"SENTIMENT VERY GOOD FOR THE IWW":

The Kootenay Logger Strikes of 1923 and 1924

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In *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, Melvyn Dubofsky writes that the union was on the verge of collapse by its 1924 Chicago convention. Employers, the state, and American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions continued to attack the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), its leaders were divided, long-time militants were in prison or only recently released, and its treasury was bankrupt. The membership was in decline: communism attracted radicals; welfare capitalism, including company unionism, reduced worker militancy. Dubofsky writes that, "where the IWW had once been a lustily militant labor organization famous for its leadership in free-speech fights and industrial conflicts, it now began to look more like an ordinary debating society."[1] A debate over tactics and organization at the convention split the union and led to "total collapse."[2] However, despite these problems, Dubofsky describes how IWW members continued to organize and lead major strikes in California and Colorado.[3] In British Columbia's East Kootenay region, the IWW's Lumberworkers Industrial Union (LWIU) No. 120, also continued the struggle. In 1923 and 1924, the LWIU led strikes that brought the region's forest industry to a standstill. Through these years of organization and conflict, organizers wrote optimistically in the *Industrial Worker* that the East Kootenay campaign was part of a transnational vision to organize loggers and farm labourers

* I would like to acknowledge that the events depicted in this article about conflict and the exploitation of land, resources, and people take place on the traditional unceded territories of the Sinixt, Ktunaxa, and Secwépemc people. I thank the Professional Development Committee of the Selkirk College Faculty Association for financial support, Claire Sutherland for research assistance, and Jessica Fulcher for making the map. I am also grateful to *BC Studies* anonymous reviewers for their feedback and to Gordon Hak for suggesting the topic to me.

1 Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), 465.

2 Ibid., 467.

3 Ibid., 474–76. The strikes involved maritime workers and coal miners.

across the heart of the continent, from the picker shacks in the orchards of the Okanagan Valley to the pulpwood camps of Northern Ontario. The sources for both sides of the conflicts do not describe a union on the verge of collapse. Nevertheless, the 1924 strike, which involved sixteen hundred workers and lasted for fifty-two days through the winter, ended in defeat. The defeat marked a low point in the history of the IWW and its anarcho-syndicalism in British Columbia.[4]

The IWW's East Kootenay organizing campaign and strikes of the early 1920s have received limited attention in BC's labour history.[5] They merit attention for what they reveal about capital's ability, following the tactics of the anti-labour "open shop" movement across North America, to respond to IWW militancy by the 1920s.[6] Lumber companies that faced volatile markets and a resource on the verge of destruction through industrial logging refused from the beginning to deal with a union that threatened profits. They relied on their employers association, the Mountain Lumber Manufacturers' Association (MLMA), to lead their response to the union. The MLMA

[4] The IWW remained influential in British Columbia beyond the 1920s. Some IWW organizers found a home in the Congress of Industrial Organizations' industrial unions of the 1930s. The IWW experienced a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s as the union's belief in direct action and democracy appealed to members of the student, women's, and environmental movements. The IWW was also active in the recent anti-globalization and Occupy movements. See Gordon Hak, *The Left in British Columbia: A History of Struggle* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2013), 57–60; Jerry Lembcke and William Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1984), 16; Larry Gambone, *No Regrets: Counter-Culture and Anarchism in Vancouver* (Edmonton: Black Cat Press, 2015). Gambone joined the IWW in Vancouver in the 1960s, became a member of the student movement at Simon Fraser University, and is a lifelong activist.

[5] Paul Phillips, in *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour and the Boag Foundation, 1967), 92, refers to the 1922 "defection" of the Cranbrook District of the One Big Union's LWIU to the IWW. He does not mention the 1923 and 1924 strikes. Rod Mickleburgh's recent history of the BC labour movement, *On the Line* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2018), examines the IWW but does mention the 1920s strikes. Jack Scott and Mark Leier provide brief coverage of the strikes in their histories of the IWW in British Columbia. See also Jack Scott, *Plunderbund and Proletariat: A History of the IWW in BC* (Vancouver: New Star, 1975), 146–52; and Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows* (Vancouver: New Star, 1990), 40–42.

[6] Peter Cole describes the core ideas of the open shop in his study of the IWW on the Philadelphia waterfront up to the 1920s. Cole notes that proponents fought for total employer control, asserting that small groups of radicals who created industrial conflict must be rooted out of the workforce. See Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 103. Richard Rajala charts the open shop movement in the Pacific Northwest forest industry in "A Dandy Bunch of Wobblies: Pacific Northwest Loggers and the Industrial Workers of the World, 1900–1930," *Labour History* 37 (Spring 1996): 228–34. On the role of employer associations in anti-labour activities in the Pacific Northwest, see also Carlos A. Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885–1917* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1979), 159.

launched a familiar coordinated response: it ignored logger grievances and demands, focusing instead on the union's alleged subversive goals; it relied on state and private employment agencies across the west to recruit trainloads of strike-breakers to fill woods camps; it enlisted the federal government to investigate and deport IWW leaders as alleged "foreign" subversives; it relied on provincial police officers to block picketers from woods camps operating with replacement labour; and, finally, it obtained a court injunction to jail picketers who eluded police officers and company guards to agitate among strike-breakers. The LWIU, on the other hand, ran disciplined and orderly strikes that emphasized a form of environmental justice for workers through improved conditions and wages and that followed the union's commitment to direct action at the point of production.[7] With limited funds and support from the region's labour movement, the impoverished workers had little chance of success.

The timing and nature of the IWW's Kootenay strikes also reveal aspects of the regional history of the province. In *Where the Fraser River Flows*: *The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia*, Mark Leier notes that the wartime prosperity of wheat farms in the American Midwest led to the growth of a migrant labour force. The IWW experienced a resurgence from 1916 to 1917 in the United States as the union's Agricultural Workers' Organization (AWO, later the Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union [AWIU]) won a series of victories for farm labourers.[8] Leier writes that the conditions for a similar resurgence did not exist in British Columbia, where there was limited large-scale agriculture and a small migrant labour force.[9] The East Kootenay region, like the Northern Interior, however, had strong

[7] Since the 1980s, members of the environmental movement campaigned for equal protection for all from environmental and health hazards as part of the notion of environmental justice. Erik Loomis argues in his study of unions in the Pacific Northwest forests that, by the early twentieth century, capital's industrial logging operations degraded the environment and led to such poor working and living conditions that workers experienced death through "slow violence." Loomis asserts that the IWW's campaign for improved camp conditions represented a call for environmental justice. See Erik Loomis, *Empire of Timber: Labor Unions and the Pacific Northwest Forests* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 24. For an institutional definition of environmental justice, see United States Environmental Protection Agency, "Environmental Justice," https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice.

[8] Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 117. On the AWO and AWIU, see Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905–1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat and Wobblies, 1905–1930: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[9] Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 118.

connections to the farm labour force of the Prairie west.[10] The region's mills depended heavily on farmers and farm labourers from the Prairies to fill winter woods camps after the harvest. A third of all loggers in the East Kootenay came by rail from Prairie farms to earn important seasonal wages. Until the 1930s, the Kootenay region also had stronger connections to the Pacific Northwest's so-called inland empire centred in Spokane than to the coast. These economic and social connections formed during the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s and the hardrock mining frontier beginning in the 1880s.[11] The cross-border connections included union organizing as the Western Federation of Miners and the American Labor Union established locals among the miners and railway workers of the region at the turn of the century. Kootenay activists from these unions, John Riorden (ALU) and James Baker (WFM), attended the IWW's 1905 founding convention in Chicago, and workers established five locals of the union in the region by 1907. They supported the IWW as a militant union that organized by industry rather than by craft and that believed in international solidarity and revolution.[12] It is not surprising, therefore, that significant IWW strikes in British Columbia would take place in the Kootenay forest industry: the region had a tradition of IWW militancy; it relied on migrant farm labour; and it was accessible to organizers from Spokane, where there was IWW activism in the 1920s. It would have been natural for IWW organizers imbued with the union's transnational vision of conflict and struggle to include the Kootenay lumber industry as part of an organizing campaign across the interior of the continent.[13] This article argues that the IWW's

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[10] On the activities of the IWW among farmers and Prairie farm labour in the Northern Interior, see Gordon Hak, "'Line Up or Roll Up': The Lumber Workers Industrial Union in the Prince George District," *BC Studies* 86 (Summer 1990): 57–74.

[11] F.W. Howay, W.N. Sage, and H.F. Angus, *British Columbia and the United States: The North Pacific Slope from Fur Trade to Aviation* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970). On the development of the hardrock mining frontier in the Kootenays, see Jeremy Mouat, *Roaring Days: Rossland and the History of Mining in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995); Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life around Idaho Peak," *Canadian Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (1985): 316–40.

[12] Mark Leier, "'We Must Do Away with Racial Prejudice and Imaginary Boundary Lines': British Columbia Wobblies before the First World War," in *Wobblies of the World: A Global History of the IWW*, ed. Peter Cole, David Struthers, and Kenyon Zimmer (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 157; and, Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 35. See Mouat, *Roaring* Days, chap. 4, for the early history of the WFM in the Kootenays.

[13] See Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, chap. 8, for the IWW's free speech fights in Spokane beginning in 1912. Robert Tyler discusses ongoing IWW activism in the Pacific Northwest in the 1920s in *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1967), 185–230. On the IWW's transnational vision and struggle, see the chapters in Cole, Struthers, and Zimmer, *Wobblies of the World*. Lucien van der Walt describes the IWW's transnational activism in southern Africa in "The First Globalisation and Transnational

Kootenay logger strikes were part of the union's revival in the early 1920s and flowed from working conditions in a region of the province both transformed and environmentally devastated by forest capital. It shows, too, the power of forest capital to defeat IWW challenges by the 1920s – a power that eventually led activists to consider new forms of organizing as the struggle moved to other regions of the continent. Finally, it emphasizes that, while the Kootenay region remained "a world apart" in British Columbia in the 1920s, IWW organizers saw the loggers as part of a global struggle against capitalism.[14]

By the 1920s, the lumber industry had exploited the forests of the East Kootenay for a generation. From the late nineteenth century, massive railway construction; the development of mines, farms, and ranches in the interior of the province and on the Prairie west; and a growing US market for lumber, poles, and piles spurred investment in Kootenay sawmills and logging operations.[15] Initially, entrepreneurs focused on the local market for building materials as the region's settler population grew slowly after the gold rushes of the 1860s. However, the construction of the CPR's main line by way of Kicking Horse Pass and Roger's Pass by the mid-1880s created demand for ties and lumber while opening up the Prairie market for forest products. By 1900, the Columbia River Lumber Company, a subsidiary of the Canadian Western Lumber Company, had a mill at Golden to supply the Prairie market.[16] Railway expansion continued in the 1890s as the federal government subsidized the CPR's construction of the southern Crowsnest Pass line from Lethbridge to Kootenay Landing, near Creston. The Crowsnest Pass line, along with the American Great Northern's initial branch line to Fernie, improved transportation, opened up markets, and led to an influx of settlers to the region. Capital took the opportunity to invest in the mineral and forest resources of the region, opening up coalmines and developing a

Labour Activism in Southern Africa: White Labourism, the IWW, and the ICU, 1904–1934," *African Studies* 66 (August–December, 2007): 223–51. See also van der Walt's, "Anarchism and Syndicalism in an African Port City: The Revolutionary Traditions of Cape Town's Multiracial Working Class, 1904–1931," *Labor History* 52, no. 2 (2011): 137–71.

[14] The phrase comes from Wayne Norton and Tom Langford, eds., *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops, BC: Plateau Press, 2002).

[15] Ken Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters: The History of Logging in British Columbia's Interior* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing), 22–33. For the wider context, see Allen Seager, "The Resource Economy, 1871–1921," in *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*, ed. Hugh J.M. Johnston (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996), 205–52; and "East Kootenay Lumber Statistics," *Western Lumberman*, January 1923, 30. The *Western Lumberman* published the district forester's timber production figures for the East Kootenay.

[16] Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters*, 33.

substantial lumber industry around Golden, Fernie, and Cranbrook.[17] Historian Gordon Hak notes that, while the Prairie lumber market was never "safe and secure," in the boom years from the 1890s to the First World War, demand "was almost insatiable."[18] By the early 1920s, mill operators, including the CPR, ran twenty-nine sawmills and dozens of logging camps in the Cranbrook district alone. In 1922, the Cranbrook district forester reported that operations not only processed sawlogs but also produced substantial amounts of railway ties, pit props, telegraph poles, fence posts, cordwood, and pulpwood. In that year, the out-of-province and US markets represented about 13 percent of an industry worth over $4 million.[19] During the 1924 strike, an editorial in the *Calgary Herald* expressed concern about Alberta's dependence on lumber from the mountain mills around Golden and Cranbrook.[20] Until the 1930s, forest products, goods, settlers, and labour mostly moved by rail in and out of the East Kootenay.

The industry's rapid expansion led to a significant long-term environmental impact on the forests, workers, and communities of the region. Operators opened more mills and logging camps, increased the speed and capacity of mill and log-hauling operations, and recruited a large force of local and Prairie labour for woods operations to meet the demand for forest products from within the region, the Prairies, and the United States.[21] By the 1920s, mills powered by electricity employed high-speed saws, splitters, and sorters to cut more logs and logs of smaller diameter each day. Operations used lengthy wooden flumes, caterpillars, steam-powered loaders, railway lines, and trucks to load and haul logs from woods camps to mills. Traditionally, loggers with horses had worked during the winter and spring cutting, hauling, and driving logs to mills. Mills then sawed logs and shipped lumber over the summer.[22] This pattern of work continued after the First World War but, more and more, operators introduced machinery to allow for year-round industrial operations. In December 1923, the *Cranbrook Courier* reported:

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Gordon Hak, *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858–1913* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 24.

[19] "East Kootenay Lumber Statistics," *Western Lumberman*, January 1923, 30.

[20] "Lumber Prices Remain Unchanged for This Season," *Calgary Herald*, 8 March 1924, in Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Department of Labour, RG 27, vol. 332, strike one. The Department of Labour file includes extensive Canadian press coverage of the strike.

[21] Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters*, 37; "Review of 1922 Conditions in Mountain Lumber Mills," *Western Lumberman*, December 1922, 37.

[22] "Lumber-workers, Cranbrook and District," in Province of British Columbia, Department of Labour, *Annual Report of the Department of Labour 1924* (Victoria: Government Printer, 1925), 38.

Figure 1. Lumberton, BC, showing the BC Spruce Mills operation, ca. 1925. By the mid-1920s, the operation was the largest in the BC Interior, producing almost 200,000 board feet of lumber per day. The mill supported a community of 250. In 1940, the mill closed for good as contractors had cut most of the accessible timber. *Source*: Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History, image 2271.0001.

"many sawmills are still sawing and will continue through the winter."[23] Operators short of sawlogs, if they could find workers, also logged and hauled through the summer.[24]

By the 1920s, BC Spruce Mills's "mammoth" operation in Lumberton, south of Cranbrook, was the outstanding example of the forest industry's expanding investment in the East Kootenay. In 1922, lumberman A.E. Watts sold his mill at Wattsburg to BC Spruce Mills Limited of Wisconsin. The company renamed the community as Lumberton and proceeded to invest $2 million in sawmill and logging operations.[25] The company's investment included a new planer, log splitter, and sorter for the mill and ten-ton caterpillars to aid in log hauling. In the woods, the company built modern bunkhouses in four camps where almost four

[23] "District Sawmills Continue Operation," *Cranbrook Courier* (*CC*), 28 December 1923, 3.

[24] "BC Spruce Mills Ltd," *CC*, 4 May 1923, 2. BC Spruce Mills had three logging camps in full operation and planned to build another camp in the early summer.

[25] William M. Mercer, *The Growth of Ghost Towns: The Decline of Forest Activity in the East Kootenay District and the Effect of the Growth of Ghost Towns on the Distributing Centres of Cranbrook and Fernie* (Victoria: King's Printer, 1944), 9; N.A., "Lumberton," *Encyclopedia of BC* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2019), http://knowbc.com.ezproxy.library.selkirk.ca/ebc/Books/Encyclopedia-of-BC/L/Lumberton.

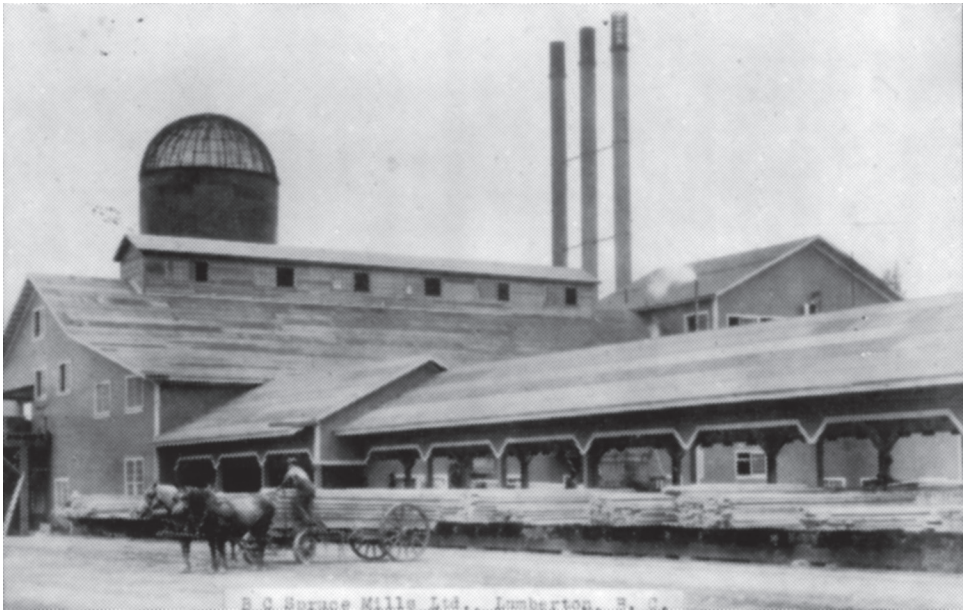

Figure 2. BC Spruce Mills' "big" mill, showing the green chain and lumber sorting area, ca. 1925. *Source*: Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History, image 0040.0021.

hundred loggers worked through the winter. The *Western Lumberman* praised the company for the "permanency and efficiency" of its operations.[26] In October 1923, the *Courier* noted that "woods work was going on rapidly and fluming being carried on daily."[27] New machinery in the mill reduced congestion in the operation. The company reported that the mill was working to capacity, producing almost 200,000 board feet of lumber per day. By the mid-1920s, the BC Spruce Mills operation was the largest in the BC Interior, with a monthly payroll of almost $50,000. The town of Lumberton became a prosperous community of 250 with a company store, boarding house, recreation hall, garage, post office, and "modern" houses for workers with families. Many workers also commuted daily from Cranbrook to work in the community.[28] In August 1923, MLMA members followed meetings in Cranbrook with a trip to Lumberton "to inspect the big mill," which they proclaimed "one of the most up-to-date" in British Columbia.[29]

[26] "Modern Equipment in Boarding House and Camp," *Western Lumberman*, November 1922, 33.
[27] "Lumberton," *CC*, 5 October 1923, 4.
[28] Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns*, 9.
[29] "Mountain Lumbermen Meet at Cranbrook," *CC*, 10 August 1923, 1.

Figure 3. BC Spruce Mills flume carrying logs, ca. 1925. The company relied on an extensive flume system to move logs to the mill pond in Lumberton. *Source*: Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History, image 0008.0008.

However, forest capital's rapid expansion in the early twentieth century was not sustainable and led to the industry's collapse by the 1930s. In 1944, the economist William Mercer published *The Growth of Ghost Towns: The Decline of Forest Activity in the East Kootenay District*, which charted the industry's decline for the BC government's Royal Commission on Forestry (the first Sloan Commission). Mercer noted that East Kootenay mills, almost from the beginning, despoiled the region's stands of spruce, Douglas fir, larch, pine, and cedar.[30] In the short run, capital's depletion of the resource affected the region's human geography as mill owners moved operations away from the transportation and commercial centres of Fernie and Cranbrook to sites closer to new supplies of wood.

[30] Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns,* 2–3, 19. For industry cut volumes and exploited species, see, for example, British Columbia Department of Lands, Forest Branch Report 1924 (Victoria: Government Printer, 1925), 24, https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcsessional/items/1.0225911.

Owners created new mill towns that depended entirely on a local mill and its logging operations.[31] The forest industry's pattern of cut and run began first in the Fernie district, which supplied props to Crowsnest Pass coalmines and was closest to the booming Prairie lumber market; soon after, Cranbrook went through a similar experience.[32] In the end, the industry went into rapid, permanent decline. Mercer found that, by the mid-1920s, along with the loss of timber due to fire, "the amount of accessible timber remaining in the area had decreased to the point that many operations became unprofitable and were forced to close."[33] By the 1930s, along with the effects of the Great Depression, the lumber industry's decline had depleted the populations of Fernie and Cranbrook and left a landscape of ghost towns across the region.

In *The Growth of Ghost Towns*, Mercer details an East Kootenay region devastated by unregulated capital. Returning to Lumberton, BC, Spruce Mills ceased logging when its contractors had cut most of the accessible timber by 1938. The mill shut down for good after it had sawn its log supply by 1940. Historian Ken Drushka added that the company decided that trucking logs to the mill from even farther distances would not be profitable.[34] In the aftermath, Mercer comments: "Most of the workers drifted to the Coast and today it is difficult to find a trace of the town. The cement foundations of the fine mill and rubbish from the dismantled homes are all that remain."[35] Other East Kootenay communities, such as Elko, Hanbury, and Baynes Lake near Fernie; and Bull River, Wycliffe, and Kitchener near Cranbrook, shared a similar fate. Of Baynes Lake, south of Fernie, Mercer writes:

> Baynes Lake was the location of the 75,000 feet per day mill of the Adolph Lumber Company. At one time, the community consisted of a hotel, a large company store, an independent store, a school and a post office. There were bunkhouses and substantial homes for the men and their families. Baynes Lake was the home of some 250 persons.
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> By 1923, the accessible timber had disappeared and the mill was forced to close. Today [in 1944] the homes are boarded up and there is nothing left but a small community store to serve a few scattered settlers in the region.[36]

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[31] Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns*, 2.
[32] Ibid., 19.
[33] Ibid., 2.
[34] Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters*, 111.
[35] Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns*, 9.
[36] Ibid., 26.

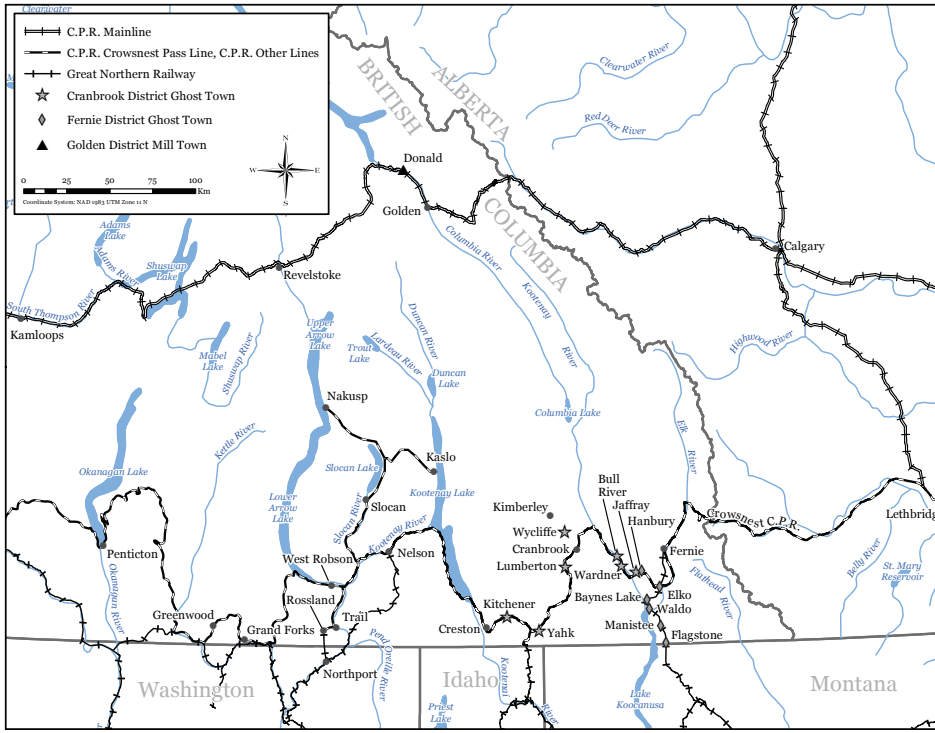

Figure 4. A Map of Mercer's *Growth of Ghost Towns in the East Kootenay District*. Map created by Jessica Fulcher, Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre, Selkirk College, 11 April 2019. *Source*: Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns*; Seager, "The Resource Economy, 1871–1921," 205–52.

Figure 4 shows the main lumbering communities of the East Kootenay region and, following Mercer's report, indicates those that became ghost towns by the 1940s.

In the end, capital's assault on the forests of the East Kootenay was a regional example of the industry's long history of overexploiting the resource in North America. Many of the region's forest companies that were based in the eastern United States were part of this history that saw capital, from the sixteenth century on, move east across the continent in search of fresh stands of timber, leaving behind resource-depleted regions. By the early twentieth century, the Pacific Northwest, including British Columbia's Southern Interior, was one of capital's final frontiers.[37]

[37] Lembcke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, 1–6. See also Hak, *Turning Trees into Dollars*, chap. 2; and Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 5–8.

The outcome in the region should not have surprised anyone. Drushka offers further analysis of the East Kootenay experience. He describes how the state in British Columbia placed few fetters on lumber companies' quest for profits through increased production. As Drushka points out, neither the Forest Branch of British Columbia's Department of Lands nor the industry placed any restrictions on the size of the cut.[38] The main concern of the industry's owners was that increased production and competition would lead to lower prices rather than to overcutting. In general, by the 1920s, the industry's solution to the problem of declining profits was to cut more rather than less. Mills eventually installed machinery that required high-value, wide-diameter Douglas fir, which, in turn, encouraged the rapid high grading of remaining forest stands. Companies also further increased mill speeds and cuts to maintain profits in the face of competition, declining prices, and rising woods costs as timber became scarce.[39] The Cranbrook district forester did not discuss in his reports the issue of overcutting in the early 1920s. However, the industry's decline appears to have affected the local forestry branch operations. In 1925, the provincial government merged the forest branch operations of Cranbrook, Nelson, and Vernon. From then on, there was a single office in Nelson. By that time, only seventy-nine mills operated in what the branch then called the Southern Interior Forest Region.[40] By the late 1930s, however, when government officials, professional foresters, and members of the public did become concerned about the sustainability of the province's forest resource, they pointed to the spread of ghost towns in the East Kootenay as the fate of regions that did not care for the resource. The East Kootenay experience was one factor that led the provincial government, in the 1940s, to introduce the policy of "sustained yield," including a system of tree farm licences.[41]

By the 1920s, forest capital's struggle to make profits in the East Kootenay led to poor wages and conditions in the logging camps of the region. During the 1924 strike, "One Who Knows" wrote to the *Courier*

[38] Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters*, 76. Rajala describes the experience on the coast, where, in the 1920s, professional foresters were aware that capital's reckless logging practices were destroying the Douglas fir region. However, in a political climate that opposed government regulation of business, foresters "expressed no real enthusiasm for firmer government control of logging." See Richard A. Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 121–22.

[39] Drushka, *Tie Hackers to Timber Harvesters*, 77; Mercer, *Growth of Ghost Towns*, 28.

[40] British Columbia Department of Lands, Forest Branch Report 1925 (Victoria: Government Printer, 1927), 13, https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/bcsessional/items/1.0228020.

[41] Jeremy Wilson, "Forest Conservation in British Columbia, 1935–85: Reflections on a Barren Political Debate," *BC Studies* 76 (Winter 1987–88): 3–17. See also Gordon Hak, *Capital and Labour in the British Columbia Forest Industry, 1934–74* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 47.

about the industry's challenges. The writer pointed out that, despite a decade of investment in modern mill operations, companies earned limited profits. The writer complained that mills faced stiff competition, high freight rates, long distances to markets, and relied on an inferior quality of timber, concluding: "Lumbering in this country is a gamble pure and simple."[42] The companies sought lower costs through speeding up mill operations and mechanizing parts of woods operations. However, throughout the 1920s, woods operations remained labour intensive as several thousand loggers with basic tools produced saw logs through the winter in dozens of scattered camps. Loggers used handsaws to "swamp" roads to timber stands and to cut and buck logs. They piled logs by hand on landings and then, in many camps, used horses to haul them to railway sidings for loading or to the banks of streams or to flumes to drive them to mills or railway lines. By the 1920s, some mills used trucks for hauling.[43] Some loggers appear to have worked full time in the East Kootenay camps while mills also relied on a large seasonal workforce of farmers and farm labour from the Prairies. Prairie workers, who came from as far away as Winnipeg, arrived on the CPR in the fall after the harvest, worked in the woods through the winter, and returned home in the spring.[44] In this situation, companies with modern mills that required a large, steady supply of logs recognized that lower log costs came mostly from a downward pressure on wages and working conditions in the woods. Capital degraded and deforested the environment; the degraded working and living conditions of loggers were part of this experience.[45] In the early 1920s, this helps to explain logger discontent; it also helps to explain the companies' adamant refusal to recognize the IWW and its demands for improved wages and conditions.

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[42] "Voice of the People," *CC*, 22 February 1924, 6. The letter writer also referred to a declining industry as follows: "Production in the interior is only half what it was 10–12 years ago and abandoned mills are monuments to lost investments. Mills are simply existing."

[43] In "Labor Situation," 28 September 1923, 6, the *CC* reported, for example, that there was work for three hundred men "in the bush" as "teamsters, swampers, bush men, road builders, loaders, etc."

[44] The *Courier* described a labour force moving back and forth across the Rockies looking for seasonal wages. East Kootenay workers laboured on Prairie farms during seeding and harvesting. Mountain mills, on the other hand, depended on farmers and farm labourers for woods operations beginning early in the winter. In "Two Hundred Idle Men Here," 16 November 1923, 1, the *Cranbrook Courier* reported "lots of men coming in from the prairies especially southern Alberta looking for woods work. During the past week, about 500 men have come into the district and taken most of the jobs in the bush. About 200 men are looking for work right now with little prospect of any work." This experience was similar to that of Prairie workers in Northern Interior bush camps described by Hak, "Line Up or Roll Up," 57–74.

[45] See Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 24.

Figure 5. Camp Three, Yahk, BC, 1920. *Source*: WF Montgomery, photographer, Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History, image, 0427.0001. Original item held by the Cranbrook History Centre.

The IWW's *Industrial Worker* provides a rich source of information on wages and conditions in East Kootenay logging camps in the early 1920s. IWW delegates published weekly accounts of their experiences in the woods in the union's newspaper as part of the organizing campaigns in 1923 and 1924. The reports provided IWW members with information, promoted solidarity, and helped to raise funds for the union's North American–wide campaign focused on loggers and farm labour. Among the capitalist press, the *Cranbrook Courier* also covered the local forest industry, including the activities of the logging camps. Both sources revealed workers labouring long hours for low pay in difficult and often dangerous conditions. The accounts revealed that loggers made arduous and often costly trips, by rail, by car, and by foot, from across the country and within the region, to reach the camps. Once there, they lived in overcrowded, poorly lighted and ventilated bunkhouses with sixty to seventy other workers. Most camps provided blankets and iron beds

with springs and mattresses. In some camps, however, the beds had top and bottom bunks and operators packed beds in close together.[46] In 1923, in the Columbia River Company's camps on the CPR mainline near Donald, the workers slept on wooden boards covered with hay.[47] The accounts also consistently report that loggers experienced dirty conditions as camps often had limited facilities for bathing and for washing and drying clothes. In February 1923, the *Industrial Worker* reported that at a BC Spruce Mills camp of fifty loggers, "[the] wash house [was] only big enough for 15 men … [there was] no dry house and men have to dry clothes where they sleep."[48] An organizer reported even worse conditions in the camp of the White Spruce Lumber Company near Fernie: "Conditions are awful. Water from the sinks rots under camps. Floor seldom scrubbed and old clothes thrown around. No bath [house] and many workers do not wash their clothes but wear them until they rot and fall off. A filthy crew."[49] In another camp, some "[wage] slaves" were sleeping in tents, there was no bathhouse, and loggers washed in the creek. Camps would not survive at all without decent, plentiful food, but one can imagine that these camps were often sites of frustration and anger. IWW delegates often concluded reports of logging camps with: "Sentiment for IWW is good."[50]

Loggers also worked long hours for low pay. In most camps, the working day was "daylight to dark" or ten hours. Loggers would begin their day by walking to the worksite, which might be several kilometres from the camp. On the job, in most camps, loggers earned $3.50 a day for swamping, cutting, piling, hauling, loading, and driving. However, in the 1920s, to reduce costs most companies had moved to a system of contracting out. It appears that contracting out took two forms: in one form, the company contracted a logger to cut a strip of forest for a certain price; in the other form, the companies contracted smaller operators to cut larger areas. These smaller "shows" would hire and pay their own labour according to the contract's terms. In both cases, operators often paid through a piecework system rather than through an hourly wage.

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[46] See, for example, the working and living conditions in 1923 and 1924 in Baker Lumber Company operations in Wardner and Waldo in "Job News," *Industrial Worker* (*IW*) 7, 28 March, 23 June 1923, 4; "Cranbrook Strike News," *IW*, 20 February 1924, 2; "Too Late to Haul Lumber by Sleigh," *IW*, 5 March 1924, 1. "Wardner Man Injured Tuesday," *CC*, 10 August 1923, 1; and "Man Killed on Log Landing," *CC*, 20 February 1924, 5, describe two serious accidents, including one that led to the death of a worker.

[47] "Job News," *IW*, 6 June 1923, 4.

[48] Ibid., 17 February 1923, 4.

[49] Ibid., 5 September 1923, 4.

[50] Ibid., 11 July 1923, 4.

The contract system guaranteed mills logs at a certain price while throwing the cost of difficult terrain, poor timber, the working time spent getting to and from the logging site, and all of the other struggles of logging onto the backs of the contractors and workers.[51] In August 1923, with regard to the Lindsley Brothers Pole Company, a camp delegate reported: "Pole makers are paid two and a half cents per foot and find themselves broke at the end of the month."[52] Another report noted that, in a Kitchener logging camp: "Conditions are rotten ... Work is done by [contractors who pay] twelve cents per log on steep hill side."[53] In some cases, workers claimed to prefer the piecework system that enabled them to earn five to seven dollars per day, but the system drove them to work twelve hours per day, seven days a week, to earn the higher wages.[54]

Along with piecework, living and transportation costs reduced the loggers' income. Most operators charged loggers earning $3.50 between $1.20 and $1.50 per day (including Sundays) for board as well as a monthly hospital fee. Loggers coming to the East Kootenay woods camps from the Prairies may have paid as much as ten dollars for railway fare; local loggers paid less. An IWW delegate in Golden calculated that a logger also required more than sixty dollars' worth of clothing and bedding over a season in the woods.[55] Considering all these costs, a successful logger who was able to withstand the burden of sixty-hour workweeks for four or five months might be able to clear $100 to $150 for a season's work. The federal Department of Labour's 1927 calculation that families required twenty-one dollars a week to survive points to the poverty of loggers who earned twenty to twenty-five dollars a month.[56] At the same time, the companies were always looking for ways to reduce woods costs at the expense of loggers. In the early 1920s, the companies followed a practice of reducing wages to three dollars per day on 1 December each year in response to the influx of workers arriving from the Prairies after the harvest. [57]

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[51] Central Strike Committee, "Cranbrook Strike Bulletin," *IW*, 2 February 1924, 2. The delegate reported that the CPR paid only when the contractor had logged its trips to the company's satisfaction. The delegate concluded that it was "difficult pulling a strike in a layout like that." After the 1923 strike, BC Spruce Mills expanded its use of contractors for logging operations. See "Lumberton," *CC*, 22 June 1923, 3.

[52] "Job News," *IW*, 1 August 1923, 4.

[53] Ibid., 20 June 1923, 4.

[54] Ibid., 4 July 1923, 4.

[55] "Cranbrook Strike News," *IW*, 9 February 1924, 2.

[56] Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 233.

[57] "Voice of the People," *CC*, 8 February 1924, 9.

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It was in this socio-economic context, in 1923, that the IWW began its campaign to organize East Kootenay loggers – a campaign that culminated in the major strike of the winter of 1924. The IWW's organizing drive in the region was part of the union's revival in the early 1920s after severe wartime repression in the United States and Canada.[58] The revival included, in part, a general strike in 1923 in the Pacific Northwest and a transnational campaign in the United States and Canada to organize loggers and farm labourers across the continent.[59] In the Kootenay district, delegates drew on a history of IWW organization that went back to the union's early years in the province. They also built on recent logger militancy in the region during the postwar labour revolt. In 1920, loggers in the Kootenay district, who were members of the One Big Union's Lumber Workers Industrial Union (LWIU), staged four strikes in camps across the region.[60] Members of the Socialist Party of Canada had formed this earlier LWIU in 1919. The LWIU, which included IWW sympathizers, eventually affiliated with the One Big Union. The OBU-LWIU, led by Ernie Winch, grew to fifteen thousand members by 1920. The union then declined rapidly during the postwar slump and under the attacks of employers and the state. Internal strife over revolutionary tactics between Socialist Party members and IWW

[58] The most severe employer and government repression in the United States occurred during 1917–18 after the country entered the war. The federal government, along with state and local governments, used the law, the police, the National Guard, and the military to persecute IWW members. By war's end, the state had imprisoned the union's most experienced officials. The federal government in Canada also suppressed the IWW during the war. By 1918, it had outlawed the union. See Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, chap. 5, for a description of the repression in the Pacific Northwest. See Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows*, 118–19, for the experience in Canada. Heather Mayer examines the difficult experiences of some of the IWW's class prisoners and their families in *Beyond the Rebel Girl: Women and the Industrial Workers of the World in the Pacific Northwest, 1905–1924* (Corvallis: Oregon State University, 2018), chap. 6 and conclusion.

[59] In the lead-up to, and during, the 1924 strike, in the pages of *Industrial Worker* delegates discuss a broader continental organizing campaign that includes farm labourers and loggers. See "BC Lumber Workers Plan Big Drive," *IW*, 28 November 1923, 3; "15,000 Loggers Strike!" *IW*, 16 January 1924, 1; James L. Peterson, "Canada 110 Drive Promises Success," *IW*, 30 August 1924, 1. For the IWW's successful organization of migrant labour in the American west in the early 1920s, see Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, chap. 6; Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, chap. 7; Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, chap. 12, 446–48. For descriptions of the IWW's Northern Ontario campaign, which was part of the union's continental vision, see Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), chap. 6; and Peter J. Campbell, "The Cult of Spontaneity: Finnish-Canadian Bushworkers and the Industrial Workers of the World in Northern Ontario, 1919–1934," *Labour/Le Travail* 41 (Spring 1998): 117–46. At least one IWW delegate from the Kootenay strikes, J.A. MacDonald, went on to organize Northern Ontario bush workers.

[60] Gordon Hak, "British Columbia Loggers and the Lumber Workers Industrial Union, 1919–22," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989): app. A, 89–90.

members further weakened the union.[61] The long-standing divisions within the BC labour movement concerning the importance of craft versus industrial unionism, of political action versus direct action, and the communist strategy in the 1920s "to bore within" established unions may explain the limited support that Kootenay loggers received from the labour movement in the region.[62]

The IWW's own postwar campaign in the Pacific Northwest began in 1922 as the economy recovered. Delegates to the union's convention that year agreed on the need for a general strike.[63] In Canada, the IWW campaign included organizers who defected from the SPC and led to the rapid expansion of Lumber Workers Industrial Union No. 120, which had headquarters in Seattle. In 1923 and 1924, LWIU No. 120 organizers established offices in Vancouver, Prince George, Sudbury, and Timmins.[64] It also targeted the East Kootenay. In January 1923, the union appointed James Peterson as travelling delegate to establish a branch in Cranbrook. Peterson was a US citizen but wrote that he had worked in Canada for eleven months. The IWW was aware that Prairie farm labour was a significant part of the logging workforce in the East Kootenay and planned to organize these workers as part of its larger campaign.[65] Following IWW political principles, the union planned a disciplined campaign that would draw on discontent in the camps and educate workers about their collective power through job action. As historian Erik Loomis points out, from the 1910s on, IWW delegates in the Pacific Northwest emphasized what activists today would call environmental justice for loggers: healthy, safe work in a healthy environment. Delegates felt that a fight for sanitation, safety, cleanliness,

[61] Hak, "British Columbia Loggers," 67–68.

[62] Allen Seager points out that organized labour in the Crowsnest Pass coalfields was in full retreat by 1921, in the aftermath of the defeat of the One Big Union. By 1924, rather than militant job action, many labour leaders, socialists, and communists in the Pass focused on a political challenge to employers through the British Columbia section of the Canadian Labour Party. Crowsnest Pass miners elected miner Tom Uphill as MLA for Fernie in 1920 as part of the focus on political action. During the 1924 strike, Uphill toured IWW delegates through Crowsnest Pass mining communities with unclear results for the strikers. See Allen Seager, "Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900–1921, *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall 1985): 53; Benjamin Isitt, "Elusive Unity: The Canadian Labor Party in British Columbia, 1924–28, *BC Studies* 163 (Autumn 2009): 33–64; Robert McDonald, "'Simply a Working Man': Tom Uphill of Fernie," in Norton and Langford, *World Apart*, 99–112.

[63] Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 202.

[64] Hak, "British Columbia Loggers," 87.

[65] "More Delegates Needed in the Canadian Woods," *IW*, 26 September 1923, 2; "BC Lumber Workers Plan Big Drive," *IW*, 28 November 1923, 3; "Need More Action," IW, 9 January 1924, 4.

and dignity as well as improved wages and shorter hours would build support for the union and make revolutionaries.[66]

We can see that conditions discontented loggers. Even before the union began organizing, the *Courier* reported that, in December 1922, a cook resigned due to poor conditions at the Crow's Nest Pass Lumber Company operation at Bull River.[67] By February 1923, IWW delegates were signing up members in the camps. The *Industrial Worker* reported the union's "first clash" at a camp of the Staples Lumber Company near Fort Steele, where the foreman fired loggers protesting an order to eat supper in the bush. A workers committee eventually gained the company's agreement that loggers could eat in the camp.[68] Over the next two months, delegates reported worker support for the union in Lumberton, Kitchener, and Wardner as well as Fort Steele. In March, members voted at a meeting in Cranbrook to establish a branch of LWIU No. 120, to look for a larger hall, and to hold a delegates meeting the following month.[69] On 9 March, the *Courier* reported that the union was planning a strike during spring at the peak of hauling and driving operations. The East Kootenay strike would be part of a broader LWIU No. 120 general strike in British Columbia and the United States to begin on 1 May. Elsewhere, in the Pacific Northwest, workers began the general strike as early as March. Historian Aaron A. Goings notes that, for many of these workers, the main goal of the 1923 general strike was to force the government to release the union's officials from prison. The strike alarmed employers throughout the Pacific Northwest.[70] By the end of March, in the East Kootenay, a second travelling delegate arrived in the region by way of the mainline of the CPR. On 28 April, the IWW held a mass meeting at the Star Theatre in Cranbrook to prepare for job action.[71]

The spring strike of 1923 prepared the way for the larger conflict the following winter. Conditions favoured the union in the spring. The

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[66] Loomis, *Empire of Timber*, 20.

[67] "Bull River," *CC*, 29 December 1922, 8.

[68] "Job News," *IW*, 14 February 1923, 4.

[69] "Going Good in BC," *IW*, 10 March 1923, 1.

[70] Aaron A. Goings, "Red Harbour: Class, Violence and Community in Grays Harbour, Washington" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2011), 331. Robert Tyler reports that the general strike lasted for a month and included 20 to 50 percent of all loggers in the inland empire for at least a few days. IWW journalists claimed success for the union while government officials and employers became concerned about revolution. The MLMA's obdurate response to the Kootenay strikes in 1923 and 1924 suggests that the association was well aware of the IWW's revival beyond the region. See Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods*, 202–6.

[71] Neil Guiney, "Cranbrook Workers Strike Off the Job Yet," *IW*, 19 May 1923, 2; "More Delegates Needed in the Canadian Woods," *IW*, 26 September 1923, 2.

Cranbrook Courier reported a booming forest industry as lumber prices rose: new mills were opening and there was a high demand for labour. The paper noted, too, that companies such as BC Spruce Mills Limited had a large inventory of logs on skids in the woods waiting for workers to haul it to the mills. The companies expected a large summer cut of lumber.[72] IWW delegates, however, came to see the strike as part of a process to build solidarity among a group of mostly new members and non-members, and to educate them about the union and strike tactics in preparation for a coming revolution. IWW leader Walker Smith, the editor of the *Industrial Worker*, came from Spokane to address loggers in several communities to build support for the general strike. The *Courier* gave extensive coverage to Smith's speech in Cranbrook. According to the paper, Smith described the IWW's growth since the period of government repression during the war. He encouraged loggers to remain united in face of the power of the bosses and to fight to free class prisoners serving time in US prisons. Smith noted that the demand to free IWW members in US prisons reflected the fact that much of East Kootenay forest capital was American and that workers were part of a worldwide, historical struggle against capitalism. He concluded with a call for loggers to provide employers "with a show of strength": "But always, they must stand as one man on the platform of their inalienable rights straining every nerve to bring about the new order of things for which the IWW was working – control of the machinery of production and an equitable distribution of products."[73]

IWW delegates felt that the Cranbrook meeting was "a splendid occasion." Smith had less success in Elko "in the snow and the rain and in a poor place to have a meeting," but the strike committee believed that speakers played an important role in presenting the union to workers and the public as part of the organizing drive.[74]

The 1923 strike, which began on 1 May and lasted for three weeks, brought the loggers few material gains. Along with the general strike's demand to free class prisoners, East Kootenay members of LWIU No. 120 demanded a minimum four-dollar daily wage and an eight-hour day. The union also made a long list of demands to improve camp conditions, called for an end to piecework, and insisted that there be no discrimination against union members. Aside from the political demand to free class prisoners, these were demands that came from IWW camp

[72] "Editorial," *CC,* 6 April 1923, 2; "BC Spruce Mills Ltd," *CC*, 4 May 1923, 2.
[73] "Sunday Labor Meeting," *CC*, 4 May 1923, 5.
[74] "International Day," *IW*, 12 May 1923, 2; Guiney, "Cranbrook Workers Strike Off the Job Yet," *IW*, 19 May 1923, 2.

committees and workers committed to their union and the strike.[75] Loggers appeared to stop work first at camps near Fort Steele and at Donald on the CPR mainline.[76] By 11 May, when one hundred men joined the strike from the Otis Staples Lumber Company in Wycliffe, the *Courier* reported that, "so far as bushwork is concerned[,] the district is at a standstill."[77] The *Industrial Worker* asserted that the strike eventually affected fifteen logging operations and three mills and that there were camps of picketing workers in most of the region's logging communities. However, there were weaknesses. At Wardner, the Crow's Nest Pass Lumber Company had enough workers to load logs on railway cars, while on the Goat River a contractor used strike-breakers to drive logs.[78] The delegate at Donald complained that the strike "did not amount to much" because the CPR crews did not join the walkout.[79] The union's inability to gain the support of railway workers, who were members of the railway brotherhoods, to shut down the lines would become a major problem during the 1924 conflict. On 9 May, J.R. Poole, the secretary of the MLMA, arrived in Cranbrook to discuss the strike with the local operators. The *Courier* reported a couple of days later that the Kitchener Lumber Company had agreed to pay four dollars a day for an eight-hour day and to improve bunkhouse conditions. However, in the face of the MLMA's adamant refusal to deal with the IWW, the company appeared to withdraw its offer.[80] After almost three weeks on strike, at a meeting in Cranbrook, the loggers voted to return to work and to continue the strike "on the job."[81] By the end of the month, the *Courier* was reporting that the Cranbrook chief of police praised the loggers' "exemplary" conduct during the strike and that baseball was now the focus of the community of Lumberton.[82] In the end, the *Labour Gazette* noted that the 1923 strike included 460 workers who "resumed work under the same conditions as existed prior to the strike."[83] Despite the loggers' failure

[75] "Indians from Reservation Fail to Load Logs," *IW*, 23 May 1923, 2; Central Strike Committee, "What They Strike for in Cranbrook, BC," *IW*, 26 May 1923, 2; "Cranbrook Workers Carry Strike Back into Logging Camps," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 1. The union held a camp delegate meeting in Cranbrook on 1 April.

[76] "Intelligent Methods Win in BC Strike," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 2.

[77] "Local Notes," *CC*, 11 May 1923, 6.

[78] "Indians from Reservation," *IW*, 23 May 1923, 2; "Cranbrook Workers Carry Strike Back into the Logging Camps," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 1; "Intelligent Methods Win in BC Strike," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 2.

[79] "Job News," *IW*, 6 June 1923, 4.

[80] "Local Notes," *CC*, 11 May 1923, 12.

[81] "Cranbrook Workers Carry Strike Back into the Logging Camps," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 1.

[82] "Conduct of Strikers Appreciated," *CC*, 1 June, 1923, 1; "Lumberton," *CC*, 8 June 1923, 10.

[83] Canada, Department of Labour, *Labour Gazette* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1923), 606, 609. The *Labour Gazette* reported that the strike lasted from 1 to 26 May and that it involved 460 loggers and six employers.

to make immediate gains, however, the 1923 strike in the East Kootenay represented one of the most significant job actions during the LWIU's general strike in the Pacific Northwest. The loggers' demonstration of solidarity may well have encouraged the IWW delegates to launch the further strike in 1924 as LWIU No. 120 members remained on the job in Washington and Oregon.[84]

In the East Kootenay, the 1923 general strike was a prelude to the major conflict six months later, at the beginning of 1924. The IWW continued to view East Kootenay loggers as an important part of the union's broader organizing campaign across the heart of the continent. IWW delegates in Cranbrook recognized the importance of organizing seasonal farm labour from the Prairie west as part of organizing the Kootenay woods camps. The union delegates found that impoverished farm workers and farmers were reluctant to join the union and to remain on strike. They needed seasonal wages to support families and farms; they also struggled to earn a good season's wages and to pay the transportation costs to and from the camps. On the other hand, the conditions for a successful campaign remained as low wages and poor conditions discontented loggers. Reflecting the shared experience of camp work, they had demonstrated unity and strength during the 1923 strike. IWW delegates, however, lamented that some members left the region for the United States after the strike.[85] Yet they believed that, despite gaining no concessions, the loggers had gained experience in union principles and effective job action during the strike. An IWW delegate reported at the end of May that the union was "preparing for a future and, if possible, more successful strike."[86] At the same time, the lumber companies, led by the MLMA, following tactics practised by employer associations across North America, mounted a campaign to rid woods operations of the IWW after the 1923 strike. The companies used a blacklist and spies to keep IWW members out of camps. Bosses fired IWW members found on the job, ejected them, and banned union literature from the camps. In pamphlet form, the MLMA distributed in the camps an article from the Nelson *Daily News* that was hostile to the union.[87]

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[84] Rajala describes the employer campaign against the union after the strike, which may explain the lack of job action in the woods outside the East Kootenay in 1924. See Rajala, "Dandy Bunch of Wobblies," 230–31.

[85] Malcolm McGill, "Should Support the Cranbrook Strikers They Did Good Work," *IW*, 13 June 1923, 4.

[86] "Intelligent Methods Win in BC," *IW*, 30 May 1923, 2.

[87] "One Striker Replies Act Well Justified," *IW*, 13 June 1923, 2.

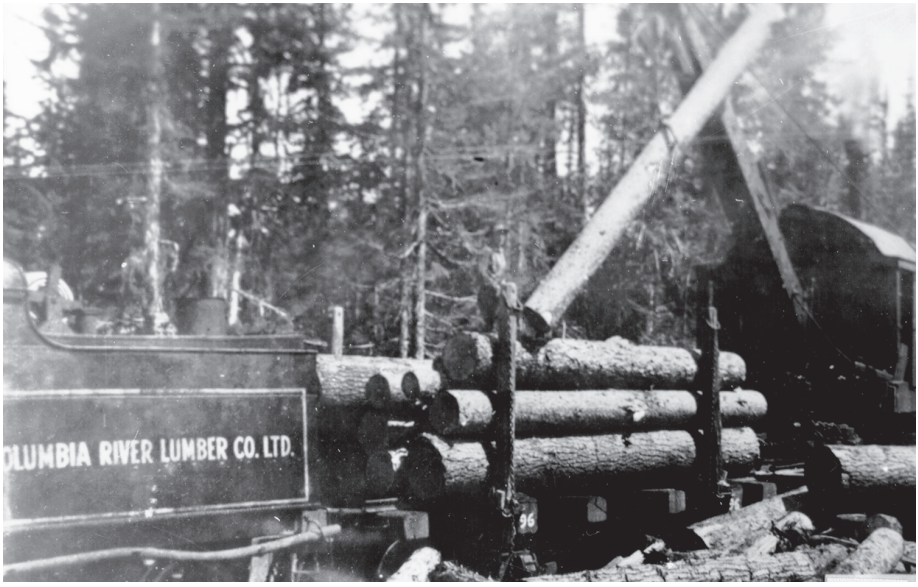

Figure 6. Columbia River Lumber Company Train at a logging camp near Donald, BC, ca. 1917. Source: Columbia Basin Institute of Regional History, image 1904.0098. Original item in the collection of the Golden Museum and Archives.

The 1924 strike began in the heart of winter, on the morning of 1 January, at Lumberton when loggers at BC Spruce Mills Camp Two walked off the job.[88] The loggers opposed the company's ongoing discrimination against IWW members. The dispute at BC Spruce Mills spread over the following week to other companies who refused to deal with the union and rejected its demands. The union demanded (1) an end to discrimination against its members, (2) an eight-hour day, (3) a four-dollar daily wage, (4) an end to company censorship of union literature, and (5) the release of class prisoners. According to the union, the strike eventually involved twelve companies and almost one thousand loggers in the Cranbrook and Fernie districts.[89] On 10 January, workers in Columbia River Lumber Company camps at Donald on the CPR mainline joined the strike. The *Industrial Worker* reported that the 350 striking loggers took the train from Donald to Golden, where they held meetings in the Columbia Hotel, closed the liquor store,

[88] "Lumberton Walkout," *IW*, 9 January 1924, 4.

[89] Fred Jackson, Secretary, LWIU No. 120, Cranbrook, to Deputy Minister of Labour, 28 October 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Federal Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924, strike one.

and established a picket of members to shutdown bootleggers.[90] IWW organizers planned a disciplined and orderly strike. In Cranbrook, the union soon rented seven houses for the strikers while locals helped by boarding loggers in their homes.[91] Many of the city's merchants supported the loggers, who provided a significant amount of local business. Merchants donated food and blankets; the Wentworth Hotel in Cranbrook offered the union the use of its kitchen and dining room to feed one hundred strikers at a sitting in return for payment of the electricity bill.[92] In Cranbrook and Donald, the strike committee organized pickets throughout the region to "pull" workers from the job and bring woods operations to a standstill.

In 1924, the IWW strike committee chose a different strategy from the previous year's job action. The 1923 strike focused on shutting down the spring log drive; the 1924 strike shut down the winter cutting and hauling operations. The strike committee believed that the companies would have to settle quickly because they feared the loss of the summer log supply for their high-capacity milling operations.[93] Even in good years, the mills often shut down early in the fall due to a shortage of logs. By the 1920s, the companies had mechanized parts of log hauling but their operations still required winter weather for logging roads. As a result, January and February were crucial log-hauling months for the companies.

The MLMA, on the other hand, continued to refuse to recognize or to negotiate with the IWW. It began a coordinated campaign to break the strike. On 21 January, the *Calgary Herald* reported a statement by the association's J.R. Poole, who claimed that "professional agitators" had forced loggers to stop work. Poole encouraged unemployed workers from Calgary and across the west to seek work in the Kootenay district, where there were seven to eight hundred jobs and plenty of "police protection." Poole noted: "Larger owners have special police protection and the inspector of the BC provincial police is now in the district and has assured the owners that men wanting to return to work or to start work will have police protection."[94] Poole's statement reflected the association's strategy to recruit strike-breakers through provincial employment bureaus and private employment agencies from across the Prairie west to resume

[90] M. Fitzwilliams,"350 Out at Golden," *IW*, 19 January 1924, 1.
[91] J.A. MacDonald, "Bosses Caught at the Right Moment," *IW*, 16 January 1924, 1.
[92] Ibid., "Cranbrook Strike Near Victory," *IW*, 30 January 1924, 1.
[93] "15,000 Loggers Strike!" *IW*, 16 January 1924, 1.
[94] "Agitation May Increase Price of Lumber Cut," *CH*, 22 January 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

operations and to break the strike. The MLMA's annual convention at the Palliser Hotel in Calgary also passed a resolution to enlist the power of the state to fight the IWW. The resolution called on the provincial and federal governments "to rid the country of agitators [who were] bent on the destruction of industrial welfare in Canada."[95] A few days later, in a telegram to the *Herald*, James Murdock, the federal minister of labour, assured the newspaper:

> Last week instructions were issued to the immigration department and to the Mounted Police to cooperate in preventing the admission of undesirables from the Border States and also to cooperate in deporting representatives of the IWW from the Border States. Information suggests that instructions are being complied with. Officers of the Mounted Police and immigration officials will be glad to receive advice regarding undesirable aliens who are improperly in Canada advocating or participating in the loggers' strike.[96]

In early February, the *Industrial Worker* reported that an immigration official from Calgary had examined the members of the IWW strike committee at Cranbrook's city hall. The IWW had anticipated the government's deportation tactic. The government official found that returned Canadian soldiers made up five of the seven members of the committee, while the other two had lived in Canada long enough to become naturalized citizens. The government was unable to deport any of the strike committee.

In the meantime, the IWW and the companies fought the strike in the camps and on the railway lines. By early February, the companies began to bring in trainloads of strike-breakers from as far away as Winnipeg. In some cases, the men did not know that a strike was going on until they arrived in the region. The union responded with picket squads that met the trains at stations and at switches where the companies transferred them to private cars to take them to the camps. IWW picketers encouraged the men to join the union, promising to feed and house them. Many opted to join the strike while others went on to the camps.[97] Throughout the strike, large groups of picketers also found their way into the camps, where they agitated among the workers to pull

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[95] "Lumber Men Request That the IWW Be Declared an Illegal Organization," *CH*, 23 January 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

[96] James Murdock, Minister of Labour, to *CH*, 23 January 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

[97] See, for example, J.A. MacDonald, "Strike Grows in Power," *IW*, 23 January, 1924, 1; "Donald, BC, Walkout Completely Effective," *IW*, 23 January 1924, 2; Neil Guiney, "Strike Squadrons Get Results," *IW*, 6 February 1924, 1.

them off the job.[98] The strike committee also sent picketers to Calgary, where there was easy access to transportation to the East Kootenay and high rates of unemployment due to the postwar depression, to picket Hanson's Employment Agency to prevent men from taking jobs and to spread information about the strike.[99] The companies and the CPR responded with armed guards, and they closed and shuttered railway cars to keep the picketers away from the trains and camps. In an article hostile to the union, Evan McKowan reported in *Saturday Night* on the order and discipline of the strike:

> They [the IWW strikers] pride themselves on their orderliness. Cranbrook has been treated to the sight of two men, in perfect order, following one lone "scab" up and down the streets, refusing in an orderly manner his challenge [to them] to come on one at a time, but still following him from one rooming house to another, where he finds that they dare not take him in on account of the IWW's orderly system of boycott, and finally [he goes] out in the woods where he makes his escape, and the men return, still in an orderly manner.[100]

By the end of the month, the companies, helped by the railways and "hired gunmen," had filled their camps with workers. The strike committee recognized, as the conflict went on, that to shut down the industry required the support of railway workers who were transporting strike-breakers into the region.[101] Even so, many of the strike-breakers were boys as young as fourteen years old and inexperienced loggers who made operations inefficient and dangerous.[102]

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[98] "Full Year of Intense Organizing Results in Canadian Strike Action," *IW*, 23 January 1924, 2. The IWW delegate reported that the strike committee had pickets in Kitchener, Wardner, Elko, Fernie, Lethbridge, and Calgary.

[99] David Bright notes that the postwar economic downturn meant that the Calgary working class experienced high rates of unemployment until 1925. Bright describes how joblessness was worst over the winter until house construction resumed in the spring. A winter woods job likely appealed to these workers. See David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883–1929* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 183. See also "Suspected of Connection with IWW Cause," *CH*, 9 February 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924, for a report on the picketers doing duty in front of Hanson's Employment Agency in Calgary. The police arrested one picketer, Mike Macdonald, after the owner, C. Hanson, accused him of abusing and insulting him. Police charged three others with vagrancy. The courts dismissed all charges against the men.

[100] Evan McKowan, "The IWW in Eastern British Columbia: A Graphic Story of What Is Happening in the Cranbrook District of BC," *Saturday Night*, 15 March 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

[101] "Railroaders Are Not Union Men When Scabs Are Carried to Break Strikes," *IW*, 27 February 1924, 1.

[102] Central Strike Committee, "Striker Is Beaten and Then Arrested," *IW*, 16 February 1924, 1.

Unable to defeat the IWW on the job, the MLMA enlisted the support of the courts. On 26 February, five of the companies obtained an injunction to prevent the officers and members of the IWW from interfering with logging operations. The injunction named IWW delegate James Peterson and LWIU secretary Jack Sampson, and it called for the union to pay over $105,000 in damages.[103] A report in the *Industrial Worker* noted that the injunction made it illegal even to inform someone about the strike. Legal historian Ben Isitt notes that employers in British Columbia long used court-issued injunctions to gain the power of criminal law enforced by the police to defeat strikes.[104] The strike committee responded to the injunction by sending out flying squadrons of picketers to three BC Spruce Mills camps. However, the experience of picketing had changed as the flying squadrons now faced Mounties, provincial police officers, and company guards as they tried to agitate in the camps.[105] At the end of February, the loggers agreed unanimously to continue the job action, but the union was clearly in trouble after almost fifty days on strike. A strike report pointed to the union's problems:

> We are going to continue striking until all the demands are met. What form the strike takes rests with the members. Expenses are getting bigger every day. We must continue as we are for a few days. We still have a lot of pickets to be brought in and fed until they can be located with a master some place. We also have lots of materials that have to be returned to their owners and that costs money. We have 1500 men to be taken care of regardless of how the strike proceeds.[106]

With the strike's outcome uncertain, the union brought in its prominent US leader, James Rowan, on a speaking tour to maintain solidarity and to raise funds. Rowan addressed four meetings in Vancouver about the Cranbrook strike, the Russian Revolution, and working-class tactics. At the last meeting, "he spoke to a packed house at the Columbia Theatre" and raised $148.87 for the strikers.[107] Rowan then travelled to Golden and to Cranbrook where he addressed a full house

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[103] Neil Guiney, "Borrow US Court Tactics in Strike," *IW*, 5 March 1924, 1; "Lumber Firms Get Injunction," *Vancouver Sun*, 27 February 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

[104] Benjamin Isitt, "Patterns of Protest: Property, Social Movements, and the Law in British Columbia" (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2018), 77. Isitt quotes then labour lawyer Tom Berger in 1966, saying that injunctions "place the judiciary, as far as the labourer is concerned, in the ranks of the employers." See Isitt, "Patterns of Protest," 75.

[105] "Too Late to Haul Lumber by Sleigh," *IW*, 5 March 1924, 1–2.

[106] "Bosses Losing Out in Bitter Contest," *IW*, 1 March 1924, 1.

[107] "Speaking for IWW," *IW*, 5 March 1924, 2.

at the Star Theatre. Rowan encouraged the strikers to respond to the injunction "with an intensified campaign of organization." He pointed out that "[the] chief value of legal defense is to show up the courts and make the boss pay for any striker who goes to jail by action on the job. It will make the practice of jailing workers too unprofitable for the bosses." The union gained fifteen dollars in a collection "which more than met hall expenses."[108] The walkout ended a couple of days later. The delegate report comments as follows:

> At a joint delegate and mass conference, held here yesterday, … the general consensus was that we have made a fine demonstration of solidarity and that we have taught the companies a good lesson by this time. Practically all the timber that was to be sleigh-hauled to the landings is in the woods yet and they are up against it for logs to keep their mills going this summer ... [Seeing] that they fought us and lost all the good logging weather, we figure that we can not accomplish anything now by staying off the job. We therefore consider that it is the best policy to take the strike back to the job … Practically every lumberworker in this district has voted to keep the fight going until every last one of our demands are granted ... We have become a well organized and educated body of men during the two months that we have been on strike and we are now capable of carrying on any kind of fight we decide upon. We are keeping our relief camps open here for a few days yet in order to allow our members to have some place to stay until they can locate jobs.[109]

Looking back, the IWW's Kootenay logger strikes of 1923 and 1924 were remarkable achievements during a grim decade for organized labour in British Columbia. In two seasons, over two thousand loggers went on strike for a combined seventy days. Many of the strikers came from the Prairie west looking for wages to supplement farm income or to earn wages after work on the harvest. Others were unemployed workers from western Canadian cities simply looking for work and wages. Still others were experienced loggers from the towns of the lumbering region between Golden and Cranbrook. In all cases, workers took a risk to join the IWW and to strike for four dollars for an eight-hour day. The IWW made few, if any, gains for the strikers as the MLMA, following a well-developed employer strategy by the 1920s, refused to recognize or to negotiate with the union, fought hard to defeat the strikes, and maintained

[108] Ibid.
[109] "Relief Camps Kept Open for Strikers," *IW*, 12 March 1924, 1.

blacklists to keep union members out of woods operations. After the fifty-two-day 1924 strike, the strike committee attempted to find work for blacklisted workers, but newspapers in Calgary and Lethbridge also reported destitute loggers jailed for vagrancy in these cities.[110]

During the organizing campaign and strikes, union delegates and members rarely mentioned the IWW's long-standing revolutionary goals. We have no information about how individual loggers felt about the union, the organizing campaign, or the defeat of the strikes. However, the general support of the loggers for the union's goals to gain immediate improvements in wages and conditions through job action, to support the campaign to release IWW members serving long sentences in US prisons, and to organize loggers and farm labour across the continent suggests a belief in change. Loggers may have subscribed to the belief of the US IWW leader Ben Fletcher that immediate organizing was essential to achieving "far-flung hope."[111] The loggers' support for the strikes also suggests that union delegates such as James L. Peterson, Jack Sampson, and J.A. McDonald were remarkable organizers. The willingness of the loggers to mount long, coordinated strikes across the region also points to the poor wages and conditions in the woods. The MLMA's J.R. Poole reported during the 1924 strike that operators did not plan to make reforms. Poole noted that mill owners recognized that profits depended on "making every effort to cut down the cost of production … Keen competition means the price has to be as low as possible."[112] The outcome was low wages, poor conditions, and discontented workers in the woods and continuous pressure to find accessible timber in the region. By the 1930s, the collapse in prices and the shortage of logs due to overharvesting led to the closure of many mills across the region.

The IWW's postwar resurgence drew the union to the East Kootenay in the early 1920s. Delegates committed to organization, direct action, and international solidarity saw Kootenay loggers as part of a broader struggle for change across the continent. Although the region's labour movement did not directly support the union in 1923 and 1924, organizers could maintain "far-flung hope" from news of IWW organizing drives and strikes elsewhere: maritime workers on the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts, coal miners in Colorado, oil workers in Oklahoma, and loggers

[110] "IWWs Get Two Weeks in Jail," *Lethbridge Herald*, 10 March 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924; "IWW Striker Is Given Chance by Court to Get Job," *CH*, 18 March 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

[111] Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*, 175.

[112] "Agitation May Increase Price of Lumber Cut," *CH*, 22 January 1924, LAC, RG 27, vol. 332, Strikes and Lockout files, 1924.

and harvest labour across the west.[113] By the early 1920s, the Agricultural Workers Industrial Union had ten thousand members across the American and Canadian west.[114] The LWIU No. 120's Kootenay logger strikes were part of this broader IWW revival and struggle. In May 1924, two months after the strike, James Peterson, writing in the *Industrial Worker* from Cranbrook, laid out for members the union's upcoming plans:

> All camps now working should be represented at the Kamloops conference. This will allow for an extensive organization drive to be outlined for the summer and fall. We must also take up the question of an extensive organization drive in the harvest fields of the Canadian west. The question of organizing the fruit pickers and packers of the Okanagan valley should also be taken up … Now that the lumber workers are fairly well organized we must stay organized so that in the future we can display a solid front to the sawdust kings to gain the 8-hour day. It is necessary that the eight-hour day be established in the lumber industry in the whole of Canada so that the vast army of unemployed can be absorbed in the workforce … The goal is to make the IU No. 120 a 100% organization … Having traveled over a big part of BC since the last strike, I find the sentiment very good for the IWW.[115]

Peterson's remarks signalled the continuation of the union's 1924 organizing drive across the Prairie west to the pulpwoods of Northern Ontario, where loggers had already voted to affiliate with the union.[116] In 1923 and 1924, capital had defeated the IWW's Kootenay loggers, but, without looking ahead to the union's fall convention in Chicago, one does not feel in the spring of 1924 that the IWW was a divided union on the verge of collapse.

Finally, the Kootenay logger strikes point to the regional nature of economic development and class relations in British Columbia into the 1920s. US and Canadian capital developed the lumber industry of the East Kootenay district. The production techniques, wages, and working conditions in the region were similar to conditions found elsewhere in the lumber industries of the Pacific Northwest and in the Interior. As a result, the IWW's industrial union model and focus on

[113] On the IWW struggle elsewhere, see Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 474–77. Cole makes the point that, "clearly, the IWW – in Philadelphia, the Great Plains, the Northwest, and elsewhere – was still quite active in the 1920s, and it is a gross oversimplification to suggest otherwise." See Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*, 146.

[114] Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 177–79.

[115] "Look for Successful Kamloops Conference," *IW*, 17 May 1924, 2.

[116] Campbell, "Cult of Spontaneity," 134.

rank-and-file organization and power at the point of production were successful in building support for the union in the East Kootenay. At the same time, the MLMA's response to the logger strikes followed a broader strategy by capital to use employer associations, with the support of the state, to fight radical unionism in the early twentieth century. Nonetheless, aspects of the strikes suggest that the Kootenays remained a region apart in British Columbia into the 1920s. In many ways, the Kootenays remained more connected, as the region had been since the hardrock mining frontier began in the 1880s, to the inland empire centred on Spokane and to the markets and labour of the Prairie west rather than to the rest of the province. The IWW's most important speakers, Walker Smith and James Rowan, and the IWW's newspaper, the *Industrial Worker*, came from Spokane and Seattle, respectively, rather than from Vancouver. Of the urban press, the *Calgary Herald* provided by far the most detailed reports and editorial opinion of the 1924 strike. And the revolutionary vision of the IWW delegates was focused east and south beyond the Rocky Mountains, not west and to the Coast. In effect, the strikes showed that the Kootenays remained a northern extension of the inland empire. And the region would remain so until social and economic change transformed the province after the Second World War. As a result, few British Columbians know of the Kootenay logger strikes of 1923 and 1924, which offer evidence of the vitality and ongoing appeal of the IWW in the 1920s, including its radical opposition to capitalist power.