



Fire on the Mountain

Violence and Repression in the West Virginia Coal Wars

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“There is no fact more generally known, nor more widely believed, than that without coal there would not have been such grand achievements, privileges, and blessings as those which characterize the nineteenth century civilization.” — United Mine Workers of America Constitution, 1890

“And in my darkest hour
I cry out to the Lord
He says, “Keep on minin’, boy
‘Cause that’s why you were born” — Coal, Tyler Childers

Introduction

In 1921, 13,000 coal miners marched on Logan County, in the southern Appalachians of West Virginia. Traveling on foot and by commandeered trains, they were met by nearly 3,000 heavily armed lawmen and strikebreakers in what would become the largest labor dispute in American history and, indeed, the largest uprising of any kind since the Civil War. The first shots were fired at the County’s Blair Mountain on August 21, but in fact the roots of the conflict stretched back decades in what has become known as the West Virginia Coal Wars.

The right to unite with other workers, to bargain collectively – key tenets of labor policy today – grew in large part out of the West Virginia Coal Wars a century ago. The explanation for how might rest on what political scientists call the “backfire effect.” It occurs when one side in a conflict acts so brutally and indifferent to public opinion that it ends up furthering the very thing the perpetrator sought to avoid. In modern terms, this might be called “block back.” By its conduct, the coal industry actually amplified public sympathy for the miners, strengthened solidarity, and fueled union growth, accelerating the rise of the labor movement. By examining the interplay between violent repression, media portrayals, and the “backfire effect, this paper will demonstrate how state power and public perception converged to accelerate the rise of collective labor.

King Coal

The story of West Virginia labor politics is the story of coal. Bituminous coal — the type that would later be used for electricity generation — was discovered in the region in the 1840s, but it wasn’t until the 1870s that the market saw dramatic expansion following the construction of rail lines, mostly by the Chesapeake and Ohio (Martin, 2019). From there, there was no turning back. West Virginia produced 489,000 tons of coal in 1869, and ten times as much by 1889. By 1917, 90,000 miners dug nearly 90 million tons of coal (Corbin, 1981; Lewis, 2016). The predominance of this one industry dramatically reshaped economic and political conditions in the state.

Historian Bob Johnson explores this reshaping in his book, *An Upthrust into Barbarism*. He says that the coming of coal completely restructured the state’s economy, concentrating economic power in the hands of a few corporations “translating ...to almost total social control over a quarter of the state’s population and ... political control over local and state governments besieged by the coal industry’s deep pockets” (Johnson, 2010, p. 265–279). State and industrial interests began to converge. The labor historian Selig Perlman was even more damning in his assessment, writing that business and industry operated under their own “industrial government” rather than under the regulation of the American state (Perlman, 1928, p. 170). The “industrial government,” as Perlman saw it, prioritized the expansion and prioritization of industry and capital over the laborers that produced it.





This convergence of state and industry was especially evident in the figures that held local and state offices. Historian Brandon Digregorio offers a striking explanation of the relationship in his work, "Company Owned Americans," writing, "Politicians very often had investments in industry, and so it was in their best interests to cooperate closely with the coal barons to preserve those investments. Likewise, it was in the coal barons' best interests to continue supporting a party or politician that protected and supported their business endeavors via legislation, and many barons were outspoken patrons of one party/politician or another" (Digregorio, 2022, pp. 4–5).

There are also myriad examples of industry figures holding office themselves, such as in the case of "King" Samuel Dixon, president of the New River Coal Company and head of the county Republican Party. In 1891, A.B. Fleming was the first of nine governors who were themselves either coal company officials or hand picked by a coal company. George Watson, the owner of the Fairmont Coal Company, effectively controlled Marion County for the Democratic Party. The close linkage led to state governments that championed the coal industry. In 1897, Governor George Atkinson famously declared, "Instead of fewer corporations in West Virginia, we need more of them" (Ayers & Savage, 2018, p. 4).

However, as much as the actual government became interested in the business of coal, coal companies became equally interested in the business of governing. Mine operators and company officials enjoyed nearly unchecked power over the lives of their workers. "To use the expression of the Middle Ages," claimed mine operator W. P. Tams, "I was high justice, the middle, and the low" (Ayers & Savage, 2018, p. 5). The oppressive paternalism and brutality perpetrated by company men created an exploitative prison for those working the mines. Miners were usually paid in coal scrip, redeemable only at the company store which could charge as much as management wanted for food, soap, or other household necessities. As one elderly miner recounted to David Corbin, "You didn't even own your own soul in those damnable places. The company owned everything, the houses, the schools, churches, the stores – everything." Although coal companies provided housing for miners and their

families, it came with the condition that it could be searched at any time without warning. Miners could be evicted without any semblance of due process (Ayers & Savage, 2018). Digregorio observes that none of this would have been possible without the support and permission of government entities. For instance, the state generally upheld "yellow dog" contracts imposed on the miners, which prevented the employee from joining a union. Moreover, coal operators' hired guns frequently partnered with state police and volunteer militias to break strikes or other disputes. Perhaps most damning is the fact that workers were frequently imprisoned without proper trial and for indefinite periods of time (Digregorio, 2022). Noted labor organizer Mary Harris "Mother" Jones and forty other miners were imprisoned indefinitely after a walk out, only to be released after substantial outside pressure from the media (Gorn, 2001, p. 191).

Relatively few miners in West Virginia initially chose to unionize despite enduring harsh working conditions, frequent violence, and persistently low wages. Union membership was particularly sparse in the southern regions of the state, where miners faced not only economic hardship but also significant barriers to collective organization. While some West Virginia miners did join the United Mine Workers (UMW) as a direct response to wage cuts following the economic downturn of 1893, UMW membership across the state remained low, reaching only about 5,000 members by 1902 (Corbin, 1981). However, striking as a tactic gained considerable momentum after the Coal Miners' Strike of 1897, which involved mines along Northern West Virginia's Pittsburgh seam (George, 1898). The strike marked a pivotal moment, signaling a shift in labor organizing strategies and setting the stage for future conflicts as miners increasingly embraced collective action to challenge their conditions and assert their rights.

John L. Lewis, the newly elected president of the UMW, sought to increase unionization rates in the region. Lewis recognized that the area was behind many other parts of Appalachia in unionization efforts and was ripe for change, so in 1920 he sent several top organizers including Mother Jones (Jones, 1925). However, the coal companies saw unionization as a threat to their bottom line. "Following World War





I, there was an increasing concentration into fewer hands of industrial corporate power,” says Rebecca Bailey, an expert on Matewan. “Unions were anathema to them simply because human labor was one of the few cost items that could be manipulated and lowered” (Boissoneault, 2017). Bailey’s words line up with those of Lon Savage, who wrote one of the definitive texts on the Coal Wars. Savage contends that West Virginia industrialists were disadvantaged “from the start” due to the added transportation costs of being farther away from “the biggest markets on the seaboard, lakes, and rivers,” and needed to reduce workers’ wages to remain competitive (Savage, 1990, p. 4).

This paper will examine three case studies of violence in the coalfields of Southern West Virginia: the Paint Creek–Cabin Creek Strike of 1912, the Matewan Massacre, and the Battle of Blair Mountain. These three events will be analyzed in the context of the so-called “backfire” effect as developed by sociologist David Hess and others (Hess & Martin, 2006, p. 249). Through this lens, I aim to demonstrate how severe state repression galvanized the coal unionization effort, leading to increasingly violent events, heightened public awareness, and ultimately enlarged support for pro-labor policy. Adopting a discursive approach, I will examine how the language used in national media may have played a pivotal role in fueling a backfire effect.

While traditional wisdom suggests that a strong state apparatus can effectively subdue or even extinguish intrastate violence, paradoxically, a militant state’s aggressive show of force often produces unintended and contrary outcomes. Kurtz and Smithey argue that two conditions exist for backfire to occur: first, an action must occur which is perceived as unjust, unfair, excessive, or disproportional. Second, information about the action is communicated to relevant audiences. The authors suggest that repression can enhance recruitment among sympathetic publics and evoke support from supportive third parties (Kurtz & Smithey, 2007). In the case of the Coal Wars, this paper will link the repression faced by striking miners at Paint Creek to the backfire effect, arguing that the violence enacted by state officials and outside parties actually enhanced miners’ willingness to seek violent resolution to their grievances. That is what happened in Appalachian coal country.

The brutal violence in West Virginia throughout the Coal Wars would culminate with the Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest uprising in American history since the Civil War. The bloodshed in Logan County was a direct result of the repression the miners had endured for decades. The coal wars therefore demonstrate the extent to which state repression can backfire, worsening divisions and brutality.

Paint Creek, 1912

In his book *Mountaineer Mine Wars*, Hoyt Wheeler argues that the violence which erupted at Paint Creek was nearly predictable. “Firing men for union activities, beating and arresting union organizers, increasing wages to stall the union’s organizational drive, and a systematic campaign of terror produced an atmosphere in which violence was inevitable” (Wheeler, 1976, p. 82). Miners working in these coal camps saw the threat of violence firsthand. Joe Huber, a miner who testified before Congress in 1913, recalled observing about a dozen Baldwin–Felts guards, private guards hired by coal companies in the region, shooting their rifles from the post office door at targets on the nearby railroad track with a large pile of ammunition stacked beside. Huber “understood clearly” the message being conveyed by this display (Committee on Education and Labor, 1913).

Tensions in West Virginia’s Kanawha County came to a head in April, 1912, when miners along Paint Creek, who received two and a half cents per ton less than other union miners in the area, demanded that their pay be raised to meet local rates (Lee, 1969). When operators refused, The UMW called for a strike to begin April 18. UMW hoped to spread its presence into southern West Virginia, a longtime goal of the union (Shogan, 2004, p. 38). More than 7,500 miners engaged in mostly peaceful demonstrations for the first month. However, on May 10, management hired the infamous Baldwin–Felts Detective Agency, which sent more than 300 armed guards to break the strike (Lee, 1969, p. 22). Striking miners and their families were prohibited from using company bridges and roads, as well running water. Many were evicted from company owned housing. The UMW set up tent camps for miners and their families who could be evicted without



warning (Corbin, 1981). This was the beginning of the Coal Wars, and it became a frequent national headline.

In the first few months of the strike, company guards and private detectives killed several miners. In response, miners turned to guerilla style tactics, taking the offensive at Mucklow, Dry Branch, and Eskdale (Barkey, 2024). After more than 5,000 miners joined the fight, company guards constructed a makeshift armored train they christened the “Bull Moose Express.” Armed with high powered machine guns, they began firing into the makeshift tent city (Corbin, 1981). Attempting to quell the bloodshed, Governor William E. Glasscock declared martial law and sent 1,200 state troops to confiscate weapons and ammunition (Corbin, 1981). This would be the first of multiple such declarations tied to Paint Creek. The continued bloodshed and attempts to stifle it brought national attention. Glasscock’s successor Henry Hatfield settled the strike, pardoning the majority of court-martialed miners; however, he kept the most fervent strike supporters in jail without charges. He sent the National Guard to close Socialist newspapers in Charleston and Huntington (Bailey, 2024). Hatfield’s actions prompted an inquiry into the strike by the U.S. Senate, the first investigation into the actions of a state government by a committee of Congress. The Congressional committee concluded that the guards aboard the Bull Moose Special killed multiple striking miners and committed “countless other acts of terrorism.” Despite this, the guards were never so much as detained (Gorn, 2001, p. 191).

The state’s attempt to put down the strike at Paint Creek backfired. It amplified violence and helped to set the stage for conflicts that followed. More importantly, it generated recognition among the miners that they needed to organize. Sociologists Barkan, Gerlach & Hine, and Zald & McCarthy assert that the backfire effect may prompt movement organizing (Barkan, 1980; Gerlach & Hine, 1970; Zald & McCarthy, 1979). In the case of Paint Creek, as company guards and state officials attempted to break the strike, more miners joined the fight and violence increased. Further, Chenoweth et. al. assert that while short-term repression may dampen mobilization, it often leads to a resurgence of dissent over time. Put more simply, even if a state can crush a movement in

the short term, wounds often fester below the surface. This is borne out in the Coal Wars. Although Paint Creek ended in defeat for the striking miners, a few years later, violence would erupt again, this time in nearby Mingo County.

Matewan, 1920

What would become the Matewan Massacre began when 300 miners in Matewan joined the UMW. In retaliation, the Burnwell Coal and Coke Company fired every union-aligned miner and gave them three days to leave their company-owned residences (Bailey, 2008). The company hired the Baldwin–Felts Agency to oversee evictions, but five days later, Mingo County officials, apparently sympathetic to the miners, arrested agency head Albert C. Felts for illegal evictions. Sheriff G. T. Blankenship negotiated with miners that as long as only county officials were involved in the process, miners would peaceably comply with the evictions (Bailey, 2008). Two weeks later, thirteen Baldwin–Felts agents returned to Matewan to evict miners, this time from Stone Mountain Coal Corporation housing. They were challenged by police chief Sid Hatfield and Matewan Mayor Cabel Testerman (Bailey, 2008). Accounts of what followed differ. Some reports indicate that Baldwin–Felts agents attempted to arrest Sid Hatfield, and shot Mayor Testerman when he intervened on Hatfield’s behalf. Others suggest that Hatfield initiated the violence himself. In either case, the shootout resulted in ten dead, including the two of the Felts brothers and Testerman (Boissoneault, 2017).

That wasn’t the end of it. In July, miners went on strike again, blowing up multiple railroad cars. In response, multiple strikers were beaten and left to die on the side of the road (Boissoneault, 2017). The continued violence began to receive attention from the national press, with the miners often being portrayed as violent and unruly hillbillies. The New York Times ran, “Mingo Folk Lawless, but the Law is Lax” (“Mingo Folk Lawless, But the Law Is Lax,” 1921). The New York Tribune wrote “Hatfield Urged Massacre of Detectives” (“Hatfield Urged Massacre of Detectives,” 1921).

Tempers flared on both sides as several of the miners were put on trial and acquitted and Tom Felts, the last surviving Felts brother, pursued a prosecution



of Police Chief Hatfield who had sided with the miners and killed Felts brothers in the melee. When the charges against Hatfield and 22 others for Albert Felts' murder were dropped, Baldwin–Felts detectives assassinated Hatfield and his deputy, Ed Chambers, on August 1, 1921, on the steps of the McDowell County courthouse in Welch, West Virginia (Kilkeary, 2005). Angered, union miners began destroying property owned by non-union mines in Mingo County. Martial law was imposed and hundreds of union miners were imprisoned (Savage, 1990, p. 58).

In the end, what became known as “Matewan Massacre,” increased support for the Mingo County miners. Hess and Martin contended that repression can backfire, actually cementing support for the movement, even among those not directly implicated in their article, “Repression, Backfire and the Theory of Transformative Events” (Hess & Martin, 2006). Rebecca Bailey, a local historian, came to a similar conclusion specifically when looking at Matewan. “I call it elevation through denigration,” she says, noting that the union benefited from the moral high ground as victims regardless of whether they instigated the violence” (Boissoneault, 2017). Opp and Roehl take this a step further, arguing that repression can actually radicalize protestors by labeling them as dissidents (Opp & Roehl, 1990). This is readily apparent in the aftermath of Matewan. Miners across the southern portion of the state were angry about the killing of Hatfield and were convinced that his assassin would escape punishment (Savage, 1990, p. 73). Estimates vary, but somewhere between 5,000 and 20,000 miners began marching into Logan County to take matters into their own hands (Corbin, 1981). According to Ayers and Savage, the massacre helped to solidify their union identity and foster solidarity with the UMW (Ayers & Savage, 2018).

Logan County, 1921

On August 7, 1921, Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney, veteran union organizers in the region, met with Governor Ephraim Morgan in Charleston and presented him with a petition of the miners' demands. Morgan rejected the demands in their entirety (Shogan, 2004, p. 164). In response, talk began of a march to Mingo County to free the jailed miners by force. To

do so, they'd need to pass through Logan County and cross Blair Mountain. At a rally the same day, Mother Jones actually urged her audience not to join the march, fearing a bloodbath between union forces and heavily armed Logan County deputies (Shogan, 2004, p. 170). Her warnings fell on deaf ears. Four days later, nearly 13,000 had assembled and began the march to “Bloody Mingo.” Some commandeered a Chesapeake and Ohio freight train that they renamed the “Blue Steel Special,” to get to the fight sooner (Bailey, 2024).

Meanwhile, the staunchly anti-union Sheriff Don Chafin had set his defenses on Blair Mountain (Bailey, 2024). Supported financially by the Logan County Coal Operators Association, he created the nation's largest private armed force of nearly 2,000 men (Bailey, 2024). The first clashes occurred on the morning of August 25. The very next day, Chafin and Governor Morgan requested federal assistance, and President Warren Harding responded by sending 2,500 federal troops and a squadron of bomber aircraft led by Gen. William “Billy” Mitchell, a World War I hero often called the “father” of the US Air Force (Bailey, 2024). The Federal troops brought with them unused bombs and chemical weapons left over from the fight in Europe (Corbin, 1981). The miners, equipped only with vintage rifles, had no choice but to go no further. 16 men, including 12 miners, died in what the press described vividly as the “Battle of Blair Mountain.” “[Blair Mountain] was covered rabidly by the national press,” says Chatham University historian Louis Martin (Boissoneault, 2017). However, outsiders might come away with a dramatically different view of the events depending on what paper they were reading. National papers sold copies by portraying the area as a lawless land where the mountaineers were inherently violent (Boissoneault, 2017). Local West Virginia papers were more even handed, covering troop movements and battles, but also focusing on the hardships mining families endured and the root causes for the violence (LAWCHA Board of Directors, 2023). The Washington Times, published in the District of Columbia, wrote, “Logan County Bristles with Machine Guns... Gaunt Hollow-eyed Men hold Ridges...Every Path is Guarded” (The Washington Times, 1921). Two days later, the Chicago Eagle published with palpable concern that the miners sought to “defy [an] order of



[the] President.” The Eagle also reprinted a Washington Times report on miners singing, “we’ll hang Don Chafin from a sour apple [tree]” (Chicago Eagle, 1921).

Comparisons to the recent war in Europe were also common, such as when the Indiana Daily Times wrote that “the little mountain town, like Verdun, lies in the shadow of the mountain.” For readers of these papers, West Virginia might as well have been a foreign country (Indiana Daily Times, 1921). The national papers sensationalized the violence as a means to sell newspapers. Tales of West Virginia’s “wild mountains” became a staple in their coverage (LAWCHA Board of Directors, 2023).

Local papers highlighted stories about the people and families involved in these battles, as well as the miners’ demands. On September 3rd, The Wheeling Intelligencer dedicated space on its front page to assurances from UMW officials that the union would “submit to any rules and regulations of the federal authorities.” The paper also gave side-by-side columns to Governor Morgan and UMW Vice President Phillip Morgan (The Wheeling Intelligencer, 1921a). The September 7th edition featured obituaries for two men killed by law enforcement in the battle, Dewey Bryant of Virginia and Kenner Williamson of Kentucky (The Wheeling Intelligencer, 1921b).

The scale of the state and federal response fueled a backfire effect. “One of the key mechanisms for generating backfire is public outrage at repressive events,” noted Hess and Martin (Hess & Martin, 2006, p. 250). Case studies from around the world and from entirely different periods in history bear this out. Their book cited such distant examples as the British suppression of Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent protest demonstrations in India in the 1930s and the 1991 East Timor massacre in which nearly 300 unarmed Timorese calling for independence were mowed down by Indonesian occupiers. Both were turning points in the struggle for self determination

However, the backfire effect often does not galvanize support immediately. Opp and Roehl argue that repression can activate micromobilization, but Rasler contends that due to the lag of micromobilization processes, repression may have a short-term negative effect and long-term positive effect on movement mobilization (Opp & Roehl, 1990; Rasler, 1996). This is

evident in the data that we have. After Blair Mountain, UMW membership in West Virginia experienced a sharp decline. Between 1921 and 1924, membership in District Seventeen dropped by half, from 42,000 to 21,000. By 1933, the UMW membership in West Virginia had reached a low of 16,000 (Wilson, 2008, p. 3). However, the UMW’s efforts intensified during the 1930s, particularly after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 (Posey, 1941, p. 347). Thus we see a dynamic emerge wherein repression can be effective in the short term but backfire in the long term. The decline in union membership immediately after the shock of Blair Mountain is logical -- what man wants to give his life for his job? But as the years passed, the labor movement saw a resurgence in the coal fields, aided almost certainly by the long memory of wrongdoings endured.

Backfire

The progression from Paint Creek to Matewan to the Battle of Blair Mountain shows the backfire effect in action. Excessive use of state force to repress a movement that began peacefully led to violent clashes. Heavily armed strikebreakers and soldiers and the Baldwin–Felts gunmen were able to break the strikes with superior arms. Nonetheless, the underlying discontentment would resurface and the encouragement of miners from across the coal belt along with growing public support led to a sense of solidarity, demonstrating the time delay of the backfire effect that Chenoweth et. al. describe (Chenoweth, Perkosi, & Kang, 2017).

When the miners reached Don Chafin’s defenses at Blair Mountain, the violence with which they were met shocked the nation. In the years following, although 985 miners were indicted on charges including treason, the majority were acquitted or simply let go (National Coal Heritage Area, n.d.). This was due, in no small part, to a sympathetic public and support from the news media (Corbin, 1981). The public was revulsed by the news coming from West Virginia.

However, it should be noted that press coverage was not uniform, and the coverage of the Coal Wars by local papers differed widely from their national competitors. National papers, sympathetic to the



concerns of industry, depicted pro-union miners as dangerous subversives and presented the conflict as an almost foreign affair. They sought to sensationalize the violence. On the other hand, local and regional papers generally put the focus on the overuse of force and portrayed the miners as victims.

Media portrayals of the violence during the coal wars likely both helped and hurt a backfire effect. Sympathetic news coverage would have supported backfire by publicizing information about brutalities committed, garnering support for its victims. Conversely, coverage that framed the conflict as somehow foreign (or the miners as somehow less than human) would have worked against backfire by creating a sense of separation between the readers and the combatants. However, as information surfaced in the following decades, this negative coverage would become more apparently biased to readers. This further helps to explain the initial stifling of collective labor in West Virginia followed by a resurgence about a decade later.

All of this rests on the assumption that backfire, to some extent, depends on public sympathy. Although authors may disagree on the exact mechanisms of backfire, most suggest in one form or another that the backfire is generated when outsiders feel a certain kinship with the victims of the repression. For that reason, if news coverage depicted the miners' struggle as foreign, and the miners themselves as simple-minded or even vaguely subhuman, that kinship wouldn't develop. Readers might be interested in learning of their strife, but they wouldn't internalize any sort of connection to it. However, the local coverage, which humanized the miners and portrayed the conflict in a nuanced way, would have generated a greater backfire effect by eliciting support from a sympathetic public. This is likely what caused such a high number of locals to join in on the march to Blair Mountain.

The combination of violent repression, media coverage, and the backfire effect was crucial in solidifying the growth of collective labor movements in the coal mining industry in the early 20th century.

The Long Memory

In 1932, the Democrats under Franklin Roosevelt swept into power during the Great Recession. One of their first acts was to secure passage of a National Industrial Recovery Act to restore the economy by ending the numerous labor strikes and violence that had resulted from the refusal of many employers to recognize unions. It may be the greatest example of the backfire effect in American history.

It's clear from the comments made by legislators in this period that the events of the Coal Wars remained in the collective memory. Many congressmen framed their support for labor reform by calling back to violence in the preceding decade. In a floor speech on May 23, 1934, Alfred Beiter, a representative from New York offered his unwavering support for what would become the NLRA. In the speech, he called out certain "destructive" practices employers had relied on in recent years, including "the use of spies and deputy sheriffs as paid company guards," which would have sounded quite familiar to the miners that worked the coalfields of Southwestern West Virginia (U.S. House of Representatives, 1934). Another champion of labor reform, Senator David Walsh of Massachusetts, also seemed to have the past on his mind, asking, "Cannot some law be enacted that will force a peaceable solution of labor differences ... before the punishable acts of violence occur?" (U.S. Senate, 1934). But no one put it more bluntly than William P. Connery Jr. -- Detailing the course of several recent violent strikes, Connery warned, "You have not yet seen the gates of hell opened, and that is what is going to happen from now on unless the Congress of the United States passes labor legislation to cure the evils which are existing in industry" (U.S. House of Representatives, 1934). The Wagner Act, passed in 1935, was clearly informed by a collective memory of labor violence. This is the long backfire effect.

Although it had no enforcement power, in one year the National Labor Board created by Roosevelt managed to settle more than 1,000 strikes and avert many others. It was followed by the Wagner Act, named for New York Senator Robert F. Wagner, establishing a national policy of collective bargaining and prohibiting employers from interfering with the right of workers



to organize. Following the act, union membership in the coalfields of West Virginia increased dramatically (Posey, 1941, p. 347).

As coal mining moved westward in later years to places like Wyoming, memories of the Coal Wars faded. Mining jobs disappeared in West Virginia. But some stories about the Coal Wars continue to be passed down through families (Keeney, 2018).

There may still be an undercurrent of conflict between mine owners and workers in the mining communities of West Virginia. Perhaps the reality of the Coal Wars is that they reflect divisions deeper than the seams being mined under Mingo County. Maybe John Hennen, an author born and raised in West Virginia, put in best when he described President Harding's use of the military to put down the Blair Mountain strikers: "The battle lines at Blair Mountain were formed by irreconcilable models of Americanism, one based on the individual right to do business and the other on the , collective rights of labor. The federal troops sent by Harding ended the fire storm but could not resolve these fundamental differences" (Hennen, 2006).

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