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A STUDY IN SOCIAL CONTROL: The Life of the Silver Miner in Northern Ontario*

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The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inaugurated a period of rapid and turbulent transition in Canadian society; a change that was characterized by growing industrialization, immigration, urbanization, and industrial mergers. In the past decade, historians have increasingly turned their attention to the social and economic effects of these changes upon the nation's cities, factories, and construction camps. In particular they have examined poverty and the growth of urban slums, labour strife and union organization, and the socio-economic and ideological gulf between worker and employer.¹ Despite this growing interest, labour and social historians have generally ignored the effects of technology and industrialization on the conditions in the frontier mining camps. The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the working conditions, and the relationship between miner and mine owner, in the mining camps of Cobalt, northern Ontario.

Cobalt was one of the most important mining centres in Canadian history. Prior to the discovery of silver at Cobalt in 1903, metal mining played only a small part in the nation's economy. In fact, it was

* I wish to thank R. C. Macleod of the University of Alberta and D. Bercuson of the University of Calgary for their constructive comments. The Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation supported part of the research for this paper.

¹For example, see the work of I. Abella, A. Artibise, D. Avery, M. Bliss, T. Copp, and G. Kealey.

popularly believed that there were no precious metals east of the Rocky Mountains. However, when work crews engaged in the construction of the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway (from North Bay to New Liskeard) uncovered silver deposits of almost unequalled richness in the vicinity of the present town of Cobalt, the public's apathy was soon dispelled and mining went on to become one of the country's most important resources.

The boom which the discovery of silver touched off was one of the most colourful and exciting ever seen in Canada. Prospectors, writers, stock brokers, and mining engineers from New York, London, Brisbane, San Francisco, and Johannesburg all journeyed to Cobalt to seek their fortune. And the boom did not stop at Cobalt. It had only just begun. Silver was discovered at Elk Lake and Gowganda. Gold was found at Porcupine, Kirkland Lake, and Timmins. The financial resources and organizational talents acquired at Cobalt made it possible for Canadians to develop these newly discovered areas. For the next half century nearly every major find in Canada — from Noranda to Eldorado to Elliott Lake — owed its life to the talents and financial resources which were developed at Cobalt.

By the time the silver boom had petered out at Cobalt in the 1920s the camp had become the fourth largest silver producer ever discovered. While the actual production of silver was tremendous, Cobalt's greatest contribution was the impetus it gave to the mining industry and the resulting development of the vast mineral resources of the Precambrian Shield. The town of Cobalt also played an important role in the development of public policy. The rapid and spectacular development of silver mining forced the provincial government to create new agencies and to develop new philosophies to deal with the unique phenomenon of a mining boom. The province's mining laws were redrawn, separate mining divisions were established, and the office of Mining Commissioner was created. Stock market regulations and public health laws were rewritten, and a Royal Commission was created to consider labour problems in the silver mines. The small town of Cobalt, situated two hundred and fifty miles north of Toronto near the Ontario-Quebec border, thus became the prototype for other northern mining centres, and provides a perfect opportunity to examine governmental and business attitudes towards hardrock miners in Ontario.

I

The first prospectors at Cobalt were adventuresome, weather-beaten, high-spirited men who often arrived with little more than a small grubstake and a prayer. Their one consuming passion was to



The miner, dressed in wet clothes, is about to descend into the shaft perched on an ore bucket. Note the candle in one hand and the dynamite in the other. The photograph was taken from a postcard written in 1907. (In author's possession).

discover a valuable ore deposit, sell it for a profit, and return home to live in comfort. These prospectors were followed by the entrepreneurs who were willing to take a chance on the property for a relatively small sum.² The first shipments of ore consisted almost entirely of rich silver nuggets taken from surface excavations. This not only permitted the capitalists to purchase machinery and to begin a more systematic development of their property, but also ensured that Cobalt would not become a one-company town.³

²Because most Canadians were unwilling to risk their capital in speculative mining ventures at this time, the majority of the claims were purchased by Americans.

³In 1905 out of every dollar received only fourteen cents went to wages which

As the silver veins were followed to greater depths, experienced engineers and skilled miners were employed to recover the ore buried deep beneath the earth's surface. The majority of the skilled miners originally came from Nova Scotia, with lesser numbers from the mines in British Columbia and the western United States. In Cobalt, as elsewhere, the backbreaking labour was performed by unskilled immigrants from continental Europe — Poles, Italians, Austrians, Hungarians and Finns — without whose muscle, the mine owners claimed, they could not operate their mines.⁴ Because of the rapid development of the camp, the demand for miners soon exceeded the supply. This dearth of experienced men was aggravated by the defection of many of the Nova Scotian miners during the prolonged, but unsuccessful strike for higher wages in 1907.⁵ As a result, new workers recruited from the larger Ontario cities had to be trained for the job.

The rapid growth of population in the mining camp soon placed a premium upon lodging facilities.⁶ The labourers working in the immediate vicinity of the town of Cobalt moved into the numerous boarding houses in the town, which quickly became so crowded that the lodgers were sometimes forced to sleep in eight hour shifts. Many mining companies built their own bunkhouses and provided room and board for sixty cents a day. The Nipissing Mining Company, for example, erected four small bunkhouses and a large two storey com-

left eighty-six cents for replacement of capital and profit. The first carload of ore from the Trethewey mine, for example, brought its owners \$34,000 clear profit. As a result there were approximately forty producing mines and several hundred non-producing mines in the Cobalt camp in 1910. H. P. Davis, *The Davis Handbook of the Cobalt Silver District* (New York 1910), p. 36. Ontario Bureau of Mines, *Annual Report*, 1906, p. 9 (Henceforth cited as *Ontario, Mines Report*).

⁴Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1912, p. 14. In 1911 fourteen percent of the town's population had come from Russia, Germany, Poland and Italy. Canada, *Census*, 1911.

⁵The early labour history of Cobalt was marked by general mining strikes in 1907 and 1919, and by the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1916 to look into the labour difficulties in the camp. In each case the issues revolved around wages, union recognition, and collective bargaining. The miners' case was presented by the Cobalt Labour Union, which was affiliated with the Western Federation of Miners. In defense, the operating mines established the Temiskaming Mine Managers' Association which was able to successfully withstand labour's demands.

⁶The total number of miners rose from 57 in 1904 to 3,500 in 1912, while the population of the immediate area approached 30,000.

ination kitchen, dining hall, and bunkhouse that could accommodate over two hundred at a single sitting. At some of these mines the health of the men was a prime consideration. Iron beds were fitted with springs and mattresses; while steam-heated rooms, electric lights, and hot baths all contributed to the miners' comfort. Yet all too frequently the living conditions were less than satisfactory. The sleeping rooms were infected with bedbugs, washroom facilities were either absent or unsanitary, and the bunkhouses lacked proper heating and ventilation. As a result, when a Board of Conciliation was established in 1914 to inquire into a labour dispute at the Temiskaming Mining Company, it recommended that the health inspectors be more thorough in their inspections of the miners' general living conditions and urged the Company to improve their facilities "especially as to cleanliness, sanitation and ventilation of the rooms and furnishings."⁷

The erection of bunkhouses allowed the mining companies to exert greater control over the extra-curricular activities of its employees than would otherwise have been possible. Recreation pastimes were directed and supervised by the company's staff, "proper"



This is a typical bunkhouse in the Cobalt camp. (Noranda Mining Company).

⁷Canada, Department of Labour, *Industrial Disputes Investigation Act*, 1916, p. 220.



Open-cut mining practices.
(Northern Miner).

reading material was provided, suitable movies were selected, and consumption of alcohol was limited. Perhaps most important, the growth of union activities could be checked before they had a chance to take root.

Later, several mining companies began to encourage their employees to take up private residence on their property. In order to attract married men to their employ, the management frequently offered special inducements to encourage the miners to erect their

own houses.⁸ The ultimate object of these incentives was to enable the companies to close their boarding houses, which by 1909 were beginning to cost more than they were earning. It was also more profitable to rent land to the miners and their families than to try to cope with the increased costs of living. The Coniagas Mine, for example, rented out 42 houses at \$48 a piece⁹ and the Nipissing Mining Company owned so much land to the north and east of Cobalt that it earned over \$17,000 a year on ground rents in 1908 and established a separate company to manage its housing revenues.¹⁰ The mining companies, in fact, controlled virtually all the land in the district. Home owners had to lease their land from the mines, and the tenant could be forced to move on thirty days' notice if his house was located on ground considered necessary for mining purposes. Although renting land was not as effective a means of controlling the miners as were boarding houses, it was less expensive, and the owners could, and did, use their power as landlords to evict or harass troublesome labour leaders by claiming that they needed the land for mining purposes.¹¹

The Mines Free Employment Bureau was another agency for dealing with undesirables. All miners seeking work were registered at the Bureau's Cobalt office. An employer was at liberty to engage workers without going through the Bureau, but he was required to send the employee to the Employment agency to be registered in the usual way. The miners' records were kept at the Bureau and the employers were to send in discharge slips explaining why the workers had left their employ.¹²

The Mines Free Employment Bureau was operated by the Temiskaming Mine Managers' Association (T.M.M.A.) which was established in 1907 to coordinate the hiring policies of the operating mines in the camp. The Association grew slowly, but by 1910 nearly all the producing mines were represented on its rolls. Its stated purpose was to advance the mining industry in the Temiskaming District, to consider changes in mining legislation, to maintain a hospital in the area, and to promote a spirit of co-operation amongst

⁸*Canadian Mining Journal*, 1915, p. 485 (henceforth cited as *C.M.J.*).

⁹*Coniagas Mining Company Letterbook for 1914*, Cobalt Mining Museum; *Coniagas Rent Roll*, Cobalt Mining Museum.

¹⁰H. A. Innis, *Settlement and the Mining Frontier* (Toronto 1936), p. 328.

¹¹*Hearings of the Royal Commission to Enquire into Industrial Relations in Canada*, 2, p. 1765. See also *C.M.J.*, 15 October 1916, p. 484.

¹²The Temiskaming Mine Managers' Association, *Constitution*, Cobalt Mining Museum.

the various mines in the camp.¹³ In reality, however, it was a union of the leading mine managers designed to regulate hours, wages, and working conditions. By controlling both the labour supply and the type of employees that were hired, the Employment Bureau allowed the mine owners to discipline the work force effectively.

Article 10 of the Association's constitution established the minimum length of each shift at ten hours from Monday to Friday, and at nine hours for the day and seven hours for the night shift on Saturdays. In 1912 a bill was introduced in the Ontario Legislature to limit underground work in the province's mines to eight hours. When this proposal was withdrawn pending an investigation by former Mining Commissioner, Samuel Price, the Cobalt mining companies attempted to forestall the anticipated legislation by voluntarily adopting a nine hour day for underground miners.

The mine managers opposed the proposed legislation for a variety of reasons. Many stated that by decreasing the output of the industry, and by making low grade propositions unworkable, the shorter hours would discourage investments. Such capital was necessary because the silver mines were in competition with Mexico which had both a cheaper labour force and fewer expenses due to its warmer climate. Other objections dealt with the supposed disastrous effects of similar legislation in British Columbia, Australia and England, the greater likelihood of accidents arising from a quickened work schedule, and the socialistic nature of the proposal.¹⁴

The employees replied that with proper management the same amount of work could be done in eight hours as was formerly achieved in ten. Eight hours a day, they felt, was all the ordinary man was capable of, after which time exhaustion dulled the faculties and led to accidents. This was especially so underground where the miners worked under unnatural conditions, away from the sunlight and in air contaminated with gas fumes and drilling dust. A ballot administered by Samuel Price at selected Ontario mines in 1913 showed that 332 employees were in favour of an eight hour law while only twelve were against it. Price, himself, concluded "that forebodings of disastrous results to the mining industry if an eight hour bill is enacted are not justified."¹⁵ As a result, the eight hour day for *underground* work came into effect on 1 January 1914.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Samuel Price, "Report re Limitation of the Hours of Labor of Underground Workmen in the Mines of Ontario", Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 45, No. 85, 1913.

¹⁵*Ibid.* p. 10.

The same concern was not extended towards the miners' wages. Miners' salaries were favourably compared with those in other industries. During the 1907 strike at the Cobalt mines, for example, the *New Liskeard Speaker* gave the following classic statement of free enterprise:

It will be seen that the lowest price paid is higher than labouring men get on any public work in Canada. The work is easier, and the wages higher than railroad work. Just where the ground of complaint is, it is hard to tell. If men do not want to work, we live in a free country, they need not, but if Canadian labor cannot be got at reasonable pay, then foreign help can and must be got.¹⁶

Despite increasing profits, the availability of cheap foreign labour, the weakness of the Cobalt Miners' Union, and the united action of the T.M.M.A. combined to keep wages static from 1907 through 1915.¹⁷

World War One had an unsettling effect upon the labour situation. Initially the war hampered mining operations. Access to the markets in India and China was cut off and the price of silver plummeted. In addition, the scarcity of cyanide and mercury increased milling costs and several mines were forced to shut down. These problems were only temporary, however. Soon the price of silver rose to phenomenal heights, the mines reopened, and profits soared. The gains were not passed on to the workers whose real wages declined due to an inexorable rise in the cost of living. These conditions provided fertile ground for union organizers. In 1916, for example, the Cobalt delegate to the Western Federation of Miners' convention submitted a favourable report on the Union's progress

¹⁶*New Liskeard Speaker*, 12 July 1907. During the labour unrest of 1916, the mine managers compared the wages in the Cobalt mines to those in Quebec and Nova Scotia. They also reported that two of every three miners had a bank account. *C.M.J.*, 1916, p. 484.

¹⁷The price of silver rose from fifty cents per ounce in 1907 to seventy cents in 1915, yet the following pay schedule remained static for this same period.

Timbermen	\$3.25	Hand drillers	\$2.75
Pumpmen	3.25	Cage tenders	2.50
Machine drillers	3.25	Trammers	2.50
Machine helpers	2.75	Surface labourers	2.25
Machine drillers in wet shafts	3.50	Ore sorter	2.25
		Carpenter	3.25

A deduction of sixty cents per day was made for board, and \$1.00 per month for hospital and doctor's fees.

and asked for, and received, subsequent organizing support.¹⁸ The T.M.M.A. attempted to curtail union activities by granting an increase of twenty-five cents a day to all underground miners, and promised an additional twenty-five cents bonus when the price of silver rose above seventy cents per ounce. While the owners claimed that the increase was necessary in order to keep the workers from moving to other more profitable occupations, it is more likely that the move was motivated by the sudden growth in union membership from 400 to 1,500.¹⁹ Although this compromise failed to mollify the union, a subsequent Royal Commission declared itself satisfied that the mine managers had done all that could reasonably have been expected.²⁰ It should be noted, however, that the Royal Commission had not been established out of concern for the miners, but due to the influence of the British Treasury which had expressed concern that a strike in Cobalt might affect Britain's ability to pay her allies.²¹ The workers' salaries thus became dependent upon the fluctuating price of silver on the New York and London markets, which reflected the conditions in China and India rather than the cost of living at home.

II

Mine safety precautions at the beginning of the twentieth century were almost non-existent. The drifts were illuminated by flickering candlelight, holes were hand drilled, dynamite was defrosted in the miners' pockets or in containers of warm water, and the muck was removed in wheelbarrows. The shafts were cold and damp. Hard hats and safety boots were still in the future.

Prior to 1907 the ore was extracted by means of open cuts and underhand stoping. With two or three exceptions there was not a shaft over one hundred feet in depth and the total value of mining machinery at Cobalt did not exceed \$100,000.²² The miners' tools consisted of a wheelbarrow, a pick, a shovel, a piece of drill steel, and

¹⁸Printed summary of the "Western Federation of Miners' Convention, July-August, 1916", courtesy David Miller.

¹⁹*C.M.J.*, 1916, p. 482.

²⁰Judge E. Coastsworth (Chairman) and E. T. Corkill, "Majority Report of the Committee to Investigate Unrest in the Mining Industry in the Cobalt District", reprinted in the *Labour Gazette*, October 1916, pp. 1633-38.

²¹Public Archives of Canada, Robert L. Borden Papers, John Bradbury to W. Griffith, Borden to Griffith, Microfilm C139.

²²Frank C. Loring, "Mining at Cobalt", *Canadian Mining Institute*, 1908, p. 336; *Engineering and Mining Journal* (New York), 26 January 1907, p. 186.



Underhand drilling in a typical stope. (Canadian Mining Journal, 1917).

a hammer. The Right-of-Way Mining Company was laughingly described as "seven men, three planks and a wheelbarrow, to which has been added a couple of candles for the nightshift."²³ The first shafts resembled wells with ladders down the side. They were timbered around the opening and a small bucket was lowered down the shaft by means of a winch or windlass. Although pneumatic rock drills had been introduced into Canada well before the turn of the century, hand drilling was the accepted practice at Cobalt in the first few years, because the owners (many of whom were operating on a shoestring budget) were unwilling to undertake large capital expenses until the silver veins proved out at depth. As usual, it was the miners who bore the brunt of the companies' parsimony. Despite this prevailing fear that the silver veins were only surface deep, modern mining methods were adopted after 1907 and the silver veins were followed to greater depths. Open quarrying gave way to shaft mining. The number of men employed underground increased from 186 in 1905 to 1,089 three years later, and the total value of mining machinery rose to a million dollars.²⁴

In the following years the basic indifference of government and owner towards the life of the mine labourer was revealed in their

²³*Engineering and Mining Journal* (New York), 26 January 1907, p. 274.

²⁴Ontario, *Mines Reports*, 1906-1908.

response to the new problems of ventilation, explosives, health and sanitation. The government, it is true, did improve its mining legislation, but it was generally unwilling to enforce its own laws; while the owners sought ways in which to avoid them.

As the shafts reached greater depths, and as drifting was extended mile upon mile, ventilation problems became more acute. The Mines Act of 1908 required "an adequate amount of ventilation" in all underground workings.²⁵ The word "adequate", however, was open to interpretation. The enforcement of all safety regulations was at the discretion of the provincial inspectors who were empowered to ignore the Mines Act if safety measures were not deemed "reasonably practicable". As a result, although there were several efficient types of ventilating fans on the market, the mines made no attempt to adopt any form of artificial ventilation until compressed air was introduced at Cobalt in 1910. The hydraulic compressed (Taylor) air was lower in oxygen content than ordinary compressor air, but it was nonetheless adopted by almost all the producing silver mines in order to save on costs. The low oxygen content in the air made it difficult to supply enough oxygen in the more remote stopes and development works, or to clear away the smoke and fumes after blasting. Despite these hazardous conditions, it was not until 1919 that the law was amended to require the installation of mechanical appliances where the natural ventilating current was insufficient for working conditions.

Another defect of the compressed air was that the candles would not burn in the close stopes. Various devices were tried in place of candles. The Coniagas mine experimented with "Sunshine" oil lamps, while the majority of the mines adopted carbide lamps. The lamps generated acetylene gas from the action of water on calcium carbide. The gas burned with a flame of varying intensity for several hours before the lamp had to be refilled and cleaned — often leaving the user entirely in the dark. After 1910 compressed air was used to light the shafts electrically, but it was not until the 1920s that electric hat-held lights were adopted.²⁶

The early explosives used in the mines added to the problems of ventilation. Carbon monoxide and nitrous oxide fumes led to several

²⁵Ontario, *Statutes of Ontario*, 1908. Department of Labour, *Labour Legislation in Canada*.

²⁶A. A. Cole, "Mining Practice in the Cobalt Silver Area". 1926; P. Sidney Teare, *Northern Miner*, 25 March 1965; "Hydraulic Air Compression, *Mines and Minerals* (San Francisco), October, 1910; Trethewey and Coniagas *Letterbook*, February, 1907.

deaths, while headaches and sickness from the blasting powder were common. The high freezing temperature of the first types of dynamite, and their sensitivity to shock or friction, was one of the major causes of mining accidents. Extreme care was a prerequisite. A quick fuse could have disastrous results, while gelignite explosives had to be fired as quickly as possible before they had time to freeze. The mining companies generally used six to seven foot fuses which gave the miners approximately three minutes to find a safe place.²⁷ If the shot was not completely exploded, the drillers or the muckers could accidentally set it off when they returned to the workings.²⁸

To ease their backbreaking task, machinemen would sometimes drill into old holes, or would inadvertently drill into the back of an old hole and either kill or maim themselves. In 1907, for example, nine men were fatally injured when they drilled into a missed hole. One thoughtless miner even attempted to thaw a stick of frozen dynamite over an open fire. Other accidents were due to insufficient knowledge of the gases resulting from the explosion itself. The 1912 Bureau of Mines *Annual Report* contained the following report:

Three men lost their lives through being overcome with the gases emanating from the discharge of a round of explosives. Two of these men were shift bosses who went to the part of the mine where blasting had been done, and where none of the men were working. They were overcome by the gases and were dead when found. In connection with these two accidents it was found that the gases had been allowed to remain for some hours without turning on the air to blow them out . . . The other man was asphyxiated in a winze. Owing to there not being sufficient air to hoist the men from the winze after the round of holes had been lighted, one of them was unable to reach a place of safety, and, after the blasting, was overcome by the gases and was dead before he could be taken out.²⁹

To protect the miners from their own carelessness and from the owners' indifference, the 1909 Mines Act stipulated that no explosives could be stored within four hundred feet of a mine and that all caches must be separated from the mine by a hill or an artificial mound of earth. The quantity of explosives stored in underground

²⁷Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1909, p. 62. Occasionally snuff from a miner's candlestick would fall into the drill hole and cause a premature explosion.

²⁸Of additional concern for the miners was the large variety of explosives, each of which had different fuse speeds. One inspector thus reported that it "would be a step in the right direction if manufacturers were compelled to make a fuse that has a burning rate between certain limits." *Ibid.*, 1919, p. 77. For further material on this problem see A. Desborough, *Report on the Explosives Industry in the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa 1911).

²⁹*Ibid.*, 1912, p. 61

thawing houses was also limited to the mines' requirement for that day. Six years later the Mines Act was amended to prevent the miners from thawing gelignite in cans filled with warm water, and reliable thermometers were required for all thawing houses.

Another problem concerned the nature of the explosive itself. At this time there was no federal legislation concerning the inspection of explosives. Competition between manufacturers was keen, and in the desire for profits, the grade of the explosive was not always kept up to standard. In addition, old dynamite that had been in storage for a year or more was frequently shipped to northern mines.³⁰ In both cases, the only way the quality of the explosive could be checked was by using it.

In the first few years of the camp all drilling was done by hand. Because this method was extremely slow and difficult, hand steeling was soon replaced by piston drills mounted on huge tripods. In 1911, lighter hammer drills were adopted by most of the mines, but they so contaminated the air with dust and small particles of rock that these drills were soon nicknamed 'widow-makers' by the miners. Although an investigation into the working conditions in the mines in 1912 revealed that arsenic poisoning and phthisis (consumption) were not prevalent at Cobalt, the report did conclude that there was a basis for fear "arising from the breathing of the dust caused by the drilling and other operations, and especially from the hammer drills where no water is used to allay the dust" ³¹

As a result of this and other inquiries, a clause was inserted in the Ontario Mines Act requiring the mines to provide suitable appliances for allaying the dust caused by drilling and blasting operations. The first dust allayers were expensive and inefficient. The water tended to freeze in the winter and the spray attachment was subject to frequent clogging. The drillers objected to the dust allayer because it doused them with water and required more effort on their part to operate the drills. Not until the Leyner hollow steel drill was introduced at Cobalt in 1914 was the problem of dust alleviated. Even then, however, some mines were unwilling to discard all their hammer drills without some kind of compensation from the government.³²

The sanitary and health conditions in the mining camp were the

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 60.

³¹S. Price, "Report re Limitation of the Hours of Labor of Underground Workmen in the Mines of Ontario", Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, No. 85, 1913, p. 11.

³²A. A. Cole Mining Engineer's Report to the *Temiskaming and Northern Commission*, 1912, pp. 35-37.

responsibility of the Mining Inspectors and the Provincial Board of Health. Although the mine managers were required by law to arrange for suitable hospital facilities and to contract for monthly medical inspections, it was not until the Board of Health forced the issue that the owners consented to obey the regulations. In 1905, Dr. Bell of the Provincial Board of Health arranged a meeting of the 22 mine managers in the silver camp to discuss the best means of providing hospital accommodations and medical attention for the miners. Although only seven managers came to the meeting, Dr. Bell explained the necessity of providing proper facilities and suggested that the owners pool their resources and erect a hospital. The mining companies, however, were not interested in this suggestion and several managers at first refused to contract for medical service although they were charging their men fifty cents a month for these privileges.³³ Several years later the T.M.M.A. secured an excellent hospital in Cobalt. Unfortunately, the workers had no say in its operation (although an additional monthly charge of fifty cents was deducted from their salaries) and its services were not extended to the miners' wives or children. This hospital provided yet another means by which the companies could oversee the activities of their employees. Despite several complaints by the miners,³⁴ the doctors were hired by the superintendents and could be expected to report those employees who were not seriously ill, and to take the side of management in lawsuits regarding accidents.

Prior to 1919, the province's mining laws had only two small subsections that were concerned with sanitation. One dealt with ventilation while the other specified that a "sufficient number" of underground portable privies should be provided whenever a shaft was sunk below one hundred feet. There were several loopholes in the legislation, however, and the mine superintendents were generally lax in enforcing this section of the law. When several Board of Health inspectors visited the area in 1909, they found that in many mines it was common practice for the men to urinate and defecate in the tunnels and drifts. Even after the owners' attention was drawn to this problem, and the applicable legislation pointed out, the inspector

³³Ontario, *The Sanitary Journal of the Provincial Board of Health of Ontario Annual Report*, 1905, p. 14. The manager of the Buffalo mine, who was charged with "neglect and refusal to contract with one or more qualified practitioners for the medical and sanitary supervision of his employees and works", was fined a grand total of four dollars and costs.

³⁴Coniagas *Letterbook*, 1907.

reported that the superintendents continued to contravene the intent of the law.³⁵

Despite the outbreak of a serious typhoid epidemic in 1909 that infected over one thousand people in the Cobalt district, many mining superintendents still refused to provide portable privies underground. Although such facilities were common in other mining areas of the world, the Ontario Bureau of Mines supported the owners' stand. The best safeguards, the Bureau felt, were a pure supply of drinking water and strict enforcement of the laws against contamination of the underground drifts and stopes.³⁶ In other words, the Bureau wanted the government to enforce the rules that applied to the workers, and to ignore that section of the law that applied to the mining companies. This meant that some miners would have to travel several hundred feet to the surface whenever the call of nature came. The employees were more practical. Empty carbide tins or other receptacles were used as toilets and then carried to the surface at the end of the shift. Maude Groom recounts the following amusing tale:

One day, a careless can-carrier was stooped over one of the containers investigating to see it was full. He had a lighted cigarette in his mouth and it dropped into the contents of the carbide can. The tin exploded in his face! The poor guy was crap from head to toe. When the other miners saw that he wasn't hurt — just shook up a little — they rolled on the ground laughing at his predicament.³⁷

Not all the owners were unconcerned with their employees welfare. In such mines as the Beaver, the Crown Reserve, and the O'Brien, the men were provided with excellent facilities and good care. The Crown Reserve carried accident insurance for the men and paid its employees a Christmas bonus based on the company's earnings. The Beaver installed a shower bath and required all of its workers to bathe frequently and to keep themselves in good health. The O'Brien pumped pure water to the bunkhouse from a nearby lake and provided its men with spacious living quarters.³⁸

III

Mining was a hazardous occupation. Each year the silver mines took their toll of dead and maimed. From 1904 through 1913, two

³⁵*Ibid.*, "Report of G. E. Young, Sanitary Inspector", 1909, p. 41.

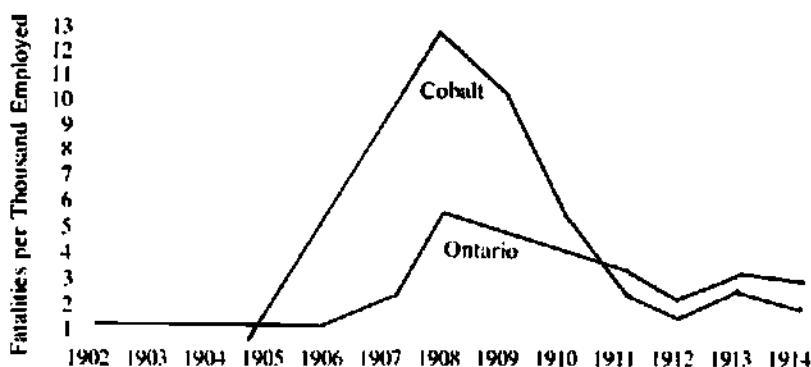
³⁶Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1910.

³⁷Maude Groom, *The Melted Years* (New Liskeard 1971), p. 137.

³⁸The Coniagas also had accident insurance, but the insurance company asked the mining superintendent not to divulge this information to the miners. Coniagas *Letterbook*, 1914, 4 February 1907.

hundred and seventy-eight people were killed in the mines of Ontario, and of this total forty-one percent died in the Cobalt mines.³⁹ Many accidents were due to the miners' carelessness. This was particularly true in the first few years when experienced miners were in short supply. Another cause of the initial high death rate in Cobalt was that this was the period when prospect work turned to shaft sinking — which is the most hazardous time in the life of a mine. Subsequent drifting and development work was less dangerous. The following chart illustrates this trend.

Table One
Mining Fatalities per Thousand Men Employed, 1903-1914⁴⁰



The mining authorities took a detached view towards accidents. The Bureau of Mines even boasted that the Cobalt mines produced over \$700,000 of ore for every miner who was killed, which compared most favourably with the figures for the Transvaal gold mines which showed that one man died for every \$200,000 worth of ore.⁴¹ Because accidents in the metalliferous mines rarely involved a large number of miners at one time, public opinion was seldom aroused, and the mine owners were not impressed with the importance of careful supervision and safety procedures. The general attitude was that mining was inherently dangerous and accidents were inseparable from it. It was also common practice to blame most of the accidents on the labourers' laziness. The mining engineer for the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway, for instance, complained that the mining companies "find it extremely difficult to make their miners observe even the more simple precautions. In all kinds of work men willingly court

³⁹Ontario, *Mines Reports*.

⁴⁰Computed from *Ibid.*, 1905-1919.

⁴¹Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1913, p. 259.

known and certain hazards rather than take a little trouble to guard against them."⁴² The provincial government's attitude towards mining accidents is partially revealed by the way in which the Mining Inspectors classified mining fatalities.

Table Two
Mining Fatalities in Ontario, 1908-1913⁴³

Cause	1908	1910	1911	1912	1913
Danger Inherent to the Work Itself	45	22	28	33	30
Defects in the Mine Workings	32	33	28	19	25
Fault of Fellow Workmen	9	9	6	2	5
Fault of Injured Person	15	46	39	54	41

"Defects in the Mine Workings" was a euphemism meaning the mine management was at fault. Areas in which the owners were most often negligent concerned the erection of proper thawing houses, adequate ventilation of underground workings, the enforcement of the provisions regarding drilling and picking into old holes, and the so-called "less important" requirements for safety rails around shaft openings and dangerous machinery. The workers, on the other hand, it was felt, "wilfully" disobeyed safety precautions through ignorance, carelessness and neglect.⁴⁴

The mine owners were slow to realize their responsibility in enforcing safety regulations and for training their employees in proper mining procedures. "In a number of cases", one mining Inspector reported, "it is feared that shift bosses spend too much of their time inspecting a soft seat in the boiler house, or a warm spot alongside the pump, to properly supervise the work in the mine... the managers in a number of cases do not personally see that the mining work is properly looked after by their assistants."⁴⁵ Often it was purely the case of economics — that is, an attempt to save money and to garner larger profits. E. T. Corkill, Inspector of Mines for 1908, reported:

In some mines, supervision of the scaling of the stopes is so lax as to be absolutely useless. The manager relies on the superintendent, the superintendent on the foreman, and the foreman on the men. The foreman or shift boss cares more about making his hoist of ore large than he does about safeguarding the employees. It is often the practice of the superintendent to get the shift bosses "running" each other to produce the largest tonnage, and consequently they each try to throw the burden of scaling on the opposite

⁴²A. A. Cole, *Mining Engineer's Report*, 1912, p. 37.

⁴³Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1909-1914.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 1910.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 1909, p. 78.

shift, with the result that it is either not done at all, or else done very superficially.⁴⁶

Although the Mines Act established rules for the proper conduct of mining, the government was reluctant to enforce them. Despite the fact that one-quarter of the mining accidents in the province resulted from a direct infringement of the Mines Act, the inspectors only investigated the most flagrant cases. In addition, many foremen often refused to report employees who broke the law, especially if the offender was one of the better workmen.

To educate the employers that it was their responsibility to protect the miners if they would not protect themselves, the Bureau of Mines chose to emphasize the debilitating financial aspects of mining accidents. "A fatal accident in the mine, apart from the fact that a life has been sacrificed", it claimed, "is very expensive for the mine itself." The working schedule was disrupted and damage suits often proved costly. "The total loss to the company from a fatal accident", the Bureau concluded, "would in most cases pay several times over for maintaining the mine in a proper manner, and for the adequate supervision of the mine workings."⁴⁷

The amount of earning power that is lost yearly to the industry at large through mining accidents is sufficient to make all those who are seriously interested in the industry to think carefully of ways to prevent it. In 1910 there were 48 men killed in the mines of Ontario. Assuming that each of these workmen had still an earning power of \$5,000, we find that \$240,000 was lost to the country. In addition to this was the time lost by men injured in mines and thus unable to work for periods longer or shorter. Also some men were so crippled in accidents that they will never again have the same earning capacity. We thus see that upwards of \$300,000 of earning power was destroyed in the mining industry in Ontario in 1910.⁴⁸

By 1908 the Bureau had decided that, although many accidents were classified as inherent to the occupation, they were not necessarily unpreventable. This new concept of accidents inaugurated a concerted program of technical training. The *Annual Reports* now began to urge the mine owners to hire scientifically trained men to devise better safety precautions and to join in the nation-wide movement towards technical education of their employees. In addition, the Bureau regularly reported the results of South African research into mining disease prevention, and published data on accident-proof cages, automatic shaft gates, and other safety appliances. Negligent

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 1911, p. 68.

owners, for the first time, were subjected to harsh criticism.

Managers are often retarded in the work of putting their mine workings in proper condition by owners or operators objecting to the additional cost. This is false economy, and, if wilful, places them amongst the worst type of criminals. It is more charitable, however, to take the position that they are ignorant of the dangers, and need to be educated. [In other cases the foremen fail to report violations of the Mines Act.] These omissions by the superintendent or foreman are not intentional or with a view of causing accidents; they are the result of not being able to grasp the exact meaning of their orders or to realize the danger of the practices they permit. In other words, they lack the mental training that persons in such responsible positions should have.⁴⁹

Once again, accident prevention was couched in the language of efficiency and savings. Liability insurance, for example, was a considerable item of expense in every company budget. Yet it was necessary to protect management from damage suits resulting from an accident to one of its employees. The Bureau of Mines therefore argued that the lower the accident rate, the lower the rate of liability insurance.⁵⁰

Despite the government's good intentions, it was unwilling to put any "teeth" into its legislation. In 1918 the maximum fine that could be levied against a company at fault for a miner's death was one hundred dollars. At the same time, any labourer accused of causing another's death could be fined one hundred dollars or sentenced to hard labour in jail. In actual practice the mining inspectors only investigated the most flagrant cases. The coroner's jury investigating the death of a miner at the Nipissing Mine in 1908 reported: "We further find that the Mine Inspector should make more frequent calls at the different working shafts, as this shaft has been worked for over a year and there is no evidence of it ever being inspected until this man was killed."⁵¹ Other coroner's reports revealed that several mining companies habitually disregarded the Mining Act, and refused to comply with the inspectors' suggestions. Some superintendents ignored all safety precautions in the hope that they could finish the development work before the inspector arrived; and, if an accident did occur, the mine operators rushed to erect proper equipment before the shaft could be inspected.⁵² As a result, there were very few prosecutions for infringements of the Mines Act. It is true, however,

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, see also 1908, p. 62.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 1911, p. 67.

⁵¹Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1909, p. 65.

⁵²Coroners' verdicts were often reprinted in the Ontario, Bureau of Mines Annual Reports, see 1909 in particular.

that when the mine managers were convicted, they were fined the maximum, while the employees received minimum fines of ten dollars and costs.

Due to the Bureau's campaign, or perhaps because of the increasing number of avoidable accidents, several mining companies at Cobalt decided to take the initiative in preventing further fatalities. The Beaver and Buffalo mines appointed safety inspectors to check each miner's physical condition prior to work. The Cobalt Lake Mining Company posted the pertinent sections of the Mines Act at the mouth of the shaft and set its own strict requirements for the handling of explosives. A safety committee, consisting of the foremen and a small group of elected employees, was established to oversee the regulations. The results were encouraging. The mine manager reported that "not only did the minor accidents practically cease, but we also obtained in a large degree much greater efficiency from our employees, and I can state definitely that it is a saving of time and money both to the employer and the employee."⁵³ This statement, no doubt, indicated the priorities of both mining and government authorities. Indeed, when the Ontario Workmen's Compensation Act came into force in 1915 several of these companies abolished their safety departments because safe mines were assessed at the same rate as unsafe mines, and the possibility of costly damage suits was now ended.⁵⁴ It was obvious that the major purpose of these safety measures had been to protect the owners from lawsuits, not to save lives.

IV

Saturday evenings were the highlight of the miners' week. On these days the workers would take the electric streetcar to Cobalt. The town was the hub of entertainment and excitement. Movies, dancing, burlesque, penny arcades, oyster bars, pool rooms, shooting galleries, cat houses, and blind-pigs all catered to the varied tastes of the fun-loving miners. Several of the mining companies tried to keep their employees entertained by organizing social clubs. For fifty cents a month the men and their families were treated to moving pictures, music, and lectures. The Coniagas Mine held a tennis tournament every July, celebrated Dominion Day with a picnic on Lake Temiskaming, and joined with the other mines near the town in funding the construction of a Y.M.C.A. building in 1912.⁵⁵ In addition to providing a useful diversion for the men, these latter activities

⁵³Ontario, *Mines Report*, 1915, p. 81.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁵⁵Coniagas *Letterbook*, 1907 and 1914.

often stressed the "proper" virtues of honesty, thrift, hard work, and obedience to authority.

The most popular mode of escapism was athletics. On public holidays the miners joined with the citizens of Cobalt, Haileybury and New Liskeard in exciting sporting weekends of baseball, boxing, roller skating, and various tugs-of-war between miners of different nationalities. The highlight of the festivities was a hand-drilling contest between the producing mines.

It was hockey, however, that created the greatest interest and the highest stakes. In 1907, four mining companies organized the Cobalt District Amateur Hockey League to keep their men amused during the long winter and to provide an outlet for their gambling penchants — which had apparently progressed to the point that the miners were betting on who would be blown up next.⁵⁶ The league also provided an important outlet for the miners' pent-up hostilities and grievances. In addition, the teams helped to foster loyalty to the mining companies, and thus promoted social harmony within each mine.⁵⁷ Although the rules required all players to be employees of the mining company which they represented, the league was amateur in name only. As the games became more popular and competitive, the club managers began to travel around the province in search of good hockey players.⁵⁸ The players were hired solely for the hockey season and were not expected to do any mining. "Coming to a mining company", the manager of the Nipissing team wrote a promising young hockey player, "does not mean that you would be concerned at all with the actual mining. In fact, you would probably never see the mine or know of its existence as such."⁵⁹

The game was brutal. The teams played seven-man hockey for two halves of thirty minutes. Substitution was limited and, if the game was tied at the end of regulation time, an overtime period was played. The games were marred by numerous fights between the contestants, and between players and fans. The manager of the Nipissing Mines

⁵⁶John P. Murphy, "Yankee Takeover at Cobalt", unpublished manuscript, Ottawa, 1975, p. 130.

⁵⁷For an intriguing article about the role of athletics in the promotion of group identification, see Carl Betke, "The Social Significance of Sport in the City: Edmonton in the 1920s", in A. R. McCormack, I. Macpherson (eds.), *Cities in the West* (Ottawa 1975).

⁵⁸Many of the teams' players came from the Ottawa Valley and the Junior Ontario Hockey Association. Cobalt Mining Museum, Nipissing Mines *Hockey Letterbook*, H. Park to T. Matte, 18 November 1913.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, E. Butterworth to E. J. O'Leary, Ottawa, 5 December 1913.

hockey club gave the following confidential assessment of one of his defensemen: "He is not just as classy as the others but he is as game as you make them . . . most of the young fellows down here prefer to give him a wide berth as he has an awful body check and at times is inclined to be a little dirty . . . Sometimes a boy like this on a team will give the others the courage which they often lack."⁶⁰ One year, play became so violent that a Cobalt player was arrested for attacking the referee and the local newspaper suggested that the town Council hire several constables just to control the mayhem at these contests.⁶¹

Contrary to many other mining boom towns, contemporary observers all remarked on the lack of violence and disorder in Cobalt. "If the visitor to Cobalt expects to find a mining camp, the streets of which are lined with gambling places, dance halls and saloons with rough characters carrying belts filled with cartridges, revolvers, and all the accessories of the early Western mining camps," the *Canadian Mining Review* wrote, "he will be greatly disappointed."⁶² Even during the miners' strike of 1907 there was so little violence that the Bureau of Mines reported that Cobalt's record for the observance of law and order was surpassed by only a few towns in rural Ontario.⁶³

This phenomenon was frequently attributed to the Mines Act which prohibited the sale of intoxicating liquor within five miles of a producing mine. Since several mines were operating within the town limits, the citizens had to travel to the four licensed hotels in the nearby town of Haileybury for a drink. The saloons in Cobalt were restricted to soft drinks such as O'Keefe's Star Beer, which was advertised as a "wholesome, nourishing food drink, made from the choicest hops and malts", but contained less than two per cent alcohol.

As is usually the case, prohibition resulted in the growth of numerous illegal bootlegging rings. At first, liquor was shipped to Cobalt by train, but as more and more railway detectives were assigned to the job, the rings imported alcohol by boat from Quebec to Haileybury, and then by wagon to Cobalt. Others brewed or distilled their own concoctions, which were known locally as "Cobalt Bloom", or "Recreation Rye" and apparently played havoc with the nervous system. "An occasional evening's spree in the hotel bar",

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, Butterworth to Park, 15 December 1913.

⁶¹*Cobalt Daily Nugget*, 12 February 1914. In 1910 Cobalt had a team in the National Hockey Association, which later became the National Hockey League.

⁶²*Canadian Mining Review* (Montreal), 1907, p. 19.

⁶³*Ontario, Mines Report*, 1908, p. 15.

one visitor to Cobalt reported, "would surely make less trouble for its victims than falls to the lot of the maniacs who have drunk their fill of this alleged non-alcoholic concoction."⁶⁴ The distributing houses were called blind-pigs.

Because of the large number of thirsty miners in the town, the number of blind-pigs quickly proliferated. The most popular spots were the soft-drink saloons and the boarding houses. As the town grew, the liquor traffic gravitated towards the poorer section of town along Argentite and Lang Streets. The former soon became the site for so many bootlegging establishments that it was referred to as Liquid Avenue. In 1910, the town's police records show that thirty-eight percent of the convictions for the year were due to illegal sale or possession of liquor, while another twenty-four percent stemmed from charges of drunk and disorderly.⁶⁵

Of more interest to the mine owners was the disappearance of large quantities of silver ore. Nearly every high-grade mining camp suffered from petty thefts, and Cobalt was no exception. Because of the unusually rich silver nuggets lying in the open, it was not surprising that many nuggets never found their way to the sacks of the rightful owners. The miners were not searched, and it was easy for the men to slip pieces of native silver into their pockets.

High-grading, as it was termed, soon reached such proportions that the mine managers hired a private detective agency to stop these thefts. Although several arrests were made, it was almost impossible to obtain a conviction. The mine manager had to swear that the stolen ore came from his mine, but since the general character of the silver veins in the camp were all similar, the high-graders were eventually acquitted. Ore trafficking, the *New Liskeard Speaker* claimed, had been in progress "ever since mining started here, and it is difficult to stop it. Employees have abundant chances for pilfering, and some of them take advantage of the opportunity."⁶⁶ Petty ore thefts were soon replaced by well organized rings operating out of Toronto. The blind-pigs were the go-between. The stolen ore exchanged hands at the blind-pig and was transported from there to the refineries in Toronto. The liquor dealer returned with a supply of whiskey. This double trading was very lucrative and allowed the blind-pigs to meet the increasingly heavy liquor fines.

To help control high-grading, the Criminal Code was amended. The buyer and seller of silver ore were required to have written

⁶⁴"Cobalt as She Is", *Canada First*, October 1905, p. 436.

⁶⁵*Cobalt Daily Nugget*, 12 January 1911.

⁶⁶*New Liskeard Speaker*, 31 May 1907.

permission from the mine manager for any transaction, and the maximum penalty was increased to two years imprisonment. This put the onus of proof on the defendant, and with the aid of this new law the Ontario Provincial Police were able to break up a province-wide high-grading ring in 1909 that had been operating for four years.⁶⁷

The disclosure of the magnitude of the ring's operations, and the arrest of several prominent Cobalt citizens caused a sensation in the silver belt. The general practice, it was revealed, was for the machine runners to hide the high-grade ore on one side of the tunnel. Because they were closely watched, the drillers left the ore for the muckers who would extract the rich silver and hide it in a prearranged place.

The chief fence in Cobalt would make a tour of these mines and either receive it directly from the men or recover it from the caches. The high-grade would then be distributed among the fences in Cobalt and they would take it down to Toronto in a hundred or a hundred and fifty pound lots as safety dictated.

One of these men alone has made twenty trips to Toronto in the nine months that watch has been kept and at a low estimate it is expected that he took a hundred pounds of ore with him on each journey. The ore is worth five dollars a pound so that man alone has in all probability taken in the neighborhood of \$10,000 out of Cobalt in stolen ores, and there are many others known to be in the trade.⁶⁸

The chief fence for this ring was the keeper of the largest and most prosperous blind-pig in Cobalt. He distributed the stolen ore to two boarding house owners and to a life insurance agent, who then transported it to a reducing plant in Toronto.⁶⁹

Despite the dramatic exposure of this operation, several other rings remained undetected. During the next few years, the O.P.P. were successful in apprehending numerous small high-graders but they were not able to uncover any other provincial rings. One such thief was arrested for carrying fifteen dollars worth of ore out of the mine under his shirt. The fact that he had been doing this for some time, indicated that there was a ready market for stolen ore.

Unrest among the miners themselves usually arose over the problems of race and nationalism. Prior to 1914, the ranks of the Cobalt Miners' Union consisted largely of Finns, Poles, Austrians and Hungarians.⁷⁰ World War One had an unsettling effect upon their

⁶⁷The new high-grading bill was sponsored by the Mayor of Cobalt and the Reeve of Coleman Township, both of whom were presidents of important mining companies in the Cobalt camp.

⁶⁸*Nugget*, 18 December 1909.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 20, 22 December 1909.

⁷⁰Public Archives of Canada, Department of National Defense Records, R.

relationship with British and Canadian workers. The poor economic situation, coupled with the war propaganda against Germans and Austrians, created an unhealthy situation in the mining community. A movement to intern all "enemy aliens" was initiated by several hundred residents of Cobalt who circulated a petition and sent a delegation to Ottawa to press for internment. The Mining Corporation of Canada, acting under orders from its headquarters in England, fired the forty-five Austrians and six German miners who were employed at the Cobalt Lake, Cobalt Townsite, and City of Cobalt mines. Although most of the other companies continued to employ foreign workers, they were unwilling to hire the dismissed miners and demanded that these labourers be interned before they became dangerous.⁷¹

Racism reached a peak during the 1919 miners' strike. The "alien" workers became the scapegoat for the growing unemployment problems. In an effort to destroy the Cobalt Miners' Union and to split labour's strength, the mine owners helped to foster racist sentiments. "It is a grim fact", they declared, "that although the majority of the returned soldiers appear to be opposed to a labor strike under present conditions, yet they have been compelled to suffer defeat in a voting contest where the ballot of the Hun and the Austrian carried equal weight to their own."⁷² The owners pretended to empathize with the war veterans, whom they said had sacrificed years of high pay only to find upon their return that the enemy aliens were comfortably ensconced in all the best jobs. As a result, when the Great War Veterans Association attempted to mediate between miners and management in the 1919 strike, they asserted that any agreement would have to include a provision for the dismissal of all enemy aliens. The mine managers immediately accepted this provision. A year later, however, the owners demanded that labourers from southern and eastern Europe be imported by the government to work the mines of Northern Ontario.⁷³ In a final effort to divide the labour movement, the mine managers attempted to equate the strike leaders with bolshevism. The *Northern Miner* addressed the following editorial to the mine operators:

Have you any Austrians, Germans or other alien enemies working for you?

W. Leonard (president, Coniagas Mining Company) to Captain A. Coventry, Camp Borden, 1917.

⁷¹*C.M.J.*, 1 July p. 412; 1915, 15 November p. 707.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 20 August 1919, p. 628.

⁷³F. Brian Hogan, "Cobalt: The Year of the Strike, 1919", M.A. research

Has a returned Canadian, able to fill an Austrian's job applied for it? . . . It is up to you as well as every other employer of labour to get rid of this "red" element and replace it by a Canadian one.

Perhaps you have replaced a large number of alien enemies that you admittedly had to hire in war time to keep going, but you haven't done your duty until you have rid every alien of his job if a Canadian applies for it.

Fire the Reds!

Keep the North White!⁷⁴

Such nativist tactics were used successfully by mine and factory owners across the continent to erode labour solidarity.⁷⁵ In Cobalt they were particularly successful in 1919 because of the ethnically heterogeneous labour force and the racial passions that had been aroused during the war.

V

The social life of the mine managers was completely different from their employees. They ran for public office in Cobalt and Coleman Township and "hob-nobbed" with the local elites. Many lived in elegant homes along the shores of Lake Temiskaming, in what came to be known as millionaires' row. The manager of the Badger mine, E. E. Smith, was a typical example. He arrived from Chicago in 1908 and immediately took up residence in the company's large two-storey frame house with his wife and their two young daughters. Each Saturday the Smiths held an open house for the mines' staff of engineers and for the many visitors who came from as far away as New Zealand, Ireland, England, San Francisco, Colorado, Boston, New York and Montreal.⁷⁶

The Smith family took regular holidays to Chicago, Quebec, and throughout Northern Ontario. Parties were catered from Toronto and included such delicacies as caviar and "pate de fois gras". The family drew pure water from a well near the house, and cheesecloth canopies kept the mosquitoes out at night. The girls were tutored by a live-in teacher who was hired in Toronto, only went to town to visit the

paper, University of Toronto, 1975, p. 121.

⁷⁴*Northern Miner*, 14 July 1919. For additional information see Hogan, pp. 116-130.

⁷⁵For example, see Donald Avery, "The Radical Alien and the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919" in C. Berger and R. Cook, eds. *The West and the Nation* (Toronto 1976).

⁷⁶E. E. Smith, *Guest Book, 1908-1912*. Courtesy Mrs. Helen (Smith) Dixon, Glendon College, York University.

dentist, and had almost no contact with the general labourers.⁷⁷ There was thus a great chasm between the owners and the workers. The miners worked long hours under hazardous conditions, while the companies earned tremendous profits and their executives lived in relative luxury.

In their search for greater profits and increased production, the mining companies refused to increase the miners' wages and fought against the introduction of shorter working hours. Dangerous and unhealthy mining conditions were tolerated or ignored, as long as they did not upset the actual working of the mines. Safety precautions, for example, were not adopted until the authorities realized their advantages in terms of efficiency and accident insurance. At the same time, government legislation was both slow and ineffective in its half-hearted attempts to ameliorate the working conditions within the mines. The only immediate hope for the workers lay in organization. In this area, however, the mine managers took positive and sometimes subtle action to prevent the growth of labour unions. The employment bureau controlled entry into the mines. The erection of company houses permitted closer observation, while the formation of social clubs and sporting leagues helped to dissipate unrest, and inculcated good working habits among the labourers. In the same vein, the government liquor laws were aimed at maintaining a sober, ordered work force. Once the unions did become a threat, the owners attempted to undercut labour solidarity by appealing to the miners' different racial heritages.

The strike in 1919 marked the end of Cobalt's golden era. Many mines that had become flooded during the strike never reopened. The high-grade ore had become exhausted at the same time as milling costs were rising. The decline in the price of silver after 1920 further curtailed production, and the miners began to disperse to the prospering mines in Kirkland Lake, Porcupine, and Noranda. The struggle between labour and capital was continued in these towns.

⁷⁷Interview with Mrs. Dixon, 24 July 1975.