing a new definition of politics and government, one no longer limited to simple electoralism and lobbying.

The WLC and the OBU were not apolitical and not against the idea of a political party. They were against lobbying and setting up a new political party to replace the SPC, and they were also in favour of replacing the contemporary capitalist state with the "Proletarian Dictatorship," an industrial Soviet-based state. However, many of the resolutions passed at the WLC have led some historians to conclude that the OBU was syndicalist. Other historians, such as Gerald Friesen, have analysed the theory and practice of the SPC to argue that the OBU was not syndicalist. Bercuson argues that the WLC had an "anti-electoral bent" and further that it was in outright opposition to "labour parliamentary activity."¹¹⁶ David Bright similarly argues that because of the defeat of the political action resolution,

¹¹¹ Julian, *Aims of the Strike Leaders*, 5.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹⁵ *District Ledger*, 22 August 1918.

¹¹⁶ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 86; Bercuson, "Western Labour Radicalism," 40.

the WLC set up the OBU "devoid of any political agenda."¹¹⁷ Gerald Friesen disagrees and argues that it was SPC members who made up the leadership of the WLC and the subsequent OBU. Unlike syndicalism "the SPC leaders advocated short term reforms, sought to avoid outbreaks of violence, and assumed the continued relevance of their political party."¹¹⁸ The AFL had introduced a resolution calling for uniting "labour and kindred organizations in a homogenous political party, believing that a united labour party is a necessary adjunct to the development of our industrial organization."¹¹⁹

As Friesen has argued though, the SPC "had long boasted of their pure revolutionary outlook," and members were "required to pass an examination in Marxist doctrine before admission."¹²⁰ It is understandable, then, that a resolution calling for an all-embracing labour party was defeated at the WLC because it implied either the destruction of the SPC as an independent body or unity with reformists. SPC members did not call for the dissolution of the party until the much later debate on joining the Comintern, and the very idea of unity with reformists had prevented the SPC from joining the Second International.¹²¹ Thus, the OBU had a political agenda, but one which was revolutionary and not reformist.

District 18's support for Bolshevism and revolution were not the only positions reflected in the WLC's resolutions. A concern for working-class solidarity across ethnic lines was revealed at District 18's 16th Annual Convention and at the WLC. Two key resolutions that passed at the WLC, with applause, were Resolutions No. 7 and No. 10. No. 7 stated that "the interest of all members of the international working class being identical, that this body of workers recognize no alien but the capitalist."¹²² No. 10 declared in part that "this congress declares all organized alien enemies worthy of protection of organized labor," and it also protested a recent resolution passed by the Trades and Labor Council of Lethbridge that urged the "government to deport all unnaturalized alien enemies."¹²³ These resolutions followed the language and sentiment of District 18's recent convention.

During the discussion on the relationship of the labour movement to the returning war veterans, Alex Susnar stated that "Today the great big corporations raise the great cry, also the press, the alien enemy, supposed alien enemy with the sole

¹¹⁷ Bright, *Limits of Labour*, 154.

¹¹⁸ Friesen, "'YOURS IN REVOLT'," 140.

¹¹⁹ Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1979), 71.

¹²⁰ Friesen, "'YOURS IN REVOLT'," 140.

¹²¹ Bright, *Limits of Labour*, 174-175.

¹²² Julian, *Aims of the Strike Leaders*, 6.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

purpose of dividing us as workers and making it into a complete division."¹²⁴ Referring to these divisive tactics, delegate Cacchioni argued that foreign workers such as the Chinese were brought in, not because they were "more satisfactory," but because they were paid less and did not know the English language and thus were prevented from uniting with the native workers. Hence, they faced greater exploitation and class unity was hindered.¹²⁵ In his view, the only manner of solving the problem was by "crushing the corporations and the system and let us and the returned soldier stand by as a brotherhood – because divided we fall and united we stand or vice versa."¹²⁶ Here again we see the essential elements in the "class moment." The miners did not ask the "foreign element," all non-Anglo-Saxon workers, to leave Canada, nor to abandon their culture. Instead, miners called on all workers, civilian or veteran, to recognise their class interests, in their resolutions. Nationality or race, then, were submerged but did not cease to exist. Radical workers recognised that race and nationality were still very real issues, and it was a sign of the sophistication of their approach that they did not deny these differences or reduce them merely to class. Rather, they called for equality and acceptance on a revolutionary class basis.

The convention also demonstrated the limits of the miners' radicalism. On the first day of the convention, Calgary Labour MLA Alex Ross opened the proceedings with a speech. Near the end of it he spoke briefly on the question of unemployment. He stated that it was important to "find employment for the men who went to France."¹²⁷ Yet he also asked "Don't we want to find work for those replaced by the returned soldier; the father of the boy who went, or the sister who found employment during his absence? Can she be thrown on the street?"¹²⁸ He argued that such a situation could give rise to "hatred between the soldier and the civilian," and that work was needed for all.¹²⁹ This was the only mention of female workers during the convention.

This could be explained by the fact that the miners in District 18 worked in an all-male profession. But, while Ross's comments were warmly received, no concrete action was taken to address the poor wages and working conditions of women. Thus, while ethnic hierarchies were challenged by the miners, gender hierarchies in the coal communities were not. This should caution us from interpreting the "class moment" in a uniform manner. While some distinctions within the class may be undermined, others may, in fact, remain untouched or even strengthened. Though the power imbalance between working-class women and men were not challenged by the miners, this does not speak against the usefulness of

¹²⁴ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 71.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

the "class moment" as a tool of analysis. Rather, it shows that just as a "class moment" may fail to consummate a desired unity between different sectors of the class, it may also fail to even reach out to other sectors in the working class. The utility of the "class moment," then, resides in showing the limits of the class experience.

The WLC did not actually launch the OBU. It set out its political and economic perspectives and it likewise set up a general structure for the organisation, a constitution, and a Central Committee of five.¹³⁰ It had also passed resolutions calling for an end to the Canadian federal government's ban of radical literature and imprisonment of political prisoners; District 18's convention had passed similar resolutions.¹³¹ The One Big Union was officially launched at "a small, closed meeting in Calgary on 4 June."¹³² Even before this meeting, though, the UMWA-D18 had made their move. At a meeting on 29 March 1919, the "District 18 board and policy committee voted 9 to 4 to "fall in line with the OBU."¹³³ Then, in April 1919, a referendum was held by officers of the OBU among District 18 locals. The referendum was on affiliation with the One Big Union and support for a general strike for definite demands. The "membership-in-good-standing of the locals which participated stood at 7,300; there were 5,519 "yes" votes on affiliation and 256 "no" votes."¹³⁴ The miners of UMWA-D18 had become the largest contingent in the OBU.

District 18 formed the backbone of the OBU not merely because it was the largest section numerically, but also because of past and present factors. The miners' long tradition of militant class struggle and uncompromising socialism were the historical basis for their enthusiastic support for the idea of One Big Union replacing the capitalist system. The radicalising effect of war-induced inflation and the Russian Revolution further invigorated the miners' traditions and gave them hope that revolution could succeed. Thus District 18's radical outlook was reflected in both their support for the OBU and in many of the resolutions of the WLC. Although gender hierarchies inside the working class were not challenged by radical workers, ethnic and national distinctions were. The OBU thus stands as the high point in the "class moment" which stretched from 1917 to 1920. This high point would end in the struggle with the Canadian opponents of revolution. As soon as District 18 joined the OBU, they immediately came under the fire of anti-OBU opponents.

¹³⁰ Julian, *Aims of the Strike Leaders*, 12-13.

¹³¹ Norman Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of the Winnipeg General Strike*, ed. Norman Penner (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel, 1973), 28; GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 133, 139.

¹³² Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked," 231.

¹³³ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 136.

¹³⁴ Allen Seager, "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-21," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985): 27.

Chapter 4

Shortly after the miners of District 18 joined the OBU, they began a strike to prevent wage reductions instituted by the director of coal operations. They were immediately opposed by what they themselves termed the "Triple Alliance" of the federal government, the mine operators, and the UMWA international leadership. This was, though, an informal alliance, because its members never sat down collectively to formulate their aims. Although they were not formally allied, these distinct groups all agreed that the OBU was not a legitimate union and should be removed. Another group that held the same outlook and objective was the media, especially the *Calgary Herald*. The *Herald* frequently distorted the aims of the OBU, denied the legitimacy of the miners' claims, and promoted nativism and anti-OBU sentiment in its columns. The miners never directly focused on the actions of the press and did not realise the existence of a "Quadruple Alliance."

The miners' were acutely aware of the role of newspapers and capitalists in inciting returned veterans to hate and attack in their words, the "enemy alien." While the miners did not respond to the media, they had tried to forge a unity with returned veterans at their 16th Annual Convention. However, they ultimately failed. Returned soldiers had formed a bond in the trenches. On the basis of their war experience, most veterans considered striking workers, immigrant or not, to be ungrateful radicals. Patriotism or lack of employment compelled many returned soldiers to take jobs as strikebreakers. It was violence on the part of these strikebreakers that defeated the miners' strike in Drumheller and spread terror throughout the coal fields. Thus, the "class moment," as an attempt to undermine the distinctions between civilian and veterans, was unsuccessful because veterans refused to identify with "alien" workers. Through the efforts of the "Quadruple Alliance" the miners of District 18 were pressured out of the OBU and forced to rejoin the UMWA.

The Canadian federal government directly opposed the miners after they joined the OBU, through the office of the director for coal operations in western Canada. In the three years before District 18's 16th Annual Convention, it had grown from 15 to 41 locals and this had made the creation of new sub-districts necessary.¹³⁵ This growth in class consciousness and class organisation was also matched by a rise in the class struggle. In 1918 the miners of District 18 organised at least sixty work stoppages over various disputes, an increase over the previous year.¹³⁶ In his brief report to the convention, District 18's Solicitor, H. Ostlund, remarked that "last year has been a most strenuous year for me in connection with legal affairs of the District, and I am safe in saying that in no particular year since District 18 was created has there been so much litigation in this Province."¹³⁷ This increased class struggle in the coal fields compelled the federal

¹³⁵ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 29, 32.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 60.

government to intervene. In 1917, the miners went on strike and halted the production of coal. The strike for higher wages to cope with inflation had violated their contract with the Western Coal Operators Association (WCOA), which "represented most coal operators in Alberta."¹³⁸ The government ended the dispute and appointed W.H. Armstrong, businessman and owner of his own contracting firm, as "director of coal operations for Western Canada with the power to determine wages, working conditions," regulate production, and settle disputes.¹³⁹

Shortly after becoming members of the OBU, the miners of District 18 went on strike because of a directive issued by Armstrong. This strike would soon move beyond the initial questions of wages and hours to the recognition of the OBU as the miners' bargaining agent. On 9 April 1919 new negotiations began between District 18 and the WCOA. The first issue was a directive from director Armstrong to institute an eight-hour workday, which had already been established in British Columbia in March. However, this workday also meant that most miners' wages would be reduced. Because of inflation, District 18 refused to accept this new change. By 15 April, WCOA agreed to pay "nine hours for eight hours work," but the men who worked more than nine hours a day, would continue to work at the reduced wage. The miners' were not satisfied with this amendment and the leadership held a strike vote. The majority of the men voted yes and the strike was set for 25 May.¹⁴⁰

District 18 now had a new leadership, one that was far more radical and militant than the previous executive and committed to revolution. Just before the strike vote an election in District 18 had occurred in which P.M. Christophers, a member of the SPC, defeated International Board member David Rees and became the new president of D18. Christophers was also a staunch supporter of the OBU movement.¹⁴¹ The union was now in a complicated situation. The leadership and the rank and file had already decided on affiliation with the OBU. They had also decided to go on strike against the wage reductions. However, by joining the OBU the miners of District 18 had seceded from the UMWA. Since they were no longer members of the international union, they would not receive moral or financial support for any strike action. With hostilities in Europe over, war production ceased and coal demand consequently fell. Further complicating the workers' situation, coal consumption regularly dropped in the spring. Operators could now afford to put off negotiating in a strike, because they were planning to lay-off sections of their workforce.

Two leaders of the OBU, W.A. Pritchard and Victor Midgley, refused to help the miners, because they claimed "they could not deal with questions of wages and hours" so early in the development in the OBU. Unlike the miners' leadership,

¹³⁸ Bercuson, "Introduction," x.

¹³⁹ Ibid, xi; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 67, 196-197.

¹⁴⁰ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 138; Ramsay, *The Noble Cause*, 123.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 123; Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 51; Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 114.

they felt that the newly-created OBU was not yet ready to engage in such an action.¹⁴² With the OBU leadership unwilling to provide assistance for the time being and no help expected from the international UMWA leadership, the former miners of District 18 were without organisational help in their strike.

The Winnipeg General strike took place after the miners joined the OBU, but before they went on strike. This event influenced the federal government's view of the OBU as a revolutionary threat to Canadian society and determined its opposition to the miners of District 18. On 15 May 1919, at 11:00 a.m. the great Winnipeg General Strike started and the city shut down.¹⁴³ The general strike was a response to two other separate strikes by building-trades unions and metal-trades workers. Both groups wanted to "bargain collectively through union structures of their own choice."¹⁴⁴

The construction and metal employers associations, however, refused and the strikers turned to the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC) for help. The WTLC decided to poll all of its member unions on holding a general sympathetic strike and won the support of the majority of workers. At its height, the general strike involved "36,000 workers out of a total population of 175,000."¹⁴⁵ The workers were now "essentially running the city."¹⁴⁶ This led to fears of a "soviet revolution" among Winnipeg's upper classes and the formation of a Citizen's Committee of 1000, made up of businessmen and professionals. It carried on an intense campaign of propaganda against the strike, especially promoting nativism and calling for the deportation of all "aliens."

Then, on 17 June, the leaders of the strike were arrested and on 21 June the strikers held a silent march to protest the arrests. The march was declared illegal by the mayor of Winnipeg and special police, the mounted police, the militia, and regular armed forces intervened with bats and small firearms. One person died and dozens were injured. By 25 June the strike was called off and the strike leaders were then put on trial.¹⁴⁷

The Winnipeg General Strike was only indirectly connected with the OBU. It was a part of the same international process of working-class radicalism. Some of the leaders of the strike were supporters of the OBU. Indeed the OBU was not even officially launched until 4 June. However, in the minds of the Citizen's Committee and the federal government, the general strike was a part of an OBU conspiracy which was plotting revolution with the goal to "establish a soviet form of govern-

¹⁴² Ibid., 138-139.

¹⁴³ Mitchell and Naylor, "The Prairies," 177.

¹⁴⁴ Penner, "Introduction," ix.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., ix-x.

¹⁴⁶ Mitchell and Naylor, "The Prairies," 183, 187.

¹⁴⁷ Penner, "Introduction," x-xi.

ment."¹⁴⁸ Senator Gideon Robertson was the first trade unionist to become the Minister of Labour, and he led the federal government's actions in defeating the strike. He was also an official in one of the international craft unions affiliated to the TLC. As a conservative craft-unionist he opposed the industrial-unionist OBU because he considered it to be a threat to the TLC, which was dominated by craft unions. He hoped that the defeat of the strike would weaken to the OBU.¹⁴⁹

Robertson asserted that "If [the Winnipeg General Strike] proves a failure the One Big Union movement intended to be launched at the Calgary convention on June 4 will I think also be a failure."¹⁵⁰ The TLC leadership was definitely against the secessionist OBU, and at one point it received \$50,000 from a group of businessmen who wanted help in promoting higher tariffs in the postwar period; some of those funds were later used to fund the TLC's fight against the OBU.¹⁵¹ As a radical threat to law and order, the federal government sought to encourage the failure of the OBU everywhere it appeared in Canada.

In early August District 18 officially became District No. 1, mining department of the One Big Union.¹⁵² As of July 1919 the strike was still in effect with no end in sight and according to P.M. Christophers, one reason for the continuing strike was because the federal government refused to negotiate with the OBU. Christophers wrote to the *Herald* asserting that "the statement of Coal Commissioner Armstrong, that the government does not dictate what organization the miners should belong to is misleading."¹⁵³ As evidence Christophers referred to comments in the *Coal Trade Bulletin* "to the effect that the commissioner will not do business except through International officers."¹⁵⁴ He finished by saying that "in order to test the feelings of the miners in District 18" he would resign and run for president against any opponent whom the "triple alliance may see fit" to run.¹⁵⁵ The federal government thus sought, through the agency of coal director Armstrong, to weaken the OBU by refusing to continue the negotiations for the new contract with the miners' chosen bargaining agent.

The federal government was not the only part of the "Triple Alliance" to reject continuing the new negotiations with the OBU. The mine owners also refused to

¹⁴⁸ Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919*, 3; Kenneth McNaught and David J. Bercuson, *The Winnipeg Strike: 1919* (Don Mills: Longman Canada Limited, 1974), 117-118.

¹⁴⁹ Penner, "Introduction," xix.

¹⁵⁰ Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919*, 232-233.

¹⁵¹ Desmond Morton and Terry Copp, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1984), 127.

¹⁵² *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

¹⁵³ *Calgary Herald*, 28 July 1919.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

work with District No. 1. According to an article in the 7 August 1919 issue of the *Calgary Herald*,

many large employers of labor have agreements with the international organizations...The general supposition is that where such agreements do exist, a man with a card from the OBU will to all intents and purposes be looked upon as non-union, and the employer cannot take him on without violating the pact made with the international organizations.¹⁵⁶

This position of the mine owners was incorrect though. As of 9 April 1919 negotiations had begun for a new contract between District 18 and WCOA, because the previous agreement had ended. Thus it was untrue that many of the employers had agreements with the UMWA. There was only one agreement that covered all of the coal fields in Alberta and that had come to an end. That is why Armstrong opened the negotiations for a new agreement. As one mine owner told the *Calgary Herald*, "One thing is for certain, and that is that we will have no dealings with the One Big Union nor officers of any organization representing that sentiment."¹⁵⁷ Mine owners did not negotiate with the miners because they already had an agreement with the UMWA, but because they were opponents of the OBU.

The international leadership of the UMWA was anti-socialist and they were against militant industrial unionism. The OBU stood for everything it opposed. The leadership was also unhappy with the formation of District No. 1, because the secession of the former miners of District 18 represented a loss of membership, and hence of funds and influence for the UMWA. The international UMWA leadership thus aimed to pressure the miners to rejoin the American-based union. Three UMWA international officers arrived in Calgary to meet with Commissioner Armstrong.¹⁵⁸ The *Herald* did not report the results of the meeting, but in the same issue another article reported that "The charter of District 18 of the United Mine Workers of America has been revoked."¹⁵⁹ The three officers reported that the whole District would be reorganised under their control. They also declared that Christophers, Browne, and the other officers no longer had positions in the UMWA and were now obliged to turn over the District's office, records, and finances to the three international officers.¹⁶⁰ The justification for such actions was that by joining the OBU, District 18 had forfeited membership in the international union. The miners now faced three very powerful opponents.

P.M. Christophers and Ed Browne remained defiant stating that "there had been a feeling now for years against International affiliation as at present constituted"

¹⁵⁶ *Calgary Herald*, 7 August 1919.

¹⁵⁷ *Calgary Herald*, 5 August 1919.

¹⁵⁸ *Calgary Herald*, 28 July 1919.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and that they were "out to fight them for all we are worth."¹⁶¹ Secretary Browne later told *The Albertan* that "we refuse to turn over either office or property to the International. It is our district and has been paid for by the hard earned money of the lads of the pick. If the International wants any of it, they have got to fight for it."¹⁶²

The miners of District 18 had already voted to affiliate with the OBU, but they had not set up a new structure. Throughout August, the officers of newly-formed District No. 1 met with different locals and held meetings in order to get a confirmation of support for the OBU and its officers. The Gladstone and Michel Locals both voted to reaffirm their support for the OBU and Gladstone passed a resolution stating that "we endorse the election of the policy committee and our district officers and declare Gladstone local officially connected with the District No. 1, mining department of the One Big Union."¹⁶³ Christophers, A. Susnar, and other officers were in attendance representing the OBU. David Irvine, a representative of the UMWA, also attended. He tried to persuade the men to stay with the UMWA, "but met with scant support."¹⁶⁴ All locals enthusiastically reaffirmed their commitment to the OBU.

In the first few days of August the Drumheller, Lethbridge, Taber, Blairmore, and Brule Locals, and Sub-Districts 6 and 7, either held meetings with District No. 1 officers or sent in a "statement declaring their affiliation with the O.B.U. and their confidence in the present officers of the district to conduct affairs."¹⁶⁵ By 1 August 1919, the strike had entered its tenth week and with over seven thousand miners organised by the OBU, working-class radicalism in the coal fields had reached its height.¹⁶⁶

In response to the growing support for the OBU, its opponents increased their efforts to destroy the OBU. The UMWA International leadership took the officers of District No. 1 to court in an attempt to gain control of the District's finances and property. The courts found in favour of the UMWA's demands and awarded all of District No. 1's finances and property to the UMWA, which was a major defeat for the OBU.¹⁶⁷ The UMWA international leadership then sent two more representatives who were "able to speak several languages...to thoroughly explain the

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² *The Albertan*, 1 August 1919.

¹⁶³ *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ *The Albertan*, 5 August 1919.

¹⁶⁶ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 143.

¹⁶⁷ *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

situation to the foreign speaking element" because many of the miners were from eastern Europe.¹⁶⁸

The UMWA gained another victory on 30 July when the Canmore Local passed a resolution "giving a vote of confidence in the International."¹⁶⁹ It was also reported that "credit for the success...as far as the Canmore Local is concerned, is due to Robert Livett, former International board member, and David Irvine, representing the organization, who personally visited that district."¹⁷⁰ So while District No. 1 officers were touring the locals to shore up support, UMWA officials were touring also to undermine that support, but had almost no success. It would take far more pressure to force the men back into the international union.

Returned veterans employing the threat and application of physical violence against the striking miners provided significant pressure. This was a possibility that the miners had raised at their 16th Annual Convention in their discussion on the relationship between returning soldiers and the labour movement. Two Great War Veterans Association (GWVA) fraternal delegates attended upon District 18's invitation. The convention then dedicated the morning of the first day of the conference to the discussion of the issue.¹⁷¹ Fraternal Delegate W. Irvine of the GWVA stated that solidarity currently existed between workers and soldiers, and hence the unions had nothing to fear.¹⁷² This gave the delegates hope for unity, but many were worried that the opponents of the labour movement were trying to undermine solidarity between soldier and union member.

According to Delegate Beard "we have a fear through the present trend of events as they come that leads us to believe that every effort has been concentrated to create a division between returned vets and organised labor."¹⁷³ Susnar argued that unemployment was increasingly a major issue for the workers in Canada. In his opinion, that would cause greater competition between the workers, and already corporations and the press were trying to divide unions and soldiers.¹⁷⁴ Cacchioni then argued that civilians and soldiers had to unite in the struggle against the system.¹⁷⁵ The miners had two great concerns: First, they were worried that vets would be used as a battering ram against the labour movement and second, they hoped to unite with the soldiers and prevent such an outcome from occurring. This was one of the initial aspects of the "class moment." The miners recognised hierarchal distinctions within the working class and

¹⁶⁸ *Calgary Herald*, 6 August 1919.

¹⁶⁹ *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 67-68.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 66-67.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

their threat to solidarity, and attempted to overcome them. That two GWVA delegate attended and one of them stated that there was solidarity shows that a small section accepted unity. The "class moment" was thus successfully accomplished at the convention, but did not reach beyond the convention, because the majority of veterans did not accept unity with radical workers.

There had already been a precedent for returned soldiers crossing the picket lines. As far back as 1916 disabled veterans had been employed in the breaking of a strike by theatre projectionists in Calgary, which had "caused grave alarm across the West."¹⁷⁶ There were many other examples of veterans employing violence to disrupt socialist and labour meetings. International Organiser Rees referred to recent events in Vancouver when "returned soldiers...raided the Labor Temple," smashed the windows and furniture and finally had "made two or three men kiss flags."¹⁷⁷ He then informed the convention that as a result of similar instances in other cities, workers were now placing guards at the doors of their meetings because "organized labor said we are going to run our meetings and we are going protect them too."¹⁷⁸ In his opinion, the GWVA had been created by government job-seeking officers and that the returned soldier who had been engaging in the violence was "a dupe" and "not sober."¹⁷⁹

Joe Knight felt that there was a "secret service" in Canada terrorising and undermining the rising workers' movement and that it was such provocateurs who were to blame for inciting veterans.¹⁸⁰ The delegates thus stressed that returned soldiers were not really to blame for their actions. The miners believed that if the soldiers were not being lied to by the press, government, corporations, and self-serving officers, then they would naturally unite with the labour movement. This belief in a natural basis for unity between soldiers and workers, and the influence of the Russian Revolution, led Secretary Browne to propose near the end of the discussion that, in order to force the federal government to accept the workers' demands,

this convention goes on record to ask the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada to immediately call a special session of congress. Let the returned soldiers go back to the Great War Veterans Association and ask their organization to call a special session of congress, and meet in some central part of Canada, somewhere around Winnipeg and form a Soldiers' and

¹⁷⁶ McCormack, *Reformers*, 121.

¹⁷⁷ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 77.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

Workers' council, [APPLAUSE] to bring pressure to bear on the Dominion government.¹⁸¹

Delegates passed a resolution declaring that the interests of "the mass of the returned men" and organised labour were "identical" and that the executive of District 18 was "empowered to enter into negotiations with the representatives of the returned soldiers to consider whereby justice would be secured" for both workers and veterans equally.¹⁸² These attempts to unite with the soldiers, were ultimately not successful because of the fear and nativism that caused by the Red Scare.

Many immigrants arrived in Canada before World War I, especially in Alberta. Between 1903 and 1912, "over 2.2 million immigrants" arrived in Canada. Though Immigration was low during the war, "the coal fields of Alberta in 1911, nine out of ten miners" were immigrants.¹⁸³ Historian Howard Palmer notes that although the developing integration of "Ukrainians and other central and eastern Europeans" in the years before the WWI "led to a gradual decrease in hostility" towards these groups, the "advent of World War I precipitated the most strenuous nationalism and pervasive nativism in Albertan history."¹⁸⁴ The early wartime propaganda that demonised Germans soon affected all immigrants.¹⁸⁵ The Russian Revolution exacerbated these prejudices and nativists assumed that all "non-British," immigrants were the "enemy aliens," and labeled them as "Bolshevik" or "Bolsheviki."¹⁸⁶ The Winnipeg General Strike was assailed by its opponents as the work of "aliens."¹⁸⁷ Returned soldiers were especially susceptible to this Red Scare because of their war-time experiences and the few employment opportunities they found when they returned to Canada

At the founding convention of the GWVA in Winnipeg in April 1917, there were strong, open expressions on anti-alien sentiment. However, the convention also, like the labour movement, called for "the conscription of wealth."¹⁸⁸ The majority of soldiers were working class in origin, but through the war experience many felt "a new nationalism," one that "obviously excluded those who stood aside from the national crusade." Veterans shared the common bond of making sacrifices for the nation and believed that they were entitled to social provision based on

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 85.

¹⁸² Ibid., 89, 98-100.

¹⁸³ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 162.

¹⁸⁴ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 47.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁸⁶ McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 423.

¹⁸⁷ Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 55.

¹⁸⁸ Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 71.

their military service.¹⁸⁹ The returned soldiers maintained the patriotism of the early war years, between 1914-1916, because they had been out of the country during the process of growing working-class radicalisation. While they still expressed a working-class interest, as seen in the calls for conscription of wealth, their class consciousness included the patriotism and nativism of the early war years. It also included the experience of the new trench camaraderie, which had a cross-class character, as the army was not solely working class.¹⁹⁰ Thus, most returned soldiers did not take part in that aspect of the "class moment" which questioned ethnic hierarchies within the working class. This would have made it difficult, but not impossible, for a veteran to understand and accept the outlook of radical workers. Veterans were one section of the working class that chose not to turn to radicalism. Instead, as returned soldiers, they turned to their sense of entitlement.

This was especially true with the post-war economic depression and its consequent high unemployment aggravated the situation of returned soldiers.¹⁹¹ Veterans' sense of entitlement did not stop at demands for governmental help in re-integration into society. It also extended to jobs and seeing immigrants with jobs incensed soldiers. Veterans' organisations across Canada "bombarded the government" with resolutions demanding the "property of enemy aliens be confiscated, immigrant radicals be arrested or deported, and that that enemy aliens be prevented from voting for at least twenty years." They also called on the government and employers to "replace immigrant workers with veterans."¹⁹² In more than one city angry mobs of returned soldiers marched to factories "vowing to chase out aliens and put 'white men' in" and severely beating immigrants. There were anti-alien riots led by disabled veterans in 1917 and 1918, and in the spring of 1919 veterans rioted in Hamilton, Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary and attacked any suspected immigrants and their property.¹⁹³ Many of these riots targeted the property of suspected enemy aliens and the meeting places and offices of the SPC and other socialist groups. Morton and Wright argue that while there was a division between returned soldiers' organisations during the Winnipeg events, between pro- and anti-strike factions, returned soldiers largely ignored revolutionary workers' overtures of class unity.¹⁹⁴ The press supported and excused the various violent actions of the returned soldiers. So while radical workers were correct in pointing to the pernicious role of the press and others in fomenting divisions among workers, they did not fully grasp the importance of vet-

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 64, 80.

¹⁹⁰ Lara Campbell, "'We Who Have Wallowed in the Mud of Flanders': First World War Veterans, Unemployment and the Development of Social Welfare in Canada, 1929-39," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* no.11 (2000): 125-127.

¹⁹¹ Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 53.

¹⁹² Ibid., 55.

¹⁹³ Morton and Wright, *Winning*, 121.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 80.

erans' war-time experiences. This made it difficult for them to be able to get their message across to veterans. The basis of the failure of the "class moment" to unite radical workers and patriotic returned soldiers was the two groups' respective experiences during the war. These different experiences made it difficult for both sections of the working class to relate to each other. It was here then that the "class moment" was at its weakest and where it would finally break.

The print media's promotion of nativism and consequently anti-OBU and anti-revolutionary sentiment was significant. While the press promoted patriotism for the war effort and prejudice against the "enemy alien," they also had begun to focus on developing nativism among veterans and encouraging them to repress attempts at "revolution." When a veteran-led mob destroyed the offices of the SPC, burned their books, and assaulted members in Winnipeg, the papers applauded their actions.¹⁹⁵ In Calgary, where the press and especially the *Calgary Herald* would foment anti-OBU prejudice, the *Herald* had already in 1900 been attacking immigration and promoting a nativist outlook.¹⁹⁶ The paper had a history of developing anti-immigrant feelings in Alberta, which continued during and after the war. Thus, there was even some debate on allowing the press to cover District 18's 16th Annual Convention. Although the miners wanted media coverage, they worried that the reporters would distort what delegates said. The convention finally decided to allow the press to attend, with their promises of no mischief, but Delegate Cacchioni expressed his and others' disgust at the *Calgary Herald* and he argued that it did "not give the workers a square deal."¹⁹⁷ When returned soldiers used violence to break District No. 1's strike in Drumheller, the *Calgary Herald* misrepresented the OBU, excused the OBU's opponents, and continued to instigate nativism. This encouraged violence against radical workers and distorted the actual events to Calgary's working class.

District No. 1 had gone on strike over wages and hours. Immediately the goal of the strike became the recognition of the One Big Union as the chosen bargaining unit of the miners.¹⁹⁸ Because it was an opponent of the OBU, the *Herald* denied the existence of the strike. In late July, rumours began to circulate that the mine operators were going to re-open the mines. The miners in Drumheller held a meeting and "voted in favour of continuing the strike for OBU recognition."¹⁹⁹ Thirteen mining companies "including Drumheller, Newcastle, Western Gem, Manitoba, Atlas, A.B.C., North America, Scranton, Sterling and Midland" began to develop plans to break the strike. To that end they requested and received "official government permission to hire special constables to 'protect' their prop-

¹⁹⁵ McKay, *Reasoning Otherwise*, 441, 477.

¹⁹⁶ Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 29.

¹⁹⁷ GMA, Report of 16th Annual Convention, District 18, 91, 93.

¹⁹⁸ Anne B. Woywitka, "The 'Unholy Alliance' Against the OBU," in *The Canadian Worker in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Irving Abella and David Millar (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1978), 219.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

erty."²⁰⁰ During this time the miners' leadership had been running ads in papers, asking workers to stay away from Drumheller because there was a strike in progress. For example, an advertisement that appeared in the 7 August 1919 issue of the *Morning Albertan* stated "All Miners and Laborers are advised to Keep Away from the ROSEDALE MINE (MOODIE MINE) as there is a strike there. Ed. Browne, Secretary District 18, U. M. W. of A."²⁰¹ However, the August 4 1919 *Calgary Herald* ran an article with the headline: "NO STRIKE AT ROSEDALE MINE, UNION MEN SAY."²⁰² The piece went on to state that

recently The Herald stated that union members would be justified in seeking work at the Rosedale mine, since the men working there were members of the United Mine Workers of America and were working with the full sanction of the International body. Since then an advertisement that does not bear the name of the person or persons responsible has been appearing in another local paper stating that there is a strike at the Rosedale mine. There is no strike at that mine. It is working at full strength and many of the miners are returned veterans.²⁰³

The report quoted a letter from the president of the UMWA local stating that "there is about 175 men working and they all belong to the U.M.W. of A. and, best of all, returned soldiers."²⁰⁴ The *Calgary Herald*, like federal government and mine operators, did not recognise the legitimacy of the One Big Union and hoped to see it fail.

The *Herald* denied the OBU's legitimacy by defending Armstrong's position on the strike. It reported that "Coal Commissioner Armstrong...is not prepared to negotiate any contract with the O.B.U."²⁰⁵ Because of Armstrong's stance, Christophers had charged that Armstrong was dictating to the men what organisation they could belong to. In the *Morning Albertan*, he had quoted Armstrong's statement that "When miners have returned to work under order No.124 and properly authorized officers of the United Miner Workers of America, vouched for by the international...it will be possible to negotiate something workable."²⁰⁶ By stating that he would not deal with any union, except UMWA, Armstrong implied that unless the men rejoined the International, they would not be going back to work. Armstrong was, then, *de facto* dictating what organisation the workers could be a part of, a stance that the *Calgary Herald* endorsed. On 4 August 1919, it argued that there was some confusion on the question of the positions of Armstrong and

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 220.

²⁰¹ *Morning Albertan*, 7 August 1919.

²⁰² *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ *Calgary Herald*, 5 August 1919.

²⁰⁶ *Morning Albertan*, 28 July 1919.

the "former officials" of District 18. "In order that the miners might be thoroughly conversant" with the different positions, F.E. Harrison, assistant to Armstrong "handed the representative of The Calgary Herald the following correspondence."²⁰⁷ One telegram was addressed to Harrison by Christophers and Browne declaring that the men were ready to meet with miner operators and the government to negotiate a settlement to the dispute. Another telegram from Armstrong reiterated that he would transact "negotiations of a new agreement" only with the UMWA. The *Herald* ended the article by stating that

This information is published for the benefit of the miners of District 18, and owing to the fact that they have been led to believe that the Director of Coal Operations is prepared to transact business with representatives of the One Big Union. It is not the desire to dictate to the men of District 18 to what organization they should belong to, but the Director of Coal Operations reserves the right to say with whom he shall deal.²⁰⁸

In two separate pieces in the 28 July 1919 the paper reported Christophers' comments that Armstrong was *not* prepared to deal with the OBU and further was "attempting to dictate what organization" the miners should belong to.²⁰⁹ It is also important to note Armstrong's and the *Herald's* references to District 18. The miners had already seceded from the UMWA, thus District 18 ceased to exist. Armstrong and the *Herald* did not recognise the legitimacy of the existence of the OBU, nor of the miners' decision to join the union and leave the UMWA. The *Calgary Herald's* admission that it was in direct contact with Armstrong's office in carrying on its campaign against the OBU, shows that the *Herald* sought the subversion of the OBU. While the miners correctly perceived the members of the "Triple Alliance," they were too busy to realise that there was a fourth member and thus a "Quadruple Alliance."

Nativism and unemployment led to many veterans to become strikebreakers in Drumheller. It was their violence, and the terror it created, that defeated the strike in Drumheller. The "special constables" hired by the mining companies to protect their property were returned soldiers. In late July the companies paid them ten dollars a day and "let many of them become plied with liquor." The men were then given "pick handles, crowbars and brass knuckle" and sent out to round up the strikers for work.²¹⁰ The men then went to the individual residences of the strikers early in the morning. Strikers were asked if they would return to work and if they refused, they were transported out of town "30 or 40 miles away, beaten and left on the prairies as an example to others."²¹¹ Miners began to move about and sleep in groups for safety. On 9 August 1919 hundreds of miners milled

²⁰⁷ *Calgary Herald*, 4 August 1919.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Calgary Herald*, 28 July 1919.

²¹⁰ Woywitka, "The 'Unholy Alliance,'" 220.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

about in Drumheller calling the veterans "scabs." The returned soldiers called the strikers "bohunks" in response. The two groups began to physically fight and the miners succeeded in chasing many veterans into the hills. On their way back into town however, shots rang out and the miners saw their own men running for the hills, while more returned soldiers arrived in cars. Many miners hid in the hills. Some were caught and beaten, and others were hung up by their feet and offered "horse urine to drink." Christophers himself, who had come into town for a meeting, was caught by returned soldiers along with Jack Sullivan, organiser and secretary of the OBU in Drumheller. They were put on a mock trial, beaten, and driven out of town and ordered to never return. As the days dragged on, the miners realised they could not stay in hiding. Some left the Drumheller Valley completely while others gradually drifted back into town. There they had to sign papers agreeing to join the UMWA and refuting the OBU. By August 21 it was all over and the OBU in Drumheller was broken.²¹²

The *Herald* did not begin to report on the Drumheller situation until it was well underway. When it did report, the paper excused the actions of the veterans and gave full expression of its nativism. On 12 August, it reported that veterans had gone to the strikers houses and told them that "any man who did not go to work on Monday would be deported."²¹³ In a separate piece from the same issue, the paper reported that "From the views expressed by the operators and leading citizens every effort will be made to make Drumheller a white man's town," and that "citizens are jubilant" in the face of the "brilliant and decisive victory over O.B.U. agitators." Finally, it added that new workers were sought and that "Preference will first be given to returned veterans, next white men who have had mining experience, and last the alien element."²¹⁴ And on 10 August the *Herald* reported that the miners had been run out of town, but that "Some of those that were down on the black list could not be found" as they were still "in hiding." They were also quick to point out that in carrying out their work, the veterans did not "engage in any rough work."²¹⁵ This begged the question as to why the men were in hiding. But, being an opponent of the OBU, the *Herald* was not concerned with reporting truthfully on the strike.

The *Calgary Eye Opener* took the same position as the *Calgary Herald* on the Drumheller strike. It argued that the advertisement regarding the Rosedale strike was "misleading because there was no strike" and there would not be one as "the mine was running full blast with approximately 200 men, 150 of whom are returned veterans."²¹⁶ Engaging in stock nativistic prejudices, the *Eye Opener* stated that "this mine has been at the mercy of a bunch of foreigners, the bulk of

²¹² Ibid., 222-226.

²¹³ *Calgary Herald*, 12 1919.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ *Calgary Herald*, 10 August 1919.

²¹⁶ *Calgary Eye Opener*, 9 August 1919.

whom are ignorant, simple creatures, easily inoculated with the serum of discontent by a few anarchistic leaders of I.W.W. affiliations."²¹⁷ It also argued that the "boldness and arrogance of these bohunks" had placed mining in the area in jeopardy, but that the "bohunk element has been driven off from Rosedale and will not be allowed to return."²¹⁸ It then revealed that "The policy recently adopted by Manager Moodie was decided upon while the war was yet in progress and has turned out splendidly, just as he predicted it would. Almost three- fourths of the miners now employed at the Rosedale are returned men" and now the "Management for the first time in years engages in gay lafteur [sic]."²¹⁹ After celebrating the manager's new outlook on life, the *Eye Opener* then showed that it had "sympathy" for the defeated miners: "One cannot altogether blame the bohunks, most of whom represent the scum of eastern Europe and are steeped in impregnable ignorance." To underline this point, it related a story of how the foreigners had walked out because they had not liked the taste "of a certain kind of pie the cook made. This sounds incredible, but it actually happened. Not one of them had ever seen a pie before coming to this country."²²⁰ Thus, it was not only the *Calgary Herald* that engaged in distorting the aims and actions of the OBU, and promoted the racist ideology of the Red Scare. We may conclude, then, that a section of the press openly sided with veteran violence and the OBU's opponents. They constituted the fourth member of the anti-OBU alliance because they denied the legitimacy of the OBU and sought its failure.

The strike of the miners of District No.1, mining department of the One Big Union continued until October. Even though the combined effects of being without work for almost half a year, lack of strike funds, the violence of veterans, and government threats to bring in federal forces to protect the workers who crossed the picket wore down many men, the strike continued. However, on 10 October 1919 the supreme court issued an injunction against the OBU for "failing to abide by the requirements of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act and attempting to convince UMW miners to break their contract with the operators."²²¹ While Christophers and the rest of the leadership were defiant, men continued to return to work. By 15 October the OBU leadership, feeling the strike was now hopeless, issued a general call for the men to return to work. On 14 June 1921, the miners' held a special convention to re-form the UMWA in District 18. The OBU was roundly condemned and the international UMWA leadership praised. On 1 August 1921 the UMWA restored full autonomy to District 18. While many workers still supported the OBU, the union had been forced into submission. Exhausted,

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 213.

they accepted defeat and the OBU disappeared from the coal fields of Alberta and south- eastern British Columbia.²²²

Between 1919 and 1920 the One Big Union had a membership of "as many as 70,000 workers," the overwhelming majority of whom resided in western Canada. The OBU had sent more than a few organisers out east after the WLC, but they met either hostility or skepticism. Some, like J.B. McLachlan, leader of UMWA District 26 in Nova Scotia and socialist, were supportive, but thought the split with the TLC too premature and would bring reprisals from the international UMWA leadership. By 1924, the OBU was making inroads the Nova Scotia, even though it was losing support elsewhere.²²³ Between 1920 and 1921, the OBU lost thousands of west coast loggers, its second bulwark after District 18. The loss of membership led to increased financial pressures, which in turn led the leadership to start running a successful lottery in its organ the *OBU Bulletin*.²²⁴ This brought a windfall of sorts, but the loss of membership continued. By 1920 Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* had reached Canada and it had a powerful effect on many OBU members. Lenin argued against dual- unionism, against the setting up of pristine revolutionary unions, and exhorted radicals to work in the mainstream of the labour movement in order to win the support of the majority of workers and to oust the various bureaucratic leaderships. In Canada, this meant rejoining the TLC. Some OBU members could not agree with such a perspective, but many accepted it fully, such as future communist leaders like Joseph and Sara Knight, William Moriarty, Jack Kavanaugh, and Mike Buhay. Others, in particular Pritchard and Robert Russell, refused to agree with the new tactics and continued to organise the OBU. With the formation of the Workers Party in February 1922, many more OBU supporters left to join the nascent communist movement.²²⁵ By 1921 the OBU had a membership of 5,000, and when it temporarily joined the All-Canadian Congress of Labour in 1927, dues paying members only amounted to 1600 and most of whom were located in Winnipeg. Though the era of the OBU had passed in 1920-1922, it was not until much later that the organisation was finally laid to rest. In 1956, the One Big Union dissolved itself into the Canadian Labor Congress. By that time it "represented little more than the employees of the Winnipeg Transit System."²²⁶ With that act, another chapter of the Canadian working-class revolt came to a close.

²²² Ibid., 213-214.

²²³ David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1999), 166-168, 360-362, 366-367.

²²⁴ Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men*, 216-217.

²²⁵ Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 109-113.

²²⁶ Bercuson, "Syndicalism Sidetracked," 233, 235.

Conclusion

Between 1917 and 1921, Canada witnessed the growth of radical class consciousness and class cohesion among sectors of the working class. The formation of the One Big Union was one of its most spectacular aspects. National factors such as war-time inflation and government curtailment of civil liberties meshed with the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution, which inspired socialist to adopt revolutionary strategies. Yet the rise in revolutionary sentiment had precedents. This was especially the case with the miners of the United Mine Workers of America, District 18. With roots in the Knights of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, and the Socialist Party of Canada, the miners followed a tradition of industrial unionism and a radical working-class critique of capitalism. This political and cultural tradition of socialism and class struggle formed the basis for the miners' preference for militant, radical actions. It was on this basis that the new factors of radicalisation developed. With such a background, the miners of District 18 were well placed to influence the Western Labor Conference and eventually provide the backbone to the OBU.

In a temporal sense, the 1917-1921 period constituted the beginning and end of the "class moment." In this moment radical workers questioned hierarchies in the working class and attempted to develop solidarity on a class basis. As both District 18's 1919 convention and the resolutions of the WLC show, class identity was raised to a place of primacy, but ethnicity was not attacked, nor submerged. Rather, delegates recognised ethnicity as a factor and subordinated it in importance in relation to class. This was attempted by the miners and by other workers, not merely because a significant portion of them were first or second generation "aliens," but also because of fears of violence on the part of veterans.

Many returned soldiers were working-class men. However, the majority of them were ethnically Anglo-Saxon and since most of the Canadian working class were not unionised, the majority of men returning home were not trade unionists. With the advent of war and the rise in patriotism, class differences submerged. Yet these workers in uniform underwent a different process from their brothers in Canada. They had made sacrifices in the trenches and, still imbued with the patriotism of the early war years, now had a new sense of entitlement that was based on military service. All of this combined with their class interests. With the rise of the Red Scare in Canada and the encouragement of nativists, employers, the press, and the government, combined with frustration over a lack of employment, the veterans proved a threat to the working-class upsurge. The different war-time experiences of soldiers and radicals hindered both groups ability to understand each other and unite, thus preventing the consummation of the "class moment."

The concept of the "class moment," like class itself, has objective and subjective elements in its formation. The objective side includes the material basis, specifically the existence of people working for wages, sharing in the same alienation from economic power. The subjective side includes an individual's agency and

their cultural experiences. The "class moment" was created by workers' conscious attempts to find unity in spite of their varied social distinctions. The miners of District 18 built on their previous traditions, were inspired by Russia, and attempted to forge an organisation that would help overthrow the capitalist system and usher in socialism. Though they ultimately failed to unite with the majority of returned soldiers, that was not the only reason that the miners returned to the UMWA. That they failed, does not speak to the inherent failure of Marxian socialism or to the weakness of the "class moment." What it does speak to, was that they were unprepared for the vehement opposition from craft unions, the media, the federal government, and the mine owners. The weakness of the miners and other members of the OBU, then, was not in daring to dream and to act on those dreams, but not realising how many and how powerful the guardians of capitalism were. The miners of District 18 perceived the "Triple Alliance." But while they recognised the powerful and pernicious influence of the press, especially the *Calgary Herald*, they did take any steps to deal with them.

With the defeat of the OBU and the miners' return to the UMWA, the high levels of radical class consciousness and class struggle would not be seen in Alberta's coal fields until the 1930s with its Great Depression. The unprecedented class cohesion of the 1917-1920 period gave way to new divisions in the working class between pro- and anti- communists. In the light of this "class moment" and the one which occurred in the 1930s, the role of the miners of District 18 reminds one of Marx's adage that

proletarian revolutions...constantly criticize themselves, constantly interrupt themselves in their own course, return to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin anew; they deride with cruel thoroughness the half-measures, weaknesses, and paltriness of their first attempts...recoil constantly from the indefinite colossalness of their own goals – until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*²²⁷

If the real failure of the miners of the OBU was underestimation of its opponents, it was an underestimation based on a lack of experience in dealing with state repression. Such a failure would not be repeated by radical workers in the 1930s. The OBU thus stands as a formative stage in the Canadian working class' development.

²²⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 19.

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