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THE CROWSNEST PASS DURING THE DEPRESSION;
A SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY OF SOUTHEASTERN
BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1918-1939

by

William Alexander Sloan

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A SOCIOECONOMIC HISTORY OF
SOUTHEASTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA,
1918-1939

by

WILLIAM ALEXANDER SLOAN

B.A., Notre Dame University of Nelson, 1966

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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Supervisor: Dr. Reginald H. Roy

The decade of the "thirties" had profound effects on the economic and social structure of Canada. Considerable research has exposed the trauma of the vast majority, but historians have tended to apply the general trends affecting the larger political or geographical areas to particular locales or economic units. The Crowsnest Pass area of Southeastern British Columbia has been treated in such a manner.

The three-year slump in trade postdating the First World War was ended in most of Canada with a return to relative prosperity by 1923. But in many areas the much-heralded prosperity was superficial at best. Throughout the decade, coal and steam as sources of energy were gradually replaced by oil and other easily transported fuels. The railways which had played an integral role in pre-war prosperity were in constant difficulty after the war. A number of costly strikes waged by the United Mine Workers of America in face of wage cuts and periodic "lay-offs" further reduced coal orders. The entrance of a superior Alberta domestic coal into the market curtailed an outlet formerly filled by British Columbia steam coal. Demands of the Nova Scotia miners for a subsidy that would allow competition with Pennsylvania coal for central Canadian markets brought a retaliatory tariff by the United States government on Crowsnest Pass coal supplying the

American mid-west markets. The combined result of the aforementioned factors prostrated the only major industry of the Crowsnest Pass throughout the two decades prior to the Second World War.

Economic stagnation of the region led to widespread unemployment. Instruments for relief of the unemployed had not been created in the decade before 1929. Charity was largely in the hands of benevolent societies who were often limited by a lack of resources. By the time the more intense effects of worldwide depression afflicted the area, residents were hardened to declining economic conditions.

Social trauma which accompanied the disastrous economic recession, in wreaking severe hardships on the indigent, caused major adjustments in their thinking. Repercussions were felt in almost every aspect of human relationships and endeavor, as the character of churches, schools, clubs, political parties, hospitals and fraternal societies were forced to undergo changes. The attitudes of parents and families underwent major adjustments as the ability to properly clothe, feed and educate their children was endangered. Many who had been accustomed to the security of regular incomes and savings for retirement were forced to live on a mere subsistence with no hope for the future.

Pressure of public opinion on the government brought action only to satisfy minimum political expedients. Because the entire region was economically stagnant the dole would not suffice. Only a long-range retraining program could have eased the situation. As the standard of living generally rose in Canada during the last half of the decade the state of residents in the Crows-

nest Pass correspondingly worsened. Dissent was promulgated through radical unions, unemployed associations and local political parties. The demands of the residents were not treated seriously by 1936 because of the relative prosperity of the rest of Canada. The lack of response to the plight of this coal mining region and the accompanying stigma that enveloped the indigents' parasitic condition quelled all their initiative. It was not until the large-scale armament build-up in 1939 and the resulting increased coal orders for the Crowsnest mines that a premium was placed on mine labour and the relief roles were reduced.

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CHAPTER I

ECONOMIC BASES OF THE REGION

In the traditional industrial countries population and industry tends to concentrate around natural resources or within ready access of transportation routes. However in Canada, the largest coal reserves are located in isolated areas, far from the industrial center of the nation.

In the West, vast quantities of coal did not become available until the transcontinental railways and the opening of the prairies provided a market. As a consequence of the geological location of the coal deposits and the relatively recent availability of the principal reserves, industrial development in Canada was forced to resort to other sources of energy. The St. Lawrence lowlands in the industrial heart of Canada had to rely on the Appalachian coal fields of the United States to fill its requirements. Shipping of coal from Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island, and from the Western Provinces could be undertaken only under serious competitive handicaps.¹

The vast deposits of coal in the Crowsnest Pass area of British Columbia lay in the shadow of this geographic dis-

¹W. T. Easterbrook and Hugh G. J. Aitken, Canadian Economic History, Tor., Macmillan Co., 1967, pp. 523-524.

advantage and did not become economically important until the last decade of the nineteenth century when discovery of ore bodies was made in the West Kootenay. Attention was then directed to a need for facilities to transport the necessary coal for smelters and reduction furnaces. The history of the development of the Crowsnest Pass area of British Columbia corresponded with the fulfillment of this essential service by the construction of the Crowsnest Branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1898 and the Great Northern Railway from Gateway, Montana in 1902.²

With the entry of James J. Hill, the American railroad and industrial tycoon, into the directorship of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company in 1901³ and the completion of his railroad into the American Midwest in the following year, the Crowsnest Pass coalfields became indelibly linked to a large metallurgical and railroad market. Industry in western Montana, Idaho and Washington soon became as reliant on these coalfields as the St. Lawrence lowlands industrial complex was on the Pennsylvania coalfields.⁴

As coal markets mushroomed in response to fuel demands of the numerous smelters⁵ in the Pacific Northwest and southern

²T. A. Rickard, "A History of Coal Mining in British Columbia," The Miner, July, 1942, p. 29.

³Ibid.

⁴See Table XX.

⁵Harold A. Innis, "The Kootenay Region: after the Crowsnest Pass Railway," Settlement and the Forest and Mining Frontiers, Tor., Macmillan Co., 1936, pp. 282-283.

British Columbia, a number of accessible coal seams were opened in the Crowsnest Pass. The original coal seams in the valley of Coal Creek were supplemented in 1898 by development of reserves at Michel Creek, twenty-two miles north,⁶ and in 1901 by the opening of mines near the intersection of Morrissey Creek with the Elk River, ten miles to the south.⁷

Prosperity of the communities which grew around the mine sites was almost completely reliant on the state of the coal industry, with the exception of Fernie, whose diversity of commercial interests attracted the residents of the smaller towns and the lumber workers from the isolated camps. Fernie's prosperity climaxed at the end of the First World War when 4,500 people resided in the community. The Michel collieries developed into the most productive in the "Pass"⁸ and the prosperity of the town directly paralleled that of the mines; a peak population of approximately 2,000 was reached in 1920 before declining in the "twenties" and "thirties" to about

⁶Twenty miners from Cape Breton Island began stockpiling coal at Coal Creek in 1897 although the Canadian Pacific Railway (hereafter referred to as CPR) did not reach Fernie until 1898 and Coal Creek, five miles away, until 1899.

⁷The Fernie coal basin is a pear shaped valley with its narrow portion to the north. It has a length of about 34 miles, a maximum width in the vicinity of Fernie of 12 miles and covers an area of approximately 230 square miles, all of which is underlain by coal. Erosion in these fields has resulted in providing access to the seams at the valley level, thus not only facilitating mining operations but providing conditions for railway communication with the site of operations. Description in Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946, 1947, p. 44.

⁸Michel coal had most desirable coking qualities, was easily accessible and centrally located.

five hundred.⁹

The fate of the town of Morrissey¹⁰ which grew around the Crow's Nest Pass Company mines opened in 1901, was not so fortunate. The town had grown and prospered through 1902 and 1903; a newspaper, the Morrissey Miner, had been put into operation, and substantial residential and business communities flourished. However, expansion of the community levelled off in 1903 and 1904 when dangerous "outbursts" of gas¹¹ killed a number of men and it was found that the coal in the area was no longer suitable for the two hundred forty coke ovens which had recently been completed.¹² By 1910 Morrissey mines were abandoned by the Company and the community soon disappeared.

A similar fate awaited the community of Hosmer, eight miles north of Fernie, which had evolved around the Canadian Pacific Railway mines opened in 1906. The mines at Hosmer

⁹A later community, Natal, grew immediately to the east and the two were united as a single community, Michel-Natal. J. J. Denholm, Unpublished Research Notes concerning Fernie History compiled from Newspapers, Victoria, Public Archives of British Columbia, n. d., p. 87.

¹⁰Two communities were recognized at the time; "Morrissey Mines" located at the confluence of the creek is what had been commonly referred to as Morrissey, and "Carbonado", located about one-half mile up the creek. Fernie Historical Association (hereafter referred to as FHA), Backtracking with Fernie Historical Association, Lethbridge, Alta., Lethbridge Herald, 1967, p. 65.

¹¹"Outbursts" were air blasts caused by the sudden compression of air when a pillar hanging wall gave way under pressure often releasing methane and other deadly gases. "Bumps" were caused by a sudden collapse of a rigid stratum overlying the coal after its removal. Rickard, op. cit., pp. 28-30.

¹²FHA, op. cit., p. 41.

guaranteed a coal supply for the Canadian Pacific smelter at Trail which had been paralyzed by repeated strikes against the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company. When the International Coal and Coke Company of Blairmore entered into a contract with Canadian Pacific to supply a superior quality of coal to that produced at Rosmer in 1914, the community of nearly 3,000 was abandoned.¹³

A company town not held in the hands of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company which prospered in the first quarter of the century was the community of Corbin. Founded in 1908 by the railroad magnate of Spokane, D. C. Corbin, who had consolidated a number of branch lines into the railway network known as the Spokane International, the town prospered as a producer of steam coal for American markets and as a source of domestic coal in Canada and the United States. A fire in the most productive area of the mine reduced its value considerably in 1913,¹⁴ but production continued until 1935 when a major strike, caused at least partially by conditions brought on by diminishing markets and profits, resulted in its closure and abandonment.

The Elk-Flathead area experienced a remarkable period of growth which climaxed about 1920 when a population of over 6,000 was reached.¹⁵ The community used as the barometer of

¹³Ibid., p. 59.

¹⁴John Fahey, Inland Empire, D. C. Corbin and Spokane, Seattle, Univ. of Wash. Press, 1965, p. 222.

¹⁵See Table II.

success of the district was Fernie. The Coal Company obviously considered that all of its operations in British Columbia would center on this picturesque city situated on a wide shelf above the Elk River, for no mines were opened near its town-site and except for coke manufactured within its confines until 1932, the community was pollution-free. At its beginning Fernie had all the characteristics of the coal mining shack town. However, after the fire of 1908 it rose into a very substantial well-constructed community¹⁶ with imposing public buildings, paved streets, and cement sidewalks; by the early "thirties" it could boast of a beautiful park, licensed airport, public utilities, and an adequate waterworks and sewer system. Labelled by the Fernie Free Press as "the Pittsburgh of the West", the city had survived two devastating fires and several crippling strikes, to become a stable community of over 4,000¹⁷ with a highly diversified commercial establishment and a vigorous social climate.

The communities in the Crowsnest Pass initially were tied neither socially nor commercially with the West Coast.¹⁸ All roads and trails into the area had their origins in the

¹⁶After the fire of 1908, a city by-law required all buildings within a ten square block area to be of fire-proof construction. Interview with Mr. Dan Chester, a former employee of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company (hereafter referred to as the CNP Coal Co.) and resident of Coal Creek and Fernie for most of the present century.

¹⁷See Table III.

¹⁸J. Hughes, A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia, Edmon., unpub. M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1944, p. 26.

United States, and the southern interior of British Columbia was generally held to be a part of the "Inland Empire" which included eastern Oregon, Washington, western Montana and Idaho.¹⁹ The rail connection via the Great Northern linked the "Pass" to Spokane and travellers often followed American routes when vacationing.²⁰ News of a national nature usually came by way of the American press and in the late "twenties" when radio became a news medium, many Crowsnest Pass residents irrevocably listened to American broadcasts. School competitions were held against the nearest major competitors which were either from Kalispell, Montana or Spokane, Washington.²¹

Economically the Crowsnest Pass district was more inclined to ties with the provinces to the east, particularly Alberta. In 1897 rates favourable to transportation of staple goods from the Prairie Provinces to the "Pass" had been introduced by the Canadian Pacific Railway to increase the payload on empty boxcars coming west to return with coal and ores from the Kootenays.²² Geographic ties with Alberta, and particul-

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Advertisements in the Fernie Free Press (hereafter referred to as FFP) regularly included rates and economy fares on the Great Northern to U. S. points.

²¹"Annual Debate between Fernie High School and Kalispell High School, Local and General," FFP, Nov. 18, 1938, p. 5.

²²On Feb. 1, 1897, rates on grain, flour, hay, etc. shipped in carlots were reduced from 10 to 30 cents per hundredweight to twenty-one Kootenay points. Rates on butter, cheese and eggs were reduced by amounts from 15 to 65 cents per hundredweight. Blanket rates were given to all Kootenay points on dressed poultry, meats, hogs, packed and frozen fish and packing house products. Innis, op. cit., p. 308.

arly Calgary and Lethbridge thus were more realistic than those with the West Coast or even with interior cities, and a vigorous interprovincial trade developed between the districts.

Industry in the East Kootenay area was confined to coal mining and lumbering during the first two decades of this century, the latter being mainly dependent on the fortunes of the former. The period of railway construction and opening of the coal mines was paralleled by feverish activity in the lumber industry. Lumber initially was desired for camps to house construction workers, to provide railway ties and bridges, station houses and rolling stock. With the completion of the railway, sawmills in the "Pass" further accelerated output to provide mine props, and facilities for coal handling.²³ The towns which grew around the mines were largely of wood frame construction, with the exception of Fernie which after 1908 was of stone and brick. In addition, the completion of the Crowsnest branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway provided a transportation link with the Prairie Provinces which were entering a prolific period of expansion and whose lack of timber resources necessitated large-scale imports from out of the province, much of which was supplied by the East Kootenay area.²⁴ Sawmills were located in the Cedar Valley near Fernie, at West Fernie, at Lumberton near Cranbrook and in the Kootenay Valley

²³In 1903 there were 24 sawmills employing 1,800 men in operation in the East Kootenays. Ibid., p. 307.

²⁴W. M. Mercer, "Growth of Ghost Towns," Royal Commission on Forestry, 1944, p. 12 and Harold A. Innis, "The Lumber Trade in Canada," Essays in Canadian Economic History, Tor., Univ. of Tor., 1965, p. 245.

at Wardner, Waldo and Jaffray. The camps in the Bull River drainage, at Canal Flats in the Upper Kootenay Valley and at Yahk, west of Cranbrook supplied the Canadian Pacific with railroad timber.²⁵

The cities of Fernie and Cranbrook evolved as business centers for the logging camps which dotted the area. Staple commodities, accomodation, entertainment facilities, and transportation links were routed through these two communities.²⁶

The end of lumbering in the East Kootenay area was effected by the large-scale logging and numerous fires which afflicted the area, combined with the loss of human resources to the First World War. Particularly serious were the many fires which had repeatedly devastated large areas of the country, mining the soil to the state where vast tracts were totally unproductive.²⁷ Furthermore the decade which ended in 1914 witnessed the virtual end of the agricultural frontier and its attendant demand for lumber. After 1914 the frontier moved north into the Peace River country which had abundant timber resources to support its own population. When the men of the East Kootenays returned from the war they found the lumber industry was almost at a standstill. Many of the lumber workers moved north into the Upper Columbia River drainage and were absorbed into newly developing forest industries.

²⁵Mercer, op. cit., passim.

²⁶Hilton Young, Early Days of Logging on the Crow, n. p., n. pub., July 7, 1964, p. 25.

²⁷Mercer, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

A few obtained employment in the expanding metallurgical industry at Trail and Kimberley but a considerable number were unable to obtain regular employment and were forced to join the ranks of unemployed which swelled with the re-absorption of First World War veterans.²⁸

Agriculture as a livelihood did not become a force in the Crowsnest Pass. The climate of the region, though relatively moderate was adversely affected by the high altitude;²⁹ and the cold winters³⁰ in combination with poor soil conditions³¹ limited agriculture to a minimum. Restricted by the same qualifications which were favourable to the development of mining, the shallow, stony soil required fertilization as well as careful tillage. Grass was abundant on the few un-timbered meadows and small-scale ranching was possible where other crops could not be raised. A few small farms and ranches grew on the few arable benches along the Elk River. The advent of agricultural associations in the "twenties" influenced a great improvement in the standards of agriculture, particularly in the vicinity of Fernie and Elko, but

²⁸Ibid., pp. 21-23.

²⁹Altitudes ranged from 2,450 to 3,100 feet in the lower valley and nearby mountains ranged from 7,000 to 9,000 feet. Denholm, op. cit., p. 4.

³⁰Winter sets in during November and continues until March; temperatures range from freezing level to about zero and as low as forty degrees below zero. "Average Snowfall," FFP, Jan. 22, 1932, p. 1 and "Snowfall 153 inches," FFP, Jan. 1, 1935, p. 1.

³¹British Columbia, Department of Lands and Forests, "The Brown Podosolic Zone," Second Resources Conference, 1949, p. 17.

geographical conditions hindered a sizable influx to the land.

By 1918 the economy of the Crowsnest Pass had reached a prosperous plateau. The average weekly wage of coal miners exceeded the average industrial wage in the province by more than five dollars.³² The mines were at maximum employment to meet demands for coal to smelt the vast quantity of metal required in wartime.³³ Shortage of manpower in the services had offset the effect of termination of lumbering in the East Kootenays and full employment became an accepted fact over the duration of the war.

However, with a return to peacetime economy, reduction of the rates of production put many men out of work and the situation was intensified when thousands of returning veterans entered the labour force. Soldiers stood in relief lines and surveyed "obese" businessmen who had accumulated great wealth through wartime industry while they were risking their lives for their country. Consequently when ideas advocating public ownership and equalization of wealth were heard, they were well received by the dissident elements.

The One Big Union was the principal manifestation of this dissent and gained considerable favour across the country. In the Crowsnest Pass the movement gained a following with magnitude second only to that of Winnipeg. In addition to the various forces which caused a recession in the coal industry of the area, the burgeoning radical union disrupted

³²See Table XXI.

³³Innis, Settlement and the Frontiers, p. 297.

the fulfillment of existing markets. A major strike was called in 1919 which lasted eight months and minor stoppages were enforced in 1920 and 1922. The situation reached a climax during the negotiations of 1924 when management attempted to reduce wages in face of deteriorating world markets.³⁴ An unsuccessful strike ensued which broke the back of the labour movement in the "Pass" and saw miners return to work at drastically reduced wages.

In August of 1923 a financial calamity of a different nature struck the citizens of Fernie. The Home Bank of Canada, one of the busiest branches in the city, filed for bankruptcy and suspended the payment of deposits.³⁵ The citizens lost heavily as deep inroads were made into the life savings of many residents which added to a growing distrust of existing institutions.

The first indication of declining markets for Crowsnest Pass coal was felt immediately after the war when reduction of government orders for copper forced closure of the Granby smelter, a valuable customer of the Coal Company and co-sharer of an owner.³⁶ Alberta coal entered into the British Columbia

³⁴H. A. Logan, The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada, Chic., Univ. of Chic. Press, 1928, p. 195 and British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour (hereafter referred to as ARML), 1924, 1925, p. G40.

³⁵Denholm, op. cit., p. 85.

³⁶Innis, Settlement and the Frontiers, p. 289.

market for the first time in the early "twenties" and displaced a small portion of the market.³⁷ The Fordney-McCumber tariff³⁸ together with the use of California oil as fuel by locomotives of the Great Northern Railway put an end to a profitable outlet³⁹ in the United States, the mainstay of Crowsnest Pass coal markets. In addition to wresting away the railway markets of the Pacific Northwest, the switch from coal-fueled steam power to oil and hydro-electric power ended a large portion of the metallurgical industrial market of the area.⁴⁰

Simultaneous to the decline in coal orders and the termination of logging activity in the "Pass", a decrease in employment was experienced.⁴¹ Immediately following the end of the

³⁷ Tonnage of coal brought into British Columbia from Alberta:

1915	54,860	1927	187,028	1931	193,060	1935	221,758
1920	128,850	1928	262,198	1932	136,188	1936	244,928
1925	117,037	1929	247,060	1933	119,026	1937	269,023
1926	127,858	1930	227,385	1934	123,968		

British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, (hereafter referred to as ARMM), 1930, 1931, p. A322 and 1937, 1938, p. G9.

³⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, The Oxford History of the American People, N. Y., Oxford Univ. Press, 1965, p. 923.

³⁹ Mr. Neill, M. P., Comox-Alberni, "Tariffs out off Fernie Markets," in Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, Official Report of Debates, May 9, 1933, p. 4766.

⁴⁰ Innis, Settlement and the Frontiers, pp. 304, 315-317.

⁴¹ A post-war high of 1,774 men employed in East Kootenay coal mines in 1921 declined to 1,538 in 1922 and except during the 1924 labour strife, averaged about 1,400 until 1928 when a slight increase was experienced due to a burst of speculative activity in base metals with attendant coal demands for smelting. Figures of employment are not always accurate since in slack times miners worked only one or two days per week. See Table XVIII and Innis, Settlement and the Frontiers, p. 316.

First World War the economic problems of the area were further accentuated by the number of returned veterans seeking work. A period of exceedingly low employment, discord in labour-management relations and increased social aid to indigent citizens was experienced. By the mid "twenties" many of the unemployed in the "Pass" moved on to employment in alternative industries which were experiencing unprecedented expansion. Although migration of the surplus labour allowed the majority of residents full employment, seasonal fluctuations of markets resulted in periodic "lay-offs" and "slow-downs".

CHAPTER II

HARDSHIP AND ADJUSTMENT

The depression which afflicted the Crowsnest Pass in 1930 was not a markedly different experience for the residents than the recession which had been taking place in the area since the First World War. Miners had experienced a drastic cut in wages in 1924¹ and had suffered periodic reductions thereafter.² Production had decreased to the state where annual summer layoffs were the rule, and full employment was seldom experienced even at reduced wages. When the severe depression precipitated by the Wall Street "crash" caused a devastating economic recession in Western Canada, the degree of retrenchment in the Crowsnest Pass was less drastic since the economy of the area was already at a low ebb.³

Nevertheless, the winter of 1929-1930 was a critical period for many unemployed people since the instruments of distributing relief had not yet been created. At Coal Creek nearly four hundred men were permanently dismissed in the autumn of 1929 and the balance were working half-time or as little

¹See Table XXI.

²British Columbia, Department of Labour, ARML, 1929, 1930, p. L7.

³"Situation Discussed," FFP, Feb. 14, 1930, p. 1.

as two days per week.⁴ A crucial situation developed when the limited charities were unable to accomodate the growing relief demands⁵ and the burden of providing relief and arranging public works fell on the municipality of Fernie. Employment on city-owned water system improvements was apportioned among the indigent and permits to cut and transport wood from the park were issued.⁶ The unemployed were thwarted in attempts to obtain free coal from the Crow's Nest Coal Company, but were allowed the same privileges as the miners who obtained coal at less than retail cost.⁷ Resolutions by Fernie City Council demanding immediate aid for the unemployed outside the city limits were successful to the extent that highway improvement projects were undertaken, but after a month's duration these were suspended due to a lack of funds.⁸

⁴"Send More Telegrams," FFP, May 2, 1930, p. 1.

⁵In 1929 the Fernie branch of the Canadian Legion donated \$407.85 for groceries, beds and meals for the needy; \$400.69 was spent on relief projects for the unemployed and of this, \$200 was donated by City Council while \$273.15 was given to other charities. "Fernie Legion Activities," FFP, Dec. 12, 1929, p. 6. The Ladies Benevolent Society, one of the leading charitable organizations, provided funds for only seven families during the fall of 1929. "City Council Meeting," ibid. Figures from other benevolent organizations were not published by the FFP, but because the two quoted were the only regularly reported donors to the unemployed their contributions would undoubtedly represent the bulk of voluntary relief.

⁶By March 1930, thirty permits had been issued for cutting wood in the park. "City Council Meeting," FFP, Mar. 7, 1930, p. 1.

⁷"Mayor Makes Statement," FFP, Oct. 10, 1930, p. 1.

⁸The articles "Tom Uphill Gets Busy," FFP, Feb. 14, 1930, p. 4, "Road Work Underway," FFP, Feb. 21, 1930, p. 1, "City Council Meeting," ibid., and "Coal Creek Notes," FFP, Mar. 28, 1930, p. 8 portray the extent of the public works.

Residents of the community of Michel-Natal were similarly affected by declining markets. Although some miners were only employed one or two days per week and experienced severe hardships, there were no large-scale dismissals of the magnitude that afflicted Coal Creek and, by extension, Fernie.⁹ Michel-Natal coal, due to its superior qualities and ease of recovery, retained a proportionately larger market than that of the Coal Creek colliery, and the community benefited accordingly.

Similar to Michel-Natal, Corbin was completely dependent¹⁰ on the company and its coal markets. However, the residents of the community enjoyed the most stable conditions in the Crowsnest Pass during the early years of the depression. The Corbin Coal and Coke Company Limited¹¹ relied mainly on the steam coal market, which was reasonably constant and their mines became noted for the largest per capita production of any field in the East Kootenays.¹² It was not until coal-cutting machinery and large labour saving steam shovels were

⁹"Michel and Natal Notes," FFP, Oct. 17, 1930, p. 4. See also Table XIX.

¹⁰The Corbin Coal and Coke Company owned all property in the townsite until a few months before the strike of 1935 when houses were sold to those who desired them.

¹¹In 1929, a reorganization of the company changed the name to Corbin Collieries Ltd. "Local and General," FFP, Dec. 6, 1929, p. 5.

¹²In 1918 the rate of output for each man underground was 2,066 tons for a 291 day year. Highest comparative output in Coal Creek mines was 1,355 tons in 1941 and at Michel, 1,544 tons in 1942. The coal at Corbin was close to the surface and coal-cutting machinery could be used. Hughes, op. cit., p. 91.

introduced that union opposition displayed by a major strike forced closure of the mines in 1935.¹³

The situation in the city of Fernie during the summer and autumn of 1930 improved only slightly. However, a system of registration of unemployed was introduced which put into the hands of the city concrete evidence of the dilemma and an instrument to extract aid from the provincial and federal governments.¹⁴ In addition, the municipality established a local residence qualification, which predated the federal version and required ninety day's residence before relief could be obtained.¹⁵ Municipal relief works were undertaken during the summer of 1930 but very little was actually accomplished since workmen took the attitude that the city was constructing and maintaining public works at the expense of the unemployed. A few men intentionally staged "slow-downs" in order to extend the projects as long as possible¹⁶ which resulted in their cessation except for limited wood-cutting operations.¹⁷

The termination of large-scale harvesting operations in the Prairie Provinces was one of the most deeply felt forces which affected the employment situation in 1930. The scheme was first organized in 1921 under the auspices of the British Columbia Government Employment Service. Railways granted

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴"City Council Meeting," FFP, Aug. 8, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., Sept. 5, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁶Ibid., Aug. 22, 1930, p. 1.

¹⁷"Relief Work Commenced," FFP, Oct. 24, 1930, p. 1 and "Unemployed Problems," FFP, Nov. 28, 1930, p. 1.

reduced rates during a limited period, and men and women were guaranteed a minimum wage and employment harvesting grain by the Employment Services of the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments.¹⁸ The introduction of the "combine"¹⁹ and automated threshing after 1926²⁰ reduced the number of migrant harvesters but not enough to prevent over 10,000 British Columbia workers, the majority from the Crowsnest, Red and Yellowhead Pass areas, from participating in the harvest of 1928.²¹ The destructive force of the physical elements and the depression of markets practically ended the annual migration by 1930 when only sixty-seven British Columbia residents were employed. Thus an integral labour safety valve during the summer lay-offs of the "twenties" was closed to the Crowsnest miners and remained so for the balance of the depression.²²

The winter of 1931 in the Crowsnest Pass was extremely difficult as money from a new relief instrument initiated by the federal government²³ was slow in negotiating bureaucratic

¹⁸British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1923, p. G42.

¹⁹The "combine" was a machine operated by one man which combined the cutting and threshing operations.

²⁰The combine cut labour by about one-seventh where it was used. In 1927 there were 195 machines in Alberta, and by 1928, 1,095. British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1928, p. J49.

²¹A total of 10,812 British Columbia workers helped harvest the 1928 crop. Ibid., 1931, p. E8.

²²Ibid.

²³All projects were to be within the conditions as set down by the Fair Wages and Eight Hour Day Act, 1930. Only goods and materials of Canadian manufacture were to be used and

channels. Relief outlays had eroded approximately fifty percent of the 1931 collectable taxes, which caused public works to slow down after the New Year and terminate a short time later.²⁴ Destitute residents of the "Pass" created a great furor and provoked both dominion and provincial governments to promise Mayor Gates of Fernie that no one was to be without food, clothing or fuel. Unemployed were encouraged to pick coal at the coke oven dump, screen "slack" along the Canadian Pacific tracks, and cut wood in the park for which the city would provide transportation.²⁵ A "Christmas Cheer and Relief Fund" organized by the Rotary Club subscribed a large sum of money to provide aid during the festive season,²⁶ and gave the surplus to help the most severe cases of want. Unsuccessful attempts to obtain free coal during the winter months were made by the newly formed unemployed committee in conjunction with Mr. Thomas Uphill, M. L. A. for Fernie. A cost-of-living index compiled by the Fernie and District Unemployed Association for a family of five was used as a criterion by those on

contracts on the projects were to be granted only to Canadian construction firms. All persons employed were to be residents of Canada, and as far as possible, of the locality in which the work was to be performed. In no case was discrimination to be made or permitted in the employment of persons whether by reason of their political affiliation, race or religious views. British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, Correspondence, arts. 76, 77 & 78, Sept. 22, 1930.

²⁴"Final Council Meeting," FFP, Jan. 16, 1931, p. 1.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶"Finally Reaches \$2619.84," FFP, Dec. 26, 1930, p. 1.

relief to document their demands for aid.²⁷

Upon the receipt of financial aid from the federal government the municipality proposed to extend the waterworks and storm sewers and clear an air strip. A further proposal to clear 10,000 acres of arable land in the Elk valley was rejected as too expensive by a meeting of the unemployed and city fathers.²⁸ Temporary measures to create work led the city again to enter into the wood-cutting business in January of 1931.²⁹ Within a month the venture was plagued by an eighty-man strike for more wages. At the root of the discontent was the belief that the unemployed were required to work in order to obtain relief which in other localities was being obtained without performing works.³⁰ The wood-cutting experiment carried into the spring but was characterized by disagreements and stoppages. The unemployed used the project as a device to draw attention to their disapproval of the entire relief program.³¹

Competition for the few jobs created under the relief program was extremely bitter. The criteria for determining recipients of available work became increasingly complicated. Initially married men were given priority on all projects but the great number of married unemployed necessitated some means

²⁷"Final City Council Meeting," FFP, Jan. 16, 1931, p. 1.

²⁸"Mayor Makes Statement," FFP, Oct. 10, 1930, p. 1.

²⁹"In the Wood Business," FFP, Jan. 30, 1931, p. 1.

³⁰"Wood Cutters on Strike," FFP, Feb. 27, 1931, p. 1.

³¹"City Council Meeting," FFP, Ap. 10, 1931, p. 1.

of further selection among them. The competitive principle of priority to the most industrious workers gave way to the degree of plight. Most single unemployed realized the family men's dire need for relief and the few who did not, received very little sympathy. ^{But} It was difficult for administrators to justify to the industrious single worker who had been performing a credible job on public works that a less able worker than himself deserved his job on the basis of necessity.³²

Instances of capable citizens unable to sustain themselves increasingly occurred³³ and numerous cases of want among the aged, orphaned children, and physically incapacitated and mentally ill people appeared before City Council. Many families in the "Pass" who believed their problems deserved special attention appealed to the local authorities. Three to four hundred men were still unemployed in Fernie and many were in danger of losing their homes if their petitions to council to work off tax debts were not granted.³⁴ The Coal Company acquiesced to the request that blocks of unoccupied land at the north end of the city be opened for gardening by the unemployed. The city complied by supplying water to the land at reduced

³²"Pine Program Adopted," FFP, Sept. 25, 1931, p. 1.

³³A mother of a family of six ranging in age from ten to twenty stated before City Council that she had barely enough food without consideration of clothes, school books and other necessities. Demands that her husband be given more work than the two days a week he received in the mines were met with the reply that many were in worse straits and were receiving no employment. "City Council Meeting," FFP, June 5, 1931, p. 1.

³⁴Ibid., May 2, 1931, p. 1.

rates³⁵ and the provincial government introduced a program of providing free garden seed.³⁶

If the depression was anything less than continent-wide many of the single men and a few of the heads of families would have left the area to seek work, but every day transients who rode the trains into Fernie to beg a bare subsistence³⁷ were living evidence of the distress and disillusionment in all parts of the country.

The various levels of government were adept in utilizing the unemployment problem in the "Pass" as a "political football". A visit to the district in the spring of 1931 by a leading minister of the Tolmie government must have served to reveal the gravity of the situation in the area, but the only solace to the unemployed was summed up in the comment: "as soon as the Dominion government outlined its policy in regard to relief funds they [the provincial government] would be able to relieve the situation"³⁸

The British Columbia government was soon faced with such acute financial conditions in the municipalities and unorganized territories that by July immediate measures were taken to alleviate the provincial situation pending mobilization of a new federal program. A system of registration was intro-

³⁵Ibid., May 8, 1931, p. 1.

³⁶British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K84.

³⁷"Unemployment Conference," FFP, June 19, 1931, p. 4.

³⁸"City Council Meeting," FFP, May 22, 1931, p. 4 and "Minister Bruhn Visits Fernie," FFP, May 15, 1931, p. 1.

duced³⁹ and temporary highway projects were begun.⁴⁰ Shortly after, the province introduced its program of summer relief the federal agreement under the "Unemployment and Farm Relief Act" came into effect.⁴¹ The combined aid of the two levels of government eased conditions considerably. At Fernie, improvement of the system of water supply, beautification of the city park and improvement of the airstrip was undertaken.⁴² The City Engineer as head of the relief committee for Fernie recommended that a system tailored to local conditions be introduced whereby registered married miners who were city residents would be engaged on public works on Monday of each week and unemployed married residents would work the remaining four days of the week.⁴³ This would supplement the miners'

³⁹The new system of registration required an unemployed person to report to the local government agent personal particulars which were written on a card and had to be presented to obtain relief. The exact number of unemployed, those who were residents, and their individual plight, whether absolutely destitute, or just requiring housing or food or both was determined. "Minister Bruhn Visits Fernie," FFP, May 15, 1931, p. 1.

⁴⁰The public works projects proposed by the province would have included a main trunk highway from the Alberta border to the Coast and up the east side of Vancouver Island, supplemented by work in British Columbia's national parks projects. "Relief Measures," FFP, July 8, 1931, p. 1.

⁴¹Between \$7,000,000 and \$8,000,000 was to be spent in British Columbia from the time of the commitment to April 1, 1932. Of this amount the provincial government would spend about \$3,000,000, "the federal... about the same or a little more, and the municipalities the remainder." The program was designed to employ up to 20,000 men on provincial works. At the time about 50,000 men were registered as unemployed. "Fine Program Adopted," FFP, Sept. 25, 1931, p. 1.

⁴²"Ratepayers to Decide," FFP, July 24, 1931, p. 1.

⁴³At the time the city had 122 part time miners on the payroll one day a week and 90 working four days a week. Fundamentally the program was designed to raise the earnings of all

wages and at the same time permit the unemployed a comparable income. Residents would also be allowed to work for overdue taxes, water, and light bills which would be deducted from their wages.⁴⁴ The effect of financial aid from all levels of government was to supply all of the indigent with some form of relief and to raise the residents' standard of living to a subsistence level.

As the unemployed situation eased during the spring of 1931, the weather became increasingly hot and dry and indirectly raised a serious social problem in Fernie. As the humidity fell forest fires at various times threatened to wipe out Morrissey, Cedar Valley and Corbin, and a major conflagration reduced much of the Kootenay River valley to blackened stumps.⁴⁵ Unlike the years of prosperity when Forest Service officials had great difficulty obtaining fire fighters, hundreds of men moved into the Crowsnest Pass to seek employment. The influx continued to such an extent that Fernie City Council was forced to take steps to ensure that the feared "hobo jungle" was confined to a particular area. City health officials were instructed to inspect the rapidly congregating transients

residents, miners on "short" time and unemployed, up to the level of \$30 every two weeks. "Local and General," FFP, Oct. 16, 1931, p. 5.

⁴⁴Public works were to be carried on irrespective of weather and days could not be banked or loaned. Unemployed members of the city fire brigade were to be given two days' work a week to ensure that they would not be forced into relief camps and thus endanger the city with ill-trained recruits. "City Council Meeting," FFP, Oct. 2, 1931, p. 4.

⁴⁵"The Fire Situation," FFP, Aug. 21, 1931, p. 1.

for typhoid fever and other communicable diseases.⁴⁶ Within a short time it became obvious to the destitute transients that available jobs fighting fires would easily be filled by the large number of local unemployed, and with the coming of fall rains to dampen the fires the "hobo jungle" disappeared.

The first indication that the government would assume the major responsibility for the unemployed occurred in 1931 when public works camps were created in British Columbia. The willingness of the federal government to provide material aid to operate the camps was basic to the introduction of the program. However, tremendous pressure had also been exerted by the municipalities. Their task of providing for the married unemployed bankrupted their resources and resulted in the neglect of the single unemployed.⁴⁷ Thus the relief camps were founded in order to provide means for the single destitute men.⁴⁸

The mushrooming relief program put into motion by the announcement of the federal Unemployment and Farm Relief Act of 1931 was set back by a request in October for the provinces to reduce the rate of relief expenditures as much as possible. It was suggested that through rotation of available public

⁴⁶"Fernie Will Have Jungle," FFP, Aug. 14, 1931, p. 1.

⁴⁷"City Council Meeting," FFP, May 8, 1931, p. 1.

⁴⁸Five camps were in operation in the Crowsnest Pass intermittently throughout the depression; two near the provincial boundary at Crowsnest and one each at McGinnis, Elko, Loon Lake and Fort Steele. Registration in the "Pass" area had reached 1,350 men by mid-September, 1931. See Table X and "1,350 Have Registered," FFP, Sept. 11, 1931, p. 1.

public works the relief monies be spread thinner so that 10,000 to 15,000 indigents not provided for under the present budget could be employed in the winter months.⁴⁹ To comply with this request it was decided in Fernie that work for all city relief employees would be reduced to two days per week commencing December 31, 1931.⁵⁰ However the critical state of affairs in the district permitted no large-scale reduction in relief payments.⁵¹

The mines at Coal Creek were at their lowest point during 1932.⁵² The number of days worked was half that of the ten year average and the number of men had now dropped to slightly over

⁴⁹"Dominion Says Go Easy," FFP, Oct. 28, 1931, p. 1.

⁵⁰In Fernie the City Council was forced to cut salaries. "Council Cuts Salaries," FFP, Nov. 6, 1931, p. 1.

⁵¹Because of the high expenditures felt by the province in the spring of 1932, in mid-summer the British Columbia Minister of Public Works, Mr. Bruhn, announced the halving of the numbers of men receiving assistance in the provincial camps. "Cutting Down Camps," FFP, July 29, 1932, p. 1. It had been decided earlier to expel all non-residents and instructions went out ordering some 2,000 transients out of the province. "Not for British Columbia Alone," FFP, June 24, 1932, p. 7. This action led to a relief board created jointly under federal and provincial auspices, and the transfer of all single homeless men from the cities to camps where they would be cared for at dominion expense. Under the plan the dominion took over several provincial relief camps which were utilized solely to accomodate single homeless men whose relief simultaneously was terminated in the cities. The federal government bore the cost of food, clothing and maintenance while the expense of administration and provision of camps and equipment was borne by the province. British Columbia, Department of Labour, "Relief Act, 1932," op. cit., 1933, p. G23.

⁵²At Michel 159 days were worked in 1932; the ten year average was 209.4 days per year; see Table XVII.

half those employed in 1929.⁵³ For many of the contract miners the scarcity of shifts was not a great handicap since if they had a reasonably productive "face"⁵⁴ and an industrious partner they could earn in excess of ten dollars a day. But contract mining had its negative effects in that a few very proficient miners could fill the company's orders consequently fewer were given employment. The average weekly wage in the British Columbia coal mining industry had fallen nearly ten dollars from an all-time high in 1920 and because most miners' wages were at best based on one or two shifts, the weekly rate at Coal Creek amounted to only five or ten dollars per week.⁵⁵

For the first time the people of Fernie were on the verge of starvation, and during the summer months of 1932 a large number of children were without shoes⁵⁶ and clothes and were generally malnourished. The status of orphaned children, invalids and the infirm bordered on the tragic as they felt the effects of the depression and the governments' failure to

⁵³In Coal Creek, 76 days were worked; the ten year average was 148.3 per year. The numbers employed dropped from 729 in 1929 to 345 in 1932. See Table XVIII.

⁵⁴"Face" or "place", W. J. Cousins, A History of the Crow's Nest Pass, Edmon. unpub. M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1952, p. 108.

⁵⁵The wage in 1920 was \$37.64 per week; in 1932 it was \$28.04, or \$5.61 per day. See Table XXI.

⁵⁶Approximately 455 pairs of shoes were provided children in schools of the city and surrounding district. Mr. W. R. Wilson, president of the CNP Coal Co. initiated the fund and donated \$500 of the total \$774 collected. "Communication," FFP, Dec. 16, 1932, p. 1.

assume their responsibility.⁵⁷ A meeting of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities met in Vancouver in July and protested the federal government proposal that an average family consisting of parents and one child could live on twenty dollars per month. A prominent provincial public health officer stated that the standard of unemployment relief to needy families could not be lowered without affecting the health of the individual, and that the sum of twenty dollars per month was totally inadequate for food alone. He added that pregnant and nursing mothers should be allowed an additional stipend of \$3.50 per month in order to provide an extra quart of milk daily.⁵⁸

As the status of the residents of the Crowsnest Pass declined, faith in the powers of government to alleviate their situation correspondingly plummeted. In August the federal government announced that relief to old age pensioners would be reduced by one-third, appending an earlier reduction of ten percent.⁵⁹ Public opinion against government policy was brought to the boiling point when it was learned that an

⁵⁷Permission to solicit alms in the street was not granted a cripple. At the same meeting a sixteen year old orphan was refused work. "City Council Meeting," FFP, June 5, 1931, p. 1. A provincial government agent informed the city they will not pay \$10 per month to an invalid fifteen year old whose parents were on direct relief. Ibid., Sept. 9, 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁸"Will Ask for More Relief," FFP, July 15, 1932, p. 1.

⁵⁹The maximum rate of \$45 was cut to \$40 during the summer only; the approximate amount of relief for a married man without a family was reduced to \$25. "Regarding Pensions," FFP, Aug. 12, 1932, p. 1.

Alberta city was providing bus transportation for transients to British Columbia border points and that early in the summer a number of unlicensed prairie autos travelled under free permits to the province.⁶⁰ This was the culmination of a situation which had been avoided since the great shortages of prairie harvesters after the turn of the century led the government to encourage transient workers to migrate. Until the peak of the depression in 1931 and 1932 "riding the rods" had been an easily accessible means of travel. The railway police had tended to look the other way in the fall as demand for harvesters had grown over the years. "Coming west, they rode in empty box-cars and could get into very little mischief. Going back east, they rode the grain trains on which there was nothing to steal."⁶¹

At a meeting in Calgary of the politicians of the four western provinces attended by Mayor Douglas and Thomas Uphill of Fernie, Prime Minister Bennett was requested to accept responsibility in registering and placing all single unemployed men into relief camps. Mr. Bennett replied that the federal government had no power to order men into camps with the understanding that if they did not stay and work they would be refused relief. At the same time he announced that travelling on trains by transients would be stopped on September 30, 1932.⁶²

⁶⁰British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Letter from Nelson British Columbia Provincial Police to Commissioner," Correspondence, art. 332, Nov. 2, 1932

⁶¹James H. Gray, The Winter Years, the Depression on the Prairies, Tor., Macmillan Co., 1966, p. 144.

⁶²"City Council Meeting," FFP, Sept. 9, 1932, p. 1.

The restriction against entering British Columbia was circumvented temporarily in the "Pass" by the transients by dropping off the trains a mile or so east of the boundary then walking or catching a ride across.⁶³ Many of the men affected by the restraints were British Columbia residents who had gone to the prairies in search of harvest work and after a public outcry on their behalf, enforcement of the restriction was eased.⁶⁴

The situation for single unemployed residents of Fernie was critical. As the last element to be dealt with under the relief system, they were left to devise their own means of sustenance. During the spring, summer and early autumn after working one or two days in the mines or on public works, many loaded a packboard and hiked into the mountains which circled the communities and spent their time in crudely fashioned shelters, sustaining themselves by hunting, fishing and picking berries. The excursions came to represent a way of life to some of the young men and when observed in retrospect were the fulfillment of a utopian existence.⁶⁵

The men generally had an easier time than the women throughout the depression. The women were relegated to the dreary life of attempting to fashion a living with very meager

⁶³British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Letter to Commissioner, R.C.M.P., Vancouver," Correspondence, art. 262, Oct. 3, 1932,

⁶⁴"Permission Asked that Transients 'Ride the Rods'," FPF, Oct. 14, 1932, p. 1.

⁶⁵Interview with Mr. Dan Chester.

resources. Their days were spent in such activities as patching over clothes and preparing "hash" for meals, with no opportunity to escape into any of the usual women's diversions such as buying new clothes or going to a theatre or restaurant.⁶⁶

Marriage rates in the province as a whole dropped considerably during the depression⁶⁷ but in the Crowsnest Pass and Fernie in particular, there did not seem to be a marked decline. This was partially due to the availability of several company houses for a very small sum of money; they were gradually being abandoned by indigent miners leaving to look for work and a few others had been boarded up since the prosperous pre-war years.⁶⁸

The Coal Company was unusually compassionate to the miners of the area. Employees on two days' pay or less were allowed to work a full shift in their own "face" once a year which gave them about two tons of coal. Single men most often sold their's to local businesses.⁶⁹ Unemployed were allowed to pick Company slack piles and had them reduced by 1933; henceforth they were allowed to buy coal at wholesale cost.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷See Table I.

⁶⁸See Table XIX.

⁶⁹"City Council Meeting," FFP, Sept. 23, 1932, p. 1. Each miner would receive an extra day's work at the mines and the coal produced was his own. Surplus coal amounting to three hundred tons was distributed among the unemployed. "Local and General," FFP, Sept. 23, 1932, p. 5. Also interviews with Messrs. Chester and Lew Dworkin.

The Company provided teams of horses and sleds for the miners to transport firewood which was taken off Company land. Thousands of board feet of old mine timbers, old in the sense that they had deteriorated to a state where they could not be used as timbering, were given to the unemployed as firewood.⁷⁰ This policy was in distinct contrast to other companies in the "Pass" which in many instances ⁷¹ seemed to go out of their way to persecute the unemployed.

The "Pass" as one of the most bountiful game-producing areas in the world provided a great temptation for its destitute. A climax was reached in 1932 when fifteen people were apprehended in a single day for various violations under the Game Act.⁷² Several were sentenced which drew the ire of public opinion illustrated by the editor of the Fernie Free Press.

While it may be good plan to insist that the full provisions of the game act be enforced, it seems that in view of the hard times in this district a little more leniency might be exercised. Many families are bordering on starvation and have not the money wherewith to pay three-fifty for a licence. It is a great temptation for many of these people to take a chance in the bush and whether the game happens to be a doe or a buck means little to them. It is food they are after. If the game department carries out its present policy of strict enforcement of the act it will become very unpopular in this district at least.⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹For example, a "slack dump" at Hosmer which had been left untouched for eighteen years and seemingly forgotten, was resorted to by some unemployed in search of fuel. Police were promptly brought in to prosecute the "predators". "Additional Locals," FFP, Sept. 30, 1932, p. 8.

⁷²"Game Violations, Local and General," FFP, Nov. 25, 1932, p. 5.

⁷³"Game Authorities Draw Abuse, Local and General," FFP, Nov. 25, 1932, p. 5.

Largely as a result of the rash of convictions and the consequent outcry of the public, the provincial government began a policy of issuing free fishing licences to the unemployed.⁷⁴

Late in the fall of 1932 a number of families in the "Pass" expressed their desire to be deported, a request which under the conditions of the time did not require lengthy deliberation. British subjects who had resided in Canada less than four years were given transportation to British territory, while those who had been naturalized were sent to their home countries⁷⁵ at the expense of the federal government.

A somewhat paradoxical situation developed in Fernie near the end of what had been a very depressing year. The Imperial Oil Company announced that they would build a new plant⁷⁶ and within a month two bakeries were opened.⁷⁷ However the closure of a branch of the Scott Fruit Company⁷⁸ was followed immediately by the announcement by the Crow's Nest Trading Company that they were reducing their department store size: "Due to depressed conditions the keeping open of these departments is not warranted. Operation costs must be lessened. We are attempting to do so by disposing of \$30,000.00 worth of merchandise...."⁷⁹ With these commercial setbacks

⁷⁴"Fernie Jobless Protest," FFP, Aug. 27, 1937, p. 1.

⁷⁵Three families totalling nineteen residents requested deportation in December 1932. "No Relief Without Work," FFP, Dec. 23, 1932, p. 1.

⁷⁶"Imperial Oil Spend \$14,000," FFP, July 15, 1932, p. 1.

⁷⁷"Additional Locals," FFP, July 22 and Aug. 5, 1932, p. 8.

⁷⁸Ibid., Oct. 14, 1932, p. 1.

⁷⁹"Crow's Nest Trading Company," FFP, Oct. 7, 1932, p. 8.

and the announcement of further reductions in city administrative personnel, wages and the number of working days of relief employees,⁸⁰ any feeling of optimism rapidly disappeared.

In the provincial legislature Thomas Uphill made an urgent plea on behalf of the residents of the "Pass" particularly the Fernie, West Fernie and Coal Creek areas, requesting that the province urge Ottawa to advance increased relief to the communities: "miners, many between the age of forty-five

and sixty, had had a severe three years, numbers being laid off and others just working one day a week. Half of the city of Fernie... was on relief... and the drain on municipal funds was beyond meeting without additional aid."⁸¹

The dominion government announced a new arrangement in November whereby the outlay for food, clothing and general maintenance of single homeless unemployed men would be reduced and the excess outlay would be borne by the province. In cases where the administrative board believed that a man was not suited to camp life he was looked after by a relief organization which would provide a like amount.⁸² The effect of the

⁸⁰Relief employees were reduced to two days' work per week. All reductions in wages came into effect October 1 and were as follows, per month: electrician, from \$190 to \$150; engineer, from \$175 to \$150; engineer trowleman, from \$117 to \$100; city clerk, from \$160 to \$150; health officer, \$50 to \$35; fire chief, from \$152 to \$135; truck driver, from \$95 to \$80. "City Council Meeting," FFP, Oct. 7, 1932, p. 1.

⁸¹"Ferne Unable to Give Relief to Residents," Daily Prov., Oct. 14, 1932, p. 13.

⁸²A man unsuited to camp life received 20 cents per day for food and an additional 20 cents for shelter. British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Meeting of the Privy Council," Attorney-General's Papers, art. 374, Nov. 4, 1932.

new relief scale was to shift more of the relief burden onto the ratepayers of the various municipalities.⁸³ Official statements by the federal government that they would meet the cost of one-third of direct relief were misleading in that they spent one-third of a new maximum which was appreciably below the old relief allowance.⁸⁴

The announcement of a reduction in the relief scale was met by a stream of abuse in the Crowsnest Pass, much of which was directed through the Member of Parliament and a member of the ruling Conservative party, the Minister of Trade and Commerce, Mr. H. H. Stevens. Stevens met the unemployed in December⁸⁵ and promised to press for a more favourable financial arrangement. He used the arguments that the more severe climatic conditions than the Coast required additional clothing, shelter and food and as a semi-isolated interior industrial city, Fernie had higher commodity prices than more densely populated areas.⁸⁶ The provincial administration was per-

⁸³The new allowance was \$9 for the first adult, \$3.50 for the second and \$2.50 for each child under 21. The previous schedule for a man and his dependent wife was: food \$17, shelter \$9, water \$1.50, for a total of \$30. Ibid., art. 360, Nov. 25, 1932.

⁸⁴At the same time the dominion government announced the creation of "Human Interest Bonds" which would be sold by the Chambers of Commerce at \$1 each and it was hoped, would alleviate some of the financial strain on the government. "Human Interest Bonds," ibid., art. 331, Nov. 14, 1932.

⁸⁵"Hon. H. H. Stevens Busy Here," FFP, Dec. 9, 1932, p. 1.

⁸⁶The Fernie unemployed presented numerous suggestions to improve the relief system: single men living at home should receive the same amount of relief as those described as homeless; the second adult in the family should get the same allowance as the first; men should receive cash instead of relief "script" on the stores; and the camp system of relief should

sueded by the Fernie and District Unemployed Association that an additional five dollar grant per family should be provided to extend over the winter by refusing to do any except absolutely necessary work until their demands were met.⁸⁷

At this juncture, over \$6,000 per month was being spent to care for the unemployed.⁸⁸ A maximum of 300 families were assisted during the year representing between 1,400 and 1,600 people or an average of about 280 families per month. The only other significant source of relief assistance during the year had been the Christmas Cheer and Relief Fund which had supplemented aid from the government relief agencies.⁸⁹ Until March 1933 the Fernie City Council had been unable to convince either of the higher levels of government of its critical predicament. However, with the announcement that the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company would cease operations at Coal Creek and that the Great Northern Railway would remove their tracks, the threatened disappearance of the city prompted provincial officials to assume responsibility for the entire unemployment problem in the district.⁹⁰

be replaced since men were being treated on the same level as "convicts" or "chattel slaves". "No Relief Without Work," FFP, Dec. 23, 1932, p. 1.

⁸⁷"Five Dollars a Month Granted, Local and General," FFP, Dec. 30, 1932, p. 5.

⁸⁸See Table XIV.

⁸⁹"Relief Discussed," FFP, Feb. 24, 1933, p. 1.

⁹⁰Upon assuming responsibility the government immediately restored the five dollars in assistance previously terminated in the spring. "Government Will Help," FFP, Ap. 7, 1933, p. 1.

Owing to the continued depression and generally decreasing demand for coal it was decided to abandon operations at Coal Creek Colliery in late 1932. All materials and equipment were recovered from Numbers One and Two South mines and permanent seals were erected in early January 1933.⁹¹ During early 1933 only two mines were operated; Number Three mine produced coal until the end of March when the Company decided to close the operation and materials were removed and the mine sealed off in June. Number One East mine operated on a limited scale until the end of March when a permanent shutdown was contemplated.

The possibility of permanent shutdown of the sole means of sustenance in the city presented a most serious municipal crisis. Bonded debt stood at \$502,500. With the undoubted drastic effect shutdown of the mines would have on civic revenue and provision for the payment of municipal debts, the possibility of default in interest payments threatened ominously. Educational facilities and essential public services were also in severe jeopardy.⁹²

The investment of the Company was considerable, estimated conservatively including mine plant, equipment, five miles of standard railway, rolling stock and buildings, at about two million dollars. Assuming a depreciation of fifty percent the Company's physical assets amounted to approximately one million dollars. The magnitude of their investment alone made it exped-

⁹¹British Columbia, Department of Mines, ARMM, 1933, 1934, pp. A338-A340.

⁹²"The Sword Descends," FFP, Mar. 31, 1933, p. 1.

ient that the Company shutdown operations only as a last resort. The president, W. B. Wilson, explained the circumstances of suspension of operations to City Council, the Board of Trade and members of the press on March 30, 1933: "The Company,

after sustaining serious loss in the joint operations of Coal Creek Mines regret the necessity is forced upon us to close.... The circumstances leading up to this unpleasant condition may be referred to as follows: (1) A steady depreciation in fuel orders through the world wide depression that is affecting Canada and other nations. (2) A development of Alberta gas areas that are displacing coal as fuel and the installation of oil fuel by transportation companies that a few years ago took from 300,000 to 600,000 tons of coal per year from Coal Creek and Michel mines.... One of the contributing causes of the railroads... [reducing orders] may be assigned to the imposition of increased duties... [on] coal going to the States which was put into force as a countervailing duty on Canadian exports. The application of this duty reduced the number of employees at Coal Creek to the extent of three hundred, in addition to decreasing the working time for the reduced number of employees. The federal government, to aid in the securing of greater mid Canada markets, had put into force a subvention which will possibly enable the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company to increase its normal markets to Winnipeg and contingent fuel consuming areas to the extent to possibly thirty percent of the market permanently lost to the United States through the countervailing duties being put into force. This useful help will not aid the Company to operate more than Michel mine on sufficient time to give the employees a desirable living wage. To help mitigate the trying situation that has been brought about by circumstances beyond the Company's control, the Company is considering the question of turning over to the employees cast out of work, blocks of tillable land under some special arrangement.⁹³

The operating policy of the Company for the three years preceding the shutdown had been to allot seventy-five percent of the coal orders to Michel collieries⁹⁴ and twenty-five per-

⁹³"Ferne Coal Mines to be Closed on Friday," Daily Prov., Mar. 28, 1933, p. 1.

⁹⁴Due to Michel's higher quality, lower ash residue and more easily retrievable coal.

sent to Coal Creek. The total tonnage of the combined output for the two collieries was nearly 470,000 tons in 1931 and 340,000 in 1932,⁹⁵ hence the mines at Coal Creek had produced approximately 100,000 tons in each of the previous two years as compared to nearly 400,000 tons in 1920. When orders fell below 100,000 tons in 1933 the shareholders voted to cease operations. The collapse of Fernie's only industry could not be palliated by possible absorption into Michel colliery since a marked retrenchment had also occurred there; over one hundred workers had been permanently dismissed in September 1932 and the remaining miners were employed only three to five days per week. Michel colliery would therefore fill all of the orders diverted from Coal Creek without increasing the numbers employed.⁹⁶

Fernie in 1933 was a very well constructed city, boasting a highly developed system of public utilities, an airfield, city parks and recreation areas, all capable of sustaining a much larger population.⁹⁷ Many of the residents had sizeable investments in their homes, their only remaining material possession, and were unwilling to abandon the city.

Initial attempts to obtain orders were unsuccessful as pressure applied to the Canadian Pacific Railway was warded

⁹⁵See Table XIX.

⁹⁶"Fernie Mines to be Closed on Friday," Daily Prov., Mar. 28, 1933, p. 1.

⁹⁷The official assessment figures of almost \$2,700,000, with improvements alone being \$1,873,596 is an indication of the substantial construction of the city. "Shutdown Order Stunning Blow to Fernie Residents," Daily Prov., Mar. 30, 1933, p. 1.

off by the railway's arguments that the Crow's Nest Pass Company had been owned by the Great Northern, a competitor, to whom it had supplied coal. Canadian Pacific argued that they obtained coal from Coleman Collieries, a company which was entirely dependent upon their market, and if the railway turned to Coal Creek for orders a similar affliction would descend on Coleman.⁹⁸ However through the combined efforts of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company, the Fernie Board of Trade, Tom Uphill and H. H. Stevens, an agreement was eventually arrived at with Canadian Pacific to place orders at the Coal Creek mines bringing total orders to about 125,000 tons. Employment would be created for approximately three hundred men working half time or one hundred fifty working full time.⁹⁹ A campaign was conducted in the House of Commons to encourage a permanent market in the East for Crowsnest coal, and resulted in a subvention equivalent to \$1.10 per ton on all coal shipped 1,200 miles or to the Lakehead.¹⁰⁰

The publicity given the apparent shutdown of the mines and resulting abandonment of Fernie and Coal Creek brought pressure upon government at all levels. Assumption of the unemployment problem in the area by the federal government followed and the pressure of public opinion directed against the Coal Company and Canadian Pacific led to a reversal of their original stance

⁹⁸"Coleman's Narrow View," FPF, Ap. 7, 1933, p. 1.

⁹⁹"Coal Mines at Fernie will be Operated Again," Daily Prov., June 20, 1933, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰"Hon. Stevens Replies," FPF, June 9, 1933, p. 1.

and re-opening of the mines. Residents of the district benefitted from increased government aid,¹⁰¹ but more importantly they felt a renewed confidence in the belief that concern was felt for their plight.

¹⁰¹City Council reduced light and water rates to five cents per kilowatt hour with a minimum charge of 50 cents monthly for light and \$1.00 monthly for water. "Take Over Swimming Pool," FRP, Ap. 21, 1933, p. 1.

CHAPTER III

PROTRACTIVE RECOVERY

The shutdown of Coal Creek mines in the spring of 1933 marked the lowest point employment reached during the depression years as cessation of the last remaining industry signified the complete economic collapse of the Crowsnest Pass. From this absolute low in the fortunes of the area came a gradual decrease in the number of relief recipients.

If the shutdown marked the turning point in the fortunes of the area it was hardly noticeable in the months immediately postdating it. Fernie felt some respite from the clutches of the depression when the province assumed control of relief payments during the mine closure and the city managed to lighten the load on the shoulders of the local unemployed. But news that the full cost of unemployment relief for single homeless men after September 1, 1933 would again be borne on a three-way basis, the municipality assuming an equal share with the higher levels of government, nullified the effects of any economic recovery.¹ The re-assumption of relief expenditures opened the possibility that Fernie, hard pressed to meet interest payments on past debts, would be placed in the hands of

¹"Municipalities to Pay Share Relief for Single Destitute," FFP, Sept. 8, 1933, p. 1.

a commissioner.²

Discontent arose among the unemployed of the district during the summer of 1933 when authorities revoked the five dollar bonus which had been created to aid the "Pass" area in the fight against the rising cost of living and seasonal hardship. A short work stoppage was held on public works projects and the principal support came from the wives of relief workers.³ A delegation from the Fernie and District Unemployed Association carried resolutions from local organizations⁴ to table the needs of the district before the government in Victoria.⁵

The status of many of the original applicants to the province for assistance had altered considerably by late 1933. The federal government had reduced their contribution to relief expenditures⁶ and a new registration of unemployed was proposed

²"Fernie may be Placed Under Commissionership," Daily Prov., Dec. 15, 1933, p. 8.

³Women actively picketed and were very strong in their denunciation of the relief allowances, but when the "necessity" of a new football field which was underway as a public works project drew a few men back to work the back of the strike was broken. "Unemployed Strike," FFP, June 30, 1933, p. 1 and "Local and General," FFP, July 14, 1933, p. 5.

⁴Notable was the resolution of the Fernie Branch of the Canadian Legion which advocated monetary revision, a six hour day and shorter work week, abolishment of piece work and overtime, establishment of an age for leaving school, national insurance and a retirement age. "Legion Resolution," FFP, Aug. 18, 1933, p. 1.

⁵"Delegation to Victoria," FFP, Aug. 18, 1933, p. 1.

⁶Notification was received by the province on August 1, 1933 that contributions to unemployment relief on a percentage basis would cease and be replaced by a specified monthly sum. The grant would correspond to the dominion's estimate of a reasonable expenditure and because federal authorities believed outlays to be exorbitant, a considerable cut-back was expected. The previous arrangement whereby each level of government con-

to eliminate anyone no longer deserving government assistance. The new relief list was endorsed by the government largely at the insistence of a public led by the business establishment and the permanent employees, the taxpaying segment of society. Mr. S. G. Blaylock, General Manager of Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Trail, represented a large portion of voters in his following observations of the situation:

Work by the unemployed is extremely expensive. Now it is unbelievable that most of the men in these camps are slackers. I believe that most of them would return work for the value received, but unfortunately there is no way in the present circumstances to protect such men from the professional slackers until a plan is in force to pay for work done. I believe good results could be obtained if there could be segregation of those willing to work. If this could be done, and these men given better quarters and grub and living conditions. I think that we would then find that these men, who realized that the expense of their keep was being carried by those who did work, would give a good account for the money spent on them. I would not hesitate to give the slacker camps a very poor fare.⁷

Basic to the decision to reregister the unemployed was the increasing debt being incurred by all levels of government. Premier T. D. Pattullo's announcement on May 29 explained that those on relief would have two months to search for work, at which time only those who could prove themselves deserving would receive aid. The money saved by paring the undeserving would be used to broaden the works program and ensure that all

tributed one-third was changed; thereafter the province was to contribute sixty percent and the municipality forty percent of the total outlay. British Columbia, Department of Labour, ARML, 1934, 1935, n. p.

⁷Associated Boards of Trade for Eastern British Columbia, Proceedings of the Annual Convention for 1934, Trail, The Associated Boards of Trade of Eastern British Columbia, 1935, p. 21.

who were physically fit were working.⁸ The Premier stated:

There is no doubt whatever... that the present position of affairs is breaking down the morale of our people. So far as is possible within the resources of the province, necessary works will be carried out, and it is understood also that Ottawa will give a program of its own.⁹

The city of Fernie was placed in an impossible situation by the implementation of a policy to stop relief to single transients who did not meet the requirements for the relief camps and the simultaneous return of the Fernie relief problem to the taxpayers. The only alternative to default of interest payments and failure to meet relief demands was to recommend that a commissioner be appointed to handle the city's affairs. This was decided as the best means of arranging a settlement with the bond holders, relieving the taxpayers of over fifty mills per year on the present assessment, and lessening the burden on the remaining taxpayers whose outlay would have been prohibitive within a year¹⁰ at the rate properties were being turned back to the city for tax sale.¹¹

⁸At the end of April, 109,862 persons were on relief in British Columbia. Of these, 21,052 were single men and 7,162 were in federal road camps. "B. C. Relief for Thousands to end August 1st," Daily Prov., Dec. 28, 1934, p. 1.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Tax collections in the city for 1933 were \$31,157 which was just over 56 percent of the tax levy which totalled \$55,593.82. The collection was about four percent less than at the same time a year earlier. "Additional Locals," FFP, Aug. 3, 1934, p. 8 and "Recommends Government Commissioner," FFP, Dec. 28, 1934, p. 1.

¹¹In addition to recommending a commissioner, the city had continued its drastic expense cutting. Insurance expenditures on the schools, fire hall, city hall, and power house were

A delegation led by Mayor Douglas met with Premier Pattullo in December 1934 to discuss relief problems and the possibility of appointing a commissioner to handle the affairs of the city.¹² J. V. Fisher, Assistant Minister of Finance, was appointed Commissioner and J. C. Connick, city clerk at Fernie, was appointed Deputy Commissioner on January 18, 1935. Upon his appointment and investigation of the city's traumatic state which was characterized by the drop in assessed value of taxable property by one-third, cash receipts from taxes by one-half of the amounts assessed, and the curtailment of government grants, Fisher declared that the only feasible policy was one of "pay as you go".¹³

Little improvement in the status of the unemployed of the Crowsnest Pass was felt during the winter of 1934-1935. Relief instruments which had progressively improved since 1933 provided a larger subsistence allowance to more unemployed than any

slashed, representing a gross saving estimated at \$656.70 in three years. The fire truck driver was also laid off and the chief took over his duties at a reduced salary of \$125 from his previous \$155 monthly. "City Cuts Down Insurance," FFP, Ap. 20, 1934, p. 1 and "Council Cuts Fire Department," FFP, July 6, 1934, p. 1.

¹²"Fernie Plans Refunding Loan," Daily Prov., Dec. 18, 1934, p. 9.

¹³"May Work to Pay Taxes," FFP, May 3, 1935, p. 1. In order to straighten out the affairs of the city the commissioner authorized the cancellation of \$341,000 in outstanding bonds which were held in the municipal sinking funds. The gross debt of \$538,000 was reduced to \$197,000 by cancelling the city bonds held in the sinking fund. Another \$82,459 in the sinking fund in other securities further reduced the overall debt to approximately \$117,000. "Government Cancels Bonds Issued by Fernie," Daily Prov., Jan. 3, 1936, p. 18.

single previous winter.¹⁴ A winter bonus allowance of five dollars was granted in January and the maximum outlay which had previously been reduced was restored to sixty dollars.¹⁵ A wood-cutting camp was again established at Hosmer. The electricity rate was reduced in Fernie¹⁶ and plans were made to have the unemployed work out taxes. Charitable organizations in the "Pass" were able to maintain active relief work. Notable was the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire which donated books to the Legion Library, confitures to the nurses' home and the hospital, gave prizes to high ranking students in Coal Creek, Holy Family and Central Schools, provided a sizeable sum for the Alexandra Solarium, and gave relief to undernourished babies and school children.¹⁷

All basic industries except coal mining improved during 1935. The provincial industrial payroll showed a slight increase over the previous year and a sizable one over 1933.¹⁸ Wage rates continued an upward trend as the average weekly industrial salary increased over fifty cents.¹⁹

Winter always wreaked hardship on the indigent residents of the "Pass" although conditions were progressively improving.

¹⁴See Table XIV.

¹⁵"Requests Granted," FFP, Jan. 11, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁶It was reduced from ten to eight cents per kilowatt hour. "City Commissioner Keeps Busy," FFP, May 3, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁷"IODE Annual Report," FFP, Feb. 22, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁸British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K7.

¹⁹See Table XXI.

Relief coal was provided by the province and the Coal Company made available four teams of horses to deliver the fuel to the homes of unemployed.²⁰ Charitable organizations maintained a high standard of service to the community and supplemented an over-worked but continually improving provincial agency. Improvement was evidenced in the decision of the Rotary Christmas Cheer Committee, organized in 1933 to supply relief through public subscription during the festive season, to vest its energies in some permanent future organization.²¹

The coal industry did not share in the improved industrial scene and experienced a negligible production increase during 1936. As industrial activity increased in other localities and money again began to flow, the standard of living rose and prices became increasingly prohibitive to the large numbers of unemployed on relief in the "Pass". Consequently the most significant activity in the city of Fernie during the year was agitation to obtain a higher relief allowance.²²

Complaints were sent to Premier Pattullo asking for the special consideration similar to previous years regarding an extra allowance for clothing, fuel and food²³ and the usual

²⁰"Seen and Heard," FFP, Sept. 27, 1935, p. 8. The quantity for each recipient was regulated by the size of the house and family. "Local and General," FFP, Sept. 25, 1936, p. 5.

²¹Christmas 1935 saw the committee send out four hundred thirty turkeys and forty orders of merchandise to single unemployed men. "Rotary Xmas Cheer Committee," FFP, Dec. 27, 1935, p. 5.

²²"Tom Uphill on Rampage," FFP, Nov. 6, 1936, p. 1.

²³"Communication," FFP, Jan. 17, 1936, p. 4.

complaints were heard against the local relief authorities and the system of public works in winter.²⁴ In January two hundred fifty unemployed staged a protest parade. The Honourable F. McPherson, Minister of Labour, visited Fernie and rectified some of the abuses temporarily.²⁵ In the spring the unemployed again vigorously protested government action in introducing a ten-hour work day at twenty-five cents per hour in their work camps, which contravened British Columbia minimum wage and hours of work laws.²⁶

British Columbia's relief situation eased during 1935, particularly in unorganized territories where the average monthly number of married relief recipients was reduced by fourteen percent.²⁷ Although the decrease in the numbers on relief in the whole province amounted to six percent, the situation in municipalities showed little improvement; a slight decrease in the numbers of married unemployed was offset by a disproportionate increase in cost.²⁸

The unemployment situation continued to improve during 1936; the decrease in the average monthly number of relief recipients was over ten percent while the reduction in unorganized

²⁴"Fernie Asks Pattullo for Better Standard of Relief Conditions," Daily Prov., Nov. 14, 1935, p. 7.

²⁵"Unemployed Communication," FFP, Jan. 31, 1936, p. 4.

²⁶"Communication," FFP, June 12, 1936, p. 8.

²⁷Since 1933 there was a drop of 16.5 percent in the average monthly number of relief recipients in the province. British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K84.

²⁸Ibid.

territories was almost double the eight percent shown in municipalities.²⁹ A great deal of optimism was generated among the oppressed in the early weeks of 1936 by Premier Pattullo's announced intention to institute a medical care plan. The proposal for a contributory system was directed to the needs of wage earners. Public opinion led by the mass of the unemployed opposed the plan and when the Legislative Assembly failed to give it the required support, it was shelved.³⁰

Conditions continued to improve in the province during early 1937; the numbers employed in each industry were the highest since 1929³¹ and relief totals throughout the winter were within a few persons of being the lowest since 1931. The continued success of the retraining programs led to a redefinition of relief assistance under three classifications: unemployment aid, agricultural aid and relief, and assistance to unemployables. The steadily increasing employment rate was also exemplified by the federal government's announcement in August that the monthly grant for relief was being further reduced.³²

As the outlook in the country brightened the cost of

²⁹Ibid., 1936, p. T83. This program remained in effect until 1939 when a new agreement replaced the grant-in-aid, the dominion paying forty percent of the outlay to residents and fifty to transients. In March 1939, the province took responsibility for all unemployables paying eighty percent of cost for municipal cases and total cost for provincial cases in municipalities. Ibid., 1940, p. G119.

³⁰See chap. IV.

³¹"B. C. Relief is Growing Less," FPF, Aug. 20, 1937, p. 1.

³²"Cuts B. C. Relief Grant \$30,000," FPF, Aug. 20, 1937, p. 1.

living rose. The labour department's family budget of staple foods, fuel, light and rent was over two dollars above the 1933 figure which was the low point during the depression.³³ However a rising standard of living over the remainder of the country rendered the situation in Fernie more critical because the industrial and thus the wage-earning segments of the population were still dormant. As residents of the Crowsnest Pass became more distraught, a corresponding lack of understanding grew in the relatively prosperous remainder of the province. In the early "thirties" when the depression was general some idea of problems in an economically stagnant community were recognized, since most residents were able to identify the plight of indigents with their own serious problems. But by 1937 when conditions had improved over most of the province, very little sympathy was given to the Crowsnest Pass.

Complaints against the inadequate relief allowances in face of a rapidly rising standard of living reached a climax in April 1937 when the Fernie and District Unemployed Association organized a strike, picketed the publicly owned buildings in the community, and demanded: "...an increase in relief

allowances at least commensurate with the constant rise in the cost of living,... and the institution of [a] work and wages program to give us a few days extra work to meet other household necessities and requirements.³⁴

Failure to recognize the unique problems of the "Pass" led to

³³The labour department's budget in October 1929 was \$21.96; in 1933, \$15.41; and in 1937, \$17.51. "Living Cost Higher," FFP, Nov. 26, 1937, p. 1.

³⁴"Unemployed Statement," FFP, Ap. 16, 1937, p. 8.

simultaneous strikes against the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company and the unemployment relief projects as an expression of discontent with the general living conditions and status of the residents.³⁵ The decision of the unemployed association and mine union followed prolonged efforts to secure some improvement in living conditions either by increased living allowances or a supplementary program of work and wages. The labour dispute was settled by a slight increase in wages after a short stoppage but the unemployment relief controversy extended through May into June and consideration was given to withdrawing children of the unemployed from school unless demands were met.³⁶ The strike climaxed on June 11, 1937 when a mass demonstration was held on the grounds of the provincial government buildings and a promise was extracted to investigate conditions in the district. An interesting situation developed in negotiations when the majority of men agreed to the promises but the women as a block refused to accept the offers. Their refusal reflected the serious domestic crises affecting mothers in the district.³⁷

Dissent was more pronounced in the spring and summer of 1938 as the government began to close the relief project camps and as relief loans to the municipalities were curtailed. A mass migration of single unemployed men was made to Vancouver

³⁵"May Postpone Fernie Strike," Daily Prov., Ap. 12, 1937, p. 3.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷"Fernie Relief Workers Hold Demonstration," Daily Prov., June 12, 1937, p. 3.

under predominant communist leadership,³⁸ reaching six thousand by May and eventually ending in violence and a riot during a "sit down" strike.

News that the provincial government had rescinded a ten percent special allowance in recognition of severe climatic conditions was met with loud disapproval in the "Pass". Weather conditions in the area had not mellowed, the winter snow was on the ground and temperatures were thirty degrees below freezing. A group three hundred strong marched on the government buildings where protests were met by the reply that consideration would be given to payment of an allowance to married unemployed with families. Board of Trade officials proclaimed that if the new relief regulations were enforced a "hopeless financial situation would result" and Fernie would have to revert to the status of an unorganized territory.³⁹ The Honourable F. McPherson, Minister of Public Works, was told when he visited Fernie to investigate the complaints, that eighty-five percent of the taxes collected were utilized to meet relief charges and with the new agreement requiring Fernie to meet more of the relief load, an additional fifteen to eighteen thousand dollars a year would be needed. This sum would require one hundred fifteen percent of present local taxes which were already much higher than the tax rate per capita in the

³⁸Strikes were led by the communist inspired National Unemployed Workers' Association and the Relief Project Workers' Union. Margaret A. Ormsby, British Columbia: A History, Van., Evergreen Press, 1958, p. 468.

³⁹"Relief Plan Forces Fernie to the Wall," Daily Prov., Ap. 6, 1938, p. 22.

province generally. A committee from the unemployed met the minister and were advised that it was the intention of the government to open a camp in the near future to provide part-time work, and that government grants in aid of the unemployed recreation rooms and the unemployed shoe repair shop would be considered.⁴⁰

Despite the continued large-scale unemployment in the "Pass" there were indications that the depression had eased. The first tax sale in several years was held in Fernie during September 1938. The sales had been postponed during the worst days of the depression after a great deal of pressure had been exerted by residents on the government.⁴¹ Although approximately one hundred were adversely affected, relief for single unemployed men was discontinued July 1, 1938.⁴² Relief administrators terminated wood-cutting and hauling projects which had been in operation for five years.⁴³

Provincial authorities checking on underpaid employees in one small community in the "Pass" in 1938 had found that over a dozen employers were paying less than the minimum wage.⁴⁴ A year later relief investigators again visited the "Pass" and came away with the impression that the Fernie residents were

⁴⁰"Hon. McPherson Visits Fernie," FFP, Ap. 29, 1938, p. 1.

⁴¹"Little Interest in Land Tax Sale," FFP, Sept. 30, 1938, p. 4.

⁴²"To Lose Relief July 1," Daily Prov., June 15, 1938, p. 30.

⁴³"Arbitrary Methods," FFP, Oct. 7, 1938, p. 1.

⁴⁴"Local and General," FFP, Mar. 25, 1938, p. 5.

too lenient and sympathetic toward the unemployed who were getting "fat" on relief and satisfied with their parasitic condition. The statement was met with a bitter denunciation by residents. Several indigents had become satisfied with relief assistance and showed little incentive to become self-sufficient but there was also a considerable lack of understanding of the situation by provincial authorities.⁴⁵ Inequities in the relief system definitely existed. A notable example was the case of a Fernie man discovered in 1939 to have been obtaining relief since 1934 while having a considerable sum of money in the bank drawing interest.⁴⁶

The economy of the province generally was becoming increasingly stable, although unsettled conditions in Europe and the Far East combined with exceptionally dry summers in 1938 and 1939 caused a considerable recession in the lumber industry. The paradoxical condition of the Crowsnest Pass compared with the province generally was exposed in a brief formulated in 1939. Endorsed by the Fernie Branch of the Canadian Legion, the Fernie Board of Trade, and the Fernie local of the United Mine Workers of America, the informative document was presented to a Vancouver meeting of the Unemployed Federation of British

⁴⁵The local unemployed cited difficulty in obtaining work, citing examples of Fernie residents who had journeyed to Vancouver Island only to end up on relief and that there were six men waiting for every new job available in the metallurgical industry in the province. "Communication," FFP, Jan. 27, 1939, p. 4.

⁴⁶He was fined four hundred dollars with the option of eight month's imprisonment. "Chisellers Sentenced," FFP, Ap. 28, 1939, p. 1.

Columbia. It outlined the depressed condition of the coal mining industry despite the value as an all-purpose coal of the highest quality on the continent: "The sturdy city of Fernie

was built on coal mining, employment reaching its peak in 1917 when 1,760 men were engaged in the mines. Layoffs... reduced the number of miners to 156 now working at Coal Creek. The dwellings in the vicinity of the mines are being gradually dismantled.... Some 1,550 persons in Fernie district are now dependent on relief and 140 more are on subsistence allowances provided by the government field welfare services.⁴⁷

At another conference of unemployed held at Cranbrook in June, proposals were made to increase the basic scale of relief and to begin a work and wages program which would abolish the last vestiges of the relief system.⁴⁸

By the spring of 1939 indications that the economy of the Prairie Provinces had strengthened considerably were denoted by the vacant tourist camps in the "Pass". During the depths of the depression an endless stream of traffic moved through the area in search of work and escape from a more severe climate.

The mining industry finally began to show signs of recovery in the summer of 1939. Increased demands on the coal industry came as a result of the large-scale armament build-up in the late "thirties". Sources of fuel were in short supply necessitating a re-invigorated coal industry. An announcement by the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company that twelve miners from Fernie, formerly employed at Coal Creek and on relief, would

⁴⁷"Tom Uphill Talks at Nelson," FFP, Mar. 10, 1939, p. 8.

⁴⁸"Cranbrook Conference," FFP, June 9, 1939, p. 1.

be hired at Michel Colliery, marked the largest such hiring of unemployed men since the depression began, and indicated that orders for coal from the "Pass" were again being made.⁴⁹ By 1941 production in the mines had topped one million tons for the first time since 1913 and the names on the company payroll numbered over one thousand for the first time since 1932.⁵⁰

⁴⁹"Local and General," FFP, July 14, 1939, p. 5 and also see Table XVII.

⁵⁰See Table XVIII.

CHAPTER IV

GOVERNMENT AID TO THE DESTITUTE

Basic to the persistence of severe conditions in the province and the country in the early depression was the failure of government to assume control of the economy or responsibility for the destitute. Canada traditionally was governed by a strict free-enterprise system and economic guidelines were considered a transgression of authority. At the beginning of the depression governments were concerned with weathering the recession and were guided by policies of immediate political expediency. Consequently no co-ordinated or carefully planned relief policy was set up and although vast sums of money were allotted as conditions deteriorated, adequate control over their expenditures by the provinces and hundreds of municipalities was impossible. Typical of the problems encountered in allocation of public funds were the relief camps in British Columbia.

Early in the summer of 1931 the governments in Victoria and Ottawa had moved in conjunction to set up public works camps to house the tremendous influx of individuals who were draining the resources of the urban centers. A total of two hundred thirty-seven camps capable of accomodating over 18,000 men were erected, equipped and administered by the province

with one-half the total cash outlay supplied by the dominion.¹

The men in the camps were provided with food, shelter, hospital and medical requirements, necessary clothing, and a cash allowance.² An extensive program of road work was undertaken and a special arrangement was made with two transcontinental railways to provide free transportation to the work camps. During the winter months when work was suspended, some camps were closed and the balance sustained the occupants with direct relief. Closure of the camps and shrinking provincial coffers left a number of unemployed with no means of sustenance. Some of them became restive and in the winter of 1932 converged on Victoria in a hunger march.³ Stories of patronage⁴ and corrupt administration of funds combined with the public-

¹British Columbia, Department of Labour, AREL, 1931, 1932, p. E51.

²During preparation of the camps a provisional system was set up whereby men would work an eight-hour, five and one-half day week and receive 35 cents per hour if supporting dependents and 25 cents per hour if not, less \$1 per day for food and shelter. "Work Camp at Crowsnest," FFP, July 31, 1931, p. 4. The basic rate was later fixed at \$2 per day for a forty-eight hour week and was graduated for more highly skilled occupations; 85 cents per day was deducted for board and accommodation. In November 1931, the province was unable to continue the existent rates and thereafter \$7.50 per month was given in return for twenty, six-hour days and the camps were restricted to single men. British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Workers Demand Better Conditions," Attorney-General's Papers, art. 151, Ap. 2, 1932.

³The demands included: three meals a day and no work or \$4 a day, three days a week, no discrimination and all to be sent back to the camps from which they came. Ibid.

⁴"Letter from H. G. Perry to T. D. Pattullo. Mar. 27, 1933," cited in Ormsby, op. cit., p. 447.

ation of the reactionary Kidd Commission Report⁵ tended to accentuate an already tense situation. Partly as a consequence of the unrest but principally because of provincial financial difficulties the federal government assumed the entire cost of relief to single homeless persons in urban centers on November 1, 1932. The situation in the province continued to deteriorate, however, since many who had struggled along on their own efforts through the preceding years found themselves at the end of their resources and were compelled to apply for public assistance. Although the federal government bore the whole financial responsibility for maintenance of the British Columbia relief camps, the province administered and allocated funds. Appointments from the unemployed to administrative positions and awarding of contracts to supply the camps with essentials were matters of contention among the public and accusations flowed freely.⁶ In order to calm fears of misallocation of public funds and administrative appointments, administration of the relief camps was turned over to the Department of National Defence⁷ on May 1, 1933.⁸

Under the D.N.D. single homeless unemployed men entered the camps after proving that they were fit for manual labour, free from communicable disease, and were British subjects,

⁵Ibid., p. 448.

⁶"Letter from R. B. Bennett to S. F. Tolmie," Tolmie Papers, Van., U.B.C., Oct. 28, 1929, p. 3.

⁷Hereafter referred to as D.N.D.

⁸James Eayrs, In Defence of Canada: from the Great War to the Great Depression, Tor., Univ. of Tor. Press, 1967, p. 126.

although the latter stipulations were not always rigidly enforced.⁹ Persons found unacceptable to the D.N.D. remained the responsibility of the province or municipality. The men accepted were placed on the nearest project to the place of application in which there was a vacancy: "Accommodation, clothing, food and medical care were provided in kind and an allowance not exceeding twenty cents per diem" was provided. "Eight hours per day will be worked; Sundays and statutory holidays will be observed; Saturday afternoons will be used for recreation...."¹⁰ Medical, dental and optical facilities were provided by local practitioners retained on a contract basis for services rendered at the site.¹¹

The physical state of the camps was comparatively good in relation to many of the logging, railroad and mining camps. However, investigators did not realize that the lives of ordinary bush workers were rendered tolerable by the prospect of earning a large sum of money and returning to more civilized areas to spend it. Although "the men in... the camp[s] are fairly comfortable, plenty of good food, running hot and cold water, good bunks and clean crockery to eat with..."¹² the

⁹G. M. Lefresne, 5498A/CWO, The Royal Twenty Centers: The Department of National Defence and Federal Unemployment Relief, 1932-1936, Kingston, unpub. Honours B. A. Thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 1962, p. 46.

¹⁰Canada, Policy and Instructions for the Administration of Unemployment Relief Camps for Single, Homeless, Unemployed Men, 1933, p. 1.

¹¹Lefresne, op. cit., p. 60.

¹²British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Letter from Relief Camp Investigator to the Attorney-General," Correspondence, art. 227, Feb. 15, 1932.

atmosphere and cooking methods were seldom conducive to culinary enjoyment. "The soup kitchen always seemed to be

located in unsuitable premises that some politically favoured landlord had rented to the government. The odours of the food cooked last year mixed with the odours of last month and last week. To serve such masses, heavy reliance was placed upon boiled dinners, hash and cereals. Everything was usually overcooked and served on metal plates with twisted forks and knives.¹³

The attitude and temperament of administrators in the camps often varied in relation to their proximity to the inter-provincial boundary. Superintendents of the camps unless of the most liberal disposition, became increasingly curt toward the transients who came into the province and requested admittance to the camps only to stay long enough for a meal and bed, then proceed on their way. However exceptions were known and it was relayed among the men coming west that they could obtain a bed and a couple of meals at the more hospitable centers.¹⁴

Transients who "rode the rods" in from the East were less inclined to the radical ideas that were prevalent on the Coast.

The talk of transients coming West is mostly about the good treatment men get in comparison with the prairies and the East. British Columbia hospitality is known across the continent. French Canadians and Nova Scotians were plentiful and it is noticeable that the majority of these transients are very young people, many of them just [having] left school.... One can hear a lot of intelligent talk in reference to the present depression, lots of suggestions as to what the government ought to do. The prairie element, especially the farming people are loud in their denouncement of the Soviets, blaming them for underselling our farmers' products....

[While in Kamloops] I attended the Central City

¹³Gray, op. cit., pp. 146-147.

¹⁴British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Letter from Relief Camp Investigator to the Attorney-General," Correspondence, arts. 255 & 256, June 21, 1932.

Mission where meals were issued. There is a lot of kicking there mostly among foreigners and Scotchmen. I also noticed that there is a little discrimination at the Mission. The fellows who appear to be civil and try to look as if they appreciated the hand outs they received seem to get the best deal. Known Reds get pretty poor pickings. The difference is very noticeable.

While in Vancouver I distributed leaflets condemning Cooper's garbage relief. I was right outside the relief office on Cambie Street. At least seventy-five percent of the people getting relief refused the leaflets and quite a few told me I was crazy. I was also out selling the Unemployed Worker. I took out fifty copies and had a hard time getting rid of them. Japs, Finns and Swedes would [buy] but some of the people I offered them to would start an argument and perhaps want to fight....

[Upon returning to Nelson I find] The Moscow News and The Worker, published in Toronto, are not getting as good sales as they used to. The Western Worker, printed in San Francisco, seems to be most popular.¹⁵

Large-scale segregation of single men on public works projects at subsistence wages prepared the ground for the establishment of radical organization on the seeds of discontent.¹⁶ The workers' organizations had strong ties with the Communist Party which led to the compilation of an official blacklist of union organizers, although in some camps unofficial working arrangements developed with camp foremen. The union's dual role, first as idealistic propagandists and agitators against the existing economic and social system generally antagonized the administration. Their practical role was largely successful

¹⁵Ibid. is the reference footnote 14 - doesn't seem to fit.

¹⁶Early in the depression the Single Unemployed Workers' Association was formed and this led to a co-ordinating Central Council of Unemployed Organizations in 1931; the Council's leading branch was the National Unemployed Workers' Association which was in turn connected with the Workers' Unity League. Paul Phillips, No Power Greater: A Century of Labor in British Columbia, Van., British Columbia Federation of Labor & Boag Foundation, 1967, p. 105. In 1936 the Relief Camp Workers Union was reorganized into the Relief Project Workers' Union. Ibid., p. 118.

in demanding better conditions, aiding recognition of camp committees, and later under the D.N.D.'s administration, in relaxing rigid discipline.¹⁷ An informer on the radical activities in the camps on the Lower Mainland had these observations:

I heard a lot of disgruntled talk about the National Unemployed Workers' Association. The ideas of the Independent Labor Party seemed to be most favored.... Quite a lot of criticism is directed against leaders of the "N.U.W.A.".... These men are always fairly well dressed, able to buy the odd beer, do a lot of talking around 61 Cordova, but are never in front if any trouble is brewing, and this is noticed and discussed around the camp fires in the jungles, especially among English speaking people. Outside of the Russians, Swedes and Finns, and of course, the agitators, there is very little Red talk heard....¹⁸

Basically the cause of increased radical activity during the depression was in the failure of the economic system to function smoothly. The common man could see an ever-widening gulf between his status and that of the proprietors of industry. Economic disparity opened the doors for the seeds of discontent, but the failure of the traditional labour unions to provide some form of organization fitted to the needs of the relief camp workers further opened them to the communist organizers.

The camp occupants suffered most severely from boredom and loneliness. In most of the camps there were no recreational facilities and the individuals had no resources, although a small proportion of the relief funds was allocated to recreation facilities after 1935. Instances of magazines and news-

¹⁷Relief camp organizations of any kind were prohibited by the DND, but in many, local administrators allowed committees to present abuses.

¹⁸British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Letter from Camp Investigator to the Attorney-General," Correspondence, arts. 255 & 256, June 21, 1932.

papers supplied by charitable organizations were common. Some of the more resourceful individuals turned to such artistic pursuits as wood-carving and charcoal drawing while others spent long hours debating current world problems using ideas borrowed from the few books which were donated. But the great majority whiled away their time story-telling, playing cards, darts and practical jokes. In a communication received by the Fernie Free Press camp workers revealed some of their interests:

Would anyone be kind enough to forward any of the old records as the boys out in relief camp have an old gramophone of which the spring is going rusty for want of something to do. An old radio would be very acceptable, in fact anything to cause a little amusement and while away the hours. Working out in the camp is of a very slow and dull nature with no recompense....¹⁹

The relief camps of the Crowsnest Pass generated comparatively little discontent. One disruption occurred in 1934 when about eighty men walked out of the Broley camp at Crowsnest objecting to the food preparation and quality, but officials were not unduly harsh and the men were quartered in adjacent camps throughout the district.²⁰ As the depression lingered on and the future of the indigents showed no signs of brightening, discontent among the relief camp workers increased. The tense situation reached a peak in 1935 with the announcement by Prime Minister Bennett that the camp workers would be deprived of their vote in the coming election.²¹ In April a

¹⁹"Communication," FFP, Dec. 4, 1931, p. 4.

²⁰"Local and General," FFP, Feb. 2, 1934, p. 5.

²¹"B. C. Communists and Socialists Unite for Enfranchisement," B. C. Workers' News, Jan. 18, 1935, p. 4.

number of interior camp workers converged on the city of Vancouver on a "work and wages" strike and demanded the right to vote and recognition of the camp committees. A clash with Vancouver police was not enough to induce Ottawa to enter negotiations and out of desperation the unsuccessful On-to-Ottawa March was begun on June 3, 1935.

The change in government which brought Mackenzie King to power in the same year simultaneously rendered politically possible the public denouncement of a relief camp system which was increasingly drawing the ire of public opinion. A relief camp committee set up by the new government, while generally vindicating the administration of the camps, recommended that they be replaced by "work and wages" camps. The new scheme adopted by the dominion and administered by the federal Department of Labour established relief workers in railway, farm and forestry camps, marking the end of the unemployment relief camps.

Operation of public work camps by the Department of National Defence ceased June 30, 1936 and the Department of Labour arranged with the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways to carry out maintenance work to provide some employment for the men being discharged. Approximately 2,500 men, about half on forestry development and the balance on public works projects, were provided work and accomodation.²²

²²The men were paid 30 cents per hour for eight hours; 70 cents per day was deducted for board and shelter. A portion of the earnings was withheld as a performance bond and returned following termination at the rate of \$4 per week until it was fully refunded. British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1936, p. T83.

In 1935 a youth training program was introduced by the provincial government in an attempt to cultivate initiative, particularly among the young unemployed. Earlier in the depression the provincial government had aided would-be miners to build access trails to prospective mining areas but discovered that an inordinate sum of money was being spent to build beautiful trails to unprofitable and often non-existent claims. Under the 1935 scheme all details of claims, the stages of development and assay results were submitted and evaluated to obtain a possible grant of fifty percent of the total cost of construction.²³

In May 1935 a sizeable sum was allotted by the Labour Department to the Forest Branch for the employment of young single men, with the object of fitting them for employment in the forest industry. The Labour Department selected the men, preference being given to those between twenty-one and twenty-five who had been residents of the province for ten years and possessed at least partial high school education. Training was given in the construction of buildings, roads, trails and bridges, and instruction in the fundamentals of forest protection, cruising, scaling, mapping and surveying.²⁴ Announcement

²³During 1935 there were eight hundred nine individuals who received grubstakes to enable prospecting for minerals and to placer-mine. Ibid., 1935, p. K84.

²⁴The Labour Department allotted \$90,000 to the program which permitted employment of 380 men until the end of September at a rate of \$1.75 per day, less 75 cents for room, netting them \$15 to \$20 monthly with an additional \$10 allowance for the season. Work was divided into three classifications: Forest Experiment Station Work, Forest Trail Improvement and Forest Ranger Assistants.

of the project was received with great enthusiasm by the people of the Crownest Pass and optimistic predictions were made of the future possibilities of the scheme. Although the plan operated throughout the remainder of the decade and reached a peak participation of five hundred men in twenty-eight camps during 1938, the overall success was limited by a lack of funds and a failure of many of the Rangers, Assistant Rangers and Patrolmen to co-operate out of fear of losing their positions to younger men.²⁵ Nevertheless a few men were placed in the offices of Rangers as assistants, and a number of others were given constructive escape from the relief lines during the summer months.

The forest and mining plan in British Columbia was expanded later in the year into a joint Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Program, on a fifty percent share basis for projects submitted by the provinces and approved by the dominion. Unemployed males and females between the ages of sixteen and thirty of any race, religion or political belief were eligible. Allowances corresponding to the provincial outlays were provided, with the exception that the federal scheme allowed travelling expenses to receive instruction away from home, compensation for accidents, plus all equipment and materials. Fernie was one of four areas of British Columbia in which mining was offered. After completing the mine training, those who qual-

²⁵Out of nine hundred thirty men applying, five hundred nine were enrolled in 1935; one hundred eleven men obtained employment at the end of the course, fifteen left on their own accord and the balance were laid off at the end of the projects. "Says Plan a Success," FPF, Nov. 22, 1935, p. 1.

ified were given a further three month course in field methods including lode and placer prospecting and exploration under a qualified engineer.²⁶ In addition to the mining instruction which was very successful, courses in home economics and carpentry were well attended in the "Pass" area.²⁷

The ability of the women in the "Pass" communities to survive the depression was attested to by their fortitude in organizing projects similar to the male versions. In late 1938 a group of unemployed women from Fernie met to organize an educational and occupational training group which was to be a jointly sponsored dominion-provincial plan.²⁸

On December 31, 1936 a plan came into effect to aid destitute farmers to re-establish on productive land. Grants were supplied for transportation, clearance of new land, and provision of farm stock, lumber and implements. A supplementary scheme to resettle miners in the metaliferous mining areas of the province was significant to the Crowsnest Pass area. However the refusal to compensate miners for their property, particularly in the Fernie area where a considerable sum had been spent in improvements led to the plan's failure in the "Pass".²⁹

²⁶Trainees received 50 cents a day and board plus 50 cents a day bonus at its conclusion if a certificate of proficiency was won. Canada, Department of Labour, Review of the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Program for the Fiscal Year ending March 31, 1939, 1939, p. 3.

²⁷"Communication," FFP, Dec. 16, 1938, p. 8.

²⁸"Notice," FFP, Nov. 18, 1938, p. 1.

²⁹A total of 156 persons were transferred from Fernie district to other parts of the province during 1936 and 1937 at a cost of \$4,077.37. Thirty-seven were sent to other provinces or overseas. "193 Persons Transferred from Fernie in Two Years," FFP, Nov. 19, 1937, p. 1.

Premier Pattullo's proposal for a contributory system of health insurance in 1936 appeared to initiate a new social consciousness in the public of the province. Medical care by the chosen physician or surgeon, free hospital care, the services of diagnostic laboratories, and necessary drugs and medicines were some of the benefits under the proposed system which was to be financed by contributions from employees and employers.³⁰ The plan was not designed to aid the unemployed who direly needed it, but was oriented towards the wage earning portion of society which was capable of providing for its own medical needs. When the Legislative Assembly failed to give the required support and public opinion was not particularly favourable toward the plan, it was permanently shelved.

Failure of the hospital insurance scheme typified government attempts to aid the victims of the depression. The most responsive of elected members did not feel public opinion would approve large-scale measures to aid the destitute, although some social consciousness had been stirred. The minimum assistance provided accomplished very little and large segments of the population were retained on a subsistence level which, due to lack of employment in unskilled trades and opportunity for technical training, caused many to lose all initiative. The few retraining schemes for unemployed, plagued by shortages of

³⁰The employee paid two percent of his wages with a minimum contribution of 35 and a maximum of 70 cents per week; the employer paid one percent for the insured employees with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 35 cents per week. British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K8.

funds and maladministration, did not place many trainees in viable employment. Although the dissemination of public funds to the destitute during the depression set a precedent in the extent of aid provided, considerable improvement was needed in their allocation to ensure their maximum utilization.

CHAPTER V

THE "PASS" MINERS; AT HOME AND AT WORK

Around the life of the miner centered the structure and character of the society in the Crowsnest Pass. In the early days the miner retained a high degree of self respect, and as an integral cog in the industrial wheel, was well aware of his worth. Western steam coal mining fields were models of efficient operation at the turn of the century; the latest of equipment and techniques were utilized and although working conditions were poor, the prospect of high earnings offset their influence. The company-owned communities were comparatively well constructed and offered good accomodation. During and immediately following the First World War, optimum prosperity was reached when unions by numerous strikes influenced management to raise wages to a standard second to none and to improve working conditions considerably.

In the "twenties", the mine workers of the "Pass" experienced a lessening of union vitality as a decline in coal orders forced lay-offs and wage reductions. The recession in the "twenties" also saw mining as an occupation hold a gradually diminishing stature. Many workers were forced to seek other employment and wages were no longer superlative. Improvement in accomodation had not kept pace with the times and was a contentious issue.

It had been the practice particularly in the coal mining areas of the West for the companies to build houses and rent them to the miners. Closed towns were a peculiar characteristic of the West and arose as a result of control by the mine operators of all land in the vicinity of the pithead. Even in areas where housing was made available on other than a leasehold basis, uncertainty of employment and low earnings tended to deter purchase of homes. It was the policy of some operators in the "Pass" to control the men through ownership of their living quarters. In some of the camps men were employed only if they lived in company-owned dwellings, and stores, hotels and service utilities including schools and hospitals were either operated by the company or under licence from it. The feeling of insecurity among the tenant-employees that their lives were dominated in every respect led many operators who realized the strength of the sentiment to calm resentment by selling company houses to employees at reasonable rates. However the sales were often made under severe legal conditions such as a clause allowing the company to resume possession without compensation if meetings were held in a miner's residence. A common complaint that town utilities such as lighting, sewage disposal and water supply were arranged at the will of the company rather than through municipal organizations was not always justified but an aura of domination did prevail.

Houses in mining camps usually were stereotyped rows of box-like structures that exhibited little creative imagination, although a few were spacious, solid and modern in their time. The relatively poor reputation of housing in mining camps was

enhanced little by conditions in the Crowsnest Pass during the depression period. A notable exception was the city of Fernie where a number of large, well constructed homes owned by people in service and professional occupations graced an attractive community, but the majority of the employees of the coal company were not inhabitants of the privately owned residences. Miners for various aforementioned reasons preferred the company's houses which they leased. Exteriors of the houses in the mining communities admittedly were seldom attractive and usually were dirty and unpainted. This was a consequence of the airborne coal dust which rendered maintenance of the exterior impossible. In sharp contrast however, were the interiors. Energy which would have been wasted on external beautification with few exceptions was turned to maintaining immaculate internal conditions.

During the "thirties" homes in the Crowsnest communities generally deteriorated, whether owned by the company or privately. The Corbin strike in 1935 was partly due to neglect of company-owned houses and the refusal to renovate them. Residents of Fernie who owned their homes were barely able to meet tax demands and maintenance of properties ceased completely. Residents of the "Pass" towns received utilities from the companies and because the latter were in poor financial straits, payment of bills was a necessity. Consequently many of the unemployed ceased using electricity, refrained from using baths and a few were forced to completely suspend usage

of water facilities.¹ Home owners and leasers were similarly unable to continue yearly maintenance and properties deteriorated rapidly from neglect.

The life of the miner in the "Pass" district varied only slightly between the communities in which he lived. A majority of the miners employed at Coal Creek Colliery either lived in the company-owned and operated town of Coal Creek, or travelled on its Morrissey, Fernie and Michel Railway from Fernie, the principal service center in the area. The townsite of Michel-Natal, twenty-five miles north of Fernie, and all living quarters, stores, hotels and service facilities were similarly owned or leased from the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company. Residents of the town of Corbin were in every respect dependent on the fortunes of the Corbin Coal and Coke Company.²

Most of the miners in the Crowsnest region were employed underground except at Corbin where the "Big Showing" was mined by an open pit steam shovel operation. Work at the "face" as a full fledged miner engaged less than one-third of the men employed.³ The majority of employees were engaged in providing and maintaining the transportation system and in cleaning, siz-

¹All utilities were rented from, and in applicable cases, rents also paid to the company. Sanitation and water cost \$1 per month for each house and 50 cents per month for each shack. For houses with baths an additional \$1 per month was charged. Electricity per sixteen candle power light cost 50 cents per month. House rentals were approximately \$10 to \$15 per month. Contract between British Columbia Miners' Association of Coal Creek and CNP Coal Co., 1931, n. p., n. pub., n. d., p. 9.

²See chap. II, n. 11.

³Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946, 1947, p. 295.

ing and shipping the coal at the surface.⁴ Working conditions at the "face" were determined by the method of coal extraction which in turn depended partly on local custom but principally on underground conditions. The older system of "room-and-pillar" mining engaged two or three-men groups working independently of other teams but who were highly dependent on each other. Pace, efficiency, safety of working practices and earnings⁵ were largely determined by the individuals on the team who thus developed a strong sense of independence and self reliance.

A high degree of teamwork was also essential in the more modern and highly mechanized longwall mining, but instead of two or three men, as many as thirty were engaged on each team. Mechanization where physical conditions permitted made possible higher wages⁶ for lighter work but also required substitution of the old pioneer individualism with a high degree of discipline; the work of an entire shift could be disrupted by the absence of a few key men. Mechanized longwall techniques were utilized more extensively in the Michel colliery than in Coal Creek where the room-and-pillar methods prevailed.

Owing to the high outflow of inflammable gas and many tragic accidents in the mines of the Crowsnest district, safety practices were extremely important to all miners. The occupat-

⁴Ibid.

⁵"Within the general wage structure they... determine how much they earn, for they are paid according to the tonnage they load out." Ibid.

⁶Most longwall mining is also done on a contract basis. Ibid.

ional hazard of coal miners was higher than that of any other occupation of similar size and nature, and more than three times that of all Canadian males aged twenty to sixty-four.⁷ The rate of accidental death among coal miners in British Columbia was the highest in Canada in the years 1931-1941, and because of the higher outflow of gas in the Crowsnest area than in other mining districts, accidents were common. Thus safety procedures were rigidly upheld and became an integral part of the industry in the district.

Of the social aspects of life in the "Pass", the activities of the East Kootenay Mine Safety Association were undertaken with an inherent seriousness akin to no other social organization. The basically serious nature of the society was mellowed by the social milieu in which its primary activity was held. Beginning in 1921 annual competitions took place, originally to deal with accident victims but the aims were soon equally directed to the more fundamental need for accident prevention.⁸ It was discovered that the majority of accidents in mines was due to inadvertent carelessness and it became the purpose of mine safety associations to make all mine workers conscious of the value of safe methods. Each year demonstrations and competitions were held in first aid application, safety methods and mine rescue work. Most of those taking part were coal and metalliferous miners although a few were

⁷Ibid., p. 296.

⁸British Columbia, Department of Mines, "Mine Safety Associations," ARMM, 1931, 1932, p. A191.

men from quarries and logging camps. In most of the competitions, a number of young people from school age up participated in a junior event which subsequently evolved into the Junior Mine Safety Competition.⁹

In 1919 a Board of Examiners for coal mine officials was established and in the same year certificates for exhibiting competency as coal miners were also introduced and became virtual licences for underground mine workers. The miner had to satisfy the board as to physical fitness, experience in mining, and a general working knowledge of the English language.¹⁰

Over the years Coal Creek Colliery was most affected by "bumps" or "outbursts".¹¹ During 1931 three serious "bumps" occurred,¹² one of sufficient violence to be felt at Fernie, nearly six miles from the area. No lives were lost but large areas of the mine were rendered unworkable for weeks¹³ and much of the track was torn up.

Although miners were becoming conscious of many new saf-

⁹The total taking part in all competitions in 1931 was eight hundred. Ibid.

¹⁰In 1938, one hundred twenty-three candidates wrote the examination and one hundred thirteen were successful. "Board of Examiners," ibid., p. G22.

¹¹See chap. I, n. 11. Holes were often bored in the "face" which conceivably would allow the gas to be released less violently.

¹²In an attempt to gain more information, the Department of Mines installed a seismograph in the colliery in 1932 which would provide some warning and record of impending earth movements.

¹³The expense and hazardous conditions brought on by the "bump" had a bearing on the decision of the CNP Coal Co. to cease operations at Coal Creek in 1933.

ety devices and procedures, the incidence of accidents beyond human precautionary measures was still very high. In a weekend explosion at Michel Colliery in July 1938, three maintenance workers were killed when a lightning bolt was conveyed to a gas pocket at the mine "face" by the metal coal car rails. It was a twist of fate that many more were not killed as a shift of sixty-eight had worked the explosion area during the week.¹⁴ A few weeks later a cave-in at Coal Creek seriously injured a workman in Number One East Mine; it preceded a severe "bump" by three weeks which took the lives of three miners and injured a dozen more who were caught under the falling roof.¹⁵ The following description was given by survivors:

They [felt as though they] had fallen from a height, landing heavily on their feet and then [were] whirled about dizzily. All... suffered grave discomfort from suffocation from coal dust-laden atmosphere.¹⁶

The mine unions, like the mine safety organizations, were a most important aspect of the coal miner's life. All company employees were eligible to join and from the members were selected the officers and committees to meet and discuss with the companies conditions and welfare of the employees. The unions in the "Pass" had a long history and were an important aspect of community life.

The mine union as a vital force had been introduced into the Crowsnest Pass as an instrument to ensure safe working

¹⁴"Three Killed at Michel," FFP, July 8, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁵"Accident Fatal to Three," FFP, Sept. 23, 1938, p. 1.

¹⁶"Brave Men to the Rescue," FFP, Sept. 30, 1938, p. 1.

conditions in the mines after an explosion in 1902 which had claimed one hundred twenty-eight lives. Organized labour gradually became an institution in the life of the "Pass" miner, not only to guarantee a reasonable standard of living, but also as a collective force to ensure safe working conditions in an extremely hazardous occupation, to ensure older miners and disabled men of work they could perform which avoided their being discarded when their usefulness as labourers had ended, and to obtain special considerations for abnormal conditions under the contract system of mining.

The record of wage advancement during the first twenty years of this century paralleled unprecedented prosperity in the coal industry.¹⁷ The average industrial wage for all male employees in British Columbia was almost six dollars less than that of the coal industry in 1920. Decline of the coal markets during the "twenties" saw the unions gradually lose strength and by the time of the "Great Depression," organization had reverted to small local agreements.

The "Pass" area was organized under the jurisdiction of the United Mine Workers of America¹⁸ during the first quarter of this century. The U.M.W. entered Western Canada postdating development of broad coverage bargaining for the coal fields in the central United States¹⁹ after the turn of the century.

¹⁷See Table XXI.

¹⁸Hereafter referred to as the U.M.W.

¹⁹H. A. Logan, The History of Trade Union Organization in Canada, Chic., Univ. of Chic. Press, 1928, p. 193.

At that time mining was confined to Vancouver Island and the Crowsnest region, centering on Michel and Fernie. The Western Federation of Miners had previously attempted organization of the area but stepped aside for the powerful newcomer in 1903 when the U.M.W. obtained a contract with the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company. In 1906 and 1907 the union expanded and signed contracts with most of the smaller companies along the southern route of the Canadian Pacific Railway. As a consequence of this expansion, the mine owners formed themselves into the Western Coal Operators Association and signed a joint collective agreement with the U.M.W. in 1907, the first of its type in Canada. The first major strike in the "Pass" occurred in 1911 when a sympathy stoppage as a result of an unsuccessful attempt by the U.M.W. to organize the Cumberland and Ladysmith locals on Vancouver Island deteriorated into one of the longest, most bitter and expensive strikes in Canadian history.²⁰

During 1918 the miners of District 18²¹ staged a strike in a dispute over the introduction of a compulsory eight-hour day in the mines. In the midst of the local strike the newly formed One Big Union²² called a general strike in Winnipeg, and the resultant publicity and show of strength gained the new union considerable sympathy among the strikers in Western

²⁰This strike caused Canadian Pacific to turn to the Pennsylvania coal fields to provide the Trail smelter and led to the termination of coal orders from the CNP Coal Co. Innis, Settlement and the Frontiers, p. 285.

²¹District 18 included the Vancouver Island, Crowsnest Pass, Southern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan locals of the UMW.

²²Hereafter referred to as the O.B.U.

Canada. Consequently, many miners joined the O.B.U. and precipitated a schism in the U.M.W. What began as a local company dispute became a jurisdictional battle, and when the Winnipeg General Strike collapsed in the summer of 1919, the struggle continued in the mines of the Crowsnest Pass. Virtually every employee of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company not engaged in management was strikebound, making it the most effective stoppage ever called in the "Pass". In 1920 the mines were closed again for several weeks, and two years later the remnants of the O.B.U. movement staged another stoppage. The "Pass" mines appeared to be destined to work stoppages every time the contract between the union and the operators expired.²³

In 1924, the disrupting influence of frequent strikes combined with a lack of coal markets caused a serious shutdown at the Coal Creek Colliery. In the spring on expiry of the previous agreement, employers sought major reductions in wages, similar to the demands thwarted by the successful strike of 1922 and negotiations throughout 1923. Despite John L. Lewis' controversial slogan, "no backward step",²⁴ adopted by the U.M.W. in face of the general recession during the "twenties", the union was forced to yield because of a depleted treasury.²⁵

²³Between 1902 and 1924, only the years 1904-1905, 1908, 1910, 1913-1915, 1918, 1920-1921, and 1923 were free from strikes. Hughes, op. cit., p. 94.

²⁴Logan, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁵Employers initially insisted on a reduction of fifty percent but yielded to an overall reduction of twelve and one-half percent. British Columbia, Department of Labour, ARML, 1924, 1925, p. G40.

Employers were not satisfied with the agreement and although the Michel Colliery was opened, Coal Creek remained closed throughout a seven month work period. Not until the miners broke with the U.M.W. and made an agreement for another wage reduction²⁶ through a newly formed local organization was a settlement reached.

Closure of the Coal Creek Colliery and failure of the union to provide sufficient funds for the striking miners brought to the surface a disturbing problem which grew exceedingly worse as the decade progressed. Many of the striking miners were advised to seek employment elsewhere because of an expected reduction in production when the strike ended, and "arrangements were made by the provincial government to put relief work in hand in order to cope with the... situation."²⁷

Failure to adjust to rapidly changing conditions in the industry signified the end of the U.M.W. as an influence in the Western Canadian coal fields and left a void which was filled by a new union comprised of fragments of the traditional industrial unions. The Mine Worker's Union of Canada²⁸ would never attain a following of the magnitude that the U.M.W. had commanded nor effectively improve conditions for the workers in the Crowsnest district. Suspected initially of connections with the communist movement in the American coalfields, the radical tendency of its program caused uneasiness among workers and near panic in management circles. The new union

²⁶It was for fifteen percent. Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Hereafter referred to as the M.W.U.C.

partially quelled detractors in the late "twenties" when a more distinctly Canadian form was espoused, and affiliation was made with the All-Canadian Congress of Labour soon after its organization, but in 1931 it reverted to ties with the Worker's Unity League, the general representative in Canada of the Red International of labour unions. The League used the method of working within established unions or organized industries where no unions previously existed: "the organization of the unorganized must be the main and central task of the Worker's Unity League of Canada."²⁹

In the "Pass", the union locals at Fernie and Michel were organized separately under the British Columbia Miner's Association³⁰ after the break with the U.M.W. in 1925. Pressure was applied periodically on the local bodies to realign with an international union, particularly after 1929 when the M.W.U.C. became entrenched in Coleman and Corbin. With agreements due to terminate in 1930, the representatives of the local unions in the "Pass" met in Coleman in an unsuccessful attempt to agree on a contract that would encompass the district. A vote in Michel and Fernie in September 1931 to join the M.W.U.C. which was negated after charges of stuffed ballot boxes were laid, the news of the tragic Estevan strike called immediately after affiliation with the M.W.U.C. was made, and the threatened refusal of local employers to negotiate with

²⁹British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1936, p. K67.

³⁰Logan, loc. cit. Hereafter referred to as the BCMA.

the new union, combined to influence miners to vote down the affiliation at a general meeting.³¹

Agitation eased in Coal Creek after repudiation of the M.W.U.C. but it increased in many other centers in the Crows-nest. A strike was called in Coleman in March 1932, and an attempt was made to extend the stoppage throughout the district with optimistic hopes by the union leaders that workers across the country would stage a general strike in support of the miners.³² The newly organized union was short of strike funds which led to rejection of the stoppage by a number of destitute miners and near riots between the disagreeing factions.³³ The five-month strike was eventually broken with the aid of a contingent of R.C.M.P. officers and the mines reopened on the basis of the previous agreement with the exception that known radicals would not be rehired.³⁴ Several leaders were jailed which hastened the rapidly widening split between moderate and radical unionists,³⁵ and the determination of the radicals hardened in the face of reactionary organizations formed to

³¹In a referendum in 1929 requiring a two-thirds majority, 334 voted in favour of joining the MWUC, 259 against, out of a total of 1,350 eligible. "Vote Against New Union," FFP, July 5, 1929, p. 4.

³²"Pass Miners on Strike," FFP, Mar. 25, 1932, p. 1 and "Bellevue Men Strike," FFP, Ap. 3, 1932, p. 1.

³³"Strike Trouble at Bellevue," FFP, May 6, 1932, p. 1 and "The Coleman Mine Trouble," FFP, May 20, 1932, p. 1.

³⁴"Radicals Admit Defeat," FFP, May 27, 1932, p. 1.

³⁵"Alleged 'Reds' Beat Up Moderates at Blairmore," FFP, July 15, 1932, p. 4 and "Trouble Makers on Trial," FFP, Oct. 10, 1932, p. 1.

halt the extremist trends by force.³⁶

There was sound basis for advocates of the existing system to be alarmed. The most flagrant example was the town of Blairmore which elected a communist city council and school board, renamed their main street "Tim Buck Boulevard",³⁷ celebrated May Day and November 7, the anniversary of the Russian Revolution, as the sole school holidays, and actively organized and supported Young Communist Clubs among the youth of the community.³⁸

The next community in the Crowsnest Pass to experience a work stoppage and break with the existing union largely at the instigation of the M.W.U.C. was Michel-Natal. The M.W.U.C. gained considerably more influence in Michel than in Coal Creek because of the latter's fear of antagonizing a management sympathetic to the idea of ceasing operations completely. By 1934 the radical union leaders had succeeded in attracting a portion of miners away from the B.C.M.A. A strike was called in May based on the demands that employees collect their own dues,³⁹ all work available be divided with unemployed miners who had been suspended, and working conditions be improved. A majority

³⁶"Klu Klux Klan," FFP, Sept. 30, 1932, p. 8.

³⁷A large boulevard with rockeries and lighted with a huge neon sign reading "Tim Buck Boulevard" was constructed in 1934 and eventually was dismantled when the communist city council was defeated in 1937. "Tim Buck Boulevard, Famed Street in Blairmore will soon be Memory," FFP, Sept. 17, 1937, p. 1.

³⁸"The Government at Blairmore," FFP, Feb. 22, 1935, p. 4.

³⁹Management deducted dues from wages in the "check-off" system and consequently only acceptable organizations received the funds.

of the miners failed to support the M.W.U.C. and a return to work was successfully agreed upon without incident under terms of the old contract.⁴⁰ The relatively tranquil settlement of the Michel strike was ominous in the face of forthcoming events.

Typical of the labour unrest during the "thirties" was the 1935 strike which spelled the end of a "Pass" community. The town of Corbin, near the interprovincial boundary and fourteen miles up a mountain pass from the main rail and highway arteries, had been founded by D. C. Corbin of Spokane, a railway magnate and financier, in 1908. Corbin grew as a coal company town; houses, stores, school, hospital, transportation services and utilities⁴¹ were exclusively company-owned. Houses were built in the traditional mining town pattern with either a standard one or two storey frame and the stores were leased to the operator.⁴² One doctor was retained and provided with lodging by the company to serve the miners who entered into agreements on a monthly basis; payments were deducted from their wages and transferred to the physician.

Although the community was completely dominated by com-

⁴⁰British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1934, p. L69 and "Michel Miners Return to Work," FPF, June 1, 1934, p. 1.

⁴¹All utilities were reasonable compared to other "Pass" towns. Between 1931 and 1934, water was \$1.50 per month, and electric lights 50 cents per month per forty watt bulb. Use of the company wash house cost each miner \$1 per month and garbage disposal was provided for 50 cents per month.

⁴²There was no evidence of price-fixing. Personal interview with Mrs. P. Baratelli, resident of Corbin from 1911 to the present time.

pany policy, conditions were generally good⁴³ and employment was relatively higher than in other areas of the "Pass" during the depression until 1935, due to a constant market for the particular type of steam coal mined in the area.⁴⁴ Corbin miners had been less affected by the general retrenchment of wages in the late "twenties"; the isolation of the town and higher cost of living because of poor transportation facilities necessitated higher compensatory wages.⁴⁵

Few employees were actively complaintive until 1933 when a combination of factors led to a strike which drew attention to several seeming abuses. In that year, a steam shovel was introduced in the open-pit mine which replaced a number of men. A level was sealed off due to an uncontrollable fire and another ruled as unprofitable at depression rates. The problems were given voice by an extremely vocal Mine Worker's Union of Canada.⁴⁶ The leading voices of the M.W.U.C. visited Corbin and

⁴³In 1929 at the time of the opening of a road into the town, Corbin boasted fifty cars. "Corbin Road Open Saturday," FFP, Aug. 9, 1929, p. 1. By 1935 there were one hundred ten, valued at \$130,000 and although no figures are available to compare other mining towns, the community was relatively quite prosperous. "Corbin Situation," FFP, Ap. 26, 1935, p. 8. Wages ranged from a minimum \$4.50 per day underground to a maximum \$6, except for contract miners who were known to earn \$10 per day. Agreement between Corbin Collieries Ltd. and Corbin Miner's Association, Effective Ap. 1, 1931, Terminating Mar. 31, 1935, Calgary, West Printing Co., n. d.

⁴⁴The coal at Corbin was good quality steam coal, close to the surface so that large steam shovels could be used together with other coal-cutting machinery. Hughes, op. cit., p. 91.

⁴⁵British Columbia, Department of Labour, "Coal Miners - Corbin," op. cit., 1934, p. L64.

⁴⁶The MWUC was joined in 1929. "Red Element Meets Defeat," FFP, Mar. 18, 1932, p. 1.

the surrounding districts and urged a militant stand on all demands, solicited funds from other mining communities, and generally agitated against the existing system. Mr. Uphill, M.L.A. and member of the Independent Labour Party supported the strikers,⁴⁷ urging that the miners refrain from violence. The disturbance was quelled when the company agreed to carry on development and maintenance which required miners at underground levels.⁴⁸

Later in 1933 two underground levels were closed for a period of thirty days. During the periodic lay-offs due to lack of demand throughout the year, the company's treatment of the employees was fair and payment of housing, water, light and coal bills was not rigidly enforced.⁴⁹ In 1934 the company attempted to enact a wage reduction of four percent but was thwarted by a one-day work stoppage.⁵⁰ Recurring rumours that operations were to be concentrated at the "Big Showing"⁵¹ and that lay-offs were imminent circulated through the small community and maintained a dangerous emotional pitch.

The situation reached a climax in January 1935, when a minor dispute⁵² developed into a major disagreement based on

⁴⁷"Coal Miners, Corbin," FFP, Jan. 20, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁸"Corbin Trouble Adjusted," FFP, Aug. 25, 1933, p. 1.

⁴⁹"Two Coal Mines at Corbin Close," FFP, July 21, 1933, p. 1.

⁵⁰British Columbia, Department of Labour, loc. cit.

⁵¹A term used for the open-pit operation.

⁵²The reason given was failure to remain on the job until the end of the shift, although the victim countercharged discrimination in that five other men had accompanied him.

demands for improved housing and working conditions⁵³ and the resulting stoppage forced Canadian Pacific to cancel orders constituting sixty percent of the total production.⁵⁴ The cancellation caused management to lose all confidence in an economically feasible settlement and to terminate negotiations. Sporadic working of the "Big Showing" was allowed throughout the winter to supply schools and homes but with the announcement in March that the company would begin full-scale operations to fill outstanding coal orders, the union took a militant stand. When electricity was withheld from the workers' homes⁵⁵ and Provincial Police were successfully recruited for protection of strike breakers, the stage was set for a major confrontation. The presence of seventy-seven Provincial Police⁵⁶ and approximately four hundred miners⁵⁷ walking from Blairmore in aid of the miners prepared the climate for strife. A riot

⁵³British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Report of the Constable of Corbin Detachment of British Columbia Provincial Police to the Attorney-General's Department," Correspondence, Jan. 26, 1935.

⁵⁴British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K63.

⁵⁵British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Corbin Strike, Letter from the Constable of Corbin Detachment of British Columbia Provincial Police to the Commissioner," Correspondence, Mar. 25, 1935.

⁵⁶British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Radiogram to the Commissioner from the Officer in Charge of 'B' Division," ibid., Ap. 20, 1935.

⁵⁷A May 1 celebration in Blairmore was proposed to organize a march of 5,000 persons to aid the Corbin miners. British Columbia, Department of Labour, op. cit., 1935, p. K65. A total of 1,700 marchers were prepared to hike from Calgary and 400 Blairmore miners were stopped by police at the interprovincial boundary. "Corbin Situation," FFP, Ap. 26, 1935, p. 8.

ensued⁵⁸ in which one strike breaker was killed and over forty people injured;⁵⁹ twenty-two miners were convicted with sentences ranging up to six months' imprisonment.⁶⁰ Mining operations permanently ceased and relief was refused to former residents⁶¹ when they attempted to establish residence in other communities in the "Pass". A number were transported to Vancouver, Nanaimo and New Westminster by boxcar at the expense of the province⁶² and the remainder deserted the stagnant community to filter into other industries throughout the district.

Labour unrest declined considerably in the "Pass" after

⁵⁸The following account is given by an officer of the British Columbia Provincial Police: "...as far as I can ascertain and from our own observation I don't think that the driver of the tractor was hit until the crowd was practically dispersed. The tractor stopped about five or six yards before getting to the crowd, lowered the blade close to the ground so as no person could get under it then proceeded toward the crowd. I tried to get the crowd to allow the tractor to pass but they refused. When the tractor was within two yards of them the crowd made a rush, attacked the men on the tractor as well as thirty of our men. Women threw pepper in their eyes and the men used clubs and rocks. I consider if the tractor had stopped that all of them would have been unmercifully beaten to death and their only salvation was to get away from the crowd as soon as possible. The tractor was only travelling about three-quarter miles per hour, being in low gear at the time.... As far as I can make out the driver was struck by a rock, stunned and momentarily floored just as the crowd was dispersing, but all the others were badly beaten up when the rush was made on the tractor." British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Report of the Officer in Charge of 'B' Division to the Attorney-General's Department," Correspondence, Ap. 24, 1935.

⁵⁹Many of the injured were women. It was suggested with sound basis by police officers that women were placed in the forefront of picket lines, a tactic used in previous strikes at Blairmore and Estevan. Ibid.

⁶⁰"Corbin Situation," FFP, Ap. 26, 1935, p. 8.

⁶¹"Corbin Men in Need," FFP, Sept. 11, 1936, p. 1.

⁶²"Local and General," FFP, Sept. 18, 1936, p. 5.

the Corbin strike and in 1936 the miners returned to the U.M.W., marking the end of the violent obstructionism characteristic of the M.W.U.C.'s reign. A stoppage for recognition of the U.M.W. and improvements in wages and working conditions was amicably settled in 1937 with favourable grants to the miners.⁶³ Return to an international union and attendant vast financial resources indirectly intimidated the company and an early agreement was reached.⁶⁴

Another strike by the U.M.W. in 1938 served to extract general wage increases ranging from seven to ten percent. The short stoppage and pay increase indicated a marked economic improvement in the coal industry and a return to a high degree of union solidarity.⁶⁵ A significant clause in light of ensuing events would terminate the contract in the event of a national emergency.

Emphasis on the M.W.U.C. as the "villain" is most often suggested as the basis of much of the trouble during the early "thirties" in the Crowsnest Pass and evidence supports this interpretation. However the years of major work stoppages also coincide with a period in which the economy of the district was most unhealthy and workers were the chief sufferers of the malady. Crowsnest miners' frustration and disillusionment was

⁶³Pay increases were from fifty to seventy cents per day with an average increase of twenty-five cents per eight-hour shift and union recognition. "CIO Union Recognized," Daily Prov., Ap. 21, 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁴"Avert Fernie Mining Strike," Daily Prov., Ap. 13, 1937, p. 14.

⁶⁵"Miners Get Increase," FFP, Dec. 16, 1938, p. 8.

typified in the Corbin strike. The discontent experienced during the "thirties" under the leadership of the M.W.U.C. would have been equally disruptive to the status quo regardless of the label attached to the union organization and other voices disapproving of conditions in the mining camps would have been branded likewise as communistic and treasonous.

Although the issues with which the miners of the Crowsnest were concerned varied considerably over the decade, a number of complaints repeatedly appeared. During the entire two decades after the First World War, the unions were fighting a "hold the line" policy in face of a general economic recession but particularly of a declining coal industry. Failure to adjust to changing economic conditions and continuation of unrealistic demands led to large-scale lay-offs and embittered the miners toward the traditional industrial unions which refused to organize the unemployed who were principally former miners. The avowed communist unions thus gained considerable influence among an element of society who could see no other sincere expression of concern for their plight.

Although the mine unions were believed to be integral to the livelihood of Crowsnest Pass miners prior to the "thirties", their strength at various times during the depression was nonexistent. Wage levels were undoubtedly raised to a relatively high state in the late "twenties" and they were unrealistic when recessions in coal markets occurred. Union organizations were unbending in their maintenance of existing wage levels. Instead of wages undergoing a relative decline in slack times, a few miners were retained on contract, working long hours

and earning high wages to fill coal orders while large numbers were laid off. It was a characteristic of the depression in Canada that wages were maintained for a few while the vastly reduced markets were compensated for by the dismissal of the surplus labour. Consequently as the standard of living declined during the "thirties" due to large-scale economic retrenchments and unemployment, the few who were still employed experienced comparatively easier living conditions.

Coal mining as a way of life underwent a marked transition by the end of the depression. Skilled workers were unwilling to venture to employment in mines of alternative areas whose future was cloudy, and their marked lack of confidence displayed throughout the depression was partly due to the lack of opportunity to utilize their only highly developed skills. The self-esteem of individuals skilled in the trade gradually lessened as the reputation of the coal miner went from a respected occupation with high remuneration and integral value to society to a state where the industry was considered by most individuals by the late "thirties" to be a livelihood, parasitic in nature, that would disappear without public support.

CHAPTER VI

INSTITUTIONS IN THE REGION

The unique character of the Crowsnest Pass communities was principally attributed to the nature of their livelihood. The coal mining industry and its particular companies exerted no less an influence on the growth of the institutions of church, hospital and school. Dependence was basic because facilities and property were owned by the company in all communities except Fernie. Financial fortunes hinged on the economic prosperity of the company and indirectly it influenced the policies of the institutions. Similarly the institutions in the "Pass" reflected the community's needs and aspirations and in this way developed particular peculiarities.

Several ecclesiastical bodies entered the Crowsnest Pass district at the beginning of the railway period and, as in all pioneer communities, they went through difficult times providing for the spiritual welfare of the residents. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches and the Salvation Army were all founded in Fernie before 1900. Although miners were not known for their piety,¹ the religious institutions became an integral element in the social life of the communities. Responsibility for forging a strong link

¹Fernie was described by an early cleric as the "Sodom of the West". FHA, op. cit., p. 73.

between church and community lay with men of the stature of the Reverend Hugh Grant. His Tuesday evening gatherings which were attended by individuals from all denominations, and his colourful background as the son of a logger who had "shantied"² along the Ottawa Valley, brought the people into close communication with the church and its teachings.

During the years of comparative prosperity prior to the decade of the "twenties", the policies of churches largely reflected the viewpoints of the community leaders who were inclined to look with disdain on persons without work in a land of opportunity. After the recession of 1920 many Canadians were unemployed and because government provisions for relief were inadequate, the burden for their welfare fell on the shoulders of charitable institutions. In the early years of the "Great Depression" the expanding indigent population soon impressed the churches with the necessity for greater involvement in the relief of the unemployed. Accompanying the realization that the swelling numbers of destitute citizens were not responsible for their personal plight was an increasingly critical attitude by the church toward the economic system. At the Synod of the Diocese of Kootenay in 1931, government relief camps were advocated which would be "purely... institution[s] for relief against distress, and that only the very lowest wages, if any, be paid in addition to the relief...."³

²A term for a Canadian lumberman's shack used to connote hastily built shacks and the transient nature of early logging.

³British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Resolution Adopted by the Synod of the Diocese of Kootenay in Session at Vernon, May 28, 1931," Attorney-General's Papers, art. 170.

Later in the decade the churches began to realize the real despair of the indigents and urged that the dominion government "give due consideration to some form of unemployment

insurance, framed in such fashion as to place the burden of financial stress upon society as a whole rather than upon the shoulders of a comparative few."

A few institutions took a very radical stand: "We believe that the competitive system must be transformed into a co-operative one, and that production and distribution, together with the whole fiscal system, must be controlled in the interest of human need rather than for private profit."⁴

The national moderator of a Canadian church asserted the position of his religious organization while visiting Fernie in 1934, illustrating clearly the very far-reaching change of thinking which some of the religious bodies had experienced.

The church... must stand for a greater old age pension and an earlier period to receive it... for contributory unemployment insurance... for a minimum wage and the enforcement of the law... [and] that it is made impossible [for anyone] to work for a mere pittance, [for] starvation wages....⁵

However this was not to say that all religious bodies in the Crownsnest Pass were turning to a more humanistic view of life. Some still maintained that the nation's ills would be eased by a "back to the Bible" movement: "the outstanding need of the hour is that of a great religious revival".⁶

In addition to broad philosophical stands on indirect

⁴British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, "Resolutions of the British Columbia Conference of the United Church of Canada, May 13-19, 1931," ibid., art. 155.

⁵"Dr. H. Grant's Message," FFP, July 27, 1934, p. 8.

⁶"Church's Moves to Relieve Depression," FFP, Jan. 30, 1931, p. 1.

alleviation of the depression, the churches took an active interest in direct immediate assistance to people in need. Facilities were provided for recreation and for social intercourse.⁷ Reading materials and clothes were collected and sent to the destitute,⁸ funds were raised to provide basic sustenance for the indigent,⁹ and equipment was donated to hospitals and schools.¹⁰

In addition to providing charities, recreational facilities and caring for the basic spiritual and inspirational needs of their parishioners, one religious body also provided a vital community service in the form of an educational institution. An eight-room school and auditorium was established by the Roman Catholic church in 1929 and although it was vital to the educational needs of the community, a difficult and largely unsuccessful struggle was carried on to obtain funds throughout the "thirties". In 1933 the Holy Family School announced that it would close should the municipality refuse its demand for a per capita grant and for the removal of taxes levied by the municipality on the school and its grounds. The school received no tax monies and was supported by persons who also paid taxes for public schools, although approximately \$10,000 would be required annually from the taxpayers of the district to

⁷"Catholics Plan Hall at Natal," FFP, Mar. 11, 1938, p. 1.

⁸"Communication," FFP, Nov. 18, 1938, p. 4.

⁹"Local and General," FFP, Dec. 29, 1938, p. 5.

¹⁰"United Church Meeting," FFP, Feb. 4, 1938, p. 1.

replace it.¹¹ Its continued existence saved Fernie from a serious educational crisis as the numbers of students remaining in school increased greatly during the "thirties".

Although the population of the "Pass" towns steadily decreased after 1920, the remaining families were more stable and settled than earlier inhabitants. Many residents brought their wives and children from Eastern Canada or Europe and new immigrants brought their families resulting in an increased number of school age children to accomodate.¹² By 1922 enrollment at Fernie Central School necessitated implementation of a double shift system, which solved overcrowding of classrooms but resulted in an overworked and undermanned teaching staff. The situation was eased when the provincial government decided to amend the Public Schools Act limiting a class to thirty-five pupils¹³ and by the addition of a four-room extension to Fernie Central School. Overcrowding was further alleviated in 1929 by the construction of the Holy Family School in Fernie and a twelve-room stone school in Michel-Natal.

The new facilities kept pace with normal student attendance until the mid-depression era when an increasing number of young people, who in earlier years would have sought employment at fourteen or fifteen, remained to complete high school.

¹¹"City Council Meeting," FFP, Feb. 19, 1932, p. 1.

¹²Fernie Central School was the largest in the "Pass" with approximately seven hundred students. There were schools in Michel-Natal, and one and two room buildings at Elko, Morrissey, Coal Creek, Rosmer, Corbin and Crowsnest. Denholm, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

¹³"School Board Meeting," FFP, Feb. 15, 1929, p. 1.

The provincial government amended the Public Schools Act and the compulsory starting age was changed from seven to six.¹⁴ The resultant strain on existing facilities led to construction of a four-year junior high school in Fernie in 1936. Improvement in the volume of tax collections and other municipal revenues enabled the construction of a new technical school in 1937¹⁵ which provided adequate facilities for the duration of the decade. Consolidation of school facilities during the "twenties" and "thirties" took place in Fernie and Michel-Natal principally as the result of the decline of the smaller towns and the consequent movement of the heads of families to more stable employment. Secondly, the trend to greater centralization of school facilities was initiated by the desire to reduce costs and was rendered possible by improved transportation services.

The teaching staff in the schools of the Crowsnest Pass were victims of the austere financial policies during the depression. In addition to the doubling of classroom loads¹⁶ some of the most drastic salary cuts felt by any locality in British Columbia took place in the "Pass".¹⁷ Along with a fifteen percent forced salary reduction the teachers in Fernie and Michel-Natal acquiesced when asked to voluntarily contribute

¹⁴The starting age changed in 1936. "Compulsory School Age Changed from Seven to Six in B. C.," FFP, Ap. 17, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁵"Fernie City Finances," FFP, Jan. 22, 1937, p. 1.

¹⁶"School Notes," FFP, Sept. 4, 1931, p. 8.

¹⁷"Local and General," FFP, June 17, 1932, p. 5.

another ten percent¹⁸ to the municipality in aid of the unemployed.¹⁹ By 1933 ratepayers in Michel-Natal had reduced the salary cuts from twenty-five to seventeen and one-half percent.²⁰

Children of the unemployed constituted a serious problem for the school administrators. Early in the decade a plan for providing textbooks for the indigent children was adopted and was augmented later by provisions for clothing and optical aids.²¹ In 1933 the president of the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company began a fund to provide shoes for children of the destitute which prompted the provincial government to promise that all indigent children would have clothing and school supplies.²² The indigent status of many parents and the inability of school boards to raise sufficient tax monies rendered provision of textbooks impossible, obliging pupils to copy necessary notes and information from them.²³

Despite the hardships school children endured during the depression, a number of annual social highlights brightened their outlook. Interschool athletic competitions throughout the "Pass" were common and Fernie High School competed athletically and academically against other British Columbia towns

¹⁸"City Council Meeting," FFP, Oct. 7, 1932, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid., Nov. 4, 1932.

²⁰"School Notes," FFP, Nov. 17, 1933, p. 5.

²¹"School Board Meeting," FFP, Sept. 29, 1933, p. 1.

²²"Government to Buy Shoes for Fernie Tots," Daily Prov., Sept. 6, 1933, p. 1.

²³"School Board Meeting," FFP, Sept. 29, 1933, p. 1.

and across the interprovincial and international boundaries.²⁴ One such highlight was the annual debate against Kalispell High School at which questions of contemporary importance were deliberated. A typical example pertinent to the time was the topic of 1938: "Resolved that the United States should maintain its present policy of isolation in international affairs". Academically the difficult times did not appear to harm the achievement of the district's high school which rated near the top in the province, particularly in the sciences.²⁵

Whereas school facilities were overcrowded on the eve of the "Great Depression", hospital buildings and equipment were in a relatively good state. An extension completed to the Fernie General Hospital afforded the city and surrounding district adequate accomodation and modern equipment.²⁶ A small company-owned clinic and one doctor in the community of Corbin, and a similar building in Michel-Natal served the needs of the citizens although a larger and better equipped facility was built in 1936.²⁷

²⁴"Local and General," FFP, Nov. 18, 1938, p. 8.

²⁵In 1931, Fernie High School attained the highest collective grade twelve average in the province in algebra and chemistry and the second highest in geometry. Ibid., Aug. 28, 1931, p. 5.

²⁶A new kitchen, operating, anaesthetic, dining and isolation rooms, and six additional beds were provided along with the latest equipment. "Hospital Extension," FFP, Aug. 16, 1929, p. 1.

²⁷Previous to 1925 the doctors of Fernie owned all equipment and buildings, and provided services through an agreement with the miners' union, similar to that in operation in Michel-Natal and Corbin throughout the depression. The provincial and municipal governments each provided a third of the total \$15,000 outlay for the institution. "Local and General," FFP, Nov. 13, 1936, p. 5.

In 1925, the Fernie Hospital Board had been formed to take over the administration of the community's medical needs and facilities from the doctors who had previously operated under an agreement with the Crow's Nest Pass Coal Company and the miners' union.²⁸ The hospital operated on the basis of a local agreement whereby miners paid a fixed yearly sum²⁹ to insure themselves and their dependents. Patients from the municipality not employed by the Company were required to pay seventy cents per day³⁰ and in a 1932 agreement, all residents were given the opportunity of joining the insurance scheme.³¹ Membership carried free public ward accommodation, access to operating room facilities and ordinary medicines, while an extra charge for a private room and one-half the usual fee for X-rays were levied. The Fernie Hospital Board fulfilled social and charitable functions as well as administrative ones, and instances of campaigns to aid seriously ill members of the insurance scheme were common.³² The adequate local hospital

²⁸In 1930 an agreement fixed a sum of \$27.50 a year for each miner and his family, guaranteeing full medical attention and hospital facilities. Hospitals in Michel-Natal and Corbin had like agreements. "Interesting Meeting," FFP, May 16, 1930, p. 1.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰"City Council Meeting," FFP, July 17, 1931, p. 1.

³¹An energetic campaign was waged to include all residents in the scheme at an annual expenditure of \$10 per person. "Hospital Fees Now Due," FFP, July 29, 1932, p. 1 and "Mayor Douglas at Nelson," FFP, Sept. 15, 1933, p. 1.

³²A notable example saw the Michel-Natal Medical Committee hold a dance to raise funds to permit a member's wife a six months' recuperative period in a dry climate after a serious lung disease. "Local and General," FFP, Ap. 1, 1938, p. 5.

scheme was the principal reason for the repudiation of Premier Pattullo's proposal for a universal insurance plan in 1937.³³

The hospitals in the district experienced grave economic problems throughout the decade due to the large number of indigents requiring care. Although governments spent large sums to support the institutions in the district, wage reductions were necessary, and when requested to accept a twenty-five percent reduction in 1932, the staff agreed.³⁴ In the spring of 1933, Fernie doctors approached City Council with requests for protection of accounts by the unemployed whom they estimated were leaving unpaid bills totalling three hundred dollars per month.³⁵ The city in turn approached the federal government as part of a delegation from the Canadian Medical Association. They were met by Prime Minister Bennett's reply that the administration of additional assistance to the destitute lay within the jurisdiction of the province.³⁶

Integral to the dilemma faced by the municipal hospitals in the province and particularly in the Crowsnest Pass, was the loss of revenue from the sale of liquor which in the past had been turned over to the municipalities. The onset of prohibition and the consequent drastic decline in liquor sales considerably reduced municipal revenues while the provincial government

³³A plebiscite on Premier Pattullo's proposed hospital insurance scheme was rejected by Fernie residents who voted 1,672 against to 1,087 in favour. "Plebiscite Results," FFP, July 2, 1937, p. 1. Also see chap. IV, n. 30.

³⁴"Hospital Needs Your Support," FFP, Jan. 9, 1934, p. 1.

³⁵"City Council Meeting," FFP, Mar. 17, 1933, p. 1.

³⁶"Medical Aid for Unemployed," FFP, Oct. 13, 1933, p. 4.

provided no counterbalancing compensation.

Failure of the provincial authorities to aid hospitals in the depths of the depression thrust the burden of providing additional revenue into the hands of private citizens and charitable organizations. Residents of the city and surrounding district donated preserves, fresh vegetables, clothing, large quantities of coal, butter, eggs,³⁷ carpets³⁸ and an operating table.³⁹ A local hospital sweepstake was organized in contravention of provincial regulations,⁴⁰ and the twenty-five year old ambulance was replaced by public subscription in the mid-depression years.⁴¹ Largely as a consequence of the energy of Fernie and district citizens in organizing sports days, fund drives and collecting staple donations,⁴² the Fernie General Hospital encountered less financial difficulty as the decade progressed.

The effect of the depression on the institutions of the district was to establish much closer contact with individual citizens. Churches were forced to make a genuine effort to understand the trauma and provide some form of relief for the indigent. Educational facilities matured during the "thirties"

³⁷"Hospital Shower," FFP, Nov. 18, 1938, p. 4, "Local and General," FFP, Nov. 11, 1937, p. 5 and ibid., Ap. 22, 1938.

³⁸Ibid., Aug. 28, 1936, p. 1.

³⁹Ibid., Dec. 27, 1935.

⁴⁰Ibid., May 25, 1934, p. 5.

⁴¹Ibid., Nov. 18, 1938.

⁴²"Labour Day for Hospital," FFP, Aug. 2, 1935, p. 1.

as many destitute who were confused by the complexities of the depression attempted to learn more about the world or influenced their children to acquire optimum knowledge. Hospitals which had been a barely adequate service dominated by the companies came under public control and in spite of the pressures and hardships of the "thirties", grew into a stable community service.

CHAPTER VII

POLITICS IN THE "PASS"

The most striking feature of the political activity in the Crowsnest Pass was an early and faithful adherence to socialist theory. This left-wing tendency was exemplified in the career of Thomas Uphill, the representative for nearly one-half century in the Legislative Assembly and a long-time civic administrator. Mr. Uphill, as the Labour member for Fernie, represented a certain disillusionment with the form of highly competitive democracy prevalent in Canada. The disillusionment manifested in the switch to Labour representation paralleled the gradual economic retrenchment in the area with its attendant social disruption and hardship. A recession and the accompanying turn to a more socialized order came to the Crowsnest Pass in 1920, whereas in British Columbia generally, the effect of the "Great Depression" awakened a social consciousness which did not find expression until 1933.¹

As the most obtrusive political figure in the "Pass" over the last half-century, Uphill was the Independent Labour member of the provincial legislature from 1920 to 1960. Born near Bristol, England in 1874 he lived most of his early years

¹One exception was James Hurst Hawthornthwaite who represented Nanaimo as a Labour member at the beginning of the century.

in the coal mining areas of Wales. Uphill began work in the mines at the age of fourteen. Later, after serving in the Boer War where he was awarded the King's and Queen's Medals and acquired a less desirable distinction², he became active in the labour movement which was pulsing the area and held an executive position for several years. He decided in 1906³ to emigrate to Canada where he gained employment in the Coal Creek mines. Continued active participation in the labour union movement led to his election to the position of secretary. During the First World War he served as an alderman for two terms and then was elected Mayor in 1915, 1916 and 1917, was defeated in 1918, and then was re-elected by acclamation in 1919. Defeated as a union-supported provincial Conservative candidate in 1915, Mr. Uphill was not to be denied in 1920 when he was elected as an Independent Labour member in the provincial legislature for Fernie, a position he filled for forty years through eleven consecutive elections.

Pictured widely as a man of lively good humour and of non-conformist, outspoken, and sometimes blunt nature, Uphill was known by his electorate as a very practical and common-sense man; one who was believed to be most capable of understanding the needs of a large mining population within the perspective of the province. Several of his seemingly amusing

²He was acquitted in a court martial for sending war news home to England. "Death Still Salts Wit of Tom Uphill," Daily Prov., Feb. 19, 1962, p. 7.

³"The Gift of Laughter," Vict. Daily Times, Aug. 18, 1960, p. 5.

statements reflect a deep seated "homespun" philosophy. On the problem of the world depression he once stated: "the world needs more men who can tell whether a wheelbarrow is upside down"; on parliament: "that's the trouble with too

many of us these days, we're afraid of good clean fun. We all take ourselves too seriously. Why it wouldn't matter a bit if none of us was here tomorrow, there's others, and better, to carry on;

and regarding his constituents: "beer is to a miner like milk is to a baby. Let's have plenty of it for a happy, contented nation".⁴

Although Uphill was an individualist unencumbered by a party caucus, philosophically he was inclined toward the left. A statement at the height of the Second World War reflected disenchantment with the status quo and the bent of his political leanings: "the dictators say democracy had failed. Democracy has not failed. It has never been tried".⁵ He fought for larger pensions, improved standards of living for the workers, particularly coal miners, championed the liberalization of divorce laws and legalization of hospital sweepstakes, and criticized government control of liquor outlets. When the provincial government "viewed with alarm" the rising divorce rate in British Columbia which was the highest in Canada and one of the leading in North America, and the Attorney-General suggested that "something should be done to tighten up divorce laws", Uphill replied: "widen them not tighten them.

⁴"Uphill," Maclean's Magazine, Apr. 15, 1950, p. 56.

⁵Ibid.

If you don't widen them --- and I give you fair warning --- it means free love, right in this province". He then remarked to the House that Members of Parliament were usually elderly and no longer interested in the romance and excitement of swapping partners. "Age... is a great leveller, it's age brings on this 'holier-than-thou talk'".⁶

Mr. Uphill was respected greatly in the Crowsnest Pass. His record of years as their representative stand higher than words as an indicator of this regard. He was known and appreciated most for his practical sensibility in times of crisis, particularly during the "thirties". The depression period was one of great instability in the Crowsnest as numerous strikes, hunger marches and protest parades threatened to cripple the region. At times the extremists among the unemployed and mine workers threatened violence and revolt against the status quo. Mr. Uphill, as a man who had worked years as a miner and earned as little as thirty cents per day as a young man in the United Kingdom, understood the problems and commanded the respect of the unemployed miners where conventional politicians had no bases of communication. He was able to forestall the radicals most notably during the 1935 Corbin strike when nearly five hundred sympathizers marching to aid the strikers were convinced that only violence would result in a severe reaction.

The depression period, as one of great instability in British Columbia politics, set the climate for a platform which in earlier times had found expression in various progressive

⁶Ibid.

parties and in 1933 would manifest itself in a new political party. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation,⁷ a movement organized in Calgary in 1932, proposed to establish a socialist government by democratic means. The Party began to organize in British Columbia in the spring of 1933 and before the end of the summer had nominated candidates in forty-six of the forty-seven ridings. The lone exception was Fernie where Mr. Uphill was the Independent Labour candidate.

In the 1933 election in British Columbia, a revamped Liberal party led by T. Dufferin Pattullo stole much of the new party's thunder by espousing a platform of extension of government services and in Pattullo's words, "practical idealism" against "visionary socialism"⁸ whereby the government would begin a program of economic planning by the newly formed Economic Council. The sweep to the left was manifested in the election results which gave an overwhelming victory to the left-wing parties.⁹

The Liberals had been very active in the Crowsnest Pass before the election and much groundwork was laid for the candidate, Mayor Harry Douglas, in an effort to unseat Mr. Uphill. Mayor Douglas ran on a platform to eliminate unemployment

⁷The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation came to be known as the CCF.

⁸Edith Dobie, "Party History in British Columbia, 1903-1933," Pacific Northwest Quarterly, 27:164, (Ap. 1936).

⁹Out of a total 47 seats the Liberals won 34; CCF took 7; Tolmie Conservatives 1; Independent Non-Partisan (Bowser's followers), 2; Independents 2; and Labour 1. In the popular vote, out of a total 357,534, the Liberals polled 159,131; the CCF, 120,185; Independents, 101,896. Ibid.

through highway construction, reform of municipal financing, and freedom to cross party lines on issues.¹⁰ Similarity of policy and the obvious ascendancy of the C.C.F. over the Independent Labour Party led to pressure by the C.C.F. to have Uphill run under their ticket, but this was repudiated largely at his personal insistence due to a desire to maintain his independence, unencumbered by the disciplines of a party caucus.

The 1937 provincial election in Fernie riding was a lively contest. Harry W. Colgan, a Vancouver lawyer, was asked to stand for the Liberal party¹² and he waged an energetic campaign against the well-entrenched old campaigner from Fernie, who received endorsement from the C.C.F., the local miners' unions at Michel and Coal Creek, and the unemployed associations of Fort Steele and Jaffray.¹³ Liberal support came from the professional people and surprisingly, from the ranks of the unemployed in the district. Many were frightened by Colgan's statement that "the plums"¹⁴ would be terminated in Fernie if a Liberal supporter were not returned to the Legislature. Consequently Uphill's majority in the election relative to that of 1933 was cut in all polls except two in Fernie.

¹⁰"Mayor Douglas Liberal Choice," FFP, Sept. 29, 1933, p. 1.

¹¹Total vote, less one poll, was 2,839; Douglas polled 1,245, Uphill, 1,584. "Thomas Uphill Elected by Large Majority," FFP, Nov. 3, 1933, p. 1.

¹²"W. J. Colgan Chosen," FFP, May 7, 1937, p. 1.

¹³"Uphill's Plank," FFP, May 28, 1937, p. 1.

¹⁴Meaning unemployment relief. "Fernie to Lose Plums," Daily Prov., May 8, 1937, p. 1.

Although little improvement was experienced in the economy of the Fernie area, the popularity of Tom Uphill did not wane. In 1946 when Fernie elected its first mayor after eleven years under the administration of a provincial commissioner the honour went to Mr. Uphill. He continued to represent the East Kootenay riding in the provincial legislature until 1960 when he retired after forty years service in the Legislative Assembly.

Civic politics was extremely hectic throughout the depression, and because of their proximity to the unemployment problem, the immediate pressure on municipal leaders was greater than at any other level of government. Also a lack of substantial funds after the exhaustion of local tax collections did not allow latitude for solving the relief problem. At the same time the local taxpayers, property owners and professional people were applying pressure, particularly early in the depression, to keep the "dole" at an absolute minimum. The sentiments of this group were manifested in the late "thirties" in Fernie by the Property Owner's Association.¹⁵

Mr. J. L. Gates was Mayor of Fernie during the early depression years and although finances were not healthy, the majority of taxpayers were still able to meet their assessments thus funds were available to relieve unemployment. By the time H. E. Douglas' term as Mayor commenced in 1931 many of the residents were either unemployed or working part-time. Citizens were reneging on their taxes and the ability of the city to

¹⁵"Local and General," FRP, May 13, 1932, p. 5.

relieve the situation had rapidly deteriorated to the state where it was directly dependent on federal and provincial aid. Mayor Douglas was not contested in the election of 1932 for the first time in the history of the city, an indication of the unpopularity of the position because of the inordinate demands placed upon the chief civic administrator. By the autumn of 1932, the city was deeply in debt, had defaulted on interest payments for the previous year, and was forced to request further loans from the provincial and federal governments. Mayor Douglas continued in office throughout the ensuing three years but determined no fiscal policy and acted chiefly as an administrator of relief funds supplied by the higher levels of government. When Douglas decided not to seek re-election in 1935 a request was made, with the unanimous approval of City Council, for a commissioner to take over the affairs of Fernie. Consequently J. V. Fisher was appointed by the provincial government in January, 1935 as commissioner of the city, a position which he retained until 1946.

Although the proximity of civic administrators to the unemployment problem in the "Pass" rendered them more vulnerable to criticism, the fortunes of the area were determined in Victoria and to a greater extent, in Ottawa. As the depression progressed, the federal government remained as the only government agency with enough financial power to relieve the widespread distress of the nation. The realization by the people in the "Pass" of the significance of their federal representative in determining their fate was reflected in the vigorously contested elections throughout the depression.

As the election of 1930 approached and the economic state of the country continued to worsen, people were increasingly impressed by the sound business record and personal success of Mr. R. B. Bennett, Leader of the Opposition. At the same time they became disillusioned with the tactics of Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King. On a visit to Fernie Mr. Bennett was entertained at a reception in the "beautiful grounds" of one of the district's wealthiest citizens, and he favourably impressed a number of people with indictments on the selling out and "burning up" of natural resources.¹⁶ Mr. Bennett continued on to "stump" British Columbia. In a five week tour he made over sixty addresses, stressing the great potential of the province and the incompetence of the existing administration, arguments which appealed very much to the near destitute Crowsnest residents who sat on millions of tons of coal.¹⁷

In the ensuing Conservative sweep of the country, "Mickey" McLean, a Michel miner, was elected but resigned when H. H. Stevens, the proposed Minister of Trade and Commerce in the new government, was defeated in his Vancouver Center constituency. McLean gave up his seat and was appointed to a position on the Vancouver Harbours Board.¹⁸ Mr. Stevens was elected by acclamation and represented the riding as a Conservative until his

¹⁶"Honourable Bennett At Fernie," FFP, Aug. 30, 1929, p. 1 and "Bennett Reception," FFP, Aug. 30, 1929, p. 4.

¹⁷"Possibilities of B. C. Great says Mr. R. B. Bennett," Daily Colonist, Sept. 5, 1929, p. 3.

¹⁸John Munro, Interview with H. H. Stevens, no. 9, June 14, 1966, p. 28.

split with the Prime Minister over the Price-Spreads Commission.

In the period from 1930 to 1935, the Conservative Party failed to aid the unemployed effectively to improve their statuses. The position of the leader of the Party was revealed to the destitute areas of the country and the stage at the same time was set for the 1935 election result when the recommendations of the Price-Spreads Commission, headed by Stevens, advising supervision of business practices and repression of unfair methods, was repudiated. Under pressure for statements he had made regarding Canadian business, Stevens resigned and formed a new party.

The Reconstruction Party did not advocate a great economic and social upheaval but proposed a somewhat vague program of fair wages, restraint of unfair competition, limited public works, and the adjustment of the system of tax collection.¹⁹ Workers were impressed more by the courage of Stevens, few having forgotten his efforts to re-open the mines after the shutdown in 1933 and his outspoken opposition to the leader of the Conservative Party.²⁰ Stevens' program contained reforms which were advocated by the left-wing political theorists without the large-scale social upheaval suggested by the radical parties. He thus was able to obtain the votes of not only the unemployed but also was supported by many of the business and

¹⁹Carl Wittke, A History of Canada, Tor., McLelland and Stewart, 1941, p. 399.

²⁰"It is said by Maclean's magazine that if Harry Stevens could run in every constituency in Canada there would be few other candidates elected." "Editorial Notes," FFP, Aug. 9, 1935, p. 4.

professional people in the constituency who generally opposed radical changes.

The extent of support for Mr. Stevens in the Kootenay East constituency was exhibited by a meeting in the Grand Theatre at the close of a speaking tour. The crowd was so great that the overflow had to be accomodated in the adjacent Victoria Hall to whom he communicated via a loud speaker. He totally won their sentiment by stating: "I believe this depression has been felt more acutely in Fernie and district than any place in Canada".²¹

The campaign for the Kootenay East riding in 1935 was one of the most bitterly contested in the history of the area. A local resident had been selected originally by the East Kootenay Liberal Association to contest the election, but he was replaced by the former Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia who had retired to England, the Honourable H. H. Bruce.²² The entry of Social Credit and C.C.F. candidates to contest the riding heightened suspicions of a conspiracy to split the vote²³ and provoked the following statement from a very partial "Free Press": "As the word has gone out from St. James Street that H. H. Stevens is to be beaten at any cost it is quite conceiv-

²¹"Packed House Greet Harry," FFP, Aug. 16, 1935, p. 1.

²²There were accusations to the effect that the management of Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Kimberley put pressure on their employees to support Mr. Bruce. "What Our Voters Should Know," FFP, Oct. 4, 1935, p. 1 and "Hitler Tactics in East Kootenay," FFP, Oct. 4, 1935, p. 1.

²³Only one other Social Crediter was nominated in British Columbia in the 1935 election. "Complete Lineup of Election Candidates in British Columbia," Daily Colonist, Oct. 8, 1935, p. 1.

able that a few more candidates may yet be placed in the field to split Stevens' vote....²⁴ Everyone in the "Pass" was captured by the election fever. The two major contenders, the Liberal and the Reconstruction Parties, put on major public relations campaigns; their newspaper publicity measured whole pages and the new medium of radio was used extensively for the first time in addition to the usual "stumping".

When election results were tabulated, the Liberals had swept the country except in the Crowsnest Pass where the final count gave Stevens a majority of only five hundred sixty-five votes over Bruce in a riding where eighty-one percent of the eligible voters cast their ballots, a figure much higher than the national average.²⁵

Representation from the Crowsnest Pass on the national scene during the "thirties" appears on the surface to contradict the socialistic tendencies prevalent provincially. The support given to R. B. Bennett's government in the person of H. H. Stevens in the 1930 election was a question of the lesser of two evils. The Mackenzie King government had shown a reactionary bent in the late "twenties", particularly in dealings with the Nova Scotian miners whose livelihood was closely related and of abiding interest to the "Pass" miners.²⁶ King's unfav-

²⁴"Politics Warming Up," FPF, Sept. 27, 1935, p. 1.

²⁵Bruce polled 3,339; Stevens, 3,904; Bryard Everson, CCF, 1,553; and Ernest W. Sjodin, Social Credit, 1,262. Total votes polled were 10,177 out of 12,708 registered voters. "Honourable Stevens Majority 565," FPF, Oct. 18, 1935, p. 1.

²⁶E. R. Forbes, The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party in the Provincial Politics of Nova Scotia 1922-33, Halifax, unpub. M. A. Thesis, Dalhousie Univ., 1967, passim.

ourable attitude to the miners, complemented by Bennett's campaign based on federal responsibility for unemployment convinced the electorate of Kootenay East to support the Conservative Party.

CHAPTER VIII

LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

During the first forty years of this century economic and social activity in the Crownest Pass converged on Fernie, its largest and most vigorous city. Fernie was the center of a burgeoning lumber industry, built on millions of tons of coal and optimistic of becoming the center of oil¹ and phosphate industries.² A remarkable degree of social activity accompanied the growth of this "boom" city as clubs, fraternal societies, hotels, schools, churches, political parties, organized athletics, theatre and vaudeville flourished.

Prior to the First World War a brewery, brick factory, winery, macaroni factory, school, power station, a hospital, opera house, post office, American consulate, five churches and eleven hotels of forty rooms each were connected by twenty miles of streets and sidewalks.³ Lodges included the Masons,

¹Oil had been first discovered in the Flathead area, south of Fernie, at the turn of the century and repeated efforts were made to recover it. "Drill for Oil in the Flathead," FFP, Oct. 4, 1929, p. 3 and see R. A. Price, Flathead Map Area, British Columbia and Alberta, 1966, p. 135.

²In the late "twenties" the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company explored phosphate deposits in the Rockies near Fernie with a view to developing them. "Will Soon Commence," FFP, May 31, 1939, p. 1 and British Columbia, Department of Mines, ARMM, 1931, 1932, p. A141.

³FHA, op. cit., p. 75.

Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Knights of Columbus, Eagles, Foresters, Owls, Woodmen, Rebekahs, Eastern Star, Orangemen and the Independent Order of Good Templars. Numerous clubs of which the most notable were the Five Hundred Club, a Benevolent Society, Race Track Association, Dancing Assembly, and Civilian Rifle Association involved themselves in charities, provided recreation and became social assemblies. The thriving community of Coal Creek kept pace with the development of Fernie and a Library and Athletic Club, high calibre soccer and hockey teams, a male voice choir, outdoor skating rink and three churches provided outlets for the residents.

The district had not lost its exciting frontier personages and on weekends the numerous hotels, gambling halls and other "clip joints" flourished. "Bootlegging" prospered during the early railroad days, remained in existence throughout the pre-war period, and by the time prohibition was proclaimed, if not the most highly respected profession, it was a community-wide accepted occupation. Justice was severe but practical, as illustrated in the January 1912 Fernie Free Press: "The chain gang did some effective work on the side walks during the thaw, removing humps from the straight and narrow". An added quip related how police removed six men from boxcars: "five being found fit, were put to work on the streets, but the sixth, being crippled and of no use, was ordered to leave town."⁴

Fernie was long the center for the lumber workers,⁵ and

⁴Ibid., p. 79.

⁵See chap. I concerning lumbering in the Crowsnest Pass.

hotels as well as gambling and dance halls were able to exist largely on their patronage. The end of large-scale lumbering and the general recession experienced by the coal industry foretold the end of this entertainment. In the early "twenties" the "Pass" experienced a considerable mellowing in the tempo of activity although not to the extent of the province generally which was influenced by prohibitionist tendencies. Assimilation of the frontier labourer from the isolated camps into settled communities, accompanied by acceptance of social responsibilities, ended the wild revelry which had been characteristic of the early years of the century. Indicative of the transformation was the order in 1930 by the Fernie Council instructing the Chief of Police to close the gambling halls operating in the city.⁶

Although the economic situation did not suggest it, a period of social stability previously absent in the "Pass" was exhibited during the "twenties". A cultural level was maintained through a Theatre Guild, musical festivals, and ethnic and cultural societies. In athletics, the status attained over the first twenty years of the century when the district was recognized nationally as a lacrosse, baseball, basketball, soccer and hockey power was embellished by a broadening of interest to recreation of a less vigorous nature. This was manifested in the establishment of a golf and country club and curling rink.

As the economic paralysis slowed industrial activity in

⁶"Commissioners Put on Lid," FFP, May 16, 1930, p. 5.

the "Pass" the social climate correspondingly experienced far-reaching changes. A community economically secure enough to enact an Anti-Loafers Law in 1918 underwent remarkable adjustments in thinking throughout the late "twenties" and "thirties", when very little prejudice was directed toward the unemployed.

The illegal liquor trade, although economically motivated, illustrated the social milieu as the last vestige of a stormy pioneer period of rugged individualism. The end of the "rum running" business in British Columbia marked the close of a distinct phase in the history of the province. The days of the "Whiskey Sixes",⁷ the socially accepted and independently wealthy "bootleggers", vaudeville-type "girly" shows, twenty-four hour gambling halls and large-scale pay-offs to police officers which accompanied the illicit liquor trade ceased with the repeal of prohibition.

With the exception of the illicit liquor trade and its attendant business, the life in the Crowsnest Pass was similar to that in other contemporary communities. Prior to the depression the greater flow of revenue from spectator sports allowed organized social clubs, athletic associations and leagues to flourish, but as the majority of residents became increasingly devoid of a regular income and talented unemployed athletes moved to other mining camps in the Kootenays,⁸ spectator sports

⁷McLaughlin Buicks because of their size, speed and durability became known as "Whiskey Sixes". F. W. Anderson, The Rum Runners, Calgary, Frontiers Unlimited, n. d., p. 33.

⁸The mining towns of Kimberley and Trail rose to world prominence in amateur sport in the late "thirties" by winning world championships.

declined drastically. Interprovincial and intercity competition ceased and field sports were played solely at the local level. Service clubs which in the past had sponsored "sports days" on special occasions to perpetuate organized athletics, increasingly promoted gala holiday festivities to solicit funds for needy institutions, service facilities and indigent individuals in the community.

The largely destitute population in the Crowsnest Pass gravitated toward the more sedentary recreational outlets. Availability of money for sports equipment was partially responsible, but a more drastic factor was the poor nutrition of the unemployed. A lack of initiative and an indolent outlook have been characteristics of chronically malnourished people and the failure of Canada's unemployed to exhibit the inclination to improve their status during and postdating the depression was largely attributable to this factor.⁹

Facilities in the district to meet the needs of the large indigent population developed principally at the instigation

⁹The impairment depends upon the degree of malnutrition. "Life is probably shortened as a result of a long-continued poor diet, and... working efficiency, endurance, mental alertness and ability to learn are definitely impaired." Canada, Department of National Health and Welfare, A Report on Nutrition and the Production and Distribution of Food, 1946, p. 13. While "the behaviour of people in advanced semi-starvation is characterized by sluggish intellectual processes, decreased abilities to concentrate, and dramatic incapacities for sustained mental efforts. [They develop] ... a tendency to day-dream, become restless and irritable [and] some become sullen and obstinate...." F. G. Benedict, Human Vitality and Efficiency under Prolonged Restricted Diet, Carnegie Institute, Wash., D. C., 1919 and E. Huntington, Wingsprings of Civilization, John Wiley and Sons, N. Y., 1945 as cited in Norman W. DesRosier, Attack on Starvation, Westport, Conn., The Avi Pub. Co., Inc., 1961, p. 7.

of charitable organizations. Unemployed reading rooms were opened early in the depression and were furnished with daily and weekly newspapers, and the proceedings of the House of Commons.¹⁰ Whist drives and dances were held weekly and the destitute were admitted at reduced prices. While membership in the Golf and Country Club was impossible, admission prices for the unemployed to festivities sponsored by the various service clubs were reduced and fees for curling were worked out in exchange for membership.¹¹ A yearly picnic sponsored by the Unemployed Association in conjunction with the miners' union was held in the city park to which the Coal Company provided a special train for Coal Creek residents.

In Coal Creek the Library and Athletic Club provided reading and recreation facilities, and week-end socials and dances. The Grand Theatre building in Fernie was used as a social and meeting room for the Unemployed Association and the Canadian Legion opened their club and library to the indigent. Michel-Matal had experienced a major rejuvenation of company-owned facilities in the late "twenties" which included a new theatre, a remodelled dance hall and new hotel. Although recreation facilities there were not so extensive as those of Fernie and Coal Creek, they were less in demand due to the higher rate of employment throughout the depression.

Ethnic societies enriched the culture of the "Pass" from the earliest mining days, and throughout the depression lively

¹⁰"Unemployed Reading Room," FFP, Mar. 23, 1934, p. 4.

¹¹Ibid., Jan. 11, 1935, p. 1.

and colourful national celebrations provided an escape from a somber existence. Beginning with the wild celebrations accompanying St. Patrick's Day and followed by the feasting on haggis, oat cakes and scones characteristic of the Caledonian Society's Robbie Burns' Day banquet, interspersed by socials held by the Fior de Italia, and climaxed by the Slavonic Christmas festivities, the social life in the district was varied and rich. Later in the decade ethnic social functions increasingly emphasized benefit and charitable enterprizes.

Despite a large non-British population,¹² residents held the British monarchy in esteem and memorable events in the life of the Royal Family were celebrated by extensive social activities. A climax of these events during the depression era was the 1935 celebration in Fernie in honour of the Silver Jubilee of George V and Queen Mary.¹³

Radio was the newest innovation and provided a constant social outlet throughout the "thirties". A radio club was organized in 1929 and the formation of a local station was undertaken as operators and repairmen recruited from the district donated their services. There were at least a dozen "soap operas" every day on the American networks, and half of them were carried by Canadian stations. Musical entertainment was typified by "big bands" such as Glen Grey's Casa Loma Orchestra, and by vocalists led by Kate Smith and Lily Pons. Canadian commentators of an unprecedented calibre such as

¹²See Table VIII.

¹³"Silver Jubilee Celebration," FFP, Ap. 26, 1935, p. 4.

George Ferguson, B. K. Sandwell, Willson Woodside, Watson Kirkconnell and Frank Underhill¹⁴ discussed the more serious of world events and conditions.

Motion pictures were a very special treat, but were seldom enjoyed by the indigent population. However two theatres were sustained in Fernie throughout the "thirties" along with a playhouse. It was a momentous occasion when the Natal Opera House initiated their "talking" pictures in January, 1930 by providing special buses from Michel and staging a parade between the twin communities.¹⁵

Local amateur stage productions which had reached an unprecedented success with "Facts and Figures" in 1929 continued with vigor to present such appropriate and well-presented stage plays as "Be an Optimist" which was well received in 1931.¹⁶ City bands were also popular and showed exceptional talent during the "thirties", particularly the Fernie Band and Choral Society who won every eligible award in 1936.¹⁷

A distinct paradox of the depression was the exclusive concern of the individual citizen with his personal plight¹⁸ while simultaneously sustaining a greater awareness of national

¹⁴An article by Margaret Frang, "The Origins of Public Broadcasting in Canada," Canadian Historical Review, 46:1-31, (Mar. 1965), explains the impact of public control of radio broadcasting in Canada.

¹⁵"Local and General," FFP, Jan. 31, 1930, p. 5.

¹⁶"Be an Optimist," FFP, Mar. 2, 1931, p. 4.

¹⁷"Fernie Captures Two Cups," FFP, Nov. 6, 1936, p. 1.

¹⁸A natural occurrence in times of need is to become increasingly involved with personal satisfaction only.

and world happenings. The latter concern was a new experience accentuated by the magnitude of the depression and the seeming futility of any individual effort to alter its effects. Consequently many people, including the destitute, were struck by the need to obtain a greater understanding of the world. In Fernie moving pictures of the Spanish Civil War and the war in China were presented to capacity audiences and returned volunteers from the MacKenzie-Papineau Battalion in Spain made public speaking engagements to an enthusiastic though often naive populace.¹⁹

As the decade drew to a close and the war threat became more ominous, there was increased activity in the reserve, and the threat posed by Germany and Japan instigated a government campaign to impress citizens with the need for greater defence expenditure. In March 1939, all ex-servicemen under sixty along with women of ex-service organizations were required to register in Fernie.²⁰ The news that war had been declared by Britain first reached the district in a one o'clock radio bulletin on the afternoon of September 1, 1939 which included the mobilization call to Canada's entire military force.²¹ Although met with apprehension, news of the declaration initiated a

¹⁹The editor of the "Free Press" made the following observation after hearing the Alberta president of the League for Peace and Democracy: "International trade and capitalism was clarified and explained in such a simple way that all grasped the situation immediately." "'War in China' Huge Success in Fernie," FFP, Feb. 24, 1939, p. 8.

²⁰"To All Ex-servicemen," FFP, Mar. 24, 1939, p. 1.

²¹"Latest on War News," FFP, Sept. 1, 1939, p. 1.

flurry of activity diverting the attentions and energies of the "Pass" residents away from the previously all-engaging depression toward preparation for the waging of another war.

The recession in the Crowsnest Pass region had begun earlier and protracted longer as a result of complete dependence on a single industry and the decline of its markets. Beginning in 1920 unemployment was a serious problem, and with the exception of a short period in the late "twenties", it was not alleviated until markets were restored by the large-scale armament build-up in 1939. The effect of the extended period of relative poverty and insecurity of employment had serious reverberations on the residents.

Similar to the trauma of the unemployed individuals in Canada generally which was epitomized by the hundreds of transients "riding the rods" in search of work, indigents of the "Pass" were personally unable to repair their statuses. Over the years, mine workers had become reliant upon the unions to guarantee employment and satisfactory working conditions and when out of work, they turned to the church and service organizations for aid. Trust which had been placed in the mine unions was abrogated when unrealistic hard-line wage demands and refusal to organize the unemployed weakened their position and rendered them ineffectual. Charitable organizations distributed relief to a subsistence level but also placed the unemployed in the position of permanent welfare recipients with little hope for the future. As the depression worsened, the

workers sought solutions from the government but were disillusioned because government at all levels was not inclined to set economic guidelines or sponsor retraining programs. This disinclination came partly as a result of a tradition of non-intervention and also because of the magnitude of the unemployment problem.

Accustomed to a regular income and its accompanying luxuries, large segments of the population were reduced to a destitute level and were forced to subsist on bare necessities. Time previously spent in employment was a burden and was passed without monetary expenditure in pursuits which taxed previously untapped reserves of imagination. People used to the security of a job and hope for the future became completely aimless with no prospect of saving money or of security in their old age. Children were reared with the understanding that their future depended wholly on their personal abilities and imagination. Individual perseverance and ability to survive were taxed to the utmost, but paralleling the increased self-interest was an awakening of a social consciousness heretofore not experienced in Canada.

Coming as a result of the desire of the destitute for a greater share of the "spoils", social measures in the public interest at the same time grew out of a fear by the business establishment and other influential people of the country that their social statuses and personal material wealth were being threatened. The menace of a revolution in Canada was never before so acute as during the depression, and it was felt by

many that the destitute would have nothing to lose by a social revolt which could result in the complete fall of the establishment. By granting minimum demands for social legislation to the poorer segments of society, pressure for reform of existing institutions was eased and the majority appeased, while the wealth and status of the influential were minutely affected.

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APPENDIX

TABLE I

Report of Vital Statistics for British Columbia, 1929-1939.

Year	Pop'n.	Births	Deaths	Marriages
1929	659,000 ¹	10,378	6,761	5,195
1930	676,000	10,867	6,759	4,758
1931	694,263 ²	10,404	6,447	3,880
1932	704,000 ¹	10,577	6,166	3,644
1933	712,000	10,013	6,236	4,698
1934	725,000	10,616	6,393	4,821
1935	735,000	10,987	6,927	5,020
1936	750,000	11,186	7,254	5,465
1937	751,000	13,033	7,981	6,232
1938	761,000	13,812	7,455	6,158
1939	774,000	13,176	7,626	7,897
Year	Illegit. Births	Rate Nat. Incr. / 1000 Pop.	Inf. Mort. / 1000 Live Births	Divorces
1929	273	6.04	55.4	
1930	263	6.60	51.7	
1931	288	6.17	49.4	
1932	348	5.77	46.7	
1933	350	4.72	45.8	
1934	346	4.73	43.4	
1935	320	4.29	45.9	283 ⁵
1936	377	4.46	43.9	463
1937	435	4.40	55.8 ³	536
1938	510	6.59	- ⁴	652
1939	501	6.27	-	608

¹Population in 1929-30, 1932-39 is estimated by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics as cited in the Report of Vital Statistics.

²Population is exact in 1931, a census year.

³Attributed to an abnormal number of deaths of Indian babes under one year.

⁴Infant mortality rate calculation discontinued.

⁵Divorce act in force May 1, 1935.

Source: British Columbia, Provincial Board of Health, Report of Vital Statistics, 1929-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1930-1940.

TABLE II

The Population of the Fernie District.

Town or District	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Fernie	1,640	3,416	4,343	2,732	2,545
Elk-Flathead ¹	476	4,812	6,074	4,814	4,016

¹This is the whole area east of the Elk River and north of forty-nine degrees latitude. Known as Fernie District until 1911, it was changed to the present district and name for the 1921 census. In 1901, Fernie District was probably Michel only.

Source: Canada, The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, The Dominion Census, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1901-1941.

TABLE III

Area and Population of East Kootenay.

Area		
13,367.11 square miles ¹ .		
Year	E. Koot. Pop.	Fernie Pop.
1921 ²	19,137	4,343
1931 ³	22,536	2,732
1941	22,345	2,545

¹Source: British Columbia, Manual of Provincial Information, Victoria, King's Printer, 1929, p. 55.

²Source: British Columbia, Manual of Provincial Information, Victoria, King's Printer, 1929.

³Source: Canada, The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, The Seventh & Eighth Dominion Census, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1931 & 1941.

TABLE IV

Average Monthly and Annual Temperatures of Fernie for 1916-1954 in Degrees Fahrenheit.

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July
17	20	30	41	50	56	62
Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Year.	
60	51	42	29	20	40	4

Source: C. C. Kelley & P. N. Sprout, British Columbia, Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey of the Upper Kootenay & Elk Valleys, Ottawa, Cloutier, 1956, Report #5, appendix.

TABLE V

The Frost Free Period of Fernie, Michel and Newgate.

	Fernie	Michel	Newgate
Elevation (ft.)	3305	3800	2800
Years on record	33	4	32
Average last spring frost	June 1	June 19	June 3
Earliest last spring frost	May 4	June 4	May 4
Latest last spring frost	July 12	July 4	July 4
Average first fall frost	Sept. 7	Aug. 19	Sept. 4
Earliest first fall frost	July 19	Aug. 4	July 27
Latest first fall frost	Oct. 7	Aug. 29	Oct. 13
Average frost free period	98 days	60 days	93 days

Source: C. C. Kelley & P. N. Sprout, British Columbia, Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey of the Upper Kootenay & Elk Valleys, Ottawa, Cloutier, 1956, p. 93.

TABLE VI

Average Monthly and Annual Precipitation for the Years Shown, in Inches, of Newgate, Elko and Fernie.

Station	Years on Record	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July
Newgate	1918-54	1.44	1.08	0.97	0.76	1.21	1.64	0.88
Elko	1924-54	2.36	1.20	1.31	1.26	1.62	2.73	1.43
Fernie	1916-54	4.84	3.77	3.39	2.37	2.60	2.90	1.56
		Aug.	Sept	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Year	
Newgate		0.86	0.89	1.12	1.28	1.68	13.81	
Elko		1.33	1.56	1.82	1.53	1.95	20.10	
Fernie		1.60	2.56	4.11	4.24	5.66	39.60	

Source: C. C. Kelley & P. N. Sprout, British Columbia, Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey of the Upper Kootenay & Elk Valleys, Ottawa, Cloutier, 1956, Report #5, p. 94.

TABLE VII

Extreme Temperature and Average Snowfall of Newgate, Elko and Fernie for the Years Shown, in Degrees Fahrenheit and Inches.

Station	Years on Record	Temperature		Snowfall
		High	Low	
Newgate	1918-53	103	-40	41.2
Elko	-	-	-	49.9
Fernie	1916-53	97	-40	131.3

Source: C. C. Kelley & P. N. Sprout, British Columbia, Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey of the Upper Kootenay & Elk Valleys, Ottawa, Cloutier, 1956, Report #5, p. 15.

TABLE VIII

Ethnic Distribution of Population in Fernie, East Kootenay Region and British Columbia.

Nationality	Fernie	E. Koot.	B. C.
English	897	7,463	272,501
Irish	195	2,001	71,612
Scotch	430	3,657	125,038
Other Brit.	58	373	10,772
French	54	721	15,023
Austrian	52	247	3,891
Belgian	9	78	1,597
Czech-Slov.	124	875	2,759
Dutch	20	146	6,234
Finnish	5	165	6,858
German	85	631	16,986
Hebrew	-	11	2,743
Hungarian	15	92	1,313
Italian	511	1,718	12,254
Polish	162	809	4,599
Roumanian	-	189	1,163
Russian	20	209	10,398
Scandinavian	32	1,851	38,854
Ukrainian	10	163	2,538
Other Europ.	10	262	4,990
Chin.-Jap.	25	473	49,344
Other Asiat.	7	30	1,607
Indian-Esk.	-	383	24,599
Unspecified	2	19	1,544
Total	2,732	22,566	694,263

Source: Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, The Seventh Dominion Census, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1931, Bulletin 22.

TABLE IX

Nationality of Employees in the Coal Industry of British Columbia.

Country of Origin	Males	Females
Canada & Nwflnd.	648	4
Gt. Brit. & Ire.	1377	1
U. S.	42	-
Australia	-	-
Belgium	8	-
France	6	-
Italy	284	-

Country of Origin	Males	Females
Germany & Austria	25	-
Cent. Europ. & Balkans	248	-
Scandinavian	34	-
Russia & Poland	164	-
Other Europ. Countries	4	-
China	125	-
Hindustan	-	-
Japan	29	-
All Others	-	-

Source: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of Minister of Labour, Victoria, King's Printer, 1934, p. L23.

TABLE X

Projects Carried Out by the Department of National Defence for the Department of Labour, 1932-1936.

Location	Type of Work	Man-days Relief to June 30, 1936
Yahk	Intermed. Land. Field	73,542
Kitchener	Intermed. Land. Field	64,858
Salmo	Intermed. Land. Field	62,569
Princeton	Intermed. Land. Field	30,901
Hope	Intermed. Land. Field	70,093
Cranbrook	Rifle Range	2,961
Victoria	Dist. H. Q., M. D. 11, Administration	32,886
Hope end, Hope-Princeton High.	Highway Construction	300,933
Princeton end, Hope-Princeton High.	Highway Construction	316,523
Vancouver Island	Highway Construction	229,025
West Coast Road	Highway Construction	45,007
Kingsgate, Eastport, Yahk	Highway Construction	150,265
Crow's Nest, Michel	Highway Construction	93,070
Kimberley-Wasa	Highway Construction	108,816
Long Beach, Nelson-Fraser's Landing	Highway Construction	

Location	Type of Work	Man-days Relief to June 30, 1936
Goatfell, Creston- Goatfell	Highway Construction	129,149
Nelway, Nelway- Nelson	Highway Construction	56,414
China Creek-Castlegar- Trail	Highway Construction	58,835
Shoreacres-Nelson- Castlegar	Highway Construction	67,144
Rockcreek-Tadana ¹	Highway Construction	65,379
Sheepcreek-Rossland- Cascade	Highway Construction	2,863
Yahk-Kootenay	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	10,195
Long Beach-West Koot.	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	12,265
Niskolinh Forest Reserve ²	Forestry	
Rosedale-Hope	Highway Construction	192,381
Agassiz-Harrison Mills	Highway Construction	268,457
Work Point, Rodd Hill & Heal's Rifle Range		
Ft. McCauley, Esquim.	Rifle Range	52,231
Boston Bar, Hope-Bar Hope	Highway Construction	329,888
Princeton	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	18,299
Sooke	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	15,830
Cranbrook	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	5,896
Merritt-Princeton	Municipal Airport	4,964
Trail-Fruitvale ²	Highway Construction	51,363
Balfour-Kaslo- New Denver ²	Highway Construction	
Mount Oldfield ²	Highway Construction	
Spence's Bridge	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	19,040
Spence's Bridge-Merritt	Highway Construction	144,236
Spence's Bridge-Lytton	Highway Construction	59,366
Spence's Bridge- Cache Creek	Highway Construction	65,130
Salmon Arm	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	13,024
Salmon Arm-Sorrento	Highway Construction	58,834
Salmon-Arm-Sicamous	Highway Construction	196,649
Newgate-Rossville Cutoff	Highway Construction	56,751
East Thurlow Island ²	Forestry	
Revelstoke	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	9,672
Revelstoke North- Big Bend	Highway Construction	165,684
Revelstoke-Sicamous	Highway Construction	128,392

Location	Type of Work	Man-days Relief to June 30, 1936
Point Grey	Highway Construction	120,967
Boston Bar	Intermed. Land. Field	77,540
Point Grey	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	13,039
White Rock	Highway Construction	254,571
Aldergrove	Highway Construction	40,745
Ender Harbour		
Half Moon Bay ³	Highway Construction	175,525
Squamish	Highway Construction	52,766
Boston Bar	Warehouse	248
Taghum	Highway Construction	45,527
Aldrige	Highway Construction	51,051
Kamloops	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	1,976
North Thompson River	Highway Construction	17,543
Dead Man Creek-Kamloops	Highway Construction	64,292
Kelowna	Grp. H. Q. High. Const.	5,172
Oyama	Highway Construction	44,479
Nahum	Highway Construction	59,838
Naramata	Highway Construction	8,264
North Vancouver	Blair Rifle Range	55,083
Yahk	Highway Construction	31,377
Kitchener	Highway Construction	35,183
Rock Creek	Intermed. Land. Field	23,206
Canal Flats	Highway Construction	48,206
Oliver	Intermed. Land. Field	30,507
Lytton ²		
Midway	Intermed. Land. Field	3,665
Pendleton	Intermed. Land. Field	15,907

¹Tadana should read Tadanac

²Projects contemplated but not started by March 31, 1936.

³Ender should read Pender

Source: Canada, Department of National Defence, Final Report on the Unemployment Relief Scheme for the Care of Single, Homeless Men Administered by the Department of National Defence 1932-1936, Ottawa, 1937, I, Appendices 4, p. 99 & 13, pp. 119-23, as cited by 5498 A/CWO G. M. LeFresne, The Royal Army Centres, unpublished Honours B. A. Thesis, Royal Military College of Canada, 1962, pp. 204-11.

TABLE XI

Numbers Receiving Direct Relief from 1930-1940 in British Columbia.

Year	Mon.	Families		Single	Total
1930 ¹		5,166		14,214	19,380
		Fam. Head	Depend.		
1931 ²		17,716	52,769	36,065	106,550
1932	Sept.	15,906	48,645	18,279	82,830
1933	Mar.	24,969	73,302	30,587	128,858
	Sept.	18,562	52,801	17,007	88,370
1934	Mar.	22,930	65,046	27,749	115,725
	Sept.	16,213	46,850	15,749	78,812
1935	Mar.	20,913	58,206	22,963	102,082
	Sept.	16,289	44,946	15,592	76,827
1936	Mar.	20,493	57,538	16,207	94,238
	Sept.	14,793	40,476	11,663	66,932
1937	Mar.	17,579	49,700	15,493	82,772
	Sept.	9,875	26,182	7,053	43,110
1938	Mar.	15,369	43,078	10,043	70,799
	Sept.	11,723	31,342	8,612	53,199
1939	Mar.	17,162	47,737	12,976	77,875
	Sept.	11,630	29,830	9,766	51,226
1940	Mar.	14,986	38,653	12,502	65,479
	Sept.	6,371	14,619	7,135	28,125

¹Numbers receiving relief date from Sept. 22, 1930 to Apr. 30, 1931.

²Numbers receiving relief date from May 1, 1931 to Apr. 30, 1932.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour, 1930-1940, Victoria, King's Printer, 1931-1941.

TABLE XII

Distribution of Costs of Relief.

Relief to Municipal Districts						
Date	Direct Relief			Relief Work		
	Fed.	Prov.	Mun.	Fed.	Prov.	Mun.
Sept. 22, 1930	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/4	1/4	1/2
Jan. 2, 1931	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/4	1/4	1/2
June 26, 1931 ¹	1/2	3/10	1/5	1/4	1/4	1/2
July 8, 1931 ²	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/4	1/4	1/2
Sept. 16, 1931				1/2	1/4	1/4
1932	1/2	1/2	-	1/2	1/4	1/4
1933 ³	1/3	1/3	1/3	1/2	1/4	1/4
Aug. 1, 1934 ⁴				-	3/5	2/5
Nov. 30, 1935				-	4/5	1/5
Apr. 1, 1939 ⁵				-	4/5	1/5

Relief to Unorganized Districts					
Date	Direct Relief		Relief Work		
	Fed.	Prov.	Fed.	Prov.	
Sept. 22, 1930	-	-	1/2	1/2	
Jan. 2, 1931	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	
Apr. 1, 1939	1/2	1/2	1/2	1/2	

¹Temporary scheme for direct relief cases only until scheme worked out by all levels of government.

²For residents only, retroactive to June 19, 1931. Prov. & fed. gov'ts. each paid 1/2 cost of feeding transients.

³Transients now administered on a 1/3 basis retroactive to June 1, 1933, instead of 1/2 fed.-1/2 prov. basis as pre-June.

⁴Percentage basis of fed. aid to provinces ended; fed. assistance received was in form of a monthly grant-in-aid of \$115,000; all monies administered by provinces. Most of relief now given in return for work.

⁵New agreements provided that fed. gov't. pay 2/5 of actual expenditures for residents and 1/2 for transients. Prov. gov't. continued paying 4/5 of cost for municipal residents & full costs for transients residing within municipal limits.

Sources: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour 1930-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1931-1940.

Fernie Free Press, Fernie, B. C., 1930-1939.

TABLE XIII

Single Homeless Men Receiving Relief through Government Camps and Projects in British Columbia, 1932-1940.

Type	1932 Jan. July	1933 Jan. July	1934 Jan. July	1935 Jan. July	1936 Jan. July	1937 Jan. July	1938 Jan. July	1939 Jan. July	1940 Jan. July
Camps	-	6,141	386	413	-	-	-	-	-
	6,741	2,725 ¹	369	215	-	-	-	-	-
Nat. Def. Camps	-	2,432	7,869	7,760	-	-	-	-	-
Hosp. Camps	-	-	6,469	2,922	-	-	-	-	-
Forest. Camps	-	-	-	-	196	196	162	162	166
	-	-	-	-	177	183	102	127	114
Nat. For. Projects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
For. Dev. & Pub. Wrks.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	425	-
Proj. Camps	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,019	2,110	-
Pub. Wrks. Projects	-	-	-	-	-	331	-	1,392 ⁶	-
Plac. Min. Camps	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	-	-
Farm	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Place. Hostels	2	-	-	-	-	209 ⁵	-	-	-
	1,651	2,252	2,181	1,499	-	-	-	-	-
	-	-	906	697	-	-	-	-	-
Relief Organ.	1,195	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban Centres	10,299	5,739	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

¹Provincial from 1933 onward.

²Classified as a camp from June, 1935 onward.

³Classified as Training camps July 1936.

⁴Classified as Farm Improvement & Employment Plan.

⁵Classified as Farm Placement & Improvement Project.

⁶Figure for Forestry Development projects only.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour, Victoria, King's Printer, 1933-1941.

TABLE XIV

Relief and Public Works Expenditures in Fernie District for Fiscal Years 1929-1939, in Dollars.

Year	Tot. Unemp. Relief	Tot. Pub. Works	Direct Relief
1929-30	-	194,069.30	-
1930-31	-	229,796.33	-
1931-32	65,249.59	136,441.95	2,260.95
1932-33	95,886.85	134,050.70	-
1933-34	56,778.01	82,560.95	-
1934-35	150,895.28	192,591.66	87,566.43
1935-36	202,236.08	235,198.79	107,273.62
1936-37	183,434.78	228,902.30	117,409.12
1937-38	171,402.34	225,119.57	114,712.25
1938-39	118,834.03	206,778.39	92,846.98

Source: British Columbia, Department of Public Works, Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works, 1929-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1930-1940.

TABLE XV

Annual Payrolls in the Coal Industry in British Columbia, 1927-1940, in Dollars.

Year	No. of Firms	Total Payroll	Year	No. of Firms	Total Payroll
1927	27	7,502,946.98	1934	25	3,198,911.30
1928	26	7,438,948.90	1935	24	3,064,399.10
1929	28	6,508,572.73	1936	27	3,416,428.00
1930	26	5,666,528.68	1937	27	3,716,206.00
1931	25	4,671,819.52	1938	23	3,339,646.00
1932	27	3,684,582.87	1939	26	3,687,824.00
1933	23	2,862,277.99	1940	24	3,811,341.00

Source: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour, Victoria, King's Printer, 1935, p. L12, & 1940, p. E8.

TABLE XVI

Comparison of Output and Per Capita Production of Coal between East Kootenay District and British Columbia, 1910-1940.

Year	Area	Gross Tons per Year	Men at Prod'ing Mines	Tons per Man	Men Under- ground	Tons per Undergr'nd Man
1910	E.K.	1,365,119	3,111	439	2,374	575
	B.C.	3,139,235	7,758	404	5,903	532
1915	E.K.	852,572	1,748	488	1,183	721
	B.C.	1,972,580	4,978	396	3,695	534
1920	E.K.	847,389	1,582	536	1,062	798
	B.C.	2,696,774	6,349	425	4,191	643
1925	E.K.	854,480	1,466	582	989	864
	B.C.	2,444,292	5,443	449	3,828	639
1926	E.K.	848,448	1,431	592	962	881
	B.C.	2,330,036	5,322	437	3,757	620
1927	E.K.	907,519	1,494	607	1,033	876
	B.C.	2,453,827	5,225	460	3,646	673
1928	E.K.	1,001,523	1,621	617	1,153	886
	B.C.	2,526,702	5,334	473	3,814	662
1929	E.K.	886,706	1,503	589	1,116	794
	B.C.	2,251,252	5,028	447	3,675	612
1930	E.K.	689,230	1,252	550	931	740
	B.C.	1,887,130	4,645	406	3,380	556
1931	E.K.	661,426	1,211	546	909	727
	B.C.	1,707,590	4,082	419	2,957	577
1932	E.K.	587,875	1,001	587	752	781
	B.C.	1,534,975	3,608	425	2,628	584
1933	E.K.	477,677	698	684	522	915
	B.C.	1,264,746	3,094	408	2,241	564
1934	E.K.	627,619	754	832	551	1,139
	B.C.	2,347,090	2,893	465	2,050	657
1935	E.K.	407,110	819	497	614	663
	B.C.	1,187,968	2,971	399	2,145	554
1936	E.K.	470,606	606	776	459	1,025
	B.C.	1,346,741	2,814	478	2,015	668
1937	E.K.	459,136	628	731	462	972
	B.C.	1,444,687	3,153	458	2,286	632
1938	E.K.	434,068	693	626	467	972
	B.C.	1,309,428	2,962	442	2,088	675
1939	E.K.	561,958	731	768	538	1,044
	B.C.	1,477,872	2,976	496	2,167	682
1940	E.K.	976,518	731	1,062	550	1,412
	B.C.	1,667,827	2,874	580	2,175	766

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, cited in J. Hughes, A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia, unpublished M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1944.

TABLE XVII

Number of Days Worked and Output in Tons per Man of East Kootenay Mines, 1926-1940.

Year	Coal Creek			Michel			Corbin		
	Per Man Under- ground	Per Man Days Wrkd	Per Man Days Wrkd	Per Man Under- ground	Per Man Days Wrkd	Per Man Days Wrkd	Per Man Under- ground	Per Man Days Wrkd	Per Man Days Wrkd
1926	741	536	205	891	592	248	1,976	878	244
1927	810	594	250½	899	585	248½	1,131	735	289
1928	820	606	282	757	540	247	1,572	928	278½
1929	666	518	217	812	585	214½	1,295	881	261
1930	590	444	155	700	503	178	1,088	847	238
1931	436	330	118	738	539	167	1,196	928	225
1932	362	269	76	760	565	159	1,131	1,013	250
1933	485	376	90	930	684	202	1,149	858	189
1934	789	614	150	1,140	818	232	1,363	983	267
1935	724	564	147	1,007	799	211	53	36	15
1936	790	603	165	1,104	834	240	-	-	-
1937	919	713	174	1,020	737	226	-	-	-
1938	826	622	171	968	627	230	-	-	-
1939	915	680	158	1,079	793	244	-	-	-
1940	1,059	789	181	1,507	1,136	276	-	-	-

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, cited in J. Hughes, A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia, unpublished M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1944.

TABLE XVIII

Number of Total Men and Men Employed Underground in East Kootenay and British Columbia Coal Mines 1920-1940.

Year	C. Crk.		Michel		Corbin		East Koot.		Brit. Col.	
	Und.	Tot.	Und.	Tot.	Und.	Tot.	Und.	Tot.	Und.	Tot.
1920	648	849	338	581	76	152	1,062	1,582	4,191	6,349
1921	702	909	415	720	90	145	1,207	1,774	4,722	6,885
1922	641	812	360	613	62	113	1,063	1,538	4,712	6,644
1923	575	759	336	593	47	82	965	1,434	4,342	6,149
1924	430	573	301	410	66	104	797	1,147	3,894	5,418
1925	549	760	362	382	78	124	989	1,466	3,828	5,443
1926	494	682	408	614	60	135	962	1,431	3,757	5,322
1927	519	708	399	609	115	177	1,033	1,494	3,646	5,225
1928	564	763	475	665	114	193	1,153	1,621	3,814	5,339
1929	565	728	421	584	130	191	1,116	1,503	3,675	5,028
1930	356	474	379	526	196	252	931	1,252	3,389	4,645
1931	359	475	335	459	215	277	909	1,211	2,957	4,082
1932	256	345	282	379	214	277	752	1,001	2,628	3,608
1933	111	143	222	302	189	253	522	698	2,241	3,094
1934	116	149	256	357	179	248	551	754	2,050	2,893
1935	120	154	308	388	186	277	614	819	2,145	2,971
1936	116	152	343	454	-	-	459	606	2,015	2,814
1937	121	156	341	472	-	-	462	628	2,286	3,153
1938	128	140	339	523	-	-	467	693	2,088	2,962
1939	113	152	425	579	-	-	538	731	2,167	2,976
1940	117	157	433	574	-	-	550	731	2,175	2,874

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, 1920-1940, Victoria, King's Printer, 1921-1941.

TABLE XIX

Coal and Coke Production of East Kootenay Mines, 1898-1940, in Tons¹.

Year	Coal Creek		Michel		Corbin
	Coal	Coke	Coal	Coke	Coal
1898	9,334	361	-	-	-
1899	102,610	29,658	-	-	-
1900	196,837	65,915	9,966	-	-
1901	322,245	111,683	-	-	-
1902	238,776	78,490	113,853	29,347	-
1903	215,776	84,321	235,347	64,818	-
1904	345,901	118,551	235,256	95,685	-
1905	425,493	123,593	309,505	124,705	-
1906	426,793	93,171	273,497	96,214	-
1907	522,783	88,775	353,728	117,766	-
1908	441,003	102,322	412,185	131,176	4,111
1909	379,968	117,268	390,462	106,174	60,824
1910	622,564	78,420	457,581	95,239	126,851
1911	206,556	28,519	114,384	25,641	81,718
1912	696,844	148,924	253,862	70,030	122,263
1913	825,185	157,905	216,224	68,469	72,788
1914	577,299	143,460	201,104	56,406	74,312
1915	511,904	147,129	278,124	93,292	62,544
1916	569,131	128,020	244,119	112,101	69,020
1917	323,561	75,187	127,125	54,312	101,065
1918	402,463	85,730	206,412	78,350	123,989
1919	306,191	13,494	172,868	43,573	79,747
1920	431,783	-	264,592	67,792	151,014
1921	413,523	-	278,301	59,434	67,931
1922	291,671	-	216,668	41,400	46,022
1923	433,836	-	258,429	58,919	48,266
1924	98,025	-	147,805	30,615	27,688
1925	464,133	28,850	321,535	46,335	68,812
1926	366,054	35,011	363,795	58,435	118,599
1927	420,706	32,346	356,696	52,726	130,117
1928	462,733	21,985	359,547	39,385	179,243
1929	376,304	-	342,143	-	168,259
1930	210,262	28,042	265,262	37,768	213,412
1931	156,708	28,263	247,515	37,137	257,203
1932	92,879	11,840	214,305	17,705	280,691
1933	53,874	-	206,591	5,444	217,212
1934	91,604	-	292,027	22,178	243,988
1935	86,879	-	310,258	24,168	9,973
1936	91,645	-	378,961	30,366	-
1937	111,265	-	347,871	43,209	-
1938	105,736	-	328,332	48,751	-
1939	103,375	-	458,583	51,205	-
1940	123,963	-	652,555	59,788	-

¹Coal is weighed in long tons; coke in short tons.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, cited in J. Hughes, A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia, unpub. M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1944, pp. 142-143.

TABLE XX

Coal Sales of East Kootenay Mines to the United States and Canada, 1929-1940, in Long Tons.

Coal Creek				Michel		
Year	Canada	U. S.	Total	Canada	U. S.	Total
1920	58,546	338,466	397,012	74,354	70,130	144,484
1921	49,535	320,410	369,945	35,932	133,889	169,821
1922	80,680	191,566	272,246	44,000	102,453	146,453
1923	113,316	284,264	397,580	115,483	33,806	149,289
1924	40,124	43,643	83,767	85,488	7,897	93,385
1925	159,641	223,209	382,850	234,894	1,233	236,127
1926	112,948	174,684	287,632	258,332	574	258,906
1927	102,814	239,502	342,316	258,724	-	258,724
1928	176,275	220,075	396,350	283,582	-	283,582
1929	110,984	212,838	323,822	263,446	-	263,446
1930	102,312	55,478	157,790	195,780	-	195,780
1931	77,389	27,354	104,743	184,775	-	184,775
1932	61,633	11,394	73,027	179,130	-	179,130
1933	46,300	4,366	50,666	192,627	131	192,758
1934	79,270	9,279	88,549	234,025	722	234,747
1935	63,042	20,615	83,657	266,218	1,737	267,955
1936	59,675	29,250	88,925	302,535	9,315	311,850
1937	71,370	33,068	104,438	247,948	9,950	257,898
1938	68,163	34,500	102,663	225,201	12,900	238,101
1939	69,611	30,930	100,541	315,095	26,890	341,985

Corbin							
Year	Canada	U. S.	Total	Year	Canada	U. S.	Total
1920	72,176	70,746	142,922	1930	158,841	21,274	180,115
1921	18,794	41,032	59,826	1931	218,887	15,669	234,556
1922	14,055	39,432	53,487	1932	225,363	16,271	241,634
1923	7,997	35,655	43,652	1933	170,310	14,091	184,401
1924	3,249	19,134	22,383	1934	191,794	13,531	205,315
1925	36,671	24,994	61,665	1935	8,940	739	9,679
1926	47,444	21,975	69,419	1936	-	-	-
1927	83,940	32,493	116,433	1937	-	-	-
1928	127,691	19,948	147,639	1938	-	-	-
1929	100,177	18,817	119,556 ¹	1939	-	-	-

¹Includes 562 tons of coal sold to other countries.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, Victoria, King's Printer, 1940.

TABLE XXI

Average Weekly Wages for All Adult Male Employees and Those in the Coal and Lumber Industries in British Columbia, 1920-1940.

Year	All Ad. Male Employees \$	Coal Industry \$	Lumber Industry \$
1920	31.51	37.64	32.47
1921	27.62	32.83	24.70
1922	27.29	33.96	25.29
1923	28.05	36.96	25.92
1924	28.39	35.73	26.15
1925	27.82 ¹	30.52	25.40
1926	27.99	30.06	25.56
1927	28.29	29.79	25.93
1928	28.96	30.50	26.53
1929	29.20	30.18	26.54
1930	28.64	29.03	25.69
1931	26.17	28.40	21.09
1932	23.62	28.04	18.73
1933	22.30	26.80	18.00
1934	23.57	28.11	21.32
1935	24.09	28.49	22.41
1936	26.36	28.75	24.83
1937	26.64	27.46	26.81
1938	26.70	28.20	26.59
1939	26.80	29.39	27.14
1940	28.11	28.04	28.83

¹The Hours of Work Act came into effect in 1925 and the Male Minimum Wage Act in late 1925. Consideration must be given that between 1924 and 1925 there was a general lowering of the hours of work in many industries; in some cases where workers were being paid an hourly rate this led to a reduction in the weekly wage.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Labour, Annual Report of the Minister of Labour, 1920-1940, Victoria, King's Printer, 1921-1941.

TABLE XXII

Estimated Value of Production of the Lumbering Industry, including Loading and Freight in British Columbia, in Thousands of Dollars, 1929-1939.

Product	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Lumber	50,140	32,773	16,738	13,349	15,457	20,337
Pulp & Paper	14,400	16,520	13,508	11,156	10,852	12,373
Shingles	8,300	4,161	2,721	2,805	4,500	4,375
Boxes	2,437	2,287	1,315	1,100	1,313	1,632
Doors	-	-	-	-	-	-
Piles, Posts, Mine Props	5,500	4,726	2,453	772	450	487
Cordwd., Fce.						
Posts, Mine Tie	1,734	1,596	1,405	1,576	1,850	1,335
Railway Ties	2,116	1,253	1,044	502	250	485
Wood-using Industries	2,100	2,387	1,350	1,014	1,200	1,320
Laths & Misc.	2,400	1,500	1,500	1,125	1,000	1,100
Log Exports	4,124	2,492	2,370	1,730	2,228	1,931
Pulp Wd. Export	50	42	43	28	55	46
Xmas Trees	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	93,301	69,737	44,447	35,157	39,155	45,461
Product	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	Aver. ¹
Lumber	24,094	36,160	40,638	36,296	50,379	28,626
Pulp & Paper	12,414	14,950	17,214	11,066	16,191	13,625
Shingles	8,750	7,800	6,875	6,875	8,560	5,742
Boxes	1,720	1,629	2,122	1,964	2,039	1,712
Doors	1,693	2,718	2,971	1,353	737	947
Piles, Posts, Mine Props	810	1,434	2,346	1,615	1,556	1,665
Cordwd., Fce.						
Posts, Mine Tie	1,453	1,489	1,459	1,455	1,495	1,511
Railway Ties	764	623	560	560	360	640
Wood-using Industries	1,300	1,350	1,500	1,400	1,500	1,432
Laths & Misc.	1,100	1,200	1,400	1,300	1,400	1,263
Log Exports	2,820	2,646	3,782	3,238	3,852	2,709
Pulp Wd. Export	23	11	5	-	11	26
Xmas Trees	-	-	-	-	141	14
Total	56,941	72,010	80,872	67,122	88,221	59,912

¹Average is over the years 1930-1939.

Source: British Columbia, Department of Lands, Report of the Forest Branch, 1929-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1930-1940.

TABLE XXIII

Value of Production of Gold, Silver, Copper, Lead and Zinc
in East Kootenay District, 1920-1939.

Year	Placer Gold \$	Lode Gold \$	Silver 000's \$	Copper \$	Lead 000's \$	Zinc 000's \$
1920	3,500	-	398	341	2,006	2,796
1921	3,600	20	336	-	1,583	1,948
1922	3,000	-	631	-	3,022	2,511
1923	2,000	-	754	-	5,677	2,919
1924	5,200	-	1,812	9	11,769	3,957
1925	4,489	-	2,173	238	17,898	7,274
1926	721	6,636	3,082	1,313	17,043	9,467
1927	2,499	19,452	2,290	17	14,231	8,196
1928	391	15,173	3,266	41	13,412	9,251
1929	510	4,733	2,682	-	14,697	8,774
1930	119	83	1,991	-	12,330	8,286
1931	3,079	-	1,256	-	6,673	5,217
1932	9,333	-	1,400	-	5,312	4,581
1933	11,866	248	1,882	-	6,421	5,984
1934	14,841	379	3,107	-	8,329	7,239
1935	19,144	-	4,353	-	10,535	6,906
1936	19,474	-	3,190	-	14,101	7,718
1937	24,804	2,274	3,711	-	20,715	13,048
1938	28,208	2,779	3,484	-	13,584	8,228
1939	19,824	2,999	3,230	-	11,820	7,001

Source: British Columbia, Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, cited in J. Hughes, A History of Mining in the East Kootenay District of British Columbia, unpublished M. A. Thesis, Univ. of Alta., 1944, p. 139.

TABLE XXIV

Mine Disasters in the Fernie District, 1902-1938.

Date	Type	Town	Deaths & Inj.'s
May 22, 1902	Explosion	Coal Creek	128 dead.
Oct. 14, 1903	Outburst	Morrissey	4 dead.
Nov. 18, 1904	Outburst	Morrissey	14 dead.
Jan. 8, 1904	Explosion	Michel	7 dead.
Aug. 8, 1916	Explosion	Michel	12 dead.
Apr. 5, 1917	Explosion	Coal Creek	34 dead.
Aug. 30, 1928	Blowout	Coal Creek	6 dead.
Apr. 13, 1929	Explosion	Coal Creek	10 injured.
Sept. 20, 1938	Bump	Coal Creek	3 dead.
July 5, 1938	Explosion	Michel	3 dead.

Source: Fernie Historical Association, Backtracking with Fernie Historical Association, Lethbridge, Lethbridge Herald, 1967, p. 35.

TABLE XXV

Number of Pupils in Schools and Average Daily Attendance in Fernie, 1928-1940.

Year	No. of Pupils	Aver. Daily Attendance	No. in Grade XII	No. in Sr. Matric.
1928-29	823	749.68	10	-
1929-30	813	729.74	9	-
1930-31	831	771.22	6	-
1931-32	786	740.37	-	-
1932-33	748	671.81	19	-
1933-34	686	654.40	30	-
1934-35	685	634.36	27	8
1935-36	652	607.55	19	-
1936-37	674	609.24	34	-
1937-38	648	594.58	30	11
1938-39	620	577.92	20	11
1939-40	619	573.80	32	8

Source: British Columbia, Superintendent of Education, Annual Report of the Public Schools, 1928-1940, Victoria, King's Printer, 1929-1941.

TABLE XXVI

Revenue Derived from the Sale of Firearms Licences, and Game Tags, 1929-1939, in Fernie, in Dollars.

Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1929	2,642.50	1935	2,396.25
1930	2,837.50	1936	2,360.75
1931	2,662.50	1937	1,921.00
1932	3,164.25	1938	2,291.00
1933	2,875.50	1939	2,118.75
1934	3,425.75		

Source: British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner, 1929-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1930-1940.

TABLE XXVII

Revenue Derived from the Fur Trade, Fines, and Sale of Fur Licences in British Columbia, 1929-1939, in Dollars.

Year	Fines	Fur Trade	Licences & Fees
1929	9,008.00	47,329.89	142,028.22
1930	9,572.75	45,161.11	147,660.00
1931	8,645.00	46,091.08	137,233.31
1932	5,493.50	40,363.79	141,269.55
1933	3,531.00	44,167.48	135,876.94
1934	5,227.82	47,102.81	149,955.11
1935	4,399.50	49,831.95	148,689.64
1936	3,965.00	52,196.50	157,647.30
1937	5,332.50	53,697.48	177,771.33
1938	5,729.50	44,963.87	192,024.07
1939	4,776.50	49,187.00	193,170.53

Source: British Columbia, Department of the Attorney-General, Report of the Provincial Game Commissioner, 1929-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1930-1940.

TABLE XXVIII

Arrears of Taxes in Fernie, 1925-1939, in Dollars.

Year	Amount	Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1925	20,723	1930	18,079	1935	26,924
1926	21,928	1931	19,872	1936	27,797
1927	20,743	1932	25,910	1937	25,423
1928	24,971	1933	32,755	1938	22,092
1929	20,431	1934	29,537	1939	18,507

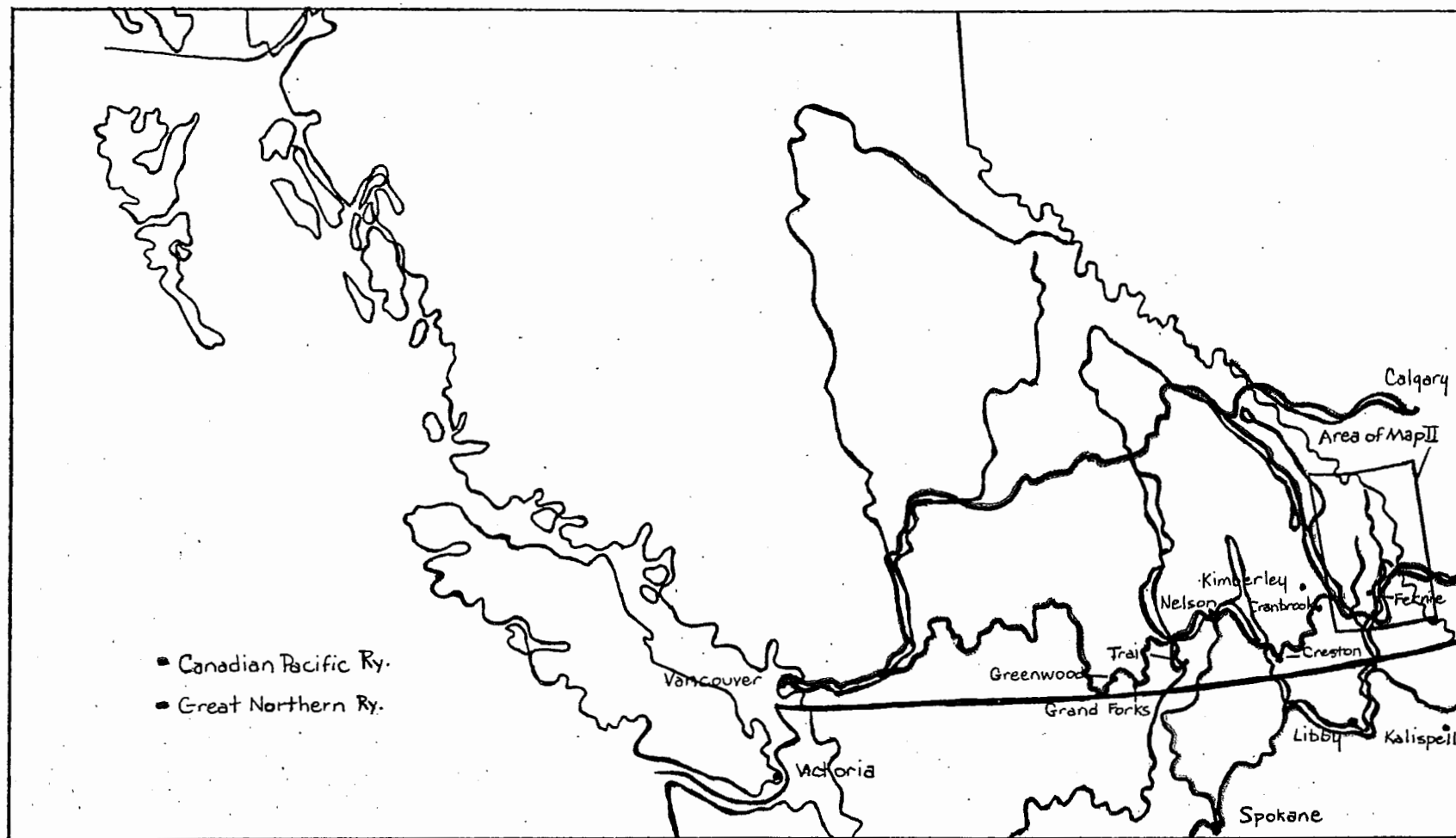
Source: British Columbia, Department of Municipal Affairs, Annual Report of the Minister of Municipal Affairs, 1925-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1926-1940.

TABLE XXIX

Sales of Liquor, including Beer in Fernie and Michel, 1928-1939, in Dollars.

Fernie		Michel	
Year	Net Profit	Year	Net Profit
1928-29	67,425.00	1928-29	27,414.00
1929-30	59,001.87	1929-30	27,445.10
1930-31	62,024.28	1930-31	23,117.21
1931-32	68,874.05	1931-32	19,317.59
1932-33	37,368.20	1932-33	13,253.18
1933-34	27,966.24	1933-34	11,066.63
1934-35	23,496.30	1934-35	13,987.48
1935-36	23,009.31	1935-36	12,967.31
1936-37	24,051.41	1936-37	17,710.53
1937-38	25,204.54	1937-38	18,287.81
1938-39	26,165.92	1938-39	18,638.46

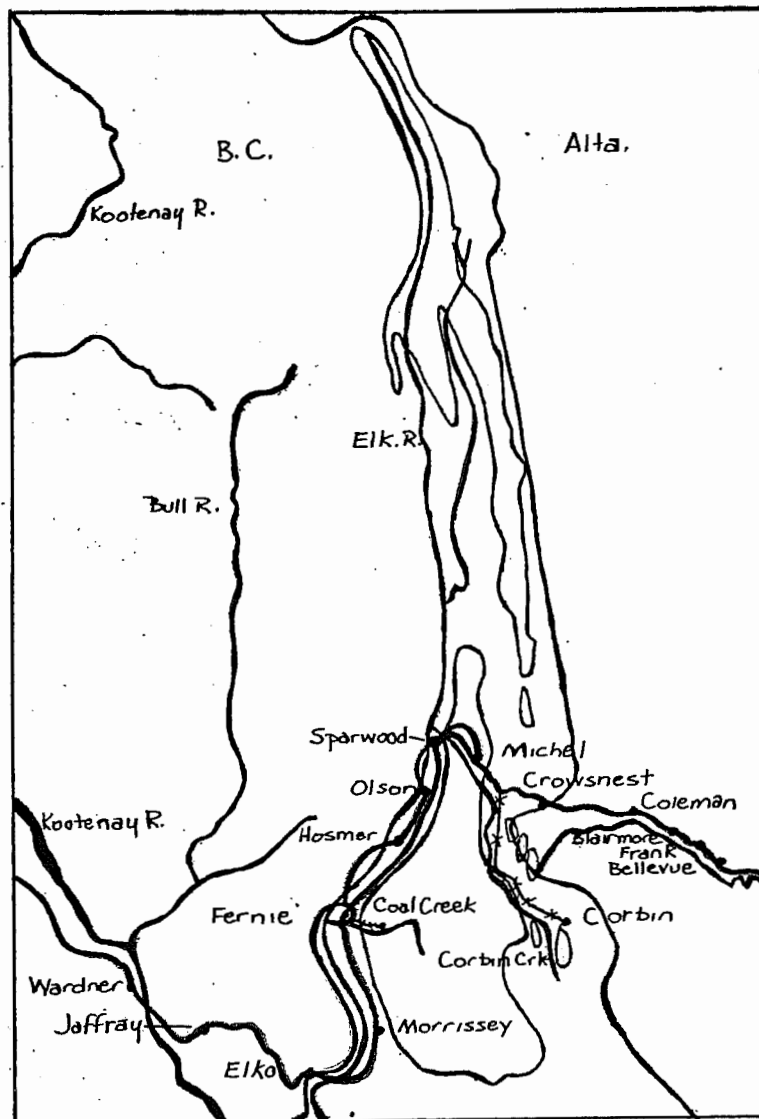
Source: British Columbia, Liquor Control Board, Annual Report of the Liquor Control Board, 1928-1939, Victoria, King's Printer, 1929-1940.



Scale: 100 miles to 1 inch

MAP I

Source: Canada, Report of the Royal Commission on Coal, 1946, Ottawa, King's Printer, 1947, map 10.



Scale: 16 miles to 1 inch

Coal-bearing Strata

Canadian Pacific Ry.

Great Northern Ry.

Eastern British Columbia Ry.

Morrissey, Fernie & Michel Ry.

MAP II

Source: Canada, Department of Mines, Coal Fields of British Columbia, Ottawa, Government Printing Bureau, 1915, diagram I.

Surname: SLOAN Given Names: WILLIAM ALEXANDER

Place of Birth: DRUMHELLER ALTA Date of Birth: SEPTEMBER 11, 1942

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY OF NELSON 1963 to 1966

_____ to _____

_____ to _____

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. 1966 Notre Dame University of Nelson.

Honours and Awards:

University of Victoria School of Graduate Studies Award

1966/67 and 1967/68.

Leon Hadner B.C. History Scholarship, 1968

Publications:
