

“Line Up or Roll Up”: The Lumber Workers Industrial Union in the Prince George District

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On a Friday evening in June 1912, South Fort George businessmen held a banquet for the railway contractors building the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway along the Upper Fraser River in central British Columbia. The end of the steel was steadily pushing westward from the Alberta border, and the contractors were anticipating the arrival of the line in South Fort George. One of the contractors chose the opportunity to address the gathering and speak on the labour problems which were then threatening the construction programme. He spoke of what he called the “won’t work” element who followed the construction camps and incited lawlessness among workers. The contractor advised the local citizenry to keep these undesirables from the area, and later the local newspaper editor promised

the order of foreign agitators known as ‘I Won’t Works’ a warm reception should they attempt to spread their pernicious doctrine of lawlessness here. . . . The law-abiding industrial class will receive a warm welcome to the town, but the disturber, the bootlegger and the tinhorn will find this climate decidedly unhealthy should he attempt to ply his trade in South Fort George.¹

The newspaper editor and the railway contractor were talking about members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and although there was industrial conflict in August 1912, the area affected was far to the west of South Fort George.² The provincial police and the contractors were able to maintain industrial peace until the railway arrived in the area in early 1914.

Railway construction had brought IWW members and sentiment into the northern interior of British Columbia, but it also wrought other changes. South Fort George was surpassed in size and importance by the contiguous community of Prince George.³ Moreover, the rail link to the

¹ *Fort George Herald*, South Fort George, 15 June 1912.

² *Ibid.*, 10 August 1912, 31 August 1912, 12 April 1913, 6 June 1914; Public Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), British Columbia Provincial Police, GR 57, v. 4, f. 225.

³ Frank Leonard, “Grand Trunk Pacific and the Establishment of the City of Prince George, 1911-1915,” *BC Studies* 63 (Autumn 1984): 29-54.

prairies and the American Midwest also spawned a forest industry along the railway line to the east of Prince George. After 1916 a number of logging operations and sawmills were established, catering to the demand in the prairie West. By 1923 there were some eighteen sawmills situated on the railway line between Prince George and McBride.⁴ The Grand Trunk also created a railway tie industry in the northern interior. During the construction of the Grand Trunk thousands of ties were taken from the bush on both sides of the line, but with the completion of construction the need for ties fell precipitously. In 1918 tie production again became important as the Grand Trunk Pacific began to let orders in the area to supply ties to be used throughout Canada. Maintaining railway lines, by replacing worn ties, required about 200 ties per mile of track yearly. In 1922 the Prince George area produced 436,199 ties to meet this demand.⁵

In the years from 1919 to 1922, workers in the forest industry of the northern interior were restless. There was a union drive and a number of strikes, reflecting the increased militancy of workers throughout Canada in this period.⁶ In British Columbia the formation of the B.C. Loggers Union (later the Lumber Workers Industrial Union) in January 1919 provided an organizational structure which harnessed the enthusiasms for organization. But unlike the larger provincial union, which was led by a socialist, Ernest Winch, the Prince George district was more committed to the ideals of the IWW.⁷ The Wobblies had not disappeared with the end of the railway construction era, and they were very active in the provincial forest industry. Ernest Winch and the socialists were able to defeat the IWW insurgents at the provincial level, but in the Prince George district the Wobbly vision of labour activism prevailed.

The nature of the forest industry along the Upper Fraser River was familiar to union organizers steeped in IWW theory and tactics. The op-

⁴ Gordon Hak, "Prairie Capital, Prairie Markets and Prairie Labour: The Forest Industry in the Prince George District, British Columbia, 1910-1930," *Prairie Forum* 14.1 (Spring 1989): 9-22.

⁵ *Western Lumberman* (June 1928), 793-95; Fort George Forest District, "Annual Management Report," 1922, PABC, Lands Branch, GR 1441, B3401, f. 027391 # 1-3.

⁶ Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (Spring 1984): 11-44.

⁷ For a history of the LWIU, see Gordon Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919-1922," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989): 67-90. Literature on the IWW is vast, but good starting points are: A. Ross McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada: 1905-1914," Canadian Historical Association, *Papers* (1975), 167-90; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, 1969); Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York, 1965).

erations were for the most part small and poorly capitalized, camp conditions were abysmal, there was a diverse ethnic mix in the labour force, and a large percentage of the work force was transient. For the migrant loggers and tie hacks, direct action at the job and a loose organizational structure had a strong appeal. They worked only during the winter in the seasonal industry, and they wanted complaints remedied immediately. The workers had little sense of where they would be living and working in six months' time.

In the spring of 1919 a Vancouver organizer with links to the One Big Union and the fledgling B.C. Loggers Union travelled to Prince George to co-ordinate union activities in the area. Tom Mace was a coastal logger involved in Vancouver political and working-class movements. Influenced by Jack Kavanagh, Mace had become a member of the Socialist Party of Canada in 1916. In March 1919 Mace attended the Western Labour Conference in Calgary. This convention recommended the establishment of the One Big Union and the holding of a general strike on 1 June 1919 to win the six-hour day. Mace returned to Vancouver, and after communicating with Ernest Winch, secretary of the B.C. Loggers Union, he left for Prince George to begin organizational work. Mace, described as a socialist with strong IWW influences, wasted little time in approaching Prince George district lumber workers. In late March he called a mass meeting to bring together loggers and sawmill workers.⁸

While Mace brought the organizational structure of the B.C. Loggers Union to the northern interior, local workers had already begun to challenge the lumber companies. The management of the United Grain Growers' sawmill at Hutton, some sixty miles to the east of Prince George, was especially worried about unionization and strikes. In April 1919, Mark DeCew, the mill manager, posted the following sign at various places in the mill yard:

OWING TO THE MANY THREATS HAVING BEEN MADE BY
PARTIES OF BOLSHEVIKI INCLINATIONS TO
EITHER BURN OR DESTROY OUR MILLS AND LUMBER
THE COMPANY HAVE CONSIDERED IT NECESSARY TO
PLACE ARMED GUARDS TO PROTECT THEIR
PROPERTY. EMPLOYEES WILL KEEP AWAY FROM THE
YARD OR MILL AFTER SEVEN O'CLOCK IN THE
EVENING, EXCEPT THOSE ACTUALLY ENGAGED IN
REPAIRS. TRESPASSERS ON THE COMPANY'S

⁸ Biographical memorandum on Tom Mace by Dorothy Steeves (?), University of British Columbia, The Library, Special Collection Division (hereafter UBC), Angus MacInnis Memorial Collection, v. 52, f. 9; *Citizen*, Prince George, 26 March 1919.

PROPERTY AFTER SIX O'CLOCK DO SO AT THEIR
OWN RISK.⁹

After posting the warning and the guards, DeCew wrote to the British Columbia police detachment in South Fort George to ask whether it was necessary to have guards sworn in as special constables and whether they needed special permits to carry firearms.¹⁰ The deputy inspector in South Fort George promptly replied that DeCew's misgivings were well grounded and suggested a means by which the illegal procedures could be easily remedied. The armed guards only had to appear before the stipendiary magistrate in South Fort George and the necessary oaths would be administered and weapon permits issued. The deputy inspector also offered to give the guards "a few 'pointers' covering duty of this nature."¹¹ With the blessing of the provincial police there was a private army at Hutton.

The Loggers Union did not launch a military offensive or employ guerilla warfare; rather, their agenda called for the more peaceable strategy of a strike. The strike began on 3 June 1919 and coincided with the beginning of the general strike in Vancouver. The dispute in the northern interior was a confusing affair. The strike was precipitated by the desire to show solidarity with Canadian workers in the protest against the events occurring in Winnipeg, where workers were engaged in a general strike. Only after the walkout had begun in the northern interior did the union present demands covering local issues. The lumber workers wanted an eight-hour day at the same wage previously paid for ten hours and the reduction of the price of board from \$1.20 to \$1.00. Further, loggers demanded improved camp conditions and the enforcement of regulations set out by the provincial board of health.¹²

The strike did not completely shut down the northern interior forest industry. Some sawmills and logging camps were forced to close and others operated at low production levels. Strike-breakers were imported from Edmonton and Winnipeg, and coupled with local strike-breakers, they were able to keep most of the mills and camps running, albeit at reduced output. By early July the number of strikers at union headquarters in

⁹ Mark DeCew to T. W. S. Parsons, Deputy Inspector, B.C. Police, South Fort George, 26 April 1919, PABC, Attorney General, GR 1323, B2151, f. 628-16-18.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ T. W. S. Parsons to V. M. de Cue [*sic*], 29 April 1919, PABC, GR 1323, B2151, f. 628-16-18. Parsons' superiors in Victoria did not share his eagerness to establish a company militia at Hutton, but neither did they see fit to overturn the decision. See Wm. G. McWynn to Parsons, 5 May 1919, PABC, GR 1323, B2151, f. 628-16-18.

¹² *British Columbia Federationist*, 6 June 1919; *Citizen*, 9 July 1919.

Prince George, where food and accommodation were supplied, was dwindling as men returned to work or left the district. Mills and camps began to return to normal production, and the effect of the walkout was becoming less and less significant. In mid-July the strike was declared over by the union. None of the union's demands had been met.¹³

In retrospect, the strike's failure is understandable. The action was premature; Mace, the organizer, arrived in March and the strike occurred less than six weeks later, prompted by events in Vancouver and Winnipeg. The intransigence of the employers in ignoring union demands undermined the weak organizational structure, and the collapse of the nationwide protest associated with the Winnipeg General Strike dampened the spirits of the northern interior strikers.

The union noted another cause for their failure in the Prince George district, namely, the farmers who worked part-time in the bush to secure cash to upgrade their struggling farm enterprises. A writer in the *British Columbia Federationist* identified farmer-loggers as

one of, if not the greatest, factor at the present time in keeping down wages, in maintaining long hours and abominable camp conditions. This is amply proven by innumerable reports coming in from the short log district, and the failure of the Prince George district to attain all its demands during the recent strike was almost entirely due to this weak-kneed, uneducated element.¹⁴

Another correspondent from the Hutton area opined that the large proportion of farmer-loggers in the district undermined the attempts of full-time loggers to secure working conditions equal to those found in coastal camps.¹⁵

Northern interior farmers carving out homesteads in a hostile environment were often heavily in debt, worked long hours on the farm, depended on earning hard cash in the woods, and could not uproot and move, like full-time loggers, if their services in the bush were no longer needed. Many farmers lived in shacks and suffered for decent food, and they did not find conditions in the logging camps especially dismal in comparison to conditions on their home farm. Furthermore, farmers were dependent on the good graces of mill operators, as the lumber camps were the best consumers of their home-grown produce. Antagonizing the controllers of this ready market for milk, hay, meat, and vegetables was not a good business strategy. Struggling to become land-owning businessmen, the farmers were not

¹³ *Citizen*, 11 June 1919, 9 July 1919, 16 July 1919; *Pacific Coast Lumberman* (July 1919), 50 and 68.

¹⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 1 August 1919, 25 July 1919.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 August 1919.

susceptible to the call for working-class solidarity offered by the loggers' union.

The failure of the strike in June and July of 1919 did not diminish the ardour of union organizers. One union member declared: "Do not conclude that because we have seen fit to call the strike off for the present that our organization is out of business. We are now starting in earnest to organize every worker and when we make our demands we will be in a position to tie up every plant on the line."¹⁶ The union did succeed in building up its membership, but rather than becoming established in saw-mills and logging camps, the tie operations proved to be the most fertile ground for union organizers.

Features of the tie industry permitted successful union work. The tie season began in November when contractors, having obtained contracts from the railway, set up camps and hired a work force. The tie hacks felled the trees and hewed them into ties, which were then hauled over the snow and ice by sleigh to railway sidings. The season was over in May. Tie contractors were mainly small operators needing only limited amounts of capital to get set up. Because of the temporary nature of the camps and the slim profit margin, accommodation for workers was very poor. The contractor was also under time restraints to meet deadlines. Having secured a contract from the railway, he was obliged to fill the requirements by the following spring, and thus work stoppages had to be minimized in order that he receive his pay. Terrible living conditions, low capital investment, and a restricted season made the tie industry vulnerable to unionization.

The loggers' union, which had changed its name to the Lumber Workers Industrial Union in the summer of 1919 when it affiliated to the One Big Union, penetrated the tie camps in the 1919-1920 season. The J. W. Blain camp at Foreman, one of the largest tie operations in the area, was the first to be unionized. Blain, of Edmonton, had a contract to take out 150,000 ties, and he hired a crew of seventy-five men to do the work. On the evening of 23 November 1919 the men held a meeting, elected a camp committee, and drew up a list of demands to be presented to management. The list included increasing the piece rate of tie hacks from sixteen cents to eighteen cents per tie and the establishment of a wage schedule for teamsters, cooks, and day labourers. Moreover, the men wanted improved living conditions, the construction of a laundry and drying room, furnished with four tubs and a stove, the addition of ventilators to the bunkhouses, an increase in the number of tables and lamps in the bunkhouses, the establishment of sleeping quarters for the cookhouse staff separate from the

¹⁶ *Citizen*, 16 July 1919.

kitchen, the procurement of a first-aid kit, and the digging of a pit 100 feet from the cookhouse to hold kitchen refuse. The men also demanded that no discrimination be shown against camp delegates or other members of the LWIU and that the eight-hour day be instituted. The meeting resolved to strike on the morning of 25 November if the terms were not met.¹⁷

On the morning of the 24th the camp committee presented the demands to management. Immediately the foreman suspended operations. The senior partner of the company was in Edmonton, and when he returned to Foreman the next afternoon he asked for a modification of the demands. The men decided to hold fast and even advanced additional requests. They now also wanted the reinstatement of a fellow worker who had been dismissed as a result of his union activities, payment in cash twice monthly, and a written reply from the company to all union demands. Further negotiations ensued, and on 26 November 1919 the strike was called off, the terms of the agreement being satisfactory to the union. The majority of the union's demands were met, including the increase in tie prices to eighteen cents per tie and the eight-hour work day.¹⁸

Flushed with success, the union moved to entrench its position in the Blain tie camp. A union business meeting was held on 30 November 1919 at which a motion was passed demanding that the company discharge the seven men who had continued to work in the camp during the strike. The company replied, in writing, that it interpreted the settlement to mean that there was to be no discrimination against workers, no matter whether they were union or non-union. Although the men disagreed with the company's view, they decided to settle the issue in their own way. The next day they held a union meeting and determined to approach the seven strike-breakers and ask them to either line up with the union or roll up their bed-rolls and leave the camp. The seven men were persuaded to join the union, and the camp became 100 percent organized with all dues paid up. Any new men entering the camp were immediately approached by LWIU delegates and enrolled into the union. The motto of the camp was "Line Up or Roll Up."¹⁹

The organization of the camp did not lead to improvement in working and living conditions. The settlement of the November strike was predicated on promises by the company to remedy the complaints of the men. From the company's perspective, procrastination was an effective and in-

¹⁷ *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 December 1919; Strike report, Canada, Department of Labour, Public Archives of Canada, RG 27, T2703, v. 318, f. 429.

¹⁸ *British Columbia Federationist*, 12 December 1919, 5 December 1919.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

telligent strategy. If camp improvements could be put off for a few months, then the tie season would be over and the camp disbanded. Expenditures on bunkhouses and cookhouses could be avoided if promises remained unfulfilled. In January 1920 a LWIU delegate at Blain's camp reported that conditions were still terrible and that no bath house, dry room, or quarters for the kitchen staff had been constructed.²⁰ A strike by the teamsters at the camp in late January was settled in favour of the teamsters, who were allowed to retain the eight-hour day with time and a half for unavoidable overtime. During the teamsters' strike the Royal Canadian Mounted Police visited the camp and found that health standards were not up to par, but since it was not within their jurisdiction to enforce the regulations, they merely reported the matter to provincial authorities.²¹ The LWIU had organized the Blain tie camp at Foreman, but by the end of the season the union had not dramatically altered the conditions of the tie workers. With the completion of the season in the spring, the workers in the camp dispersed.

There were other small victories for the LWIU in 1919-20. In March 1920 the LWIU made some headway in the United Grain Growers' logging camps near Hutton, winning semi-monthly pay in cash, the promises of baths and a dry room, stricter enforcement of health laws, and no discrimination against union members. Management was unwilling to provide blankets and sheets, to concede the eight-hour work day, or to establish a minimum wage of five dollars per day. The union victories depended on the good graces of management and not binding contract agreements. As such, the apparent victories had little long-term staying power.²² The total membership of the LWIU in the Prince George district was estimated at 800 in April 1920, but the average number of participating members in the first eight months of 1920 was only about 200.²³

Besides the camps, Prince George was also the scene of much LWIU activity. In the spring of 1920 the lumber workers were meeting every second and fourth Sunday of the month at their union headquarters on Third Avenue, and on 19 April 1920 the first semi-annual convention of the district LWIU was held in Prince George. The Prince George district of the LWIU was large, stretching from Smithers in the west to the Alberta boundary in the east. Because of the size of the district the turnout of dele-

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 30 January 1920.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13 February 1920.

²² *Ibid.*, 19 March 1920, 20 October 1920.

²³ Report of the second convention of the One Big Union, September 20-24, 1920, UBC, One Big Union Records, v. 1, # 213.

gates to the convention was small. Besides the usual resolutions concerning wages, hours of work, living conditions, and the enforcement of provincial health regulations, a campaign against piece-work wages was begun and the LWIU bought shares in a newly founded co-operative store in Prince George.²⁴

The next scheduled district meeting was not to be held until October 1920, but the resignation of the union secretary, Jack Stevenson, forced a special meeting on 4 July. At this meeting C. F. Morrison was elected secretary, but the gathering also chose the opportunity to remove members of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) from key union positions. This movement towards an IWW syndicalist stance generated much rancour. The contentious resolution resolved that "Anyone holding an official position in any political party can not hold office in the L&CWIU, OBU."²⁵ The Lumber and Camp Workers Industrial Union was the new name of the LWIU.

R. C. Mutch, of Smithers, was present at the July meeting and he was adamantly opposed to the resolution. Mutch was a member of the SPC and a LWIU delegate. He was highly critical of the proceedings as well as the content of the Prince George meeting. He reported that the convention "was a total farce, being packed by the 'Wild and Woolley' [*sic*] element, who paid no attention whatever to the OBU constitution, and by force of numbers and machine tactics ran things to suit themselves."²⁶ He accused the meeting of electing men who were not LWIU delegates to attend a Vancouver convention, and he charged that the Prince George LWIU was being run by a professional group of unionists, not by the workers themselves.²⁷

In the pages of the *British Columbia Federationist* the issue was hotly debated. Arthur Johnson addressed Mutch's criticisms by broadening the debate and highlighting the fact that Mutch was a building contractor in Smithers. Johnson was not only against political affiliations but was also against allowing non-workers in the union: "we of the rank and file believe that all bourgeoisie should be handed a withdrawal card."²⁸ Alf Palmgren entered the debate and tried to find middle ground: "both sides are very conscientious, and good workers for the cause as a whole — both striving for the same objective, and only disagreeing on the different roads to take

²⁴ *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 May 1920. The LWIU, Prince George District, used the *Federationist* as its organ. Field reports and convention minutes were published therein.

²⁵ *British Columbia Federationist*, 16 July 1920.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1920.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 August 1920.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 20 August 1920.

in order to reach their objective."²⁹ Finally, C. F. Morrison entered the fray and put the issue to rest. He stated that Mutch was wrong in his accusations against the proceedings at the July convention. Furthermore, in a theoretical discussion, Morrison came down strongly on the side of the industrial struggle, rather than the political struggle, as the main vehicle by which to obtain working-class goals. It was the struggle on the job that determined the politics of the state.³⁰ The anti-socialist position was enshrined in the LWIU in the Prince George district.

The LWIU had been established during a boom in the provincial lumber economy, but it was clear by the end of 1920 that the lumber industry of the northern interior was in the throes of a serious economic downturn. Many sawmills and logging operations had been closed, and the "only chances to trade labor-power for 'pork chops' in this district [were] by wielding a 16-pound broadaxe, making ties at from 20 to 25 cents a tie."³¹ At the end of the year the LWIU in the Prince George district had 557 members in good standing out of a total membership on file of 2,261.³² Union organization was at an extremely low level.

At a district meeting held in Prince George on 13 March 1921, it was recognized that the office had "practically gotten out of touch with the east end of the district," and a delegate was appointed to visit "all camps from Prince George to the Alberta boundary, and attempt to re-organize this region, and have the line membership elect camp delegates."³³ H. P. Hansen, former secretary of the OBU Miners' Unit in Coleman, Alberta, was chosen to organize the district, and he began his work before the appointment became official on 13 March. In the pages of the *British Columbia Federationist* Hansen documented his travels along the rail line to the east of Prince George where, at the time, only a few mills and camps were in operation. Hansen's record of his journey is worth noting in some detail; it provides insights into conditions at the time and into the attitudes and thoughts of a radical LWIU organizer.

Hansen left Prince George on 10 March and visited the Prince George Lumber Company at Shelley, a small camp where he found "about 16 slaves huddled in a shack approximately 20x24 which served as a kitchen and dining room as well. With the exception of two or three workers, it is needless to add this camp is composed of the most abject of slaves."³⁴

²⁹ Ibid., 3 September 1920.

³⁰ Ibid., 10 September 1920.

³¹ Ibid., 11 February 1921.

³² Ibid., 28 January 1921.

³³ Ibid., 25 March 1921.

³⁴ Ibid., 25 March 1921.

Hansen offered his opinion on why the conditions were so poor and the union unable to gain a foothold:

Some of the slaves in this camp are old dyed-in-the-wool craft unionists, such as the sawyer and the engineer, who were hostile to any attempts being made to organize the slaves that according to their theory were beneath them in their opinion, on the social ladder of success, and of course these lowly brow-beaten slaves were, as is usually the case, looking to their intelligent friends for a way out of their misery, instead of tackling the laborious task of finding a solution for themselves.³⁵

From Shelley, Hansen travelled through Willow River, Giscome, Newlands, and Aleza Lake, but the mills were not operating and there was no logging going on. At Dewey Hansen encountered a crew from the Bashaw Lumber Company hauling logs. Hansen noted that many of the workers in the camp "are totally ignorant of what has been taking place in the organization recently, and in some cases are still nursing their grudge to the organization, because it did not emancipate them in the strikes pulled in 19 and 20."³⁶

After his stop at Dewey, Hansen returned to Prince George to attend the union business meeting on 13 March. He then travelled to McBride and on to Jasper. On the trip back he stopped at Dome Creek, Penny, and Longworth, talking to workers and treating them to his revolutionary rhetoric:

Remember, fellow workers, that the organizing that counts is the organizing that is done on the job, where the teaching of the class struggle day after day establishes that feeling of solidarity that between workers brings about the realization of their identity of interest in their common struggle with the capitalist class and their parasites.³⁷

Hansen also encountered a mill operator on his journey back to Prince George. The lumberman demanded an explanation of how unionization could even be considered in the face of economic depression and dismal market conditions; the lumber operations were barely surviving and could not hope to meet the demands of the union. Hansen reported his view of the conversation:

These masters, slave owners and slave drivers, are evidently about ready to admit their markets are a thing of the past, inasmuch as one of them had to pertinently tell your humble servant that unless and until he was able to come around and tell the slaves (and incidentally the boss) where markets were

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1921.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 March 1921.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8 April 1921.

obtainable, he had no business talking about organizing the slaves. The organizer, however, promptly told the boss that he (the organizer) was neither a travelling salesman for the lumber trust, or a business promoter for that same trust, but that he was engaged in selling labor-power and as such had a right to assist his fellow workers in the work of organizing for the purpose of selling their labor-power at the best obtainable price, and under the best obtainable conditions.

The boss was further informed that we did not propose to mingle in his business enterprises, as the slaves had no interest in so doing. We, as the slaves, did not own any of the lumber, and therefore, we were not interested in finding markets for the boss.

Hansen then directed his argument to the readers of the *British Columbia Federationist*:

Fellow Workers: Get your mind made up on this issue. If the boss cannot find a profitable market for his products, you don't work, and the boss is therefore in reality admitting that he is incompetent to carry on any longer; and therefore, the sooner you organize yourselves in your respective industrial unions for the ultimate purpose of taking over the industries and operating them for the benefit of society as a whole, the sooner the boss will be separated from the ownership of the very things you need in order to live (not exist), and the workers will then be able to show the bosses that the different industries can be carried on and operated by the workers, and that the workers will not make as big a mess of the job as the bosses are doing at the present time.³⁸

Theoretical arguments, stirring speeches, and the energy of H. P. Hansen could not revive the LWIU in the camps to the east of Prince George in the spring of 1921. The depression had devastated the lumber industry, and the mills and camps were closed or worked intermittently. The plight of the lumber operators was obvious to all and wage cuts were imposed to reduce manufacturing costs with little protest from workers. The size of the labour force in the lumber industry decreased and the local farmer-loggers formed a higher percentage of the workers. The transient workers, who were more prone to radicalism, had no reason to remain in the area during the depressed economic times. Organization among loggers and sawmill workers had run up against the hard wall of an economic crisis.

The LWIU did not die with a whimper in the Prince George district. The tie industry was not immediately affected by the monthly fluctuations in the continental lumber market. The railway was the sole purchaser of the ties, and once contracts had been let in the fall the local contractors and their employees were guaranteed work until spring. During the 1921-22 tie season a major conflict developed between the largest contractor and his employees, leading to the most significant strike in the short history of

³⁸ Ibid.

the LWIU in the northern interior. The local press, the LWIU, the Prince George City Council, and H. P. Hansen were all intimately involved in the confrontation that developed at Mud River, thirty-five miles to the west of Prince George. The issues were the same as those that had been forwarded by the LWIU in the previous three years, but this time the conflict escaped the perimeters of an isolated camp and moved into the city of Prince George.

In November 1921 a J. D. McArthur company secured twenty-three timber limits on the Mud River and announced that the firm was going to take out 250,000 railway ties. D. Hay was the McArthur agent in Prince George, and J. Blaikie was the superintendent of the work at Mud River.³⁹ On short notice Blaikie hired 180 men, set up the tie camps, and began manufacturing railway ties.

Living conditions for the workers at the McArthur camp were extremely poor. The men requested that the management improve the sanitary state of the camp, but no changes were made. The men then sent a letter to the Health Department in Victoria requesting an investigation of camp conditions, and a provincial police constable was dispatched from Prince George to inspect the situation. He concluded that sanitary conditions were indeed below the provincial standard set by the Board of Health. Workers expected that the government regulations would be enforced, but it soon became evident that the company did not intend to upgrade the camp facilities.

On 26 February 1922 a tie hack named Jackson, who had been very active in the proceedings to rectify camp conditions, was discharged. The rest of the workers held a meeting that same day and then demanded that the company reinstate Jackson, claiming that his dismissal was a blatant act of discrimination. Blaikie, the camp superintendent, refused to consider the request and said he would give all the men who did not wish to work their time. The tie workers decided to strike.⁴⁰ On the following day the company called for the intervention of the police in an attempt to keep the camp operating with men not sympathetic to the strike. The police arrived and in their presence another strike vote was held; the overwhelming majority were in favour of the strike action. The strikers then left for Prince George, either walking into town or paying farmers one dollar a head to drive them there.⁴¹

³⁹ *Citizen*, 8 April 1921.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 28 February 1922; *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 March 1922.

⁴¹ *British Columbia Federationist*, 17 March 1922; *Western Lumberman* (March 1922), 87.

The strikers held a mass meeting in Prince George on the afternoon of 2 March in the Princess Theatre. Many of the city's unemployed were present, although they did not participate in the proceedings, and the strike situation was discussed thoroughly. A motion was put forward that declared that the strike was still in effect, and the workers from the McArthur camp voted and carried the measure by a margin of 118 to 1. The strikers then elected a twelve-man committee to conduct all their business in regard to the strike. A major point of contention was the biased, unfactual reporting of the dispute by the *Citizen* newspaper, and a delegation was appointed to meet with the editor, J. B. Daniell. According to the strikers only fifteen men were still at work at the McArthur camp.⁴²

During the following week the strike committee approached provincial health authorities to request their help in securing improved camp conditions. The health authorities agreed that the men's complaints were valid and that the McArthur company would have to remedy the situation. The strike committee also had two interviews with representatives of the McArthur company. The firm agreed to improve camp sanitation but would not rehire four of the strikers. The strikers were adamant in insisting that all strikers be taken back. Since the provincial government had upheld the justice of their cause, it seemed arbitrary and discriminatory that the four activists should be denied work. The strike committee argued "that in view of what the health authorities have seen fit to compel you [the company] to do in order to make your camps sanitary, you have no good reason to refuse to meet the men's committee and discuss the situation in a business-like way with a view to making arrangements for return to work of the men without any discrimination being shown."⁴³ The company refused to negotiate the issue.

On 16 March 1922 H. P. Hansen led a delegation of strikers to a meeting of the Prince George City Council. He wanted the council to intervene in the dispute by setting up an arbitration committee to break the deadlock. The arbitration committee was to be composed of one man representing the strikers, one speaking for the company, and a third man to be agreed upon by the two parties affected. The council discussed the proposal and decided to leave the matter to the discretion of the mayor.⁴⁴

The arbitration proceedings never materialized, and the McArthur company remained firm in refusing to take back the four men. In the face of the hard stance of the company and city council, the tie workers were

⁴² *Leader*, Prince George, 3 March 1922.

⁴³ *Leader*, 10 March 1922; *Citizen*, 10 March 1922.

⁴⁴ *Leader*, 17 March 1922; *Citizen*, 17 March 1922.

forced to capitulate. On 20 March 1922 the strike was settled and most of the men returned to the Mud River tie camps.⁴⁵ The four strike leaders of note were not rehired. The authority of the state, after much prodding by the workers, was instrumental in forcing the company to improve the sanitary conditions in the camps. The victory was hard-won, but without recognition of the camp committee and the principle of non-discrimination, the settlement was unsatisfactory from the men's perspective. The J. D. McArthur company had proved the strength of management, but theirs was a costly victory. The Mud River tie operation lost money over the season as the company was able to deliver only about half of the 250,000 ties specified in the contract with the railway.⁴⁶

The settlement of the strike did not close the book on the dispute. The night that the strike ended, H. P. Hansen and J. B. Daniell, editor of the *Citizen*, exchanged physical blows in a Prince George restaurant and legal proceedings ensued. The fight involved two men of extremely conflicting political opinions. Hansen was a revolutionary industrial unionist committed to the uplifting of the working class, while Daniell was a conservative who abhorred any attempt by workers to challenge the rights of capital in conducting business and who praised working-class leaders willing to work in harmony with employers.

The fracas occurred about one o'clock Tuesday morning, 21 March 1922. Hansen was in the Royal Cafe, as was J. B. Daniell. Daniell had taken umbrage at Hansen's behaviour during the strike: "Hansen has in his speeches incensed the men against local people and institutions that had no real difference with the strikers, or the strikers with them. He is said to have called for boycotts against business houses and otherwise proved himself to be an unreasonable man for the workers to follow as a leader."⁴⁷ In the restaurant early Tuesday morning Hansen was "discoursing on local men and their lack of sympathy with the strikers."⁴⁸ He singled out a member of the *Citizen* staff, Walter Crocker, as a spy, for during the strike the men often met on vacant ground behind the Post Office, and Crocker had looked on from the Post Office windows in a manner, according to Hansen, that was particularly obnoxious. Daniell took issue with one of his employees being called a "stool pigeon" and struck Hansen. A brawl ensued, and the café proprietor was forced to separate the two men and had to subdue Hansen physically. Hansen left the café but soon returned, and

⁴⁵ *Western Lumberman* (April 1922), 39.

⁴⁶ Fort George Forest District, "Annual Management Report," 1922.

⁴⁷ *Citizen*, 21 March 1922.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

when the owner attempted to call the police, tore the telephone loose.⁴⁹ The politics of class had indeed reached a personal, visceral level.

Hansen was arrested on Tuesday afternoon and appeared before the police magistrate the following morning. He was found guilty of damaging the property of the telephone company and given a fine. The second charge, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, was remanded. The police magistrate was the father of J. B. Daniell and it was thought best to await the return to the city of another magistrate before proceeding with the case. Hansen was released on bail. Two local citizens provided the sureties to gain Hansen's release. John McInnis, a local building contractor and a long-time socialist, put up \$250, as did John Quinn, editor of the *Leader* and trade union supporter, who had been sympathetic to the aims of the union workers involved in the Winnipeg General Strike.⁵⁰ In the next few days Hansen laid assault charges against Daniell; both men went to trial, were found guilty, and received a fine.⁵¹

As the above incident graphically shows, Hansen's political views were vigorously contested by many in the Prince George district. From his editor's chair, J. B. Daniell was able to offer an alternative interpretation of the increased militancy and radicalism of the post-war years. Four days before Hansen faced the judge, Daniell printed an editorial which was a scathing diatribe against the activities of radical union organizers. The editorial had no effect on Hansen's court case, but it did expose the feelings of many local citizens towards the LWIU and showed the feverish emotional pitch which the LWIU had generated. Under the guise of defending the presence of the RCMP in British Columbia, Daniell lashed out against the surge of working-class radicalism that had occurred during the previous six years:

The uses of the RCMP are of a nature which do not show in public print. Their duties lie in anticipating the actions of the rabid element that is today seeking to stir up the most dangerous and susceptible passions of the unskilled worker. All over the world there is evinced a desperate effort to inflame the mob against organized conditions of business, by arousing the passion of covetousness.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1922, 24 March 1922, 28 March 1922; *Leader*, 24 March 1922; *British Columbia Federationist*, 14 April 1922.

⁵⁰ *Citizen*, 24 March 1922. For more on socialism and labourism in Prince George, see Gordon Hak, "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George, 1911-1933," *Canadian Historical Review* LXX, 4 (December 1989): 519-42. This article also discusses forest industry workers, locating them in the larger social context of the northern interior.

⁵¹ *Citizen*, 4 April 1922.

That these conditions have had a good effect in some ways is not to be denied. Employers have dropped an attitude of intolerance towards the working man and gradually there is appearing new legislation, demanding better conditions for the people whose welfare had not occupied the proper attention of the employers when the intolerant attitude held sway.

The aims of the fire-brands among the laboring classes remains unappeased, however. They seek self-advancement more often than the betterment of the conditions of those whose cause they espouse with such fiery ardor. Gradually they become fanatics, preaching communism in spite of the frankly admitted failure of this system in Russia, and they awake in minds that cannot escape the false impression they declare, a response that leads on to turmoil and misery, and the unsettlement of a fair relation that saner opinion seeks to create between capital and labor in order that the slowly moving wheels of industry may be sped up to a high pitch of production again, and prosperity may take the place of hard times.

The officers of the RCMP backed up by their uniforms and the traditions of the force they represent, have become a great power to prevent the overzealous disciples of an unwise element in the world of labor from spreading discontent and anarchy where these things need not dwell. They have become the friends, rather than the enemies of the laboring classes. They are quick to note conditions allowed by employers which are not those which the men have a right to expect, and they remedy many troubles which might grow into serious proportions without their good offices.⁵²

The tie hacks and loggers, from their own experience, might well wonder just how far paternalism, government action, and reliance on the aid of the police would take them, but due to the weakness of their position this was their fate for the next decade.

The Mud River strike spelled the end of the LWIU in the Prince George district, and as the union disintegrated throughout British Columbia, pure IWW locals took its place. The IWW kept the name of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, and in 1923 an IWW local of LWIU No. 120 was established in Prince George. At a business meeting in early 1924 the card conductor noted that the local had only twenty-four members in good standing.⁵³ The IWW continued to carry the message that the LWIU had preached in previous years, but union membership remained very low. Union organizers became extremely disheartened. Witness the comments of one IWW organizer when he visited a camp to the east of Prince George:

Sanitary conditions rotten. . . . The slaves are wading up to their ankles in litter which consists of old rubbers, socks, underwear, "snus" boxes, etc. I went into this camp and could get nobody to line up in a regular working

⁵² *Ibid.*, 28 March 1922.

⁵³ *Lumber Workers' Bulletin*, IWW, 15 January 1924.

man's organization to do away with the filth and litter found in the camps. When I talked about a dry house they looked at me with their mouths open because they never heard of such a thing as a dry house. Most of them are dry farmers from the prairies and probably accustomed to living in filth on their farms, so do not mind living in filth in the logging camp. It is these kind of animals that hold the real workers from trying to better their conditions because anyone looking at their vacant faces is liable to get discouraged with the material we have to try and organize. Let us try and develop some spark of manhood in these slaves by talking to them at every opportunity. We can have no organization till we get them to act like human beings.⁵⁴

The discouragement of the IWW delegate was well warranted, and in 1925 the Wobblies gave up the office they had established in Prince George.⁵⁵ In the tie and logging camps the living conditions remained very poor and there was no organization to represent the men in dealing with the owners.

The post-war union drive in the forest industry of the northern interior was the product of many circumstances. Union sentiment had travelled west with the railway construction workers and the IWW gained a following in the fledgling forest industry. The creation of a province-wide lumber workers' union, with headquarters in Vancouver, provided an organizational structure and inspiration for the men in the northern interior camps, and the general optimism of workers throughout Canada in the post-war period further promoted militant action. The buoyant continental lumber economy also made an extremely significant contribution. In these good times workers felt that they deserved a larger piece of the pie and they had the confidence to press for changes in working conditions and the enforcement of government health regulations which were already on the books. Employers responded with a blacklist system and standardized wage schedules, but ultimately the downturn in the economy in late 1920 brought the union drive to an end. Throughout the rest of the 1920s and the 1930s, the northern interior lumber economy operated in a precarious environment. It was clear to all that the industry which had been spawned by the post-war boom was not healthy, and as such unionization and the demand for better conditions languished. Even the Wobblies had sunk to a state of despair by the mid-1920s. The LWIU had been a false start. It would take another world war to rejuvenate the union movement in the woods of the northern interior.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 April 1924.

⁵⁵ *Citizen*, 24 December 1925.