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Republican Party Doctrine and the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars

Thomas Kidd

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Dedication

I would like to thank my parents Bobby and Juanita and my brother Craig.

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Abstract

The West Virginia Coal Mine Wars of 1912-1913 and 1920-1921 are most strongly associated with the use of government and military force against organized labor. A deeper examination of the contemporary newspapers in the state, associated with the Republican Party reveals the attitudes of the party toward labor. Looking at how these editors reacted to the key events of the mine wars reveals that the Republican Party of the time supported two principles: free enterprise and rule of law. This study shows how the importance of these key principles caused the editors loyal to the party to shift the blame for these strikes from the laborers to the coal companies.

Introduction

The West Virginia Coal Mine Wars stand out in the historical record as an example of military force being brought to bear against striking workers in early 20th-Century America. The mine wars spanned a decade, beginning with the 1912-1913 strike along Paint Creek and Cabin Creek. Following the First World War, tensions in the mining regions of Southern West Virginia boiled over again in May of 1920, resulting in the Matewan Massacre. This in turn led to the murder of Sid Hatfield and the Battle of Blair Mountain in August of 1921. The mine wars finally ended with treason trials in the Spring of 1922. Labor historian James Green recognizes the mine wars as a central part of the greater struggle by West Virginia's miners to obtain union recognition.¹ Though this is the assessment of the mine wars shared by many labor historians, the editors of many of West Virginia's newspapers, especially those affiliated with the Republican Party did not share this viewpoint, at least not during the 1912-1913 strike.

The editors of those publications saw the strike as wasteful and pointless, disparaging the workers who took part in the strike, attributing the actions of the miners to a variety of distinct factors other than the conditions faced by them. The Republican-aligned press had little sympathy for the striking miners, calling for an end to the violence and a return to work. However, the socialist press of the state was supportive of the striking miners and opposed to the crackdown on dissemination of pro-labor viewpoints by the state government as well as the attempts of the governor to enact a settlement between the striking miners and their employers. Those opposed to the strike blamed it and the associated violence on the politics of the miners, the ethnic demographics of the

¹ James Green, *The Devil is Here in These Hills: West Virginia's Coal Miners and Their Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015), 15.

miners, the alleged propensity of rural mountaineers toward violence, and a variety of other factors. This reflected Republican views toward labor at the time, which valued workers as individual strivers, not as a collective body. These views provided a stark contrast with the small socialist and labor press at the time which was sympathetic toward organized labor.

Initially created in the 1850s to limit the expansion of slavery into western territories, the Republican Party advocated for the use of federal powers to strengthen the economy during its early years. However, in the early twentieth century, the Republican Party came to be associated with opposition to government regulation of the economy, a stance which defined the party's economic policy for the next six decades.² Beginning with McKinley's Presidency in 1896, the party expanded governmental control of the economy and limited the power of corporations. These policies were abandoned as the party shifted rightward following the internal division of the party between Taft and Roosevelt in 1912, with most Republicans opposing the expansion of government regulation. This shift to conservatism intensified under the Democratic administration of Woodrow Wilson during which opposition to labor unions and regulation of child labor became key components of the Republican platform.³ Warren G. Harding's electoral victory in 1921 brought the relaxation of government regulation and the weakening of labor unions.⁴ This attitude of the party toward governmental regulation and organized labor was put on full display by the disdain the Republican newspaper editors of West Virginia held toward participants in the 1912 strike.

² Lewis L. Gould, "Republican Party," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History*, eds. Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1210.

³ Gould, "Republican Party," 1212.

⁴ Gould, 1213.

In their platform adopted at the June 1912 nominating convention, Republicans declared their “unchanging faith in government of the people, by the people, for the people.” They stressed the importance of law and order to their party, writing that in a representative democracy, “order is the prerequisite of progress.” To ensure the maintenance of order, they stressed a reliance on the people rather than legislative action, stating that “Indifferent citizenship is an evil against which the law affords no adequate protection and for which legislation can provide no remedy.”⁵ The party’s platform of 1920 expanded on their belief in the importance of law and order. The platform included a demand that every citizen enjoy the “sacred” rights to free speech, free press, free assembly, and the right of representation by “duly chosen representatives.” This platform also showed the party’s stance on labor. The party acknowledged the importance of collective bargaining to “realizing the true ends of industrial justice,” yet discouraged the use of strikes, instead advocating for the use of impartial committees to facilitate voluntary arbitration.⁶

As explored by historian Richard G. Lowe, the Republican Party in West Virginia traces its roots to the Virginia Republican Party. The Republican Party of Virginia was founded in the northwestern city of Wheeling in what later became West Virginia by a group of farmers and merchants in 1856.⁷ Central to the platform of the Party in the state was the economic opposition to slavery, which grew from a resentment of the domination of the state’s government by eastern slaveowners which alienated the small farmers of the

⁵ “Republican Party Platform of 1912,” The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/republican-party-platform-1912>.

⁶ “Republican Party Platform of 1920,” The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/republican-party-platform-1920>.

⁷ Richard G. Lowe, “The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia, 1856-1860,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 81, no.3 (July 1973): 264.

west who owned no or few slaves.⁸ Shortly after the establishment of the Republican Party in Virginia, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* became an organ of the party under the leadership of editor Archibald Campbell. Though he did not openly endorse Republican candidates, Campbell expressed Republican sentiments in his editorials, and by 1857 the *Intelligencer* was receiving funding from New York Republicans. At this point, Campbell began writing editorials that were critical of slaveholders. He regarded slavery as a threat to white free labor and raised little concerns as to its negative impact on enslaved African Americans, and he even expressed anti-Black sentiments while he criticized slavery. Through the popularity of his newspaper, Campbell became a leading spokesperson for the Republican Party.⁹ Virginia Republicans went on to spearhead the creation of West Virginia in 1863, after which their party became the dominant political force in the state.¹⁰

Both the 1912-1913 strike and the Battle of Blair Mountain occurred during the administrations of Republican governors. In his 1913 inaugural address, Governor Henry D. Hatfield was quiet when it came to the ongoing strike, with his comment on labor being that despite the mineral wealth of West Virginia, the operators and miners in the state did not reap many of the economic benefits. The governor pledged to ensure that the people of West Virginia would profit from the natural wealth of the state.¹¹ In contrast to Hatfield, Ephraim Morgan was explicit regarding his attitude toward the violent strike in his 1921 inaugural address. In addressing the violence, he was outraged at the negative

⁸ Lowe, "The Republican Party in Antebellum Virginia," 260.

⁹ Lowe, 268.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 279.

¹¹ Henry D. Hatfield, "Inaugural Address of Governor Henry D. Hatfield," West Virginia Archives and History, West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture, and History, <http://129.71.204.160/history/government/governors/hatfieldia.html>.

publicity the bloodshed brought to West Virginia. He said that in a “government of laws and not of men” the law is supreme and it is the duty of “the officers of the State and the Country, also of the citizens, to see that it is upheld at all hazards, and no man, whether he be employer or employee, has the right under the law to use unlawful means even to accomplish an otherwise just result.” He held both the coal operators and the miners responsible for the lawlessness, saying that though an employer had the right to deny employment, he did not have the right to abuse laborers, and though the laborer had a right to strike he did not have a right to destroy his employer’s property. He held violence to be “un-American,” expressing his belief that such acts should not be tolerated and that anyone who advocated further violence was “a menace to society and an enemy to the interests he pretends to represent.”¹²

When the mine wars picked up again following WWI, the Republican newspaper editors of West Virginia began to re-evaluate their stance on the labor issue, considering a re-ignition of the flames of strife which only the economic conditions of a nation at war were able to keep at bay. The miners complained in 1920 of the unjust treatment they faced at the hands of private detectives, just as they had in 1912. The editors who had earlier been opposed to the strike, began to question the propriety of coal companies’ use of private detectives to perform security and eviction duties, duties they felt should have been left to the police. The private detectives and mine guards, drawn from the ranks of the Baldwin-Felts Agency, had made themselves enemies of the inhabitants of coal

¹² Ephraim F. Morgan, “Inaugural Address of Governor E.F. Morgan,” West Virginia Archives and History, West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture, and History, <http://129.71.204.160/history/government/governors/morgania.html>.

camps with the violent methods they employed when cracking down on union activity and evicting former employees from their company-owned housing.

The Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency earned its brutal reputation in the coalfields of not only West Virginia, but of Colorado as well during the Coalfield War of 1913-1914. In 1892 William G. Baldwin, the son of a Confederate general from the Appalachia-adjacent Tazewell County, Virginia took control of his former employer in which he owned stock, the Eureka Detective Agency, making himself and his underlings valuable assets to the capitalists who were bringing the lumber and mining industries into West Virginia at the turn of the 20th century by cracking down on moonshiners selling hooch to loggers and miners.¹³ In 1893 Baldwin hired Thomas Felts, a field agent with a reputation for bravery and lethal skill with firearms, with Felts eventually assuming shared control of the agency chartered as Baldwin-Felts Detectives, Incorporated.¹⁴ Under the leadership of Felts, the agency gained its reputation as one of the more violent private detective agencies in American labor history. Their response to the 1912-1913 strike in West Virginia proved their efficiency, securing a contract with Rockefeller, who hired them to put down strikes in Colorado, leading to the Ludlow Massacre in 1914.¹⁵ Employed by the mine owners in West Virginia, Felts kept tabs on members of the United Mineworkers of America, testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Education and Labor in 1913 that he kept a list of every known UMWA organizer, copies of which he provided to companies in areas of labor strife, holding that these organizers

¹³ T.R.C Hutton, "The Appalachian 'Gunmen of Capitalism'," in *Reconsidering Southern Labor History: Race, Class, and Power*, ed. Matthew Hild and Keri Leigh Merritt (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 144-145.

¹⁴ Hutton, "Gunmen of Capitalism," 146-147.

¹⁵ Hutton, 148.

composed a so-called “criminal element” which stirred up the workers into a frenzy.¹⁶ By collaborating with Progressive Era industrialists, the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency played a key role in modernizing the traditional culture of Appalachia by keeping workers in line.¹⁷ While policing the coal fields of Southern West Virginia, the Baldwin-Felts agency came into conflict with the UMWA. The Mine Wars resulted from the clash between the private detectives in the employment of coal companies and the workers who found support in the union.

The UMWA began organization efforts in the southern fields of West Virginia in the 1910s to increase the competitive edge of the unionized mines of the north, preventing the nonunion fields from underselling and thus stealing the markets from their union counterparts.¹⁸ In concentrating their unionizing efforts in the southern coalfields of West Virginia, the UMWA drew opposition from the coal companies, and in turn this brought the organizers as well as the miners into conflict with both the Baldwin-Felts agents and local law enforcement.¹⁹ The UMWA called for strike action to protect the miners from unsafe working conditions which existed in part because of the refusal of the state legislature to adopt mine safety laws. The hesitancy of the state’s legislators to enact such measures sometimes led to disaster, such as the explosion at two of the Fairmont Coal Company’s mines that killed over three-hundred and fifty men in

¹⁶ John Hennen, “A Lavish but Well-Directed Hand: Modernization Ideology in Porfirian Mexico and Southern Appalachia, 1876-1913,” *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 4 (1992): 10.

¹⁷ Hennen, “A Lavish but Well-Directed Hand,” 10.

¹⁸ Harry A. Butowsky, “Rethinking Labor History: The West Virginia/Virginia Coal Mining Industry,” *The George Wright Forum* 11, no. 2 (1994): 13.

¹⁹ Butowsky, “Rethinking Labor History,” 13.

December of 1907. These preventable disasters occurred as coal companies sought to keep their costs as low as possible, even at the expense of safety.²⁰

Following the settlement of the bloody 1912-1913 strike, the New River and Winding Gulf Coalfields were unionized and integrated into UMWA District 29. The beginning of U.S. involvement in WWI proved a great boon for the union, with a dramatic increase in membership numbers. This increase was a direct result of the Washington Agreement of October 1917 between the UMWA, coal operators, and the U.S. Fuel Administration under the leadership of Henry A. Garfield to help maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of wartime coal production. The measures adopted by the operators and the union included prohibiting the expulsion of workers for joining a union, a pledge on behalf of the union to abstain from calling for any work stoppages, the inclusion of a provision in contracts which allowed for any miners who went on strike to be charged a fine of one dollar per day.²¹ A final provision of the Washington Agreement, likely of the most significance to miners, was that wages would be frozen until whichever came first, the end of the war or April 1st, 1920.²² The stability of labor relations which existed under these conditions began to fall apart when the armistice of November 11th, 1918 went into effect, at which time Supervisor Garfield of the United States Fuel Administration lifted the controls on the price of coal, but left the wage freeze in effect, while at the same time coal prices saw a stark trend upward. Though dissatisfied with this change in their arrangements, miners did not immediately strike due to the

²⁰ Kazuko Uchimura, "Coal Operators and Market Competition: The Case of West Virginia's Smokeless Coalfields and the Fairmont Field, 1853-1933," *West Virginia History* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 75.

²¹ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 387.

²² Uchimura, "Coal Operators and Market Competition," 76.

moratorium on such action as stipulated by the provisions of the Washington Agreement. However, after the UMWA called for a bituminous coal strike to begin on November 1st, a settlement was reached which granted bituminous miners a twenty percent increase in wages effective February of 1920. Following this small victory for the union and the miners who filled its ranks, coal operators began to require their workers to sign so-called “yellow dog” contracts which established union membership as grounds for immediate termination and eviction from company-owned housing. Such evictions in Mingo County fueled the Matewan Massacre of 1920, setting off a chain of events culminating in the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain.²³

In each case, the unprecedented waves of violence in 1912-1913 and the post war strikes attracted the attention of the state’s press. Newspaper editors from all over the state responded to the strike. Editors in the communities of Martinsburg and Shepherdstown in the Eastern Panhandle, Wheeling in the Western Panhandle, Bluefield, Hinton, and Lewisburg in the Southeast, Huntington in the Southwest, and Clarksburg and Fairmont in the North-Central Region opined on the causes and assigned blame. Prominent newspaper editors in these communities that supported the Republican Party included Herschel Coombs Ogden of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Hugh Isaac Shott of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, and Wilbur Morrison of the *Clarksburg Telegram*. Editors that expressed a Democratic viewpoint included Max von Schlegel of the *Martinsburg Journal*, Joseph H. Long of the *Huntington Advertiser*, and Thomas Hamner Dennis of the *Greenbrier Independent*.

²³ Uchimura, 77.

Editors vented their frustration with the striking miners at first, and then with the coal operators, shifting from the former to the latter over time. In the case of the strike of 1912-1913, the opinion of many of the newspaper editors was biased against the striking coal miners, with those publications funded by or sympathetic to the Republican Party siding with the coal operators, largely encouraging the workers to return to the mines, and arguing that the complaints of the unionized miners were unnecessary and that they were being stirred up and exploited by some of the more radical elements of the UMWA.

The disdain Republican outlets held for the striking miners was not shared by the socialist and labor press of West Virginia who criticized the government's handling of the strike and the abuses the miners faced while working under the conditions imposed upon them by capitalism. However unsympathetic the Republican press was to the striking miners during the strike of 1912-1913, this attitude shifted during the period of the Matewan Massacre and the Battle of Blair Mountain.

When violence again broke out in the Spring of 1920, the Republican-dominated press of West Virginia re-evaluated their viewpoint on the strike that they held prior to the war. Whereas before the war the miners' concerns were largely diminished by the editors who supported the Republican Party, they turned to look at why these strikes occurred in the first place, and determined the strikes and the violent outbursts associated with them were the fault of the coal companies for using private mine guards and paying off law enforcement to evict coal miners for joining unions. Though they did raise complaints about the union itself, the largest issue the Republican editors had with both the UMWA and the coal operators in 1920 was that they undermined respect for law and

order by encouraging violence and resorting to vigilantism. The Republican editors also criticized local and state government authorities for refusing to eliminate the private mine guard system.

The primary newspaper sources from the era of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars reveal the evolving attitudes held toward organized labor by supporters of the Republican Party from The Progressive Era to the Interwar Period. The First chapter of this thesis will focus on the newspaper coverage of the Paint Creek-Cabin Creek Strike of 1912-1913 and highlight how the othering and stereotyping of the striking miners by the Republican press contrasted with the criticisms of capitalism and the government espoused by the labor press. Chapter two will cover the Matewan Massacre of 1920 and the subsequent murder of Sid Hatfield, illustrating how the Republican press came to turn against the coal operators and private detectives. Finally, chapter three will focus on the coverage of the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain and the subsequent 1922 treason trials, which show that though the private detective system came under increased scrutiny following the events of 1920, organized labor was accused of harboring subversive tendencies.

Chapter One: “Slug ‘Em and Jug ‘Em”: Deflecting Dissent onto Others during the Paint Creek – Cabin Creek Strike of 1912-1913

In April of 1912, miners along Paint Creek refused to work. They struck in response to the mine operators’ failure to meet their demand for the same pay rate per ton as miners employed within other unionized areas. Inspired by this strike, the miners of Cabin Creek submitted their demands to employers. As summarized by historian Holt Wheeler, they wanted:

union recognition, rights of free speech and peaceable assembly, an end to black-listing of union men, an end to compulsory trading at company-owned stores, an end to “cribbing”... and the establishment of 2,000 lbs. as the ton of coal for which they were to be paid, the installation of scales at all mines, the right to check-weighmen selected and paid by the miners, and the joint setting by the company and miner check-weighmen of all “docking” penalties for impurities in the coal mined.²⁴

Cabin Creek’s miners declared their own strike when these demands were not met.

Though labor historians now agree the strike corresponded to low wages and poor working conditions, the business and governmental institutions of West Virginia used the press to blame the strike on various other factors in a bid to silence dissent and maintain the image of the state.²⁵ Analysis of period newspaper accounts of the strike suppressed pro-labor and socialist views, helping form a narrative of the mine wars that delegitimized the concerns of the workers.

Ethnic Prejudice

²⁴ Hoyt N. Wheeler, “Mountaineer Mine Wars: An Analysis of the West Virginia Mine Wars of 1912-1913 and 1920-1921,” *The Business History Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 70. Cribbing refers to the practice of constructing wooden cribs on the sides of the mine cars to make them hold more coal, and then paying the piecework miner as though the car were of ordinary size. As defined by Collins English Dictionary, a check weighman is “a representative elected by coal miners to check the findings of the mine owner’s weighman where miners are paid by the weight of coal mined.” This position serves to ensure that miners receive the proper pay.

²⁵ David Alan Corbin’s 2011 work *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields* and James Green’s 2015 work *The Devil is Here in These Hills* represent the most current labor historiography of the Mine Wars.

The Republican press sought to blame the labor strife in the Kanawha field on was the qualities attributed to certain ethnicities which comprised the population of the miners. Significant numbers of immigrants worked in the mines, with 4,615 Hungarians and 10,698 Italians working in the West Virginia mines in 1913.²⁶ Republican editors such as Wilbur Morrison of the *Clarksburg Telegram* attributed the strike to the unruly behavior of the Italian as well as Central and Eastern European immigrants employed in the mines in early reports of the outbreak of the strike.

Morrison replaced Stuart Reed as editor of the *Clarksburg Telegram* in 1899. From its founding in 1874 by Robert Northcott, the *Telegram* functioned as an organ of the Republican Party. Coverage of the *Telegram* focused heavily on Republican politics and its editors gave less attention to labor conflict than they did to news concerning local civic organizations. Under the editorship of Stuart Reed from 1891 until 1899, the paper gave voice to the Republican politics of Reed, who served on the West Virginia senate, going on to serve as West Virginia Secretary of State and U.S. Representative. The trend of criticizing Democrat politicians and celebrating Republican electoral victories started by Reed was continued by Morrison.²⁷

On April 18th, 1912, the papers already associated sporadic labor unrest in the coal fields with the large concentration of Italians and other immigrant laborers. Ten days before the UMWA declared a strike, the *Clarksburg Daily Telegram* reported on a wildcat strike of around 3,000 miners in the Kanawha Field. It reported that the wage

²⁶ Kenneth R. Bailey, "A Judicious Mixture: Negroes and Immigrants in the West Virginia Mines, 1880-1917," in *Blacks in Appalachia*, eds. William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 119.

²⁷ "The Clarksburg Telegram," *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84037844/>.

strike was carried out against the wishes of union officials because “the Italians and other foreigners, outnumbering the Americans have prevented the operation of the mines where the union miners predominate.”²⁸ The UMWA encouraged miners to work through pending a settlement and unionized native-born miners were reportedly satisfied to work while the wage question was being settled, such that there had been “no serious trouble” among miners except for “such differences that usually arise in sections where Italians or other foreigners hold sway.”²⁹ According to this account, the Italian miners differed inherently from their native-born counterparts by virtue of their unwillingness to compromise or follow the advice of union officials. The narrative that the labor unrest was perpetrated solely by a group of stubborn immigrant laborers intensified in the wake of the union’s strike declaration on April 18th.

The *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* of Saturday April 20th, 1912, also sought to lay the blame at the feet of the Italian miners. The front page of the *Telegraph* reported that the “majority of the dissatisfied men” were “said to be Italian.”³⁰ Edited and owned by the postmaster of Bluefield, Hugh Ike Shott, the Daily Telegraph espoused a conservative, Republican viewpoint. Purchasing the weekly *Telegraph*, Shott began daily circulation of the paper in 1896. Serving as postmaster of Bluefield for eleven years, Shott long supported the Republican Party, eventually serving as Representative of West Virginia’s Fifth Congressional district from 1929 to 1933 and as Senator from 1942 to 1943.³¹ As

²⁸ “Coal Miners Idle in Kanawha Field,” *Clarksburg Daily Telegram*, April 8, 1912.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ H.I. Shott, “Looks like Strike in the Kanawha Field,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 1912.

³¹ C. Stuart McGehee, “Hugh I. Shott,” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, 19 February 2019, Web, 23 December 2022.

owner and editor of the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, Shott voiced his Republican viewpoint.³²

The Bluefield paper extended the critique, reporting that the Boomer Coal Company was dealing with a strike since April 1st, when several dissatisfied Italian miners, men which “not even the union could control,” walked off the job and did not return. The rhetoric used in describing the men who participated in this initial walkout gave the impression that they behaved stubbornly, even wildly, showing allegiance to neither their employer nor their union. Though the author of the article does not explicitly say that this uncontrollability is an inherent quality of Italians, the writer of the article goes to great lengths to argue that this strike is entirely the fault of Italians. As explored by labor historian James Green, a similar strike led by Italians at Boomer³³ in 1908 was written off by the coal operators as a riot by “hotheaded” Southern Italian immigrants.³⁴ The author of the *Daily Telegraph* article presented statistics to support their contention that this really was an “Italian strike”, stating that an estimated seventy per cent of union-affiliated miners were Italian and that “the proportion of men out at the Boomer Coal Company plant is said to bear a larger percentage of Italians.”³⁵

Shott’s assertion that most of the striking miners were Italian seems aimed at reassuring the readership of the *Telegraph* that there existed no labor strife within the West Virginia coal fields, but rather an outburst among a particularly hot-headed group of

³²Unsigned or un-attributed articles in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* are assumed to be written by, or with the approval of H.I. Shott.

³⁴ James Green, *The Devil Is Here in These Hills: West Virginia’s Coal Miners and Their Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2015), 104. Boomer is a Census Designated Place in Fayette County, situated on the bank of the New River.

³⁵ Shott, “Looks like Strike in the Kanawha Field,” *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, April 20, 1912.

European immigrants. He implicitly absolved the Boomer Coal Company and the other coal operators in the Kanawha field of any wrongdoing or failure to provide adequate wages and benefits to the laborers in their employ, shifting the focus instead on the inherent racial qualities erroneously attributed to persons of Italian descent.

J.W. Graham, editor of the *Hinton Daily News and Leader*, blamed the labor action on certain ethnic elements found among the coal miners, not only Italians but immigrants hailing from other parts of Europe as well. The paper ran a front-page story concerning the ongoing strike which also claimed that European immigrants instigated the strife. It reported on the arrival of agents of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, sent to monitor the strike conditions at Boomer where, like what was reported in Bluefield almost a week prior, “foreign miners predominate.”³⁶ The article reported that the operators of the mine expected little trouble from the strike except “at the mines where the Italians and ‘Huns’ are employed.”³⁷ The circulation of the narrative blaming European immigrants for the labor strife by editors with ties to the Republican Party in West Virginia shows that they were interested in absolving the state’s businessmen of any larger responsibility to their workers by arguing that the current walkouts were not purely related to labor strife. The Republican-aligned press claimed early that the Italian and Hungarian miners were at fault for the troubled situation and did not quickly forget this idea as the strike progressed over the following months.

³⁶ J.W. Graham, “Miners Requested to Resume Work,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, April 26, 1912.

³⁷ Though the term “Huns” was by this point used as a derogatory term for Germans, given the prevalence of Hungarian immigrants within the coal mines, as per the relevant historiography, this is referring here to the Hungarian miners. Hinton is the seat of Summers County, about 70 miles southeast of Boomer and not located within West Virginia’s coalfields. Graham, “Miners Requested to Resume Work,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, April 26, 1912.

When a battle erupted between miners and mine guards at the Wicomah³⁸ mining camp along Paint Creek in early June of 1912, the Republican-aligned newspapers again quickly blamed this outburst on the Italian miners. Coverage of this pitched battle appeared in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* of June 6th, 1912. The special dispatch to the *Intelligencer* concerning this outbreak of violence gave special attention to the ethnicity of the sole fatality of the skirmish, reporting that “one Italian miner is dead,” killed during the shootout.³⁹ The inclusion of the adjective “Italian” to specify a sub-set of miners reflects the racial attitudes of the time. The men who engaged in battle with the mine guards at Wicomah were “alleged to have come from the Boomer operations where the Italian miners have given the authorities trouble for years.”⁴⁰ This article moves the source of the strike even further away from a labor dispute, placing the violence among Italian miners within a context extending beyond the chronology of the strike, asserting that these men had a propensity toward violent conduct owing to their ethnicity rather than this outburst being connected to the labor situation. The stereotyping of miners by the press to explain the turn to violence during the strike, as evidenced by the historical record, was not only directed toward immigrants or ethnic minorities as the strike progressed.

Gun Toting and Moonshining: Stereotyping of “Mountain Folk”

In addition to blaming immigrants for the Paint Creek- Cabin Creek strike, the Republican editors of West Virginia also attributed the strike to the stereotypical vices of

³⁹ H.C. Ogden, “Pitched Battle with Miners,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 6, 1912. Wicomah was located along Paint Creek in Kanawha County.

⁴⁰ Ogden, “Pitched Battle with Miners,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, June 6, 1912.

the inhabitants of the state's "hollers": gun violence and consumption of illicit liquor. An article appearing in Graham's *Hinton Daily News* of October 23rd, 1912, shortly after the end of the first period of martial law during the strike, echoed the stereotype of the moonshine drinking mountaineer, alleging that the miners suffered from quite a thirst for alcoholic beverages during the prohibition of the elixir that accompanied the military occupation by the national guard. The article claims that the "miners have been thirsty since martial law was lifted."⁴¹ The author asserts that since martial law had been lifted, the miners had "been doing considerable drinking" and that "large quantities of intoxicants" were being "daily shipped into the district."⁴² The context of the appearance of the article within the paper gives the impression that the editor, J.W. Graham, had a low opinion of the alleged consumption of alcohol by miners. Immediately following this article is a story regarding a temperance rally. By giving glowing praise of the rally, the author indirectly indicates that he endorses the temperance movement.

Closely mirroring the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the temperance movement in the early 20th Century, alcohol was seen as a negative influence on the rural Appalachians who worked in the coal mines of southern West Virginia. As explored by historian John D. Buenker in his 1969 study of support for prohibition in Illinois, the Prohibition Party closely aligned itself with Protestant and nativist values, viewing the current wave of predominantly Catholic immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe as a "menace" to American institutions, spearheading movements to "Americanize aliens" and promote use

⁴¹ J.W. Graham, "Much Booze sent into Strike Region," *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, October 23, 1912.

⁴² Graham, "Much Booze sent into Strike Region," *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, October 23, 1912.

of the Bible in public schools.⁴³ Prohibition advocates saw the abolition of alcohol as a remedy to the various “evils” brought on by the influence of the new wave of immigrants, principal among these being reduced worker productivity and the prevalence of crime.⁴⁴ As revealed by Marie Gaytan’s comparative study of prohibition in the U.S. and Mexico, Temperance activists did not shy away from professing their goal of keeping America free from foreign influence, with the president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union vowing to maintain a nation “unsoiled by foreign influences” and activist Mary Hunt expressing her views regarding the undesirability of the “immigrant hordes” from the old world who brought habits and ideas favorable to the use of alcohol.⁴⁵ Not only associated with immigrants, the alleged counterproductive and crime-inducing effects of alcohol were portrayed as prevalent among the heavily-drinking miners of West Virginia by Graham’s *Hinton Daily News*.

Speaking at the Hinton temperance rally, “Mr. Cox” was said to have presented an “unanswerable argument” in favor of Prohibition.⁴⁶ Leader of the Wisconsin Anti-Saloon League, Cox reportedly “had the subject well in hand,” the result of the meeting pleasing the “friends of Temperance.”⁴⁷ Appearing in a paper published in a town in which attitudes were favorable toward if not supportive of the temperance movement and the adoption of prohibition as a constitutional amendment, an article regarding the heavy drinking habits of striking miners portrays their behavior in a negative light.

⁴³ John D. Bunker, “The Illinois Legislature and Prohibition, 1907-1919,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 62, no.4 (Winter 1969): 364.

⁴⁴ Bunker, “The Illinois Legislature and Prohibition,” 365-366.

⁴⁵ Marie Sarita Gaytan, “Drinking Difference: Race, Consumption, and Alcohol Prohibition in Mexico and the United States,” *Ethnicities* 14, no.3 (June 2014): 442.

⁴⁶ J.W. Graham, “Very Large Meeting at Temperance Rally,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, October 23, 1912.

⁴⁷ Graham, “Very Large Meeting at Temperance Rally,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, October 23, 1912.

Alleged propensity for gun violence was also portrayed as a contributing factor to the strike by the press. Reprinted in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* in February of 1913, editor of the *Sistersville Oil Review* published an article which accused “mountaineer-miners” of turning too quickly to gun violence throughout the strike, owing to their inherent ignorance. These “people of the hills” could not understand “the great system” which was depriving them of their freedom, something they valued first “even in a case of life and death.”⁴⁸

Founded in August 1852 by Eli B. Swearingen and Oliver Taylor to garner support for Winfield Scott’s presidential campaign, the *Intelligencer* from its inception was a mouthpiece for the Whig Party, and after the broad appeal of the paper became apparent, it began receiving financial support from the recently formed Republican Party by 1858 under the management of Archibald W. Campbell and John F. McDermot who purchased the paper in 1856.⁴⁹ Following Campbell’s death, the paper was purchased by Herschel Coombs Ogden in 1904. Under the leadership of Ogden, who retained ownership of *The Intelligencer* until his death in 1943, the paper continued to espouse a Republican and pro-business viewpoint.⁵⁰ Though not acting as an official organ of the party, *The Intelligencer* under Ogden continued to back the Republican Party during the strike which occurred during the terms of two Republican governors. As a supporter of the party, Ogden expressed the same views toward labor as the Republican government of West Virginia.

⁴⁸ H.C. Ogden, “The Strike Situation,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 13, 1913.

⁴⁹ *The Wheeling Intelligencer Wheeling, W. Va. -1961*, (Wheeling, WV), Jan. 1, 1903, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn86092536>.

⁵⁰ George Fetherling, “Wheeling Intelligencer,” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, 14 May 2013, Web, 19 December 2022.

The stereotyping of the mountaineers involved in the strike is connected to the legacy of othering of the people of Appalachia. As pointed out by Ronald L. Lewis, the portrayal of Appalachia as a physically and culturally isolated region arose in American literature of the late 19th Century, the most prominent early example of which was Will Wallace Harney's "A Strange Land and Peculiar People", published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in 1873.⁵¹ Most influential of the "local color" novelists which perpetuated the myth of Appalachian otherness was John Fox, Jr., who publicized the notion of a backward and economically underdeveloped populace in support of absentee economic interests as part of his role as publicist for mineral developers who helped establish the coal industry in central Appalachia.⁵² Mountaineers were routinely portrayed as irrationally violent by industrialists and Progressive Era reformers who painted them as, in the words of cultural historian Anthony Harkins, "diseased, illiterate, undernourished, and degenerate", this stereotypical portrayal serving to justify economic development of the region.⁵³ Silent films of the era also helped create this image, such as D.W. Griffith's 1911 film *The Revenue Man and his Girl*, with its supporting cast of bearded mountaineers with rifles engaging in a shootout with a revenue agent.⁵⁴ The liquor-drinking and heavily armed men portrayed by the newspapers of West Virginia fit nicely within the larger stereotype of Appalachians being developed by the popular media of the time.

⁵¹ Ronald L. Lewis, "Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia," in *Backtalk from Appalachia: Confronting Stereotypes*, eds. Dwight D. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 21.

⁵² Lewis, "Beyond Isolation and Homogeneity: Diversity and the History of Appalachia," 22.

⁵³ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

⁵⁴ Harkins, *Hillbilly*, 62.

In response to the deprivation of freedom by the mine operators and the mine guards in their employ, the simple miners “turn readily to Colt and Winchester” to regain this freedom, as due to their alleged simple-mindedness, they know “no other recourse in pursuit of justice.”⁵⁵ During this phase of the strike, this became one of the dominant explanations for the widespread use of gun violence which became prevalent as the strike progressed. An article published in the *Intelligencer* a month later took this claim that mountaineers working in the mines were quick to turn to guns even further, blaming common folk who were not even employed as coal miners. The author of this article presents a conspiracy theory which alleges that the firearm-wielding men of the hills of West Virginia were intentionally employed by the UMWA for their marksmanship skills, despite their lack of connections to the laborers who initiated the strike in April of 1912.

Echoing the language which appeared in the editorial which was originally published in the *Sistersville Oil Review* and was reprinted in the *Intelligencer* in February, the armed men who participated in the strike were described as “the type [sic] mountaineer, who believe the rifle is the proper weapon to use to force a compliance with their wishes.”⁵⁶ The lawless nature of these men is again stressed within this article, as the author writes that these “mountaineer types” had “never subjected themselves to the laws of the land.”⁵⁷ Interestingly, the tone taken seems to indicate that the author of the *Intelligencer* article, much like the writer for the *Sistersville Oil Review*, is condemning the freedom of these men and their willingness to maintain it, ironic given West

⁵⁵ Ogden, “The Strike Situation,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 13, 1913.

⁵⁶ “Labor Leaders are on Trial,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 8, 1913.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Virginia's motto of *Montani Semper Liberi*.⁵⁸ The author claims that the unrest is not purely related to labor concerns. Presenting a conspiracy theory which serves as a formal accusation of the UMWA, the author claims the men, some of whom "know nothing about mining" were receiving support from the union under the false pretense of being on strike.

The UMWA had long been trying to achieve the union pay scale for the miners of West Virginia, with organizers first entering the state in 1892. The union initially made little headway in organizing West Virginia miners until they were able to secure union recognition and contractual rights for the miners of Kanawha County in 1902.⁵⁹ Following this initial victory, there was a decade of relative peace until the outbreak of the 1912 strike, partially in response to the increased crackdown on union activity by the coal operators.⁶⁰ Due to their history of organizing efforts, the UMWA established itself as an adversary of the coal companies by the time of the 1912-1913 strike.

The *Oil Review* article reprinted in the *Intelligencer* argues that the union enlisted the help of armed men "solicited for what they may do with the rifle."⁶¹ This presents the strike as a dispute which was prolonged unnecessarily via artificial means through the intentional importation of armed elements by the UMWA. The armed agents who allegedly played a willing part in this scheme were portrayed by the author of the article as a lawless band, not subject to any laws, therefore willing to offer their innate skill with violence to the highest bidder. Accusing the UMWA of employing hired guns is ironic given the use of Baldwin-Felts agents to provide security for the coal companies.

⁵⁸ Mountaineers are Always Free.

⁵⁹ Green, 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶¹ "Labor Leaders are on Trial," *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, March 8, 1913.

Failings of Moral Character

Republican newspaper coverage slandered the striking workers and portrayed their interests as far simpler than their concerns regarding the conditions under which they labored. As miners began returning to work, the same papers ran stories that accused those still on strike when some miners began returning to work of simply being lazy and unwilling to work. These men who allegedly spent their days imbibing alcoholic beverages and taking potshots at mine guards, were accused by the press of prolonging the strike owing to their failings of a moral character. Allegations that the strike was prolonged through laziness by the striking miners entered circulation in December of 1912. On the 10th, the *Hinton Daily News*, highly sympathetic to the coal operators, claimed that the operators were only able to keep their mines open with the support of “the few men who have returned to work and who have respect for the contract made by their superior officers.”⁶² The trouble came from the strike which was being maintained by the hundreds of miners who were “rolling in filth in tents” until forced to clean upon threat of arrest by the National Guard, and who were “congregating about railroad stations and threatening the lives of men who desired to work and provide decently for their families.”⁶³ Though the author of this article did not explicitly refer to the strikers as lazy, the stark contrast of these men who were apparently living in filth and threatening the lives of workers with those who returned to work and were “decently providing” for their families implied that this was the portrait being painted of the striking miners. This is an example of the *Hinton Daily News* venting the frustrations of the mine operators

⁶² J.W. Graham, “Miners in the New River Field May Go on Strike,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, December 10, 1912.

⁶³ Graham, “Winding Gulf Working Full: Modern Mines,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, July 3, 1913.

who so desperately wished to obtain the labor of these striking miners without acceding to their demands for better pay and better working conditions.

Though this article from December of 1912 only implicitly blamed the strike on the laziness of the miners who were engaged in the labor action, by early July of 1913, when the strike was waning though not yet fully concluded, the accusation of laziness on behalf of these striking miners became explicit. Within the pages of the *Hinton Daily News*, one can see a transformation in rhetoric through a comparison of the December 10th, 1912, article and one which was printed in April 1913. On April 18th, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* presented the contention of the coal operators that they offered an adequate wage scale prior to the strike, and that they bore no responsibility for the strike. However, they argued that the refusal of coal operators to accede to the miners' original demands was "not a matter of recognizing the union" but that the companies refused to enter contracts which cost the coal companies more money.⁶⁴ The anonymous representative of the coal operators accused the miners of initiating the entire trouble by breaking promises made to the companies by "demanding additional pay" during a time when the Paint Creek operators "had been losing money for eight years."⁶⁵ He even asserted that the operators had been generously paying the miners "much more than was paid in non-union fields." The failure to recognize the union is, in this account, a response to the miners' demands for better pay.⁶⁶

On July 3rd, 1913, Graham reported the return to work by many of the miners employed in operations at Winding Gulf⁶⁷. The author writes that all the men had

⁶⁴ "Text of Governor Hatfield's Proposition to Settle Strike," *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 18, 1913.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The Winding Gulf field is located within Raleigh County.

returned to the mines, apart from those who were “too lazy to work.”⁶⁸ The remainder of the men still on strike made camp in the nearby community of Sophia, living in tents and “pretending to be on a strike.”⁶⁹ As the UMWA had recently agreed to a settlement enforced by Governor Hatfield, the wildcat strike of miners dissatisfied with the deal was viewed as illegitimate. The remainder of the article goes on to talk of how greatly the miners at Winding Gulf were provided for by the coal operators, this serving to downplay the strike and give the impression that the failure of any men to return to work could not be linked to any issues with the conditions faced by the miners. The coal operators argued that there was no reason for a strike, as their employees already received adequate pay and benefits.

This line of reasoning published in the newspaper sought to shift the blame away from the coal companies and their refusal to allow membership in the United Mineworkers of America among their employees, but onto the miners for hurting the pockets of the coal operators.

No Justice, No Peace: Socialist Agitation and Crackdown

Closely related to the idea that miners were striking under false pretenses, accusations arose that socialist agitators had incited the strike. While this narrative was present in the papers consistently throughout the time of the strike beginning in August of 1912, it came to dominate the discourse regarding the strike. Commentators argued that the strike only reached the level of violence it did and lasted as long as it did due to the influence of socialist agitators and union organizers. A key figure among these agitators was the notorious Irish-born labor activist Mary Harris Jones, better known as “Mother

⁶⁸ “Text of Governor Hatfield’s Proposition to Settle Strike,” *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, April 18, 1913.

⁶⁹ Graham, “Winding Gulf Working Full: Modern Mines,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, July 3, 1913.

Jones.” Jones rose to notoriety within West Virginia given her involvement with the 1912-1913 strike as well as the latter half of the mine war of 1920-1921. Mother Jones was no stranger to the conditions faced by the state’s coal miners, as she had visited the state a decade earlier in 1902. During the coal strike of 1902, Jones went into West Virginia on behalf of then-president of the United Mineworkers of America John Mitchell to bring the miners of the Fairmont coalfield into the union as part of their drive to organize the miners of southern West Virginia.⁷⁰ Jones’ role was to hold mass meetings of miners, during which she would “sweep whole mining camps into the fold.”⁷¹ When the strike broke out in 1912, Jones was again ready to help organize her “boys” who worked the mines of West Virginia’s southern coalfields.

Establishing her reputation as a firebrand decades before her involvement in the 1902 strike, Mother Jones was no stranger to the cause of organized labor. Born Mary Harris in County Cork, Ireland in 1837, Jones’ life prior to becoming a prominent labor organizer was fraught with hardship, leaving her native land at the age of eight to escape the devastating effects of famine, her family settled in Chicago after living in Canada for a brief period. Jones married iron molder George Jones, living with him and their four children in Memphis until George and the children tragically died of yellow fever in 1867. Following this loss, Jones returned to Chicago where she worked as a dressmaker until 1871 when disaster again struck, her shop destroyed by the Great Fire.⁷² After staying in Chicago for a brief period following the fire, Jones became acquainted with the

⁷⁰ Edward M. Steel, “Mother Jones in the Fairmont Field, 1902,” *The Journal of American History* 57, no. 2 (September 1970): 291.

⁷¹ Steel, “Mother Jones in the Fairmont Field, 1902,” *The Journal of American History* 57, no. 2 (September 1970): 291.

⁷² Simon Cordery, *Mother Jones: Raising Cain and Consciousness* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 3.

rising socialist movement during a visit to San Francisco, and in 1873 she visited Europe to study working conditions there.⁷³ Following this initial flirtation with labor and politics, Jones became involved with the American labor movement, deeply affected by the brutal crackdown on a railroad strike which she witnessed in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1877.⁷⁴ Inspired by these early experiences Jones became an organizer of coal miners during an Alabama strike in 1894, going on to become a central figure in the UMWA's organizing efforts in West Virginia in 1897.⁷⁵

The *Hinton Daily News* of August 16th, 1912, pointed to a mass meeting of miners attended by Jones as one reason the strike had become violent, justifying the decision by then-governor Henry D. Hatfield to send a company of state militia into the strike zone, a precursor to the declaration of martial law in the region. The report alleged that at the meeting, held on the previous day in the capital city of Charleston, Jones encouraged those miners in attendance to “go to Cabin Creek and clean out the mine guards” unless the governor acted before the following night.⁷⁶ So assured of the influence wielded by Mother Jones, “Prominent citizens of Charleston,” including businessmen, argued the governor was remiss for even allowing “agitators” such as Jones to go onto “private property in the coal regions and stir up strife, cause strikes and preach civil war.”⁷⁷ Afraid Jones' speech would incite violence, the business men urged Governor Hatfield to send in troops to control the situation. Well into the strike, the *Hinton Daily News* continued to

⁷³ Dale Fetherling, *Mother Jones, The Miners' Angel* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 10.

⁷⁴ Fetherling, 13.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁶ J.W. Graham, “Cabin Creek Strike in a Very Critical Shape,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, August 16, 1912.

⁷⁷ Graham, “Cabin Creek Strike in a Very Critical Shape,” *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, August 16, 1912.

publish the sentiment that the agitation of Mother Jones and others were to blame for inciting the strike, with another article to this effect appearing in the Valentine's Day, 1913 issue of the publication. Published soon after Jones' arrest on charges of making inflammatory speeches, laments that she had not been arrested sooner, saying that it "should have been made long ago" as she was "largely responsible for the conditions in the strike zone."⁷⁸

Targeting not only Jones, the author of this article also called for the arrest of the editor of the prominent socialist newspaper *The Labor Argus* of Charleston arguing this arrest would "tend to help conditions."⁷⁹ This was based on the assertion, that the publication had been said to "publish articles which were almost entirely untrue and of such a nature as widen the breach between the miner and the operators."⁸⁰

Graham got his wish when, under a state of martial law, the editors of the *Labor Argus* and the *Huntington Socialist and Labor Star*, another prominent leftist publication, were arrested when their offices were raided by National Guardsmen in the following months. Under instructions from Governor Hatfield, federal troops placed the assistant editor of the *Labor Argus* under arrest on April 30th, returning within the next two days to arrest Fred Merrick, the editor, and confiscate their printing presses. The following day, Hatfield issued warrants for the arrest of the staff of the *Huntington Socialist and Labor Star*. Military officials conducted these arrests, this time joined by police during the night on May 8th. Not stopping at these arrests of editors, another group of officials raided the

⁷⁸ J.W. Graham, "The Strike Situation," *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, February 14, 1913.

⁷⁹ Graham, "The Strike Situation," *The Hinton Daily News and Leader*, February 14, 1913.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

paper's offices, severely damaging the printing presses and confiscating the next edition of the paper in the process.⁸¹

During the period of martial law under Hatfield, he brought to bear the substantial resources of his administration to enforce his proposed agreement to put an end to the strike. On April 14th, 1913, Hatfield proposed an agreement which would allow the UMWA to organize on company property, establish a nine-hour workday, establish the right to a check-weighman, eliminate mandatory trading at company stores, and establish a grievance procedure, yet it would not require coal operators to formally recognize the union or put an end to blacklisting or the use of private guards, an omission which upset the striking miners, as well as the UMWA and socialist opposition.⁸² Gathering support from among the Chamber of Commerce and the coal companies, Hatfield threatened measures against the UMWA unless District 17 President Thomas Cairns and his officers agreed to his deal, forcing the union to approve the deal through a limited selection of delegates rather than submitting the matter to the general membership for ratification. Further exerting his executive authority, Hatfield also issued an ultimatum to the striking miners, threatening them with deportation from the state by the National Guard unless they returned to work within thirty-six hours of the adoption of his resolution.⁸³ Such a heavy-handed response from the governor garnered heavy criticism from the socialist press, criticism which Hatfield sought to stamp out.

Severely impacted and understandably incensed at the crackdown on freedom of the press by Hatfield, The *Socialist and Labor Star* told their side of the story on May

⁸¹ David A. Corbin, "Betrayal in the West Virginia Coal Fields: Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Party of America, 1912-1914," *The Journal of American History* 64, no. 4 (March 1978): 994.

⁸² Green, 174.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 178.

30th, 1913.⁸⁴ They told a story of violence and destruction when recounting the harrowing details of the raid on their offices. Major Tom Davis, Lieutenant Rippitoe and Lieutenant Templeton led the raid between 1 A.M. and 2 A.M. on the early morning of Friday, May 9th. Thompson claimed the military men “ruthlessly” destroyed equipment belonging to the Socialist Printing Co., including “job work, printing material, plates, etc.” The editor depicted this action by the “militiamen” as wanton and egregious violence through the rhetoric and language employed, a maelstrom in which type “was beaten to a shapeless mass of mashed metal,” plates were “beaten and broken,” and forms were “hurled from the composing stones,” their contents scattered over the office and street.”⁸⁵

Not only did this action by the military deal a huge blow to the capacity of the paper to disseminate its political viewpoints, the editor lamented that these “valiant soldiers” also hurt the local businesses of Huntington when they “demolished every job” in departments in which the Socialist Printing Company carried out commercial printing, destroying by-laws for local unions and printed matter for local merchants while they worked “the will of the governor upon the inanimate printing plant.”⁸⁶ While this group of military men were busy raising hell within the offices of the Socialist Printing Company, Cabell County police under the leadership of Sheriff Buffington set out to arrest associates of the printing company for whom they had warrants, sarcastically

⁸⁴ Interestingly, the paper is dated May 30th, 1912. Whether this is due to the level of damage to the printing presses or an intentional act of deception on behalf of the editors to give the false impression of great damage to the printing presses is not immediately clear. However, upon further inspection, the lack of any other apparent issues with the typeface, including the printing of both “2s” and “3s” within the advertisements appearing on the second page of the paper gives robust evidence that the latter is the case.

⁸⁵ W.H. Thompson, “Star’s Plant Destroyed and its Staff Sent to Jail: Last Act of the Hatfield Military Regime,” *The Socialist and Labor Star*, May 30, 1913.

⁸⁶ Thompson, “Star’s Plant Destroyed and its Staff Sent to Jail: Last Act of the Hatfield Military Regime,” *The Socialist and Labor Star*, May 30, 1913.

referred to as “*lettres de cachet*”.⁸⁷ Those arrested included the editor, W.H. Thompson, reporter F.M. Sturm, former employee Elmer Rumbaugh, and officers of the company R.M. Kephart and George W. Gillespie, who were visited by Sheriff Buffington’s posse as they slept “in the wee-small hours of the morning.”⁸⁸ Following deportation to the Kanawha County Jail, described as the “foulest, filthiest, most crowded Bastille within the state”, the men were released within two weeks with no charges pressed against them.⁸⁹ The closing line of the article accused the governor of abusing his power, the author stating “We almost forget to state that these midnight proceedings were ordered because *The Labor Star* and its owner had dared to disagree with Governor Hatfield in the matter of the miners [sic] strike which he has just settled (?) [sic] so satisfactorily.”⁹⁰

This crackdown by the governor on a socialist publication presents evidence that the interests of West Virginia’s business elite played a key role in the suppression of the Paint Creek- Cabin Creek Strike and related dissent, with Hatfield deciding to fulfill the wishes of the editor of a publication with clear support of business. The strike was related to the labor conditions and pay rates, but the popular press sought to ignore this narrative, effectively silencing anyone who dared say otherwise, exerting control over even the governor. This coupled with the use of othering to blame the strike on immigrants, mountaineers, and lazy miners, shows that the press was either disinterested in or

⁸⁷ *Lettres de cachet* refers to the letters which historically contained direct orders from the King of France during the *ancien regime*, countersigned by his ministers which enforced arbitrary acts or judgements which one could not appeal. (From the Encyclopedia Britannica).

⁸⁸ Thompson, “Star’s Plant Destroyed and its Staff Sent to Jail: Last Act of the Hatfield Military Regime,” *The Socialist and Labor Star*, May 30, 1913.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

opposed to the cause of labor. As the next chapter will show, coverage of the 1912-1913 strike informed the coverage of the 1920-1921 Mine War.

Chapter Two: The Media and the Matewan Massacre of 1920

This chapter seeks to reveal how the Republican editors shifted the blame for the violence in 1920 away from the factors held responsible for similar unrest a decade earlier, mirroring views expressed by the national Republican Party in its platform and by Governor Morgan in his inaugural address. On the morning of August 1st, 1921, Matewan, West Virginia police chief William Sidney Hatfield and his friend and deputy Edward Chambers, accompanied by their wives, ascended the steps of the courthouse in Welch, the McDowell County seat. The men were en route to the trial which awaited Hatfield who stood accused of destroying a coal tippie⁹¹ at Mohawk, an unincorporated mining community in the southwestern corner of the county, situated along the Mohawk Branch of the Tug Fork River and close to the border with Virginia.⁹² However, neither Hatfield nor Chambers would live to see the inside of the McDowell County courthouse, let alone stand trial. As Hatfield turned to wave to a group of defendants also awaiting trial at the courthouse, he and Chambers were met by a fusillade of pistol fire as three men drew their revolvers and gunned the men down as their wives looked on in horror.⁹³ What could possibly warrant such a gruesome killing in broad daylight, right outside of a court of law no less? The motive for this murder was simple: revenge. Hatfield's killers, employed by the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, sought vengeance on behalf of the agency's co-owner Thomas Felts, avenging the death of Felts' brothers Albert and Lee, killed in a shootout in Matewan in May of the previous year, a crime for which Hatfield

⁹¹ A tippie is a structure used to load coal into railroad cars for transport.

⁹² Green, 224.

⁹³ Ibid, 228.

and Chambers were acquitted. The shootout in Matewan and the assassination in Welch the following year started because of coal strikes and unionization in southern West Virginia. The dispute that led to the shooting started when Sid Hatfield and Mayor Cabell Testerman challenged the legal authority of Baldwin-Felts agents to evict union miners from company housing. The miners had been recently terminated for joining the United Mineworkers of America, thus violating their contracts with the Stone Mountain Coal Company.

A wave of strikes began in southern West Virginia in September 1919 when miners heard of alleged abuses of workers in Logan County by Sheriff Don Chafin and his deputies. Hearing of this, a virtual army of 5,000 miners assembled in the town of Marmet in Kanawha County, intending to march from there into Logan County, with this attempted invasion only being stopped by the governor's promise to launch an investigation into the conditions in the county. This investigation did little to improve the lot of the miners of Logan County. Things began to heat up in the Spring of 1920 when the UMWA began efforts to organize the miners of Mingo County. Coal operators refused to comply with the request of UMWA District 17 President Frank Keeney to meet with the union and instead fired suspected union members and evicted their families from company housing. One eviction led to the shootout of May 19, 1920, known as the Matewan Massacre.⁹⁴ The massacre arose from a dispute between Police Chief Sid Hatfield and the Baldwin-Felts agents that were conducting these evictions. During the evictions, Hatfield telephoned the county sheriff's office and found out that the detectives

⁹⁴ Hoyt N. Wheeler, "Mountaineer Mine Wars: An Analysis of the West Virginia Mine Wars of 1912-1913 and 1920-1921," *The Business History Review* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 77.

did not have the proper legal authority to eject the families of miners from their homes.⁹⁵ Tensions escalated when Hatfield confronted Albert Felts with an arrest warrant. Felts claimed that he too had a warrant for Hatfield's arrest. Upon further inspection, Mayor Testerman declared that Felts' warrant was inauthentic. Shortly after the mayor announced his findings, all hell broke loose when an unknown party fired a shot, instigating a maelstrom of bullets which claimed the lives of Albert and Lee Felts as well as Mayor Testerman.⁹⁶

Sporadic violence erupted throughout southern West Virginia in the months following the Matewan Massacre. By the end of June, 2,700 miners in the region had lost their jobs and were residing in tents and making a meagre living through the union's relief fund. On July 1st, the union officially declared a strike to halt the operation of all the mines in Southern West Virginia.⁹⁷ After the shootout at Matewan, Hatfield was hailed as a hero for standing up to the Baldwin-Felts thugs hired to do the bidding of the Stone Mountain Coal Company. Hatfield's newfound celebrity in connection with the intense outburst of violence in Matewan garnered widespread attention by the state's press. The news coverage of the Matewan Massacre and its aftermath was still informed by the stereotyping of Appalachians presented by the State's press during the strike nine years earlier, yet it also saw a transformation of the other factors Republican editors blamed for the strike. These editors portrayed the violence as a gross failure of law and order by both the miners and Baldwin-Felts detectives, and as typical of the people of Appalachia, with parallels being drawn between the massacre and the infamous Hatfield-

⁹⁵ Lon Savage, *Thunder in the Mountains: The West Virginia Mine War, 1920-21* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press, 1990), 20.

⁹⁷ Wheeler, "Mountaineer Mine Wars," 77.

McCoy blood feud which played out mere decades earlier. This chapter will analyze the coverage of the violence associated with the aftermath of the Matewan Massacre, ending with the acquittal of the men who conducted the vendetta against Hatfield.

“Let the People’s Law be Enforced by the People”: Lawlessness and Disorder

Within the first few days after the fatal exchange of gunfire, the press of West Virginia was quick to decry the lack of respect for the sacred principles of law and order which the skirmish was a symptom of. The major Republican news publications of the state did not reach a consensus as to who was most to blame for the violence; the miners that also took part in the battle or the men who evicted the miners without the proper legal authority. On May 24th, the editor of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* weighed in on the incident, placing the blame on the coal operators for enlisting the services of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency in the first place. The editor of the *Intelligencer* was concerned with, aside from the bloodshed, the violation of national Republican values that the use of “mercenaries of special interests” represented.⁹⁸ He suggested that the legislature of West Virginia should create a law “forbidding the maintenance of armed guards, or the employment of so-called detective agencies by employers of this state, and the uses of these men in labor conflicts and personal disputes.”⁹⁹ The author emphasizes that the law should be not only just, but justly enforced, something that cannot be done if the law is enforced by “men who are receiving their pay from private agencies” rather than the proper authorities, and that doing so brings the courts into disrepute. This practice, employed by the coal companies, causes the people to disrespect the law, with the author asking, “How can any man respect the law when he sees the enforcement of

⁹⁸ “Let the People’s Law be Enforced by the People,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 24, 1920.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

law put in the hands of paid hirelings of corporate interests instead of in the hands of duly chosen representatives of the people?”¹⁰⁰ The author asserts that if the Stone Mountain Coal Company had “relied upon the ordinary processes of law” then the “massacre at Matewan last week would not have occurred.”¹⁰¹

Nonetheless, the *Intelligencer*'s editor takes no issue with the eviction of unionized coal miners if it is conducted by state or local authorities. Though there had been complaints that the local police and officials failed to serve writs of eviction to the miners and their families, he reasoned the coal company could still have invoked “the power of the state” by asking the governor or the state police to intervene rather than resorting to delegating this authority to the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency.¹⁰² The article also expresses doubt as to the validity of the claim that local authorities refused to issue writs of eviction, writing that “Perhaps that was the case, but as a general thing, local authorities in southern West Virginia have been quite complaisant and quite willing to serve the demands of the coal operators.”¹⁰³ Assuming that the claim that local authorities refused to act on behalf of Stone Mountain Coal Company is true, which seems likely given that the skirmish in Matewan started when the legal authority of Baldwin-Felts agents was challenged by Hatfield and Testerman, revealing that the proper writs were not granted to the detectives by the Mingo County Sheriff's department in Williamson, this shows that the extensive control over the local governments by the coal companies did not extend into the towns of Mingo County.

¹⁰⁰ “Let the People's Law be Enforced by the People,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 24, 1920.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Though this editorial objects to the use of private entities to enforce the will of the coal companies, it presents no qualms with the local or state authorities doing their bidding. Not weighing in on the economic control over the lives of miners or the violation of rights constituted by the firing and eviction of miners on mere suspicion of joining a union, the central concern expressed in the *Intelligencer* was that “irresponsible agents” should not be “clothed with the authority of the state.”¹⁰⁴ The use of mercenary agents was of great political concern, constituting a violation of the principles of the national Republican Party. In West Virginia and “every other republican [sic] state” the people rule, and as such the people must be the ones who enforce the law.¹⁰⁵ How members of local law enforcement are more representative of the will of the people when they are still carrying out the same unpopular acts as the hated Baldwin-Felts agents is unclear, and the earlier attempted armed invasion of Logan County shows that miners would not hesitate to use violence against local law enforcement, such as Logan’s Sheriff Don Chafin, if they violated the rights of workers. Of note when considering the article in the *Intelligencer*, the author does not blame the residents of Matewan for resorting to violence, seeing that the evictions were not carried out by the proper authorities, a sentiment not shared by the editor of the *Bluefield Telegraph* in an article that was also published in the *Hinton Daily News and Leader* on the same day as the *Intelligencer* article.

H.I. Shott, editor of the *Bluefield Telegraph*, issued a stark condemnation of the fatal shootout in Matewan, taking the side of the Baldwin-Felts Detectives who conducted the evictions and were among those killed. Shott refused to engage the idea

¹⁰⁴ “Let the People’s Law be Enforced by the People,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 24, 1920.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

that the proper authorities should have conducted the evictions, instead arguing that the attack on the detectives, rather than their execution of the evictions, was the greatest threat to law and order. The legality of the evictions was immaterial to him: there “could have been no offense committed by the special agents that would justify the blood shed [sic].”¹⁰⁶ Shott portrayed the shootout as premeditated murder rather than a spontaneous event, claiming that this conclusion was “forced” after considering “all avenues of information”, which through the “weight of many unquestionable circumstances” proved that it was “a premeditated and willful murder brutal in its execution and demoralization in its influence where law and order should reign.”¹⁰⁷ What is interesting about this is that what is allegedly the forgone conclusion that the killing of the Baldwin-Felts agents was premeditated aligns with Thomas Felts’ interpretation of events. This account shows that the press of Bluefield, the town in which the Baldwin-Felts Agency was headquartered, was aligning itself with the viewpoint of the co-owner of the agency who lost two of his brothers and several of his employees in the gunfight. Given that only fourteen months after the killing of Albert and Lee Felts, Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers were killed in retaliation, Thomas Felts was geared toward revenge, which suggests that he would have had a personal stake in proving that his brothers were indeed murdered. To this end, Felts told reporters his side of the story, with his version of events being printed in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* two days after the shooting.

J.H. Graham’s *Daily News and Leader* seemed to endorse the claims Felts made to the *Intelligencer* three days prior. In his statement, Felts alleged that Testerman and Hatfield had been the masterminds of a conspiracy to kill the detectives. According to his

¹⁰⁶ “Must be Taught to Respect the Law,” *Hinton Daily News and Leader*, May 24, 1920.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

account, Hatfield lured the men into a trap, initiating the shootout by bringing Albert Felts to a hardware store, where he drew his gun and shot Felts “in the temple, killing him instantly.”¹⁰⁸ In the ensuing skirmish which claimed the lives of seven of the detectives, Felts asserted that the men, half of whom he claims were not armed at the time, were “chased all over the town and shot down like rats” by men who had been sworn in for the sole purpose of ensuring the agents did not leave town alive.¹⁰⁹ After the agents had been slain, the dead, waiting for the train before they were killed, were allegedly robbed of their baggage and private papers, in addition to the theft of over \$1,200 from Lee and Albert Felts.¹¹⁰ Holding Hatfield accountable, it makes sense that Felts would go so far as to order his killing when the courts failed to find him guilty. The fact that the *Telegraph*, the principal news publication in Bluefield would agree with the version of events presented by co-owner of the private detective agency, suggests that Thomas Felts and his Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency held great social influence over the town. By explicitly endorsing the actions of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, the *Bluefield Telegraph* implicitly endorsed the decision of the Stone Mountain Coal Company to use the agents to conduct evictions of miners and their families. This disagreement between Shott and Ogden reveals a split in West Virginian Republican newspaper editors’ view of private militias.

After the initial editorial in the *Intelligencer* of May 24th, the editor doubled down on the claim that the cause of the trouble was the use of a private agency to evict the miners of Matewan and their families, rather than the local or state police. On June 1st,

¹⁰⁸ “Murder Plot, Felts Asserts,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 21, 1920.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

the paper ran another article emphasizing its indictment of the use of private guards by the coal companies of southern West Virginia. The author begins by casting doubt on the claims made by Felts that his men were innocent and that they had been ambushed by the people and public officials of Matewan, reasoning that this claim ran contrary to the findings of the Mingo County sheriff as well as statements made by other citizens.¹¹¹ Whether the citizens of Matewan or the Baldwin-Felts Agents were to blame, the author declares that the coal company who employed the detectives to do work that should have been entrusted to public officials. To the editor of the *Intelligencer*, the eviction of miners and their families by the Baldwin-Felts agents contracted by the Stone Mountain Coal Company was no different than if a private landlord had hired their own armed guards in order to evict tenants, questioning not only why the duty of evictions, a “purely public” task was delegated to “special agents of the landlord,” but also why the coal companies in southern West Virginia even continued to maintain a system of armed guards, after they had apparently promised that this system would be abandoned. The author expressed contempt for the coal companies for not relying on the state police and for ignoring county officials, instead allowing the assumption of law enforcement duties by agencies that were “maintained and paid by special interests” and “used for their private purposes.” The key issue taken with the use of private guards, such as those of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency by coal companies was that it undermined the principles of Republican government, a central pillar of which is, according to the article’s author, “respect on the part of the people for the laws which the people themselves make,” a respect which could not exist as long as the law was enforced by private entities rather

¹¹¹ “The Private Detective Agencies,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Jun. 1, 1920.

than those acting on the authority of officials that have been elected by the people. The author concludes that the use of mine guards in Matewan constituted an “insult to the authority and dignity” of West Virginia which must “sooner or later breed anarchy.” It had, in fact, produced “just the result that might have been expected.”¹¹²

The use of private detectives at Matewan constituted disrespect of the law and therefore Republican ideals. H.C. Ogden would not soon forget this line of reasoning. He published another article that drove home this point a week later. The June 7th editorial responded to a “friend of the *Intelligencer*” who took issue with the editorials that had been published on May 24th and June 1st, apparently misinterpreting the previous articles as claiming that the Baldwin-Felts agents had fired the first shot which initiated the deadly shootout.¹¹³ Beginning by assuring the concerned party that who fired the first shot is not something that the staff of the paper wishes to establish, the author then reemphasizes what had been claimed all along, that the situation would not have arisen in the first place had the agents not been enlisted to carry out evictions on behalf of the Stone Mountain Coal Company. The article conveys the strongest condemnation of the guard system yet, asserting that “no individual and no corporation has the moral or the legal right to usurp the enforcement of law.” Reiterating that the use of guards threatens the legal status quo of West Virginia, the author asserted that allowing use of force by anyone other than elected officials is to also allow “the breakdown of the courts, the destruction of law and order, and a condition of anarchy,” a violation of not only Republican ideals, but the ideals of the nation. Regardless of who fired the first shot, the author argued, it should be clearly understood that “the first criminal act was the use of

¹¹² “The Private Detective Agencies,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Jun. 1, 1920.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

paid private agents to perform a duty which it was clearly the function of the public officials to perform.”¹¹⁴

The newspapers again gave voice to competing concerns over the potential for a breakdown of law and order when the jury returned a not guilty verdict in the trial of the men accused of the murder of Albert Felts on April 4th, 1921. Four days later, the *Greenbrier Independent* published two editorials that originally appeared in the *Randolph Enterprise* and the *Charleston Mail*, respectively, that forecasted a bleak future for West Virginia considering the lawlessness threatened by the jury’s recent decision.

Confederate veteran Thomas Hamner Dennis purchased the *Greenbrier Independent* in the 1880s and functioned as editor until 1917. Dennis gave voice to his Democratic politics as did the previous editors yet wrote in a more moderate tone. Taking a moderate approach to expressing his views helped boost his political career, with Dennis serving multiple terms in the West Virginia House of Delegates.¹¹⁵

The editor of the *Randolph Enterprise* was more outraged than surprised at this decision, asserting that the paper had predicted this outcome. There was “no doubt about the guilt” of the men, no jury in that “section” would deliver a guilty verdict, for if they did they would have to “leave the country or be in great danger of their lives if they remained.”¹¹⁶ The author of the article predicted that in light of the accused being made “heroes” by this ruling, lawlessness in the region would gradually increase to the point that “no property or lives will be safe and capital would be very foolish to invest in that

¹¹⁴ “The Trouble at Matewan,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Jun. 7, 1920.

¹¹⁵ “Greenbrier independent,” *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84037217/>.

¹¹⁶ “That Matewan Verdict,” *Greenbrier Independent*, Apr. 8, 1921.

country.”¹¹⁷ Similar to the concerns of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, the author claimed that the worst aspect of the ordeal was that it would damage the reputation of West Virginia.¹¹⁸ Expanding upon the argument appearing first in the *Enterprise*, the author of the article from *Charleston Mail* declared that the state legislature should disarm the residents of Mingo in order to uphold the “good name” of West Virginia, which was “tarnished” by the violence apparently prevalent in that region of the state.¹¹⁹

For the staff of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, the difference between the trials of the men accused of killing Albert Felts and the detectives accused of killing citizens of Matewan also threatened to undermine trust in the law and order. Though the jury returned a verdict of not guilty in both cases, an editorial in the *Intelligencer* on May 28th, 1921 claimed that while the trial of those accused of Felts’s murder took weeks, with the state spending great expense to pursue the trial, the Baldwin-Felts agents accused of the murders of Cabell Testerman and two other citizens got off “scot-free” within a matter of hours, with the first trial being decided based on the testimony of one witness and the prosecution dropping the other two cases.¹²⁰ This discrepancy raised doubts in the minds of the *Intelligencer*’s staff. Did West Virginia have “one kind of justice for one class of citizens and another kind of justice for another?” Were the courts to be corrupted and legal processes to be “set at naught for the benefit of a special class of law-breakers?”¹²¹ With such injustice by the state, the author reasoned that it was no wonder the citizens of Matewan took the law into their own hands.¹²²

¹¹⁷ “That Matewan Verdict,” *Greenbrier Independent*, Apr. 8, 1921.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Two Different Kinds of Justice,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, May 28, 1921.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

When Ed Chambers and Sid Hatfield were shot dead in Welch on August first, the *Intelligencer* staff reiterated the claims they made when news first broke of the Matewan Massacre the previous May, namely that the state legislature should abolish the mine guard system to prevent further violence. Killed by men who “formed a part of the mine guard system”, the murder of Hatfield and Chambers was just an extension of the same “bloodstained cause” that instigated the shootout in Matewan.¹²³ The author closed by arguing that until the people “rise in righteous wrath” and “demand that these hired thugs of the coal interests be forever wiped out”, similar crimes would continue to “blacken the fair name” of West Virginia.¹²⁴ In a shift from their attitudes toward the 1912-1913 strike, the staff of the *Intelligencer* were now blaming the coal companies for the unrest.

Legacies of Appalachian Violence

Journalists sought to explain the shocking events at Matewan by situating them within the context of historical violence within Appalachia. An infamous chapter in the history of Appalachia, the blood feud between the Hatfield clan of West Virginia (of which Sid Hatfield was a distant relative) and the McCoy clan of Kentucky, was seen as a precursor to the Matewan Massacre which took place within the same region, along the West Virginia-Kentucky border formed by the Tug Fork of the Big Sandy River. Between the massacre, and the grand jury inquest, on June 17th, the *Independent-Herald* published an article by reporter Charles Carson of the *Roanoke Times* concerning the end of the Hatfield-McCoy feud nearly thirty years earlier, connecting the decades-old family dispute and the current labor dispute, claiming that they both arose from the Appalachian predisposition toward vigilante violence. According to Carson, the massacre at Matewan

¹²³ “Terrorism Instead of Law,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Aug. 2, 1921.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

constituted a new chapter in the “veritable book of instances chalked up against the natives of this section” of West Virginia by the Baldwin-Felts agents. Carson argued that the agency’s opinion of the citizens of Matewan had been informed not only by the memory of the Hatfield-McCoy feud, but also by previous confrontations with the detectives, such as those that occurred during the strike of 1912-1913.¹²⁵ Matewan was situated within the mining district in which detectives had “many skirmishes with the natives over one matter or another” according to Carson.

The violence in the town reminded locals who lived in the region during the 1880s and 1890s of the Hatfield-McCoy feuds. This stemmed from Sid Hatfield’s relation to one of the clans and the fact that the Baldwin-Felts agency was enlisted to “deal with” the Hatfields and McCoys. Many of the locals regaled the many reporters who came to investigate the Matewan massacre with tales of the legendary feud.

The memory of the Hatfields and McCoys spoke to the inclination toward revenge of the miners and mountaineers native to the vicinity of Matewan. In this context, the massacre of May 1920 reinforced the ethos of Appalachians as exemplified by the Hatfields to eliminate the McCoys family in 1882. Carson asserts that when mountaineers and miners seek revenge, they get it, and closes by saying “The Hatfield-McCoy feud as it is known is one of the worst battles on record between families today and stands as a terrible example just as the Matewan tragedy of Wednesday May 19 does to the ferocity of people when they take the law into their own hands.”¹²⁶ This asserts the same Republican law and order ideology as the other articles, which bear resemblance to Governor Morgan’s views on the violence as expressed in his inaugural address.

¹²⁵ Charles Carson, “M’Coy-Hatfield Feud Story Retold,” *Independent-Herald* (Hinton), Jun. 17, 1920.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Carson's assessment gave readers the impression that there was some truth to his interpretation of events, though it was based on stereotypes rather than any actual correlation between the events. News supporting Carson's view appeared in the *Hinton Daily News and Leader* on August 16th, 1920. The article reported that state police had arrested Fred Burgraf for the killing of Anse E. Hatfield, allegedly shooting the man in the chest from long range with a high-powered rifle while he sat on the porch of his Urias Hotel. The report relays the belief of the state authorities that the murder of Anse Hatfield was the "sequel" to an anonymous letter the man had received warning him to "arrange his affects as he 'did not have much longer to live.'" This murder would likely have seemed like a tragic yet random event to a reader of the *Daily News and Leader* if not for the final sentence which revealed that Hatfield was a witness before the grand jury which investigated the May 19th shooting.¹²⁷ Reading of the murder of Anse Hatfield would no doubt remind any resident of Hinton who had also read the town's other paper, the *Independent-Herald* a month prior of Charles Carson's article which connected the Matewan Massacre to an inherent thirst for revenge among the residents of the borderlands of West Virginia and Kentucky, and leave them wondering if he did not perhaps have a point. The *Independent-Herald* of August 26th reiterated the belief that the killing of Anse Hatfield was one of revenge, simply stating that it resulted from "old trouble."¹²⁸

In the week following the assassination of Anse Hatfield, the papers of West Virginia published additional revelations which undoubtedly gave some the impression that Carson's assessment of the obsession with revenge harbored by miners and

¹²⁷ "Anse Hatfield is Killed at Matewan," *Hinton Daily News and Leader*, Aug. 16, 1920.

¹²⁸ "Anse Hatfield Killed," *Independent-Herald* (Hinton), Aug. 26, 1920.

mountaineers was not too far off the money. A day after the *Independent-Herald* stated that Anse Hatfield had been killed over old trouble, the *Greenbrier Independent* revealed that rumors were circulated that Hatfield's testimony to the grand jury led to the indictment of some of the miners who had participated in the affair.¹²⁹ On August 28th, the *Charleston Daily Mail* reported that two men employed by the Thacker Coal Mining Company, both Hatfields, as well as a justice of the peace had received death threats in the mail similar to the one made against Anse Hatfield before he was killed. The article reports that Mingo County justice of the peace R.M. Stafford, who had testified against Sid Hatfield before a grand jury, received a letter which read:

Squire Stafford you Have let your Jaw Run Where you didn't Have any Business what Ever we are going to Show you what we Can do Settle your Business Quick or we will blow your dam Joint in Tug River we have got your days numbered and you have Done your Dirty Work and we are going to do ours do your Business and do it quick you have not got long to live.¹³⁰

Leonard and Ed Hatfield, both employed as guards by the Thacker Coal Mining Company in neighboring Pike County also received threats that were written by the same hand who authored the letter received by Stafford. Leonard Hatfield, son of "one of the leading citizens" of Pike County was warned that he should stay away from "Sub Station" if he wanted to live, the author of the threat writing to him "if you wont [sic] Stay a way we will blow you a way [sic]."

The letter sent to Ed Hatfield; a deputy of Pike County read "Ed Hatfield if your Business as a company suck is Very Important settle it now if you Hesitate you will Be to

¹²⁹ "Shot from Ambush," *Greenbrier Independent* (Lewisburg), Aug. 27, 1920.

¹³⁰ "Three Men at Thacker Threatened with Death," *Charleston Daily Mail*, Aug. 28, 1920.

[sic] late if It takes murder to stop you we can do that all Right we are tired of you [sic] way of doing life is Uncertain death is sure.” The article ends were victims the news from J.K. Anderson, president, treasurer, and general manager of the Thacker Coal Mining Company that other “prominent citizens” of Thacker and Matewan had also received death threats from the same author, evidenced by the similarity of the handwriting as well as the fact they were mailed on the same day.¹³¹ By publicizing threats toward the owner of a coal company, the staff of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* likely convinced the public that coal company official were victims of attacks by miners with vengeful streaks.

As the trials of those indicted by the grand jury grew closer, there were more incidents that suggested revenge, such as the gunfight that erupted in Matewan on Halloween of 1920. Though not on the same scale as the skirmish of May 19th, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* reported that the October 31st disturbance resulted in one death and one fatal wounding as well as a handful of serious injuries. Among those injured were Doug Mounts and James Overstreet, both awaiting trial for charges under which they were indicted for the “recent fatal rioting” at Matewan.¹³² Though this violence was arising out of a labor issue rather than a predisposition to revenge, it was starting to become apparent that the threats of violence and other acts were not coincidences.

The sensational shootout which took place in Matewan on May 19th, a violent response to a labor dispute, garnered widespread attention from the media, ranging from sensational reports of an ambush and the looting of bodies as reported by Thomas Felts, to the editorials of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, which denounced the use of private guards by the mining companies. As with the strike of 1912-1913, the massacre in Mingo

¹³¹ “Three Men at Thacker Threatened with Death,” *Charleston Daily Mail*, Aug. 28, 1920.

¹³² “Gun Fights in Mingo County Cause One Death; One May Die,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, Nov. 1, 1920.

County in 1920 and the associated strikes in the region were the source of intense debates. However, the debates in the early 1920s were more intense, as the Republican press no longer was entirely beholden to the interests of the coal barons, with the staff of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* utterly denouncing the predatory practice of private guards. The difference in opinion in the publication seems to relate to the great geographical distance between Wheeling and the southern coalfields. Much like the coverage of the strike a decade earlier, certain papers' view of the violence at Matewan was informed by stereotypes, especially the violence of Appalachians. As the next chapter will show, these stereotypes and debates inform coverage of the Battle of Blair Mountain in 1921 as well.

Chapter Three: The West Virginia Press, The Battle of Blair Mountain, and the 1922 State Treason Trials

Machine gun positions were hastily erected. Two aircraft armed with bombs took to the skies at 10'O Clock in the morning and headed eastward. Whistles and alarms sounded, acting as a call to arms, at which men gathered their armaments and took their positions. These preparations were made in the face of an assault by an estimated force of five-thousand men, advancing along creeks and rail lines.¹³³ Though reminiscent of a scene which could have taken place three years earlier on the battlefields of Europe, these were the events of the morning of August 25th, 1921, in Logan County, West Virginia. This was the beginning of what came to be known as the Battle of Blair Mountain, where thousands of coal miners faced off against a combined force of Sheriff Don Chafin's deputies and men of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency. This engagement, which raged from August 25th until September 2nd, was the climax of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars, which culminated in a series of trials for the crime of treason against West Virginia early the following year.

The events of the late summer of 1921 were a direct result of the violence that arose in the spring of 1920, a response to the murder of union sympathizer and police chief Sid Hatfield in early August of 1921 by Baldwin-Felts agents as discussed in the previous chapter. According to historian James Green, news of Hatfield's death spurred the thousands of miners in surrounding Southern West Virginia counties to action. Their outrage at murder by men hired as mine guards and frustration with the state of martial

¹³³ "Miners Invade Logan," *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 25, 1921.

law in the area surrounding Mingo County, prompted an unsuccessful attempt to march down into the county to avenge Hatfield and free miners imprisoned in the county. To get to Mingo they would have to go through Logan. The miners' hope to "hang Don Chafin from a sour apple tree" along the way was dashed by Chafin's deputies at Blair Mountain.¹³⁴ The ensuing battle, which raged for days, was ended by the arrival of the US Army under the command of General Bandholtz. The miners chose not to take up arms against Uncle Sam.¹³⁵ Many of those who participated in the battle were later tried for treason, not against the United States, but against West Virginia. As this chapter will show, the political views of the editors of West Virginia on the Battle of Blair Mountain and the subsequent state treason trials guided the discourse.

Medieval West Virginia

When reports of the invasion of Logan County by some 5,000 armed miners first began circulating on the evening of August 25th, 1921, journalists from across the state reported on the battle. In a statement to the International News Service, sheriff Don Chafin would say only that he could not give out any information. For James Herbert of the *West Virginian*, this seemed to confirm the reports that Chafin had deputized around three-hundred men to meet the invading force.¹³⁶ Similar to the response to the shooting of Baldwin-Felts agents in May the previous year, reactions to Chafin's handling of the situation revealed that the opinion of the Republican-dominated press of the state was shifting to become more critical of the practices of the coal companies, rather than antagonistic toward the actions of miners who responded to these practices. James C.

¹³⁴ Green, 315, 319.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 346.

¹³⁶ "Logan to Resist," *Evening Journal* (Martinsburg, West Virginia), August 25, 1921.

Herbert, editor of the *West Virginian*, published an editorial condemning Chafin's lack of transparency on the following day. Herbert denounced the "medieval minded" Chafin for keeping mum about the skirmish, asserting that his cover-up which came at the same time the story was being broadcast across the state brought shame to West Virginia.¹³⁷ Herbert was convinced that whether Chafin was himself without information or was withholding information, his response to the media when pressed was evidence of severe incompetence. Herbert advised the people who "owned" Chafin to hire someone to do his thinking for him. In closing, he writes of Chafin: "Apparently he is incapable of conducting a feudal war and remembering at the same time that he also owes some slight duty to the general public."¹³⁸ Not solely concerned with Chafin's perceived lack of intelligence, Herbert expressed distaste with the feudal nature of his allegiance to the coal industry in this conflict.

While serving as Sheriff of Logan County, Don Chafin was serving the coal operators of the county as well. Chafin received a \$30,000 salary from the Logan County coal operators in exchange for providing security for the mines, a task which included keeping the UMWA and other unions from organizing in Logan. Chafin directed several his deputies to function as spies, reporting on union activity. Chafin had acquired a reputation for violence in the course of his service to the coal industry, including one incident in which he severely beat two UMWA organizers in 1919, opting to pistol-whip the two men after a deputy convinced him to do so rather than kill them.¹³⁹ Another instance of violence became fatal, when an IWW activist was arrested and later shot and

¹³⁷ James C. Herbert, editorial, *West Virginian* (Fairmont), August 26, 1921.

¹³⁸ Herbert, editorial, *West Virginian*, August 26, 1921.

¹³⁹ Green, 225.

killed in the town of Logan in 1921.¹⁴⁰ As evidenced by Herbert's article in the *West Virginian*, the press was beginning to criticize the feudal way in which Chafin ruled Logan County on behalf of the coal operators when reports of a battle in his county began to circulate. The Republican press also expressed, in keeping with the reactions to the Matewan Massacre and the murder of Sid Hatfield, a distaste for the dissolution of law and order the violence represented.

Don Chafin's iron rule of Logan County was again criticized in the aftermath of the Battle of Blair Mountain, this time by the *Wheeling Intelligencer*. On October 7th, 1921, H.C. Ogden wrote an editorial expressing distaste for the violent way in which Chafin ran his county, ultimately stating that though his actions were reprehensible, he was only a small part of the larger systems of injustice in the region.¹⁴¹ In commenting on a complaint by Kentucky salesman Averill Bays, which alleged Chafin pistol-whipped him and ran him out of the county, threatening to kill him, Ogden asserted that this and similar abuses by the sheriff embodied the system of class rule which led to the unrest. In conducting the orders of the coal companies, Chafin was only a cog in a machine, Ogden reasoned, and if he refused to do their bidding, they would simply find someone else. The *Intelligencer* editor again hammered home the point that law enforcement should be conducted by state officials in public interest, not by private individuals in the service of private corporations. Ogden closed by stating "Class distinction leads to class oppression, and class oppression leads to class strife."¹⁴² The exacerbation of class distinctions by the use of private law enforcement on behalf of the coal companies was the principal cause

¹⁴⁰ Roger Fagge, "Citizens of this Great Republic: Politics and the West Virginia Miners, 1900-1922," *International Review of Social History* 40, no. 1 (April 1995): 35.

¹⁴¹ H.C. Ogden, "Before the Courts," *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 7, 1921.

¹⁴² Ogden, "Before the Courts," *Wheeling Intelligencer*, October 7, 1921.

of the Battle of Blair Mountain, and this abuse of law and order by the coal operators had to be addressed before any investigation into the wrongs of the miners could be investigated.

“Abolish the Cause”: Dissolution of Law and Order

The day following the beginning of the march toward Logan, the politically neutral *Martinsburg Journal* was quick to decry the abuse of law and order by both the miners and the coal operators, with editor Max von Schlegel writing an editorial on August 26th in which he complained that the two factions coming to blows yet again was giving the world the impression that West Virginia was prone to lawlessness.¹⁴³

Max von Schlegel became editor of the Martinsburg Journal after purchasing it from influential Democrat Harry F. Byrd in 1912.¹⁴⁴ Schlegel renamed the paper the Martinsburg W Va. Evening Journal and gave greater attention to national and international matters. Despite the allegiance of Byrd and Schlegel to the Democratic Party, they expressed politically neutral sentiments within the paper.¹⁴⁵

Schlegel was growing weary of the violence by citizens of his state, which led to congressional investigations and national news coverage, giving the people of the state an undeserved reputation for bloodshed and murder. Rather than assign blame to one side or another, Schlegel wrote that until the two parties put their selfish needs aside and came to a settlement, the world would continue to view the “great commonwealth of West Virginia” as a “battlefield of labor and capital, unable to maintain law and order within

¹⁴³ Max von Schlegel, “On the War Path Again,” *Martinsburg Journal*, August 26, 1921.

¹⁴⁴ “Martinsburg Journal,” e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, last modified March 6, 2023.

¹⁴⁵ “About Martinsburg Journal (Martinsburg, W. Va.) 1920-1977,” *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn85059587/>.

her boundaries and finding it necessary to ask [for] federal assistance.”¹⁴⁶ To Schlegel, the worst aspect of the situation was disrespect for law and order, avoiding placing the blame for disrespect on the shoulders of either of the parties involved.

H.C. Ogden, editor of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, accused the coal operators of instigating the trouble through their criminal acts toward the miners in an August 27th article. He began by acknowledging his disagreement with the tactics of armed violence used by the miners but directed the reader’s attention to what he saw as the root cause of the violence, writing that despite the fact that “Two wrongs do not make a right,” the violence used by the miners was only a natural reaction to the abuses perpetrated by the coal industry.¹⁴⁷ Ogden asserted that when well-educated men of means with access to property and education were allowed to break the law and “prostitute justice,” it was no wonder, that less fortunate men followed their example. He stated that such abuses undermined the principle of self-government which were essential values of the republic, with respect for the law being the basis of the continued existence of effective self-government. The employment of armed mine guards for unlawful purposes, as well as the failure of the state government to prevent these unlawful acts was seen as the root cause of the violent disturbance, and Ogden called for the governor to step in and remedy the situation by eliminating the system of private detectives and replacing it with “an effective assertion of local and state authority.” With this system in place, Ogden reasoned that the present situation could be avoided in the future.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Schlegel, “On the War Path Again,” *Martinsburg Journal*, August 26, 1921.

¹⁴⁷ H.C. Ogden, “Abolish the Cause,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 27, 1921.

¹⁴⁸ Ogden, “Abolish the Cause,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, August 27, 1921.

On the same day that Ogden reiterated his argument against the use of mine guards that he initially voiced after the Matewan Massacre of May the previous year, Schlegel reiterated his claims that a generalized disrespect for law and order was to blame for the violence. He reported prematurely that the miners had decided to turn back, allegedly fearing the threat of the potential deployment of federal troops. For Schlegel, this proved the point he made on the previous day, that if either party to the conflict had any regard for law and order as well as any interest in the public good, they would not resort to violence. The threat of force by the federal government helped to instill this respect, thus putting an end to the bloodshed.¹⁴⁹ Had respect for the law existed among these men in the first place, Schlegel argued, the “most recent blot upon West Virginia’s reputation for sheltering law-abiding citizens” could have been avoided.¹⁵⁰ Though still focused on a generalized disrespect for the law, Schlegel does place additional emphasis on the wrongs of the miners in this editorial.

In the aftermath of the battle, Ogden was pleased that he was vindicated by public opinion turning against the use of the private mine guard system in his September 24th editorial. Ogden was glad that Governor Morgan and the West Virginia Attorney General issued statements that identified the use of private guards as responsible for the bloodshed, but was not pleased that in his statement, Morgan did not admit that he failed to put an end to the use of private guards when he had the chance.¹⁵¹ The governor and the attorney general blamed the use of private mine guards as well as the paying of deputy sheriffs’ salaries by coal operators for the trouble at Blair Mountain, a position

¹⁴⁹ Max von Schlegel, “The Miners Disperse,” *Martinsburg Journal*, August 27, 1921.

¹⁵⁰ Schlegel, “The Miners Disperse,” *Martinsburg Journal*, August 27, 1921.

¹⁵¹ H.C. Ogden, “They’re All Against it Now,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 24, 1921.

lauded by Ogden despite the fact he had come to this conclusion long before. He acknowledged that though the miners' side of the conflict bore some criminal liability, their involvement could not be investigated until the use of private guards and the control of local law enforcement by coal companies was stopped. Ogden closed the editorial by predicting that in considering the statements by the governor and attorney general, the state legislature would finally adopt a resolution to outlaw the use of private guards by the coal companies.¹⁵²

Though the coverage of the Battle of Blair Mountain was not as biased against the miners themselves when compared to coverage of the pre-war strike, the editors of Southern West Virginia's Republican newspapers also held organized labor in part culpable for not preventing the violence, holding that union officials as well as the government were responsible for upholding the rule of law within the state. If the state government had been wrong to allow the mine guard system to lead to such violence, then UMWA officials were equally remiss for not stopping the march from its outset. In the eyes of the *West Virginian's* editor James C. Herbert, UMWA District 17 President Frank Keeney had failed to uphold his responsibilities by allowing the march to continue. Herbert acknowledged that though Keeney may not have been the person who proposed the march, itself a mistake, that he held responsibility for not stopping it when he had the chance to, with Keeney allegedly persuading the miners to reverse their decision to go home, which Mother Jones convinced them to do.¹⁵³ Herbert argued, citing Keeney's authority as president of District 17, that the march would not have started had he simply told the miners he did not want it to happen. In Herbert's eyes, Keeney should have

¹⁵² Ogden, "They're All Against it Now," *Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 24, 1921.

¹⁵³ James C. Herbert, "Keeney's Responsibility," *West Virginian*, August 29, 1921.

known the potential danger involved, and that by allowing the march to occur nonetheless, he failed to uphold his duty to both the people and to organized labor. In closing his editorial, Herbert claimed that Keeney's actions revealed the march was a bad idea, wondering why "If the protest was a good thing Thursday evening, what made Keeney so anxious to end it Friday morning?"¹⁵⁴

Mother Jones attempted to dissuade the miners from marching the day before it started, on August 24th, but the degree of success Herbert attributed to this attempt was a bit exaggerated. Jones visited the encampment on Lens Creek where the miners assembled in preparation for their march, claiming that she had received a telegram from President Warren G. Harding in which the president allegedly encouraged the miners to return to their homes and promised to eliminate the mine guard system. However, the men were skeptical of the message and refused to abandon their march when Frank Keeney announced to the men that the telegram was a fake. After driving to Charleston along with fellow organizer Fred Mooney following his announcement, Keeney was able to confirm his suspicion that the White House had not sent the alleged telegram.¹⁵⁵ Much like the nonexistent telegram, Keeney's attempt to persuade the miners to stop their march on Friday, August 26 was also not as genuine as Herbert seemed to think it was either. Rather than being out of urgency as he assumed, Keeney's speech to the assembled miners on the baseball field in the town of Madison was mere lip service to General H.H. Bandholtz, with whom Keeney and Mooney met, promising to end the march. After the speech in which he encouraged the men to turn back, lest they come into conflict with the U.S. Army, Keeney was allegedly heard telling the crowd that they

¹⁵⁴ Herbert, "Keeney's Responsibility," *West Virginian*, August 29, 1921.

¹⁵⁵ Green, 319.

could “do as they pleased,” following a vote to turn back and the departure of General Bandholtz.¹⁵⁶

Herbert’s assertion that organized labor bore some responsibility for the disrespect for law and order which the march represented, was a bit of an outlier. Most newspaper editors focused on the failure of government officials to prevent the pending violence. Targets of this criticism included West Virginia governor Ephraim Morgan and even President Harding. Criticism of Governor Morgan, it seemed, was something Democrat and Republican editors could agree on, with Ogden’s *Intelligencer* reprinting on August 30th a brief editorial in which Joseph H. Long of the Democrat-leaning *Huntington Advertiser* accused Morgan of failing to uphold his inaugural oath.

Joseph H. Long purchased the *Huntington Advertiser* in 1894 following the destruction of its office by a fire. Long, much like the previous editors, supported the Democratic Party. Founded in 1874 by John Gilbert through a merger of the *Huntington Independent* and the *Cabell County Press*, the *Advertiser* served as an outlet through which he and subsequent editors promoted industrial development of Huntington and West Virginia.¹⁵⁷

Long, much like his Republican counterparts, was concerned with the maintenance of law and order in the state. He wrote that due to Morgan’s negligence, manifesting itself in the violence in Logan County, West Virginia had been placed in the “light of a lawless community in the eyes of the world.”¹⁵⁸ The following day, Herbert of the *West Virginian* wondered if even action by President Warren G. Harding would be

¹⁵⁶Green, 329.

¹⁵⁷ “Huntington Advertiser and The Huntington Advertiser,” *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026801/>.

¹⁵⁸ James H. Long, editorial, *Huntington Advertiser*, August 30, 1921.

enough to prevent the arrival of federal troops or the declaration of martial law. Though the proclamation made by Harding may have been too little too late, Herbert expressed the hope that at the very least, if martial law was declared, it would result in the arrest of those who continued to break the law.¹⁵⁹

In the wake of the Battle of Blair Mountain, even outlets not aligned with the Republican Party began to associate the violence with a general disrespect for authority and the law. In his paper, the *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, editor Max von Schlegel saw the violence as a symptom of an “epidemic” of disdain for authority.¹⁶⁰ He saw the army of miners as the embodiment of disrespect of law and order with their contempt for both state authorities and officers of the United Mineworkers of America. The root cause in his mind for both the miners’ march and the violation of prohibition laws was an increasing disrespect for authority. Schlegel concluded his editorial by lamenting that “Contempt for the law” was no longer limited to the “so-called criminal classes.”¹⁶¹

Following the start of the trials of union miners and UMWA officials in April of 1922, the press began to hold both union and non-union forces equally accountable for the bloodshed, condemning both sides for violating the rights of the other using violence. H.C. Ogden ran an editorial from the *New York Tribune* in the April 27th edition of his *Wheeling Intelligencer* expressing sentiments to that effect. In printing the *New York Tribune* article in his publication, Ogden suggests agreement between his politics and those of *Tribune* editor Whitelaw Reid, and that he endorsed the sentiments expressed therein. Reid clarified that, though it was wrong for the coal operators to keep out union

¹⁵⁹ Herbert, “Can Harding Do It?,” *West Virginian*, August 31, 1921.

¹⁶⁰ Max von Schlegel, “Respect for Authority,” *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, September 9, 1921.

¹⁶¹ Schlegel, “Respect for Authority,” *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, September 9, 1921.

organizers by force, union miners committed a wrong of equal magnitude by using armed violence to force the coal companies to hire unionized laborers.¹⁶² Central to the wrongs of the two parties involved was that they both violated the rights of the other, with coal operators interfering with the rights to free speech and assembly of union miners and union miners violating the rights of the coal companies by using violence to force operators to change their hiring practices. Despite holding both sides accountable for their respective violations, Reid closed by saying that in resorting to illegal means, the union miners were simply following the example set by the “illegal acts of mine-hired gunmen” who had prevented the mere discussion of unionization within Logan and Mingo counties.¹⁶³ The endorsement of this article from a Republican-owned paper outside of the state which was also concerned with law and order in the coalfields by a West Virginia Republican paper illustrates how central the concepts of law and order and preservation of individual rights were to the Republican Party during the early 20th Century.

H.C. Ogden printed Wilbur Morrison’s response to the editor of the Democrat-aligned *Wheeling Register* on May 13th. In his response, Morrison argued that the Republican newspaper editors’ apolitical support of law and order proved their superiority over the state’s Democrat press. He claimed the editor *Wheeling Register* aided those accused of treason by asserting that Governor Morgan, a Republican, failed to preserve law and order while simultaneously ignoring the failures of the former Democrat governor John J. Cornwell to do the same during his term, which came to an

¹⁶² Whitelaw Reid, editorial, *New York Tribune*, April 27, 1922.

¹⁶³ Reid, editorial, *New York Tribune*, April 27, 1922.

end in March of 1921.¹⁶⁴ This held the Democrats responsible for undermining the good name of the state of West Virginia, which made them as treasonous as the miners accused of the crime, even worse in the mind of Morrison as they lacked the courage to actually take up arms to carry out their treacherous acts. His bottom line was that the Republican press respected the efforts, no matter how futile, of both the current Republican administration and the former Democratic one to maintain the state of law and order.¹⁶⁵ Despite this claim, the Republican press seemed to be forgetful of the fact that they too criticized Governor Morgan, only coming to respect him when he assigned the blame for the violence in Logan and the surrounding area to the coal operators long after the staff of the *Intelligencer* came to that same conclusion. Respect for law and order was so important to these Republican's values that they attempted to highlight it as a way in which they differentiated themselves from the Democrats, who they portrayed as ignoring the higher duty of both parties to maintain law and order, instead choosing to slander the Republican administration's handling of the issue.

The Role of Organized Labor

Though the media outlets aligned with the Republican Party seemed most concerned with holding all parties involved in the Battle of Blair Mountain accountable for the lack of law and order, with a great emphasis placed on the failure of government to eliminate the mine guard system in earlier papers, some editors turned against the union near the end of the conflict. One example of such coverage appeared in the *Shepherdstown Register* on September 1st, with editor H.L. Snyder asserting that union

¹⁶⁴ Wilbur Morrison, "First Aid to Treason," *Clarksburg Telegram*, May 13, 1922.

¹⁶⁵ Morrison, "First Aid to Treason," *Clarksburg Telegram*, May 13, 1922.

officials were to blame for the violence in Mingo and Logan counties.¹⁶⁶ Writing of the formal accusation of three union officials (Frank Keeney, Fred Mooney, and William “Bill” Blizzard) for murder. Snyder held that though he was not sure whether the men were guilty of murder, their arrests would be to the public benefit as he saw the trio as responsible for stirring up the trouble at Blair Mountain. He argued that should the men be “penned up in prison or run out of the State [sic] peace would follow immediately.”¹⁶⁷

Other politically neutral publications also laid the blame for the violence on union officials, including Max von Schlegel’s *Martinsburg Evening Journal*. In a September 22nd editorial, Schlegel rejoiced at the news that a Logan County grand jury had returned 125 indictments for first-degree murder on Saturday, September 17th, with Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney among those indicted.¹⁶⁸ Schlegel wrote that somebody was responsible for inciting the miners’ march, which violated innumerable state laws, and even if that somebody was not one of the union officials indicted, the indictment of the two officials was of net benefit, as it would give them no reprieve until the guilty were found and punished.¹⁶⁹ Not aligned with either the Democratic or Republican parties, Snyder and Schlegel expressed politically neutral viewpoints which differed in that they saw the union as largely responsible for the inflamed passions of the miners, whereas the Republican press during the battle pointed the finger at the mine guard system and the politicians who allowed it to exist.

However, in the immediate aftermath of the violence, the Republican press in their reverence for law and order also began to set their sights on the leadership of the

¹⁶⁶ H.L. Snyder, editorial, *Shepherdstown Register*, September 1, 1921.

¹⁶⁷ Snyder, editorial, *Shepherdstown Register*, September 1, 1921.

¹⁶⁸ Max von Schlegel, “Let Justice Be Done,” *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, September 9, 1921.

¹⁶⁹ Schlegel, “Let Justice Be Done,” *Martinsburg Evening Journal*, September 9, 1921.

United Mineworkers of America. The *Martinsburg Evening Journal* printed an editorial originally published in the *Clarksburg Telegram* which charged the leaders of the UMWA with undermining their ability to hold political influence in the state by virtue of their recklessness for instigating the march on Logan County.¹⁷⁰ Wilbur Morrison, editor of the *Clarksburg Telegram*, argued that the “radical and irresponsible leadership” of the union was responsible for the “insurrection” in Southern West Virginia. Morrison calls for the elimination of radical politics from within the leadership of not just the United Mineworkers, but of organized labor in general, stating that “fanatical” leaders had undermined the cause of labor.¹⁷¹

The Role of Politics

Though the blame for the violent uprising in the coalfields was blamed on either organized labor or the use of private mine guards, some of the politically non-aligned newspapers sought to place the blame on West Virginia’s Republican Party. At the tail end of the hostilities, on September 1st, 1921, Max von Schlegel, upon discovery of Mother Jones’ falsified telegram, determined that the blame lied not exclusively on the shoulders of the private detectives of the Baldwin-Felts Agency hired by the coal companies, but rather on those of the Republican politicians who promised to eliminate this system of private mine guards but failed to do so.¹⁷² As most of the striking miners, by Schlegel’s estimation, voted the administration of Republican governor Ephraim Morgan into office, hoping that the executive would make good on his promise to end the

¹⁷⁰ Wilbur Morrison, “The Civil War in West Virginia: Political Dynamite,” *Clarksburg Telegram*, September 9, 1921.

¹⁷¹ Morrison, “The Civil War in West Virginia: Political Dynamite,” *Clarksburg Telegram*, September 9, 1921.

¹⁷² Max von Schlegel, “Whither Are We Drifting,” *Martinsburg Journal*, September 1, 1921.

hated practice of employing private guards. Failing to eliminate this system invalidated the promise to ensure that the law was enforced by duly appointed officials put forward by the West Virginia Republican Party in their platform. The promise, reproduced in Schlegel's editorial was as follows:

In a republic, the enforcement of law made by the people should be and must always be in the hands of the public servants elected by the people. We deplore the abuses that have grown up under the so-called private guard system in this state, and we pledge a Republican legislature to enact laws that will correct these abuses and at the same time maintain and protect all lawful property and personal rights.¹⁷³

Schlegel held that betrayal by the Republican Party is what led the miners to take matters into their own hands, and he closed with lamenting that politicians failing to keep their promises was a symptom of larger issues of law and order plaguing the entire nation.¹⁷⁴

Though sharing the conviction of the Republican Party that respect for law and order was essential, a theme which dominated the response of their media outlets to the Battle of Blair Mountain and the subsequent treason trials, Schlegel pointed out that the party failed to carry through with their promises to uphold one of their most sacred principles.

In their coverage of the Battle of Blair Mountain and the subsequent trials, the editors of West Virginia's Republican newspapers raised concerns over respect for the rule of law, a point which found consensus with the editors of the state's Democratic newspapers, and which alternatively drew criticism and praise from those which were not aligned with either of the major political parties. All the editors largely agreed that such a disregard for law and order should be stopped, but the point of divergence lay in who they believed to be most responsible for it, which largely was either union leaders or the

¹⁷³ Schlegel, "Whither Are We Drifting," *Martinsburg Journal*, September 1, 1921.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

coal companies, with a select few commentators insisting it was the miners themselves or the politicians which failed to hold the coal companies accountable. The radical politics of union leaders and the failures of state officials were seen as reasons for the unrest, and though they saw him as a symptom of larger issues, the feudal policies of Don Chafin were also heavily criticized. In a departure from the commentary on the 1912-13 strike, this time the unions, the coal companies, and the politicians were scrutinized more heavily than the common laborers.

Conclusion

The West Virginia Coal Mine Wars were important to not only the history of the state, but also the history of labor relations in the U.S., and they garnered a great deal of publicity from the state's press. This attention from the editors of West Virginia's newspapers served as a testament to the importance of the mine wars in the larger historiography of industrial labor relations in the early 20th-Century United States. More importantly, national and local political attitudes toward labor in this era were reflected in the published opinions of the editors of prominent West Virginia daily and weekly newspapers. Dominated by the interests of the state's Republican Party, most of the news outlets in the state reflected the political values of the devotees of the Party through how the editorials characterized the strikes and accompanying violent skirmishes, as well as the groups and individuals who alternatively supported, encouraged, policed, or actively participated in them. Editors such as H.C. Ogden of the *Wheeling Intelligencer* functioned as mouthpieces for the Republican Party by editing publications which were either founded as official organs of the party, received funding from the Republican establishment, or were staffed by ardent supporters of the party. The writings of these editors showed that the Republican platform at the time emphasized loyalty to capitalism, a disinterest in the concerns of the common laborers who worked for capital, and an interest in the preservation of the rule of law. The rule of law was characterized by individual adherence to the law as well as the fulfillment of law enforcement duties by officials duly appointed by state governments. Adherence to this principle caused supporters of the party to express dissatisfaction with the big business interests of the coal

operators they initially supported, by virtue of their contraction of private gangs and armies to protect their interests. The attitude of Republican editors began with distaste for labor strikes that disrupted free enterprise in 1912 shifted by 1921 into a criticism of capitalists, who in their efforts to maintain the free market undermined the sanctity of the rule of law.

The coverage of the Paint Creek and Cabin Creek strikes of 1912-1913 in West Virginia newspapers put on display the pre-war attitudes toward labor. It defended the practices of the coal industry and downplayed the issues with wages and safety measures raised by striking coal miners, arguing that these minor complaints against the coal operators were of little consequence and were not legitimate excuses for the strike action which resulted in work stoppages within the mines. The newspaper editors affiliated with the Republican Party insisted that the reasons enumerated by the striking coal miners and their union could not be the true aims of the strike. They claimed the strike was fueled by various other factors, ranging from socialist agitation and ulterior motives to ethnic and regional stereotypes associated with the coal miners. In their attempt to stand up for the rights of the industrialists, the Republican press argued that the strikes were fueled by the violent tendencies of the Italian and Eastern European immigrants that were employed in large numbers in the mines that participated in the strike. They put forth conspiracy theories that radical labor organizers such as Mother Jones were enticing non-miners to use violence against the Baldwin-Felts agents who provided security for the coal operators, insisted that the provincial native whites who worked in the mines lacked the capacity to understand that working under such oppressive conditions was for their own good as well as the greater good, and before the strike was over they claimed that the

strikers were simply behaving lazily. This provided a stark contrast with the attitudes expressed by the staff of the *Socialist and Labor Star*, with their dissent and dissatisfaction with the settlement of the strike bringing them under the scrutiny of the governor and the National Guard.

Beginning with the coverage of the Matewan Massacre of May 19th, 1920, the Republican press began to change its tune when it came to who was to blame for the strike and ensuing violence. Now rather than concoct conspiracy theories to explain why there was an ongoing strike, some editors expressed firm belief that the strike was a direct response to the unjust and violent eviction of union miners and their families by the private detectives of the Baldwin-Felts Agency, which was exacerbated by the agency's employment as labor spies and unofficial law enforcement officials by the coal companies. Central to this editorial shift was the importance the national Republican Party now placed on the rule of law and the responsible execution of law enforcement by elected local government officials in the interests of local government. The coal operators in the region of Southern West Virginia had violated the trust of the Republican Party they once had by going against a principle they held more sacred than the right of unobstructed free enterprise, the maintenance of law and order. By being allowed to resort to such illegal measures, the coal companies set a precedent that the less fortunate unionized miners had no choice but to respond in kind. This meant that while the editors aligned with Republican values disagreed with the use of violence by coal miners, they saw that the blame for the outbreak of this violence laid on the shoulders of the private guard system. This system had to be put out of commission before peace could be achieved or guilty parties could face judicial punishment. This opinion on the private

guard system was solidified by Sid Hatfield's murder at the hands of C.E. Lively and other Baldwin-Felts agents in August of 1921.

With the outbreak of the Battle of Blair Mountain, which raged from August 25th to September 2nd, 1921, the blame was extended to the politicians who allowed the mine guard system to continue without hindrance. The constituents of the Republican Party both in the newspaper offices and coal mines of West Virginia were upset with their legislature and governor for issuing false promises to end the system of oppression. This allowed the Republican press to establish a reputation of holding their own party accountable, a point which they accused the Democratic press of failing to do. The coverage of the mine wars from the 1912 strike until the 1922 treason trials show the importance the Republican Party assigned to free enterprise and rule of law.

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