"Such contented workers": Mine-mill organizers in the Ely, Nevada copper district, 1920--1943

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1994
"SUCH CONTENTED WORKERS": MINE-MILL ORGANIZERS IN THE
ELY, NEVADA COPPER DISTRICT, 1920-1943

by

David M. Anderson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

History

Department of History
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1994
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
May 1994
ABSTRACT

This thesis historically examines CIO union organizers in the Ely, Nevada copper district from 1941 to 1943, when three International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill) affiliates won National Labor Relations Board certification elections. Through their educational function of mobilizing working-class support for the union and of filtering the international union's progressive program to its locals, the Mine-Mill organizers fulfilled Antonio Gramsci's concept of the "organic intellectual." Although conditions favorable for unionization were apparent by the mid-1930s, Mine-Mill was initially frustrated as the union's left-wing and moderate leaders clashed over tactics, allowing several AFL craft unions to gain a foothold in the district. Mine-Mill's ultimate victory in 1943 ended the informal mediation of industrial relations that had developed after 1919 when employers instituted antiunion strategies such as welfare capitalism and the open shop.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the individuals and staffs at the following archives: Marty Covey of the Western Historical Collection at the University of Colorado at Boulder Library; Denise Conklin of the Historical Collections and Labor Archives at Pennsylvania State University’s Pattee Library; the National Archives at Suitland, Maryland; the University of Nevada Special Collections at Las Vegas and Reno; the Nevada Historical Society at Reno; the Nevada State Archives at Carson City; and the staff at UNLV Library’s Government Documents collection.

Two people deserve special mention for their assistance: Chris Wiatrowski at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Microforms; and Sean Pitts, Curator of History for the State of Nevada’s East Ely Railroad Depot Museum. I also appreciate the help of Chris Wells of the Magma Nevada Mining Company.

I am also indebted to the residents of the Ely district, especially those who shared their experiences with me: Wendell Knighton, Jay Carson, Georgia and John Skandros, Alex Lucero, and Tom Jones.

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial and academic support of the History Department at...
the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I must note the
tireless help given by the department’s administrative
staff, Arlene Maatallah, Jan Harris, and especially Frances
Honour, whose invaluable assistance throughout my years at
UNLV goes beyond this work. Thanks also goes to department
Chair Lawrence Klein. Several members of the UNLV faculty
were particularly generous with their encouragement: Thomas
Wright, Andy Fry, Joanne Goodwin, Vernon Mattson, David
Beito, Rick Tilman, Wayne Saunders, Rod Metcalf, and Eugene
Moehring. Recognizing the need for funding individual
projects at the graduate level, the UNLV Graduate Student
Association provided a timely grant for travel.

I am grateful for the support of many friends and
colleagues that discussed and helped refine many of the
ideas contained herein: I must thank Rich Mingus, who not
only patiently listened to my latest "theory," but provided
suggestions and critical comments that were always
insightful and instructive. His intellectual curiosity sets
an example that I can only hope to emulate. Andy Russell’s
companionship on several research trips was greatly
appreciated. I wish to single out Sharlene Sayegh, who gave
her time generously, reading through countless drafts and
providing camaraderie and intellectual encouragement
throughout this project. Thanks also to Darla Anderson,
Lenny Perez, Kit Spikings, Hazel Dickens, Joe Strummer,
Bruce Springsteen, and Woody Guthrie for their inspiration.
Words cannot express the debt I owe to Jay Coughtry, my graduate advisor at UNLV, a mentor in the true sense of the word. Without his constant encouragement, friendship, and guidance this work would not have been completed. His tireless and selfless devotion to the historian's craft is my greatest inspiration. Thanks to his entire family for their constant support.

Finally, I grateful to my parents, Myrwin and Dawn Anderson, who have always encouraged rigorous academic debate and have tirelessly supported me throughout my scholastic career. It is with great love that I dedicate this thesis to them.

While all the individuals mentioned above deserve credit for their contribution to this work, any faults, flaws, or errors are entirely my own.
PREFACE

Between 1941 and 1943 the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill) dispatched several organizers to the Ely, Nevada copper district to revive the union’s floundering locals. Their primary task was to recruit enough workers away from American Federation of Labor (AFL) locals to attain either outright recognition from the district’s two primary employers, Nevada Consolidated, a Kennecott Copper subsidiary, and the Consolidated Coppermines Corporation, or to win certification through a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election. Although their campaign initially met frustration, by October 1943 Mine-Mill-affiliated locals were the bargaining agents for most of the area’s copper workers.

American labor historians have not fully explored the establishment of industrial unions by copperworkers in the Intermountain West during the early 1940s. Although there are several studies of Mexican-American workers in New Mexico and Arizona, the region’s other states have been largely ignored. Nevada historian Russell Elliott, an Ely-area native, has written extensively on the district’s unions prior to 1920, but has only briefly and inaccurately
covered the Depression and World War II years. Elliott's sentimental accounts of the district's employers and his anti-CIO bias obscure a complex process that led to the establishment of legally-sanctioned and employer-recognized locals.¹

Better models are offered by Mario Garcia's work on El Paso smelterworkers and Jack Cargill's study of a New Mexican zinc mining community during their famous 1950-52 Salt of the Earth strike. Both of these historians employ a wide array of sources to critically examine their respective subjects. Following Garcia's and Cargill's lead, I use union archives, primarily the correspondence of union organizers, federal and state government records, oral interviews, and secondary sources to analyze the construction of the Cold War capital-labor accord as a historically contingent process conditioned by the attitudes and expectations of the participants. This approach allows a clearer view into the complex consciousness of workers immediately before and during World War II.²

Examining mid-twentieth century labor relations and social conditions at both the national and local level tests several pertinent questions: What effect did the defense-era and World War II prosperity have on the copper industry and its company towns? What accounted for the success or failure of unionism during this period? What was the role of the wartime state apparatus--specifically the NLRB--in
determining the formation of unions? How are the contrasting assumptions of both the organizers and the workers modified as industrial unionism comes to a company town? Finally, what specific problems did CIO union organizers face in western company towns and copper camps?

This study is presented as a social history of the union organizer. Hired from the membership or through a network that funneled working-class activists to union officers, the organizer served as a conduit, filtering the international union’s organizational program to the locals. At the community level, organizers confronted the sometimes conflicting desires of workers whose consciousness was shaped by immediate concerns of job and family security. I examine the organizer’s role by adapting Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the "organic intellectual." When convincing workers to join a union, organizers gave shape to the power inherent in mass organization. This was accomplished by either prying workers’ loyalty away from the company or by providing a vehicle for worker resistance. The union organizer thus serves as a historical agent with the political function of consolidating working-class interests into an institutional form.

In the Ely district, paternalism and unionism co­existed in an informal system of mediating worker grievances while protecting company profits and control over production. Kennecott’s Nevada Consolidated, the state’s
largest industrial enterprise, stifled unionism through its strategy of welfare capitalism at its company towns of McGill and Ruth. Consolidated Coppermines, operating an underground mine at Kimberly, maintained an open shop through intimidation and by paying relatively high wages to its more transient miners. Despite these tactics, a minority of workers, particularly those in the skilled crafts, maintained both AFL- and CIO-affiliated locals, without negotiating collective bargaining agreements until the early 1940s. During this period, Mine-Mill locals throughout the West mirrored the international union, which experienced its greatest membership gains.

As the dominant union in nonferrous metal mining, Mine-Mill benefitted from growing working-class militancy beginning in the mid-1930s. As recently as 1933, Mine-Mill languished as the dormant remnant of the militant Western Federation of Miners (WFM). Revitalized by New Deal pro-labor legislation and affiliation with the CIO, Mine-Mill challenged both AFL craft unions and open-shop employers nationwide. Not only did the union begin to organize the numerous copper, zinc, and lead mines in the West and Midwest, but by the end of World War II it had extended its reach as far south as Alabama's iron-ore fields and as far east as Connecticut's brass refineries. Mine-Mill's leaders combined an aggressive organizing strategy with a left-wing democratic philosophy that attracted black and ethnic
workers, as well as many other industrial workers long ignored by the AFL. Despite its growth, critics charged that Mine-Mill was a "Communist dominated" union. The union's expansion engendered internal dissension from right-wing members and external attacks from government officials and capitalist employers. Evidence indicates that red-baiting stemmed more from power struggles among union officers and their conflicts over the direction of the union's future, rather than simply ideological differences.

Historians of Mine-Mill agree that the union was strengthened by government guarantees of union security from 1937 to 1945. They recognize the benefits industrial unions derived from the 1942 "maintenance of membership" formula that automatically enrolled new workers in unions. Despite the CIO's impressive growth, some labor historians have criticized its wartime alliance with the government, and specifically the Democratic party. In Labor's War at Home, Nelson Lichtenstein shows the postwar costs of the CIO's support for Franklin Roosevelt's war mobilization plan. Lichtenstein concludes that labor's accommodation with the state was a "Faustian bargain" that led to a conservative and bureaucratic labor movement which suppressed labor militancy during the Cold War.

Because he limited his study to only four, albeit major, CIO unions, Lichtenstein ignored both the nonferrous metals industry and the so-called "left-led" unions. Mine-
Mill, a fragile union in a geographically diverse and oligopolistic industry, owed its institutional life to successful NLRB certification elections. An examination of Mine-Mill at the local level shows that its wartime reliance on the state labor mechanism was a strategic move that finally forced recalcitrant employers to bargain with democratically-elected unions.

My focus on Mine-Mill places this study under the rubric of "union-centered" or "neo-institutional" labor history. This method recognizes, as Howard Kimeldorf asserts, that unions are not only economically-based interest groups but potential vehicles of social change, whose social importance lay in providing the principal means through which wage earners, one of the two great classes created by the industrial revolution, constituted themselves as an organized force capable of influencing the direction of modern society.

The labor union, through its ability to mobilize, shape, and articulate class desires and grievances, is nothing less than the potential or actual locus of working-class power against capitalist hegemony. This does not deny union conservatism or class collaborationism; nor does it neglect the racist, sexist, and provincial aspects of the American working class. However, when fused with workers' own moral and ethical sensibilities, the labor union yields a collective power that directly contrasts with the free-market notion of libertarian individualism that isolates the wage worker as an economic commodity and a mere consumer of
production. Recent debates, harkening back to the origins of American labor history, have affirmed the efficacy of this type of historical analysis.\textsuperscript{7}

David Brody has urged that scholars once again place "institutions and power relations at the center of labor history."\textsuperscript{8} The study of trade unions and their goal of collective bargaining was the focus of the "old" Wisconsin school of labor history, led by economists John Commons and Selig Perlman, after the turn of the twentieth century. As the first attempt at an interpretative framework, the Commons-Perlman thesis located the character of the American working class in its conservative, "jobs-conscious" trade unions.\textsuperscript{9}

Beginning in the 1960s, the "new" social and labor historians reacted against what they saw as the Wisconsin school’s narrow conceptualization of the working class, particularly the exclusion of the vast majority of the nonunion labor force, including women, blacks, and ethnic immigrants.\textsuperscript{10} They used both class and culture to analyze worker behavior, asserting that it was not accommodation, but resistance to capitalism based on premodern workplace customs and community morals, that best characterized American workers.\textsuperscript{11}

The exclusion of labor unions from American working-class history runs the risk, as Jean Monds has argued, of "denuding this history of its essential political content."
Despite the perceived ascendence of culture studies over class analysis, the labor union has remained a central aspect of working-class history. In the process of recovering a vast range of previously ignored subjects, many historians never abandoned the study of labor unions. Instead, they have applied more sophisticated techniques and varied theoretical frameworks to examine them at the community and national level. The best of these studies acknowledge the labor union’s "centrality to working-class mobilization and social change."  

In the following chapters I examine the Ely-area Mine-Mill locals during a critical transformation in class relations. To be sure, the Ely district of the 1930s and 1940s contained a diverse social milieu. The existence of two large capitalist enterprises determined, for the most part, the area’s social formation. In the segmented labor force of western company towns and copper camps, Anglo-American skilled craftsmen held the few high-wage jobs. Unskilled whites, blacks, and first- and second-generation European, Asian, and Mexican immigrants occupied the large number of lower-paid positions as semiskilled operatives and laborers. Some women worked for wages in secretarial and service occupations, but most were relegated to domestic non-wage labor as housewives and mothers until 1943, when a labor shortage forced the company to hire them as industrial workers. White, male workers were union members and claimed
an economically privileged position in the hierarchy of the working-class community. That women and nonwhite workers influenced this process is certainly undeniable and demands further study.

This study contributes to our heretofore limited knowledge of Nevada's twentieth-century working-class history. In 1994, as some of the state's largest employers seek a return to open-shop welfare capitalism, it must be remembered that workers in the past successfully opposed these antilabor practices through the organization of labor unions. This is critical in the coming years when workers need to know that their desire for security, dignity, and a decent life is linked to a tradition of resistance to capitalist exploitation and degradation.
NOTES


3. Three "schools" have emerged that disagree, however, on effects of the relationship between Mine-Mill and the state's labor apparatus. The anticommunist interpretation, advanced in the 1950s by Vernon Jensen, accused Mine-Mill's supposedly-Communist leadership of using New Deal and wartime agencies to consolidate and centralize control of the union while driving out moderate democratic forces unable to stop the furtive conspiracy in their midst. The second interpretation, found in the work of Mario Garcia and Horace Huntley, argues that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) helped Mexican- and African-American Mine-Mill members defeat racism during the wartime surge in union membership. The third interpretation recently argued by George Hildebrand and Garth Mangum claims that the nonferrous metal industry's unique labor structure forced Mine-Mill to rely on the state to protect industrial unionism through certification elections. Vernon H. Jensen, *Nonferrous Metals Industry Unionism, 1932–1954,* (Ithaca,

4. Nelson Lichtenstein, Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II, (New York, 1982). Lichtenstein argues that despite benefitting from sympathetic rulings by the NLRB in the prewar era, the CIO faltered after an initial organizing surge in 1937. Hoping to serve on a tripartite system of economic planning that would extend through the postwar period, the CIO promised union stability in the form of a "no-strike pledge" as the trade-off for union security through National War Labor Board's (NWLB) "maintenance of membership" guarantees that automatically enrolled new workers into unions. Although the right to strike was ostensibly forfeited, workers themselves determined the effectiveness of the pledge. By 1944 a record number of wildcat strikes swept through basic industry as workers chafed under the dilatory government grievance mechanism. Undermining workers' shop floor power required that the CIO unions centralize their authority in a top-heavy and, in most cases, non-democratic structure. After the war, the CIO's bureaucracy had become entrenched at the expense of rank-and-file militancy, setting the stage for the purge of the CIO's left wing beginning in 1949. This process laid the groundwork for Big Labor's inability to effectively respond to workers' grievances during the three decades following the war. The conservative postwar labor movement, he concludes, had its roots in the immediate prewar and war years.


6. Howard Kimeldorf, "Bringing the Unions Back In (Or Why We Need a New Old Labor History," Labor History, 32 (1991), 100.

7. There have been three sides to this debate. First, there are those historians who argue for a union-centered approach, best exemplified in Kimeldorf, ibid., 91-129. The second view contends that unions have remained a central task of labor historians, but should not dominate the field;
see response to Kimeldorf, ibid.; and Eric Arneson, "Crusades Against Crisis: A View from the United States on the 'Rank-and-File' Critique and Other Catalogues of Labour History's Alleged Ills," International Review of Social History, 35 (1990), 106-127. The third approach is critical of present practices in labor history and advocates abandoning the notion of the class struggle or class itself as an analytical category. For the former position, see Michael Kazin, "Struggling with Class Struggle: Marxism and the Search for a Synthesis of U.S. Labor History," Labor History, 28 (Fall 1987), 497-514; for the latter, see John P. Duggens, "Comrades and Citizens: New Mythologies in American Historiography," American Historical Review, 90 (1985), 614-638.


9. John R. Commons, et al., eds., A Documentary History of Industrial Society, (10 vols., Cleveland, 1910-11); Commons, et al., A History of Labour in the United States, (4 vols., New York, 1918-1935); Selig Perlman, A Theory of the Labor Movement, (New York, 1928). For the intellectual roots of the Wisconsin school see Leon Fink, "'Intellectuals' versus 'Workers': Academic Requirements and the Creation of Labor History," American Historical Review, 96 (1991), 395-421. Although the Wisconsin school historians were criticized by a generation of scholars after the 1960s, their transgressions were not as great as these critics claim, and their initial studies provided the documentary foundation and suggestions for periodization that many "new" social and labor historians used to build sophisticated models of working-class experience. The primary shortcoming of the Wisconsin school was not its subject matter, which was more eclectic and relevant than most historical writing of its time, with the exception of W. E. B. Du Bois. Rather, as Howard Kimeldorf correctly maintains, its weakness was a deterministic faith in reform. See Kimeldorf, ibid., 91-103. David Brody defends the "dogged empiricism" of the Wisconsin school that "provided the major narrative text and created the archival basis" for future studies, and was a relevant response to a contemporary crisis in American labor. See Brody, ibid., 1-18.

10. "New" labor historians were influenced by British historian E. P. Thompson's The Making of the English Working Class (New York, 1963) particularly his redefinition of class as a culturally-determined relationship among groups. The initial scholars to be dubbed "new labor historians" were Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, and David Brody. Gutman focused on the triumvirate of "class, culture, and community." Montgomery analyzed the behavior of skilled


Processing Industry, 1930-1950, explores female cannery workers, their social networks, and a CIO union; and Kimeldorf’s Reds or Rackets?: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront, (Berkeley, 1988) compares radical and conservative longshoremen’s unions on the West and East Coast.
CHAPTER 1

THE POLITICS OF ORGANIZATION: THE INTERNATIONAL UNION
OF MINE, MILL AND SMELTER WORKERS, 1892-1940

Few American labor unions can match the radical, discordant, and sometimes tragic history of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and its predecessor, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). Formed as an institutional response to capitalist mining, the WFM was the predominant working-class force in the West during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Sundered by ideological dissension, the WFM shifted from syndicalism to conservatism during its volatile two-decade existence. Its legacy of promise and despair lingered long in the memories of Western miners and labor militants. Vernon Jensen aptly described the WFM as "the paragon of democratic, industrial unionism, the pride of many Socialists, the scorn of the leaders of the AFL until affiliation was belatedly worked out, the founder of the IWW..., and the valiant defender of the rights of unionism in many struggles throughout the West...."1

Unionism had existed in the mining West since the 1860s. Local unions in Nevada, Montana, and Colorado had
some success in dictating wage and hour rates around the region’s mines and mills until the 1880s. As mining operations grew increasingly larger, employers began organizing in opposition to workers’ control, using both the state and Pinkerton detectives to break strikes aimed at opposing wage reductions.

First conceived in 1892 during a class war between striking miners and employers at Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, the WFM was formally established a year later when forty delegates met at Butte, Montana to form a regional federation of existing local unions. Its constitution outlined the WFM’s original goals: union recognition and the closed shop, a fair wage ("just compensation for our labor"), arbitration and conciliation to resolve industrial disputes, and improved health and safety laws. They sought to eliminate employers’ private armies, the use Pinkerton of detectives, convict and child labor, and payment in scrip.

The document also provided for the appointment of organizers "to organize all nonunion miners." Richard Lingenfelter notes that the WFM clearly recognized that haphazard organization in the past had undermined incipient unionism. As a result, only a quarter of the region’s 30,000 miners belonged to unions. Lingenfelter credits WFM organizers for the union’s substantial membership growth and economic power over the next decade.

The WFM briefly affiliated with the AFL from 1896 until
1898, when members grew increasingly frustrated with the AFL's dilatory bargaining tactics and lack of financial support for their strikes. Members also opposed the AFL's policy of craft unionism that organized workers into autonomous locals by their respective trades. Increasing technologies in the metal mining industry created a heterogeneous workforce consisting of miners, craftsmen, semiskilled operatives, and unskilled laborers. WFM members believed that craft unionism blunted class-consciousness by separating workers by trade and that only through industrial unionism—one union for an entire industry—could workers recognize their common interest.5

Once free from the AFL's class collaborationism, the WFM spearheaded the formation of anticapitalist alternative federations that culminated in 1905 with the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Both organizations originally defended the concept of local autonomy within a democratic and decentralized organizational structure, eschewed time contracts, and advocated the use of strikes to achieve workers' demands. In 1907 the WFM reached its peak as the IWW's metal mining division, claiming 40,000 members in nearly 200 locals.6

The WFM was increasingly split between radicals who advocated syndicalist unionism and socialist politics and moderates who favored "pure and simple" economic goals. Moderates, especially those living in established
communities, increasingly rejected the IWW's emphasis on the class struggle for more accommodationist tactics. In 1908, the WFM separated from the IWW as the first step towards reconciliation with the AFL, which it rejoined in 1911 with jurisdiction over all workers in the nonferrous metals industry.\(^7\)

Encountering increased employer opposition that reflected a national open-shop movement, the WFM's membership steadily declined after disastrous strikes decimated several important locals. At its annual convention in 1916, the union was renamed the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, ostensibly to recognize its jurisdiction now extended beyond the West. The name change can also be viewed as a semantic effort to distance the union from its radical past.\(^8\)

Following World War I, Mine-Mill's decline continued as conservative leaders failed to revive the moribund union. After the resignation of long-time president Charles Moyer in 1926, organizational disarray was apparent: conventions were held irregularly and sparsely attended, and almost all international officers and board members doubled as working miners and smeltermen. An international organization in name only, Mine-Mill languished through the first years of the Great Depression, paralleling the devastated economic fortunes of the metals industry.\(^9\)

Like many other unions in the 1930s, Mine-Mill
benefitted from the breakdown of "New Era" economics that paved the way for a restructuring of American industrial relations. In 1933 the union was a mere remnant of the WFM with only six active locals and 1500 members. Over the next decade Mine-Mill recovered, aided at the national level by three developments: New Deal labor legislation, the rise of CIO and industrial unionism, and the return of prosperity to the metals industry created by defense-era and then wartime demand.

Mine-Mill, along with much of the American organized labor movement, directly benefitted from New Deal labor legislation that, for the first time, gave government sanction to unionism. The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), enacted in June 1933, reinvigorated organized labor. In its most famous passage, the NIRA's Section 7(a) affirmed the right of workers in America's industrial sector to organize and bargain collectively through elected union representatives. Although the provision proved impossible to enforce and was, along with the rest of the NIRA, ultimately struck down as unconstitutional, it spurred organization not only among the established craft unions, but also among industrial workers long-ignored by the AFL.

Following the demise of the NIRA, union growth was again stimulated by the passage of the Wagner Act in July 1935, particularly after the Supreme Court affirmed its
constitutionality two years later. The Wagner Act gave further impetus to the rising industrial union movement by upholding the principle of majority rule, initially mandating that employers bargain exclusively with one democratically-elected union. It also strengthened the National Labor Relations Board's (NLRB) power to hold certification elections, force employers to negotiate, and curb many anti-union practices.\textsuperscript{12}

The NLRB's increased power to compel union recognition directly aided Mine-Mill's growth. This was evident at many Southwestern copper mines where employer intimidation had long stifled unionism. Claiming that it was "the answer to the workers' problems," a Mine-Mill organizer working in New Mexico in 1930s recounted that the Wagner Act "was the first time that we had some semblance of government protection."\textsuperscript{13} After 1933, workers throughout the nonferrous metals industry began forming their own locals, constituting a growing membership that soon surpassed the international union's organizational capabilities.

In June 1933, delegates from Mine-Mill's remaining locals promised an aggressive drive to take advantage of this spontaneous organization. This campaign was led by a diverse combination of old AFL craft unionists, former WFM and IWW members, and, what Jensen termed "a new crop of radicals reaching to the Communist fringe."\textsuperscript{14} The next year, the union experienced a tenfold expansion, claiming
15,000 members in ninety-four locals. By 1935 membership increased to 26,000 in 132 locals. A year later, Thomas Brown, the union’s president, was expelled. His exit signaled a new era for Mine-Mill, one that would witness the resurfacing of an ideological split similar to the division that had devastated the WFM.

At the center of this controversy was Reid Robinson. In 1936, Robinson, just twenty-eight years old, was elected Mine-Mill president. The son of a Butte Mine-Mill officer who had migrated throughout the western United States and Canada, Robinson had witnessed the General Strike of 1919 as a Seattle newsboy. When his family returned to Butte in 1921, he briefly worked in the copper mines before entering local union office in the early 1930s for the Butte Miners’ Local No. 1, Mine-Mill’s strongest local. Robinson served as a convention delegate and, owing to his immense rhetorical skills and aggressive floor style, quickly rose to the head of the union. Although initially part of a conservative coalition, Robinson gradually advanced a left-wing, progressive agenda that alienated his former supporters.

Robinson followed Brown’s 1935 decision to align Mine-Mill with United Mine Workers (UMW) president, John L. Lewis’s insurgent Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) that split the AFL and the entire American labor movement between craft and industrial unionism. Mine-Mill
leaders repeatedly encountered jurisdictional disputes with AFL machinists and other craft unions. Particularly odious were the AFL's "back door" agreements—secret contracts between craft unions and employers prior to NLRB elections—that excluded the large number of semiskilled operatives and laborers employed in the metals industry.\textsuperscript{17} In 1938, Mine-Mill, for the second time in its history, left the AFL when the federation expelled the eight CIO unions.\textsuperscript{18}

Although hardly a dominant union in the CIO, claiming just three percent of its membership, Mine-Mill was, as Vernon Jensen remarked, "in the company of a thriving industrial union movement."\textsuperscript{19} However, Jensen's observation assumes that the CIO unions, and specifically Mine-Mill, had the institutional capability to take full advantage of their independence. Unlike the United Automobile Workers, for example, Mine-Mill clearly lacked a base of well-placed rank-and-file activists and organizers in key locals.\textsuperscript{20}

Despite affiliation with the newly-christened Congress of Industrial Organizations, Mine-Mill's growth slowed as the initial heady effect of the Wagner Act evaporated in the face of open-shop employers' organized opposition to the New Deal.\textsuperscript{21} The 1937-38 "Roosevelt recession" further slowed the revival of metals industry unionism, as Mine-Mill attracted a paltry 800 new members.\textsuperscript{22} The AFL's Metal Trades Department also launched
its own organizational push that helped regain some of the support it had lost to the industrial unions.23 Once again, Mine-Mill's expansion sputtered.

Mine-Mill's cycle of growth and stagnation reflected its failure to place organizers in communities where employers used welfare capitalism or open-shop tactics to quell incipient unionism. In such company towns and mining camps, organizers were needed either to recruit skeptical workers or to instruct militant workers how to circumvent employer opposition, apply for a union charter, and then petition for an NLRB election. Despite ambitious rhetoric during the late 1930s, union officers lacked adequate operating expenses to hire a sufficient number of organizers.

What organizational thrust existed was supplied by the members themselves. Chase Powers, who later became a Mine-Mill organizer and Board Member, recalled that "there were no organizers," when he and other Oakland, California tunnel workers applied for a charter in 1934. Mine-Mill "was too weak," Powers added, "so we organized ourselves."24 Vern Curtis, a Bisbee, Arizona copper miner who became a Board Member in the 1960s, remembers that until 1937 "we never had any help at all." Nor did Mine-Mill have the money to begin an adequate campaign. Curtis noted it was "a broke union" that "didn't have the operating expenses and money to assign people to assist [us]."25
After affiliation with the CIO, Robinson took action to correct Mine-Mill’s organizational deficiencies. Powers, hired as an international representative in 1936, saw a "natural chain of circumstances" shaping this decision. He claimed that Robinson, raised among conservative Butte unionists, was radicalized by CIO leaders like Lewis, Harry Bridges, head of the powerful International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union, and the United Electrical Workers’ Albert Fitzgerald. Taking his cue from these militant leaders, Robinson "reflected this association and knowledge back in his [own] union."^{26}

Robinson discovered that strategically-placed activists in the field and the front office could overcome Mine-Mill’s lack of financial resources. He duplicated Lewis’s use of Communist and left-wing organizers with the Steelworkers Organizing Committee (SWOC).^{27} Unable to obtain a sufficient operating budget, Robinson had to find people willing to work for little pay. Experienced, left-wing organizers, dedicated to promoting organized labor, fit the bill. Again emulating other CIO leaders, Robinson established organizing projects independent of the union’s Executive Board, assigning the newly-hired organizers to build locals at Connecticut brass refineries, Southwestern copper districts, Idaho silver mines, and eastern Canadian gold fields. Assembling a staff to handle the increased activity, Robinson hired a research director, a publicity
director, and named his own editor of the Mine-Mill edition of the CIO News. Powers recalled that during this period Mine-Mill "learned the techniques of organizing" other CIO leaders had used so effectively.28

Robinson’s bold action elicited protests from moderate Mine-Mill officials. In Mine-Mill’s hierarchy, Board Members from the union’s seven districts held votes on the Executive Board. As president, Robinson did not possess a vote and, if faced with a hostile Board, had to gain consent for his policies through rank-and-file support. By 1940, a majority of Board Members increasingly objected to Robinson’s organizational tactics, which they perceived as a threat to their power.

Board Members initially tolerated, but soon came to resent the new left-wing organizers when it became clear that new members were loyal to Robinson. As Powers remembered, "all the left-wing militant guys...did the organizing" in districts that lacked competent rank-and-file organizers. New members "didn’t know who [their Board Member] was....They didn’t know anybody but these [left-wing] organizers and Reid Robinson...." When Board Members started losing the support of the members in their districts, "the friction began" between them and Robinson.29

By 1940, Robinson’s organizational strategy exacerbated ideological differences that echoed the dissensions of the
WFM era. Realizing that the Depression and subsequent New Deal labor legislation had created a more militant worker who demanded union representation, left-wing members complained that moderate leaders underestimated the rank-and-file's desire for immediate organization. Because Mine-Mill needed additional organizers to take full advantage of this new militancy, provincial Board Members opposed to the hiring of outside organizers stifled the union's growth. Moderates further obstructed expansion by defeating a dues increase necessary to build an effective organizational staff.30

Moderates, usually holdovers from the 1920s, responded by red-baiting Robinson, claiming that the Communist Party had taken control of the union. They defended opposition to his policies by invoking the union's tradition of local autonomy and democratic unionism and linking those practices to the glory days of the WFM and the IWW.31 Missing from the moderate's critique were two crucial points. First, those days were long gone. Changes in both the structure of the metals industry and the national political economy necessitated centralized organization. Second, the WFM had failed, doomed by its own internal ideological differences and weak regional structure.

Dedicated to organizing the entire nonferrous metals industry along industrial lines, Robinson, in fact, never advocated jettisoning Mine-Mill's impressive democratic
credentials, established through the use of the referendum, convention resolutions, as well as rank-and-file election of officers and ratification of contracts. He did realize that without a strong, national organizational structure the union was both anachronistic and institutionally unstable. Unlike the union’s moderate members, Robinson understood the CIO’s main mission from the late 1930s through the 1940s: "organize the unorganized."

Improving economic conditions soon set the stage for a ambitious organizational campaign. Defense-era and then World War II demand for all metals, but especially copper, shifted labor market forces to the union’s side, particularly in the Intermountain West. The extensive use of copper in war materiel, mainly in the manufacture of cartridge casings, ignited an industry-wide boom. Beginning in 1939, copper production rose rapidly until domestic consumption reached record levels by 1943.

Although copper producers complained that legislation froze many prices during the war while excess profits taxes diminished the accumulation of large cash reserves, the industry was once again financially stable. Their primary problem was an acute labor shortage that prevented the maximum production required to reap the full rewards of guaranteed government demand. A need for workers curtailed management’s usual methods of resisting unionism and allowed Mine-Mill a unique opportunity to gain a foothold in areas
that had long proved difficult to organize.\textsuperscript{34}

With prosperity's return to the nonferrous metals industry, Mine-Mill embarked on an organizational drive aimed at the nation's top metal producers. Its primary target was the one hundred thousand workers employed by the "Big Five" copper companies—Anaconda, American Smelting and Refining, American Metals, Phelps Dodge, and, based primarily in the Southwest, Kennecott.\textsuperscript{35} This important campaign did not, however, diminish Mine-Mill's internal dissension. During their attempt to organize Western copperworkers, its leaders continued to debate the politics of organization.

As Nelson Lichtenstein has shown, labor's rise in the 1930s was an "unfinished struggle." For Mine-Mill and the other CIO unions, the New Deal did not mean that mass organization was a \textit{fait accompli}. Instead, they confronted an array of problems: employer opposition, internal divisions and financial difficulties, NLRB policies that increasingly worked against industrial unionism, and apathetic and resistant workers split along ethnic lines. An examination of one Intermountain West community highlights the difficulties that Mine-Mill encountered during its sometimes frustrating campaign to organize the nation's copper industry.\textsuperscript{36}


3. Lingenfelter, ibid., 221-22; Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 121.


5. Jensen, Heritage of Conflict, 63; Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 22; Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working-Class Radicalism," passim.
6. Jensen, ibid., 160-235; Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 121-127; Dubofsky, We Shall Be All, 57-87. The WFM established the Western Labor Union in 1898, the American Labor Union in 1902 before founding the IWW. Membership figures in Jensen, Nonferrous Metals Industry Unionism, 5.


8. Solski and Smaller, ibid., 14. The nonferrous metals consist copper, zinc, lead, iron, silver, gold, magnesium, molybdenum, manganese, titanium, and uranium. Mine-Mill also organized potash miners and tunnel workers. It claimed jurisdiction over all miners and production workers working the nonferrous metals industry, including brass workers in copper refining plants.


12. Bernstein, ibid., 318-351; Green, ibid., 150-151; Zieger, ibid., 38-39. E. David Cronon's Labor and the New Deal (Chicago, 1963) is a brief, but helpful source that contains excerpts from both the NIRA and Wagner Act, and includes the original debates surrounding both laws.


17. Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*, 106-109. Bernstein claims there was unanimous agreement against the AFL. He describes the Butte Anaconda 1934 four-month strike by 6000 Mine Mill workers and 600 craft workers organized into 31 different trade unions over union recognition, wages, and a grievance procedure. During the strike, the head of the AFL Metal Trades Department, John Frey, negotiated a secret agreement in Washington, D.C. for the craftworkers with Anaconda’s management and government officials. Frey, who personally went to Butte, managed to convince twenty of the craft locals to ratify the agreement. Mine-Mill members, who argued that a plantwide vote would have rejected the contract, eventually approved a similar deal. Although it was a substantial improvement over existing conditions and established the union with one of the nation’s largest copper producers, Mine-Mill members saw the settlement as a "bitter defeat because the crafts had dictated its terms....The tail had wagged the unhappy dog." When promoting the CIO and industrial unionism, Lewis repeatedly "use[d] the Anaconda agreement as a battle cry in the developing struggle for industrial unionism." (quotes, 109.)


21. An example of violent opposition to Mine-Mill is found in David Beesley’s "Communists and Vigilantes in the Northern Mines," *California History* 64 (1985), 142-151. Beesley describes the violent 1938 suppression of Mine-Mill organizational activity among California gold miners by a combination of mine owners and vigilantes. Managers of Kennecott Copper Corporation subsidiaries described their opposition to Mine-Mill in Congressional hearings considering amendments to the National Labor Relations Act, see, for example, the statements of David D. Moffat, vice president and general manager of Utah Copper and Horace Moses, general manager of Nevada Consolidated Copper in *Hearings before the Committee on Education and Labor United States Senate, Seventy-sixth Congress*, 1263-1281. For Mine-Mill members’ recollections of employer opposition, see interview of Curtis, December 11, 1969; 5-6, 10-11; interview of Chase Powers by Ronald Filippelli, December 12, 1969, HCLA-PSU, 13. See also Huntley, *ibid.*, 135-136.

23. Hildebrand and Mangum, *ibid.*, 144-5.


31. Interview with Larson, *ibid.*

32. Although consensus is rare among historians of the American West, there is clear agreement on the impact of World War II. Reaping a disproportionate amount of government spending, the West rebounded from the Great Depression by the early 1940s. Like their counterparts in urban and agricultural West, capitalists in the region’s extractive metal industry directly benefitted from the military Keynesianism required by the defense buildup. Gerald D. Nash, *World War II and the West: Reshaping the Economy* (Lincoln, 1990), passim.; Richard White, "It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own": *A New History of the American West* (Norman, 1991), 496-533; Michael P. Malone and Richard W. Etulain, *The American West: A Twentieth Century History* (Lincoln, 1989), 107-119.

33. Thomas R. Navin, *Copper Mining and Management* (Tucson, 1978), 401; Domestic copper production by primary producers reached its highest level in 1943 with 2181.6 million tons. Domestic consumption similarly increased from 1534 million tons in 1938 to an all-time peak of 5176 million tons in 1943.

34. *Ibid.*, 140.

36. Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home*, 8-25, describes the CIO's "institutional insecurity" on the eve of the war as it struggled with organizing America's basic industry.
CHAPTER TWO

"WELL CONSTRUCTED HOUSES" AND "WELL-KEPT STREETS":
THE ELY DISTRICT, 1902-1929

I.

Organizing the Western copperworkers was a crucial link to Mine-Mill’s strategy of representing all the nation’s copperworkers and a prerequisite for establishing postwar industry-wide bargaining. An integral part of Kennecott’s holdings, the Ely district stood on the northwestern point of a copper rectangle encompassing the company’s other mines and smelters in Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona.¹

Located in the Great Basin of east-central Nevada, the Ely district was the home of Kennecott’s Nevada Consolidated Copper Corporation. Their economic supremacy of the area was symbolized by the massive smelterworks at McGill, a company town of 3,000 people, thirteen miles north of Ely, the White Pine County seat. This plant processed ore shipped by rail from the company’s own open-pit mine at Ruth, and from Consolidated Coppermines’s Kimberly underground mines, both twenty-two miles to the southwest. As the state’s largest industrial enterprise, Nevada Consolidated dominated economic life in the Ely district,
employing over one thousand workers at the mines and smelter. Consolidated Coppermines, about one-third Kennecott’s size, employed an additional 500 hundred workers.²

Despite the electrical industry’s heavy demand for the highly-conductive and durable metal since the 1880s, large-scale production of Ely district copper deposits did not begin until after the turn of the century.³ Mining the low-grade (less than two percent of the surrounding rock) copper deposits—called "western porphyries"—was not profitable until Daniel Jackling applied the open-pit techniques used in Minnesota iron mining to Bingham Canyon, Utah in 1905.⁴ Because it is found in minute particles spread throughout a large area, porphyry copper must be mined in huge quantities to be cost effective. In what he described as "mass production mining," Jackling took advantage of economies of scale by doubling the amount of ore sent through the smelting process. Although his original processing methods were primitive, improved reduction techniques allowed for higher recovery rates, making open-pit copper mining even more profitable by the 1920s.⁵

Because open-pit mining was such a massive undertaking, an equally enormous initial capital investment was required for heavy machinery, a nearby smelting plant to lower shipping costs, and a railroad to quickly move the ore
through the production process. This immense cost meant that corporate capitalists, usually Easterners who possessed access to large capital markets, controlled the production of western porphyry copper. The Ely district was no exception.⁶

Five years prior to Jackling’s innovation, miners began small-scale development of the porphyry copper deposits found in mountains west of the town of Ely. Subsequent development followed a familiar frontier pattern; small-time speculators first staked out claims which they then sold to regional entrepreneurs, who, in turn, were bought out by corporate capitalists.⁷

The Ely district had been the site of gold and silver mining until 1900. In 1903, Mark Requa, the son of a wealthy Nevada miner and railroad owner, formed what would become the Nevada Consolidated Copper Company. He combined several of his own claims with other properties he purchased from two California miners, who three years earlier had first realized the potential wealth in the district’s vast copper reserves. The same year that Requa appeared on the scene, the Giroux Consolidated Company began a separate mining operation at nearby Pilot Knob, later known as Kimberly. By September 1906, Requa had completed the Nevada Northern railroad, connecting Ely with the Southern Pacific trunk line 140 miles to the north. Despite his ambitious moves, he lacked sufficient capital to efficiently exploit
the district's western porphyries.

Eastern capitalists, who had increasingly financed Requa's expansion, entered the district in late 1905. The Cumberland-Ely Company, controlled by the Guggenheim brothers, the principal backers of Jackling's Utah ventures, began buying shares of Nevada Consolidated stock and acquiring selected property, including the vital water rights essential for a large smelter works. Next, the Cumberland-Ely combined with Requa to finance a 10,000-ton smelter and reduction works at McGill. In 1905 the Guggenheims finally ousted Requa from Nevada Consolidated when they acquired a majority of the company's stock. Their initial development phase ended when the railroad reached the expanding open-pit mine at Ruth. By 1908, both the mine and smelter were operating at peak capacity. Thereafter, copper production became the central economic concern of all but a handful of the district's residents for the next three-quarters of a century.8

A corporate structure soon emerged. In 1910, Jackling augmented his copper operations in Utah, New Mexico and Arizona, with the acquisition of a half-interest in Nevada Consolidated. Jackling continued to manage the operation even after the Guggenheims' Kennecott Copper Corporation began absorbing Nevada Consolidated in 1915, acquiring full control in 1933. At Kimberly, the Giroux properties merged with several adjoining claims to form the Consolidated
Coppermines. Although an independent operation, Consolidated Coppermines paid a fee to have its ore refined at Nevada Consolidated’s McGill smelter.9

Beginning in 1908, the district’s economic fortunes reflected the rise and fall of Nevada Consolidated’s balance sheet. During the first decade of production, rising prices spurred a boom in the copper industry that continued through World War I, when profits soared aided by government price supports. Once the war ended, the copper market sagged amid a worldwide economic slump as overproduction and sluggish demand sent the industry reeling. Ely-area production even ceased for a brief period during the early 1920s. The industry rebounded by 1925, and prosperity continued through the end of the decade, when Kennecott’s corporate profits peaked at over $50 million.10

II.

Militant unionism and periodic strikes had erupted in Ely district from 1902 to 1919. Labor unions preceded Requa’s entrance into the district. A 1903 labor dispute at the New York and Nevada Copper Company had ended violently when the company’s general manager murdered three union miners.11 In 1908, the same year Nevada Consolidated began operation, the WFM issued charters to the McGill smelterworkers and the Lane City miners’ union, which included the miners at Ruth and Kimberly. Both locals
opposed the importation of "new" immigrant laborers, brought into the district by the Guggenheim-Jackling interests to fill the numerous unskilled jobs created by open-pit mining. Although native-born and immigrant workers occasionally united to protest common grievances, the district's workers were often divided along ethic and skill lines.12

The copperworkers also organized in opposition to the corporate capitalists. In 1909, as smelterworkers and miners struck to protest wage cuts, WFM members built a labor headquarters just outside McGill, on what one organizer called "the small portion of this planet that does not belong to the Guggenheims."13 Radical unionism entered the district at this time when the IWW established a headquarters near Ruth, at Riepetown. Indicating their growing class-consciousness, workers also formed political organizations, including a labor party and Socialist local in 1911.14

Labor militancy exposed management's penchant for violence. In 1912, a central council of all the district's workers, in a rare display of unity, voted to support a WFM-sanctioned walkout at Jackling's Bingham copper pit. They added their own grievances, demanding a wage increase and union recognition. A general strike followed on October 14. Nevada Consolidated hired strikebreakers and armed guards to intimidate WFM picketers. On the strike's fourth day, company police murdered two striking Greek immigrants.
Nevada Governor Tasker Oddie then broke the strike by ordering the state police into the district to help the company resume operations. Nevada Consolidated stonewalled the governor’s feeble attempt to mediate the conflict, although the company ultimately granted a twenty-five cent raise. However, it refused to recognize the union or to rehire workers who were active in the strike, a policy Jackling dispassionately defended as "good judgement."15

Sharing none of the copper industry’s sizable wartime profits, labor remained militant through World War II as rising living costs led to increased dissatisfaction.17 During the war, armed soldiers guarded the Nevada Consolidated properties "simply to keep agitators out" of the district, and deputies searched incoming trains for suspected labor organizers.18 These measures did not quell worker militancy. Citing the need for a wage adjustment, Nevada Northern railroad workers twice walked off their jobs. The most radical response to wartime conditions occurred at Kimberly in September 1918. Fifty IWW miners, demanding "better sanitary conditions, better lights, [and a] more liberal food allowance," vowed not to return to work until "war prisoners"—antiwar activists convicted under the Espionage Act—were released from federal penitentiaries.19

After the war, workers pressured Nevada Consolidated to make good on a promised wage increase. Beginning in January 1919, organized workers repeatedly walked off their jobs.
This agitation culminated in July when the McGill smelterworkers, demanding an additional $1.25 per day and improved medical benefits, called a general strike against the advice of Mine-Mill's international leadership. Federal and state mediators, including Governor Emmett Boyle, negotiated a settlement in late August that included a meager seventy-five cents wage increase. To compensate for the difference between the workers' original demands and the final settlement, the company established a commissary where food would be "sold practically at cost" and, to save on winter heating costs, lowered the price of coal, which it had traditionally sold to the workers. The 1919 strike concluded a turbulent era of labor relations. During the next decade, militancy diminished as Nevada Consolidated's policy of welfare capitalism led organized workers to develop new strategies to mediate their grievances.²⁰

III.

The social relations of production that emerged from the rationalization of copper mining in the American West were based on a patriarchal system of class power. In isolated industrial communities, mutual obligations were acknowledged by employers and workers through a system of paternalism which recognized the interdependency of both classes. As Eugene Genovese has shown in his study of southern slave society, paternalism is a "particular
relationship...of class power" that "[grows] out of the need to...morally justify a system of exploitation." Managers in the western copper industry similarly assumed the patriarchal responsibilities of plantation masters in an attempt to discipline their workforce and to legitimize their social domination.\textsuperscript{21}

From the beginning, Nevada Consolidated established a tradition of paternalism. The company had built homes at McGill smelter for the company's executives, foremen, and skilled craftsmen in 1908, the year the plant commenced operations. Citing an early real-estate boom, Russell Elliott maintains that the company had originally planned for workers to house their families away from the smelter and mines in growing residential areas near Ely. However, his assessment discounts management's early recognition of the need to attract a large and dependable workforce to the geographically-isolated copper district.\textsuperscript{22}

From the outset, the company controlled the development of the smelter town. By 1910, company control was evident in the town's appearance. Elliott recalls the row upon row of well constructed houses, confusingly alike...; the rather broad and generally well-kept streets; the lack of hotels and the scarcity of saloons along the main street; and the fact that there was no restricted [red-light] district within the town area.\textsuperscript{23}

As increasingly practiced throughout the mining West after the turn of the century, paternalism embraced much of the community's social and political realm: local government
was nonexistent, company approval was required to operate a business, and hospital, water, and sanitation facilities were provided by the employer. In McGill, the company even helped finance the construction of ethnic churches. Apologists of paternalism mistakenly claim that these amenities were "furnished free," but clearly they were purchased with profits, which instead of going into workers' paychecks were spent by company fiat.

The most glaring example of company domination at McGill was the residential segregation by class and ethnicity, a spatial reflection of workplace hierarchies. Company executives lived in the "charmed circle," an arc of stately Victorian homes around a verdant park overlooking the town. Skilled white workers and managers lived in comfortable homes in "Middle Town," while lower-paid whites lived in the "Upper" and "Lower" townsites. Immigrant workers, who had arrived from nearby states or directly from their native country, were segregated into the demeaningly-named "Jap Town," "Greek Town," and "Austrian Town." Defenders of this policy regard it as merely the company's formal recognition of the immigrants' "natural desire" to live among their fellow countrymen. But this view disregards elementary causation—it was the company managers, not the workers, who decided the housing assignments.

Segregation was an instrumentalist corporate policy
that resulted in a divided working-class split along ethnic lines. Despite Elliott's assertion to the contrary, ethnic workers were never integrated into the organized labor movement until the mid-1940s. Physically separated from the rest of the heterogeneous community, Anglo-American workers developed a nativist, self-conscious concept of "Americanism" to differentiate themselves from the other workers. Anglo-American workers blamed the immigrants for lowering the district's standard of living because the newcomers did not appreciate the unique gains made by organized labor in the American working-class struggle. This distorted consciousness stood in opposition to the inclusivity of industrial unionism that would have united all the district's workers across ethnic lines. It remained an obstacle Mine-Mill organizers could only partially remove.

Company paternalistic practices prior to 1919 proved an ineffective method of quelling labor militancy. During the next decade, Nevada Consolidated's management, like many large firms throughout the country influenced by Progressive-Era notions of industrial relations, developed a policy of welfare capitalism in an attempt to curb employee dissatisfaction and thus destroy radical unionism. This strategy expanded the company's paternalistic role into the workers' cultural realm by providing services and benefits that were not a "necessity of the industry" or essential to
maintain class domination. Welfare capitalism sought to boost employee morale and link the company and workers together in a common partnership. Richard Meltzer has accurately characterized welfare capitalism as management's attempt "to kill union activity with corporate kindness."²⁸

Under general manager J. C. Kinnear's leadership in the 1920s, welfare capitalism served as Nevada Consolidated's hedge against labor agitation. Kinnear, a college-educated engineer from Massachusetts, had been a strikebreaker in IWW and WFM strikes in Goldfield, Nevada in 1907. Transferred to McGill in 1910 after he was hired by Jackling's Utah Copper, he impressed Nevada Consolidated's key officers, rising to de facto chief of the entire Ely operation in 1922. Kinnear's management style straddled the line between the increasingly anachronistic manager and the emerging bureaucrat. His ability to maintain personal relationships with his employees endeared him to many McGill residents, especially skilled workers who shared his concept of manly comportment. However, Kinnear's "primary mission" was "to run a financially successful mining and milling operation." Diminishing the power of labor unions through welfare capitalism was one means of accomplishing this mission.²⁹

Welfare capitalism became entrenched by 1925 after the Ely district recovered from the postwar depression and a fire that destroyed the smelter. Once the smelter was rebuilt, Kinnear earnestly applied this system, aided by
industry-wide prosperity. Kinnear's son, who also became a Kennecott executive, later recalled that workers had traditionally "expected a large company to take a paternalist (father-son) attitude." Evidence suggests, however, that workers' demands were limited to decent wages and safe working conditions. Instead, it was the company that brought great expectations into the arena of labor relations.

All welfare capitalist projects were designed by management to steer their employees' allegiance to the company through identification with the community. This was evident in various community beautification projects and the promotion of rivalries between the smelter and mining towns. The company reproduced this system generationally by guaranteeing employment to the sons of McGill families. In Nevada Consolidated's system of welfare capitalism, class was subsumed by fealty to the community and, by extension, loyalty to the company.

To some observers, the 1920s represented an era of stability in the Ely district. By mid-decade, the services provided at the "model" company towns at McGill and Ruth effectively circumvented the role of working-class institutions. Expanding its domination outside the workplace, the company limited the local labor supply, guaranteed good wages, and sponsored athletic teams, fraternal organizations, and other social and recreational
activities.

This strategy engendered loyalty from many of the townspeople—an implicit consent which the company maintained across class lines. In her analysis of Lansing, Michigan’s Reo Motor Car Company, Lisa Fine interprets welfare capitalism as an "alliance" between male employers and male workers. Under this system, male workers, increasingly losing autonomy on the factory floor to a combination of Fordism and Taylorism, exchanged this loss of job control for participation in the company "family."^3^4 Fine’s analysis helps to explain the social dynamics in Nevada Consolidated’s company towns.

Although Anglo-American workers stood atop a stratified working-class community, all male wage earners were assured a privileged place in its social hierarchy. Despite the presence of some unmarried male workers, the cornerstone of the company town’s social structure was the family. By providing a living wage and suitable housing, workers experienced much of what constituted a middle-class lifestyle—their wives did not work, their children attended good primary and secondary schools, and they earned enough discretionary income to allow for modest consumerism.3^5

Reo’s system differed from Nevada Consolidated’s in several respects. The auto industry was rapidly deskill its workforce through assembly line technology; in copper, traditional skilled workers still remained. The Reo
workforce was mostly native-born and the company used an "Americanization" program to integrate the minority of foreign-born workers into the community. At the Ely district, there was a sizable foreign-born population, and the company encouraged ethnic distinctions. Finally, Reo had an explicit open-shop policy, that included firing suspected union members. At Ely, skilled Anglo-American workers openly claimed membership in craft locals. Despite Nevada Consolidated's comprehensive efforts to subvert class consciousness, the company did not openly harass or dismiss union members. Given these differences, Fine's otherwise trenchant model does not fully explain how the Ely district's organized workers maintained an informal equilibrium somewhere between the open shop and collective bargaining.

IV.

Although Nevada Consolidated refused to recognize their unions, Anglo-American skilled workers did not disband their locals in the 1920s. During a decade of nationwide employer antiunionism, Mine-Mill Local 233, tracing its origins back to WFM, remained active. Some of its members also belonged to the smelter's AFL craft unions, who claimed additional supporters among the engineers, switchmen, and skilled shopworkers employed by the Nevada Northern railroad.36

Ely-area craftsmen continued to pay union dues and hold
meetings despite their failure to exercise a labor union's most important economic function--described by Harvey O'Connor as "hav[ing] the strength to tell the employer what he should do in regard to his employees, within the limitations imposed by collective bargaining." Given Nevada Consolidated's history of antiunionism and the apparent success of its welfare capitalist policy, why did skilled workers maintain union locals?

The answer lies in understanding how workers perceived unionism at this time--as part of an informal equilibrium with an employer who refused to recognize their labor unions. The informal equilibrium was a process that allowed them to keep their locals and to mediate industrial relations without establishing formal collective bargaining or resorting to militant action. Balancing the interests of labor and capital, this system replaced other means of resolving class conflict by the mid-1920s.

At McGill, craftworkers did not forget their recent militant past; nor did they embrace Nevada Consolidated's welfare capitalism. The earlier strikes had been instructive. The 1919 strike had showed they could make clear material gains--the establishment of a commissary, for example--even though the company refused to recognize their union or to fully grant their wage demands. By the 1920s, formalized industrial relations was no longer a primary goal. Instead, the Ely-area craftworker sought security,
job safety, and a decent standard of living, characterized by a "saving wage" sufficient "to enable him to support himself and his family in reasonable comfort, educate his children, and save something for his old age." As they became permanently settled in the community, craftworkers devised a method to advance their interests and avoid incurring the brunt of employer reaction. This system required both their accommodation to company hegemony and the assertion of their perception of a labor unions' function.

Craftworkers did not discard unionism because they continued to view labor unions as the institution that had fought and won security and modest prosperity for the American working class. Speaking for AFL members at the Ely district's 1924 Labor Day celebration, C. E. Handwright claimed that "organized labor...is responsible for the high standard of living that is enjoyed in the United States." Unions were also the institution that separated native-born craftsmen from immigrant industrial workers. An Ely newspaper editorial credited the AFL for its opposition to "orientalism" and its determination to keep America a "white man's country." Unions did not function to overtly challenge Nevada Consolidated in the economic realm. But by maintaining union locals, craftworkers simultaneously upheld their conception of citizenship and class.

Nevada Consolidated had two primary considerations
regarding its workforce. First, it had to maintain a sufficient number of skilled workers and laborers in an isolated area; and second, because the profit margin in copper production was dependent on rapidly moving the ore through the smelter, it could not afford to countenance worker control of the production process. The company used welfare capitalism to assure a stable supply of skilled workers and, as Fine shows, to prevent union interference on the job. The craftworkers' response—forming unions but not formally challenging management prerogatives—was therefore an adjustment to the company's policy of welfare capitalism.

The previous two decades had shown that the company would resort to raw force or the power of the state to prevail during times of industrial conflict. However, after the establishment of welfare capitalism, workers kept their locals as a threat to extract small concessions out of employers who were determined to quell labor conflict even if it required paying higher wages or providing better living conditions. Active union members viewed industrial relations at the smelter as a dynamic balancing act between outright rejection of unionism and striking for formal recognition.

The Ely-area also offers a unique case study because of the contrast between organized smelterworkers and the miners, who vacillated between radical unionism and accommodation to the open shop. Unionism in the mining
camps reflected the boom-and-bust cycle of the mining West. Unlike the smelterworkers, the miners' unions stressed social as well as economic goals, as demonstrated by their radical demands in 1918. McGill was WFM and Mine-Mill territory, while the mining camps were IWW turf.

Conversely, when the radical impulse was extinguished in the 1920s, miners did not even retain the shell of a functioning union. At the Kimberly mine, where Consolidated Coppermines could not command a stable workforce among the transient miners, workers dismantled their locals for a system that consisted of relatively high wages and geographical mobility. This arrangement allowed them to leave the area if they disapproved of their working and living conditions. Thus the type of equilibrium carefully cultivated among the smelter and railroad workers was nonexistent at the mines, where the informal mediation process consisted of simply staying or leaving.

Industrial relations broke down quickly when external forces affected the informal equilibrium at the mines. If worker dissatisfaction with deteriorating living conditions coincided with decreased mobility, miners tended to organize spontaneously. As miners rapidly shifted from nonexistent unionism to militancy, mine employers, who rejected welfare capitalism as an option to reestablish equilibrium, resorted to repressive antiunion activities--blacklisting, hiring labor spies, and employing dictatorial foremen. These
tactics only served to increase the miners' militancy. This system would not be toppled until 1943, when Mine-Mill joined local members to forge a new regime of industrial relations. In the interim, the two different informal equilibriums would be severely tested during the Great Depression, when New Deal labor legislation sparked the Ely-district's copperworkers to seek institutional solutions amid deteriorating economic conditions.
NOTES

1. Jensen, Nonferrous Metals Industry Unionism, 133-136. In 1946 the union developed a plan for an "Ideal Collective Bargaining Structure" based on area-wide and industry-wide units. Jensen is critical of the geographical strategy because major producers preferred plant-by-plant bargaining. He does, however, view Reid Robinson's company-by-company approach as a "logical" step to industry-wide bargaining. Al Skinner, head of Mine Mill's postwar Kennecott council, defended this strategy on the grounds that large corporations must be organized on a national basis for collective bargaining to be effective. See First Oral Interview of Al Skinner by Alice Hoffman and Greg Giebel, December 9, 1969, HCLA-PSU, 29. During the war, Reid Robinson wanted to ensure "the most satisfactory results" in the union's "organizational drives at several properties of the Kennecott Copper Corporation." Reid Robinson to George Haskell, December 10, 1941, in the Archives of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, Western History Collection, University of Colorado [hereafter cited as IUMMSW], Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."


3. Navin, ibid., 13; Hildebrand and Mangum, Capital and Labor in American Copper, 94-95. Western copper mining developed slowly because of prohibitive costs due to inadequate transportation and low-grade deposits. Although the telephone was invented in 1876 and Edison patented the incandescent lamp in 1880, western miners did not begin exploiting known copper reserves until 1881, and heavy production did not occur until the 1890s. Iron wire was used in the telegraph industry until the western copper mines began production. Navin, Ibid., 13n.
4. Hildebrand and Mangum, ibid., 37-41, contains Arthur B. Parsons' description of the six characteristics of western porphyry copper: (1) "Extensive" deposits that "can be mined efficiently only at large scale, through underground block caving or open pits"; (2) Uniform distribution of copper throughout the ore preventing "selective" mining; (3) The ore contains the presences of igneous rock, "either porphyry or closely related rocks," indicating these rocks may have produced the copper minerals; (4) The "upper layers of copper ore have been concentrated by...[a] natural leaching" process; (5) "Two factors" affect the "dimensions of the ore body": the ore grade declines "with both lateral extension and increase of depth," and the cost of extraction and market price of the mineral "set the limits of mineable ore"; and (6) the presence of "low-grade sulfide...requires fine grinding and concentration before smelting."

5. Unlike underground mining where copper veins are selectively extracted from the hard rock, in open-pit mining steam shovels remove all the surface ore, which is then sent to the mill where the copper is separated from the "slag," or nonmineral bearing ore. Through a process called flotation, minute copper particles are separated from the surrounding rock, concentrated at the mill, smelted into sheets of "blister" copper, and then sent to refineries in the East.


7. Although, as Patricia Limerick shows, not the only pattern. Western merchants and speculators--"courtroom miners"--also acquired large mining interests. See Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York, 1987), 111-114 for a typology of the "winning mineowners." Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West (Norman, 1991), 265-266, describes the consolidation of Western mining.


9. Elliott, ibid., 282-289; Stanley W. Paher, Nevada Ghost Towns and Mining Camps (2d ed., Las Vegas, 1984), 236. Rumors circulated periodically that Consolidated Coppermires
would build their own smelter. Nevada Consolidated (then Kennecott's Nevada Mines Division) acquired Consolidated Coppermines in 1958.

10. Elliott, ibid., 199-200, 294-295; Paher, ibid., 231; Navin, ibid., 392.

11. Elliott, ibid., 251-3. Miners formed the Robinson Miners' Union No. 175, a WFM local, to protest a fifty-cent wage reduction, and company violations of the existing eight-hour day. The murders effectively terminated the short life of the union. This did not, however, "end[] Ely's labor troubles," as copper industry historian Ira Joralemon claimed. Joralemon, ibid., 239.

12. For a description of the Ely district's labor history from 1903-1920, see Elliott, ibid., Chapter 9.


15. Elliott, ibid., 263-268; Jensen, Heritage of Conflict, 270. Oddie disallowed two warrants for the arrest of Nevada Consolidated officials. Twenty-one guards were charged for the murder of the two strikers, but the case was not prosecuted because it was impossible to prove which guards had done the killing. Elliott, ibid., 267-8.

16. Alan Derickson, Workers' Health, Workers' Democracy (Ithaca, 1988), 206-207. Members of Local 233 threatened to strike over a company medical examination policy that discriminated against older workers and those with "insignificant health problems." Derickson quotes one Nevada Consolidated worker: "The age limit was placed at 44 years and the examination was so severe that one-half to two-thirds could not pass it satisfactory." If there was a labor surplus in the district, Nevada Consolidated used this policy to "weed...out" the "older men and physically incompetent."

17. Elliott, ibid., 268-9, 295.

a situation he credits to the "excellent self-restraint of Nevada labor organizations during the war." He also claims that workers adhered to the wartime "no-strike" pledge, see Elliott, Growing Up in a Company Town, 21.

19. "Second Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1917-1918," (Nevada), Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly, (Carson City, 1919), 90. Railmen struck for a wage increase in March 1918. Shopmen in Nevada Northern's repair works walked out in July 1918. The trainmen's demands inspired McGill workers to demand recognition of their wartime "workmen's committees." Nevada Consolidated submitted an industrial plan that recognized the committees. Twice during the war, the company was cited by the Nevada State Labor Commissioner for violation of eight-hour laws.

20. Elliott, ibid., 269-72. During the two-month strike, Nevada Consolidated illegally attempted to stop railroad service into the district. Elliott also notes that the company blamed the IWW for the January 1919 strike. In that strike, Ruth miners and Nevada Northern railmen stayed out demanding a wage adjustment, which the company refused. He omits, however, the railroad shopmen's strikes in March and June, that ultimately resulted in a one-dollar per day wage increase, see "Fourth Biennial Report of the State Labor Commissioner, 1921-1922" Appendix to the Journals of the State and Assembly, (Carson City, 1923), 65. The local newspaper commented on the "disturbed conditions" in the district during the strike, but regarded the settlement as evidence of a "conciliatory spirit," and claimed that labor leaders were "satisfied with the result." The Ely Record, September 5, 1919. See also Jensen, ibid., 456. Jensen notes that the strike violated Mine-Mill's constitution and was opposed by Mine-Mill president Charles Moyer and Board Member Henry McClusky. McClusky, a personal friend of Governor Boyle, lost his seat on the union's Executive Board in the next election. Jensen also claims that the Ely locals "never amounted to anything after" the 1919 strike.


22. Elliott, ibid., 210-216.

23. Elliott, ibid., 214-218, quote on 220.

24. Derickson, ibid., 189-219. Derickson labels these practices the "new paternalism," that companies used in the first quarter of the century to diminish workers' self-help organizations, such as hospitals and mutual aid societies.
He shows these policies were clearly designed as a response to labor conflict.


26. Elliott, *ibid.*, 228-231; Elliott, *Growing Up in a Company Town*, 27-29; Jack Fleming, "Copper Town King," *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* 25 (Spring 1982), 33. Fleming omits any mention of the Anglo-American workers in his brief description of the town's residential pattern. Instead, he identifies two sections: "the charmed circle" where the executives and their families lived; and the rest of the "segregated community" which contained southern European and Japanese immigrants, "the primary labor force for the copper industry." Fleming claims segregation was the result of "a number of reasons," including the desire to maintain "different languages and the traditional cultures ... transferred from native lands."

27. Elliott, *Growing Up in a Company Town*, 27-29. He calls this the "silliest thing to develop" from Anglo-American workers' early opposition to immigrant labor, but does not "believe that company officials deliberately sought to establish a company town based on economic and racial discrimination."


29. Fleming, *ibid.*, 28-45. Fleming culled most of his information from Kinnear's memoir, *Fifty Years in Mining* (Kennecott Copper Corporation private publication, 1967),
In Fleming's rather hagiographical article, he describes Kinnear as "a master craftsman in the gentle art of motivating human beings," who ruled McGill with an "iron fist and soft heart." Residents "worshipped" Kinnear for his "sincere, unsolicited concern for his fellow beings." Kinnear "earned the trust of the immigrant elements [sic]" in the town, citing two oral interviews Greek residents. This trust did not prevent Kinnear from personally firing a second-generation Greek worker who requested a wage increase when Kinnear asked for the man's opinion about work conditions at the slag dump. At the time Kinnear was general manager of the Nevada Mines Division. Oral interview of John Skandros by the author, November 11, 1993. Russell Elliott describes Kinnear a "benevolent dictator," but lauds Kinnear's "benevolent and far-sighted policies." Fleming, ibid. 28; Elliott, ibid., xi.

30. J. C. Kinnear, Jr., quoted in Fleming, Ibid., 39.

31. In a survey of the district's Labor Day speeches from the holiday’s inception in 1903 through the 1940s, there is not one mention of the workers desiring any benefit other than decent wages, union recognition, and safety legislation. After the Great Depression, workers looked not to the company, but to the government for a solution to their material problems. David M. Anderson, "Speeches and Sports: Labor Day Celebrations in the Ely, Nevada Area, 1903-1949," paper given at the Sixth Annual Convention of the Far West Popular Culture Conference, February 6, 1994.

32. Elliott, Growing Up in a Company Town, 37, 110, 112.

33. The literature on company towns in the West is scarce. The only monograph is James B. Allen, The Company Town in the American West (Norman, 1966). Allen defines a company town as "simply...any community which has been built wholly to support the operations of a single company, in which all homes, buildings and other real-estate property are owned by that company, having been acquired or erected specifically for the benefit of its employees, and in which the company provides most public services." His brief definition is "any community which is owned and controlled by a particular company." 4-6. Readers should be warned that this book is seriously flawed and I use it here because Allen, an apologist for the company town, accepts the employers’ definition for the term "model." As I contend throughout this study, the company town was devised to "benefit" the copper companies.

Allen’s book was the subject of one of the most scathing book reviews in the American historical profession. Calling it an "unmitigable disgrace," Herbert Gutman cited

34. Fine, ibid., 276-7.

35. Ibid., 274-291; Elliott, Nevada's Twentieth-Century Mining Boom, 205-250; Elliott, Growing Up in a Company Town, 24-35.

36. "Seventh Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1927-28, (Nevada)," Appendix to the Journals of the State and Assembly., (Carson City, 1929). In 1928, there were four AFL locals at the mill, including Mine Mill, carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. The Nevada Northern railway workers and machinists in the railroad's East Ely repair yard were also organized. Additionally, six AFL locals were able to dictate wages and hours with some success in the town of Ely. Excluding Mine Mill, most of these locals were formed just before or during World War I, when they were assured government protection.

37. O'Connor, ibid., 323.


I.

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony explains how a ruling class gains consensus from subaltern groups, thereby extending its domination throughout the whole of society without the continual application of brute force. He defined hegemony as an "organizational and connective" function of the superstructure emanating historically from a society’s specific economic base through the corresponding social relations of production. Refining Karl Marx’s theory of society, Gramsci posited a superstructure consisting of two integrated levels. The first level consists of "political society," where the state and legal apparatus exercise their familiar roles of force and legal coercion, or what Gramsci labelled "direct domination" and "command." The second level consists of "civil society," or the "private" sector. It is at this level where the ruling class organizes hegemony, obtaining "spontaneous consent" from the subordinate class.¹

Hegemony is maintained through the dominant economic
groups' ability to "elaborate," or extend, its economic domination into the political, cultural, and social realms of the subordinate class. A social class gains consent and subsequent social cohesion through the use of intellectuals serving as "deputies" to "direct...the ideals and aspirations" of the dominant class. Although Gramsci posited a theory of the state, hegemony is also organized at the local level.²

The character of company domination and the construction of the informal equilibrium of industrial relations in the Ely district shows a local application of hegemony. During the 1912 and 1919 strikes, Nevada Consolidated demonstrated its ability to command the state's juridical and police apparatus to forcibly coerce compliance with its rule. During the mid-1920s, its policy of welfare capitalism supplanted working-class institutions and quelled agitation, thus gaining peaceful consent for its control.

"Hegemony," Eugene Genovese says, "implies class antagonisms; but it also implies...the ability of a particular class to contain those antagonisms on a terrain in which its legitimacy is not dangerously questioned."³ After the 1919 strike, Ely-district workers discarded the overt challenges to management prerogatives so evident in the preceding two decades. This decision was marked by the rejection of inclusive industrial unionism and the abandonment of any notion of an oppositional political
culture. The workers' capitulation and deference to capitalist prerogatives attest to the establishment of company hegemony. As a dynamic system of class domination, hegemony also required compromises by both companies in order to obtain consent from the district's workers.⁴

Nevada Consolidated recognized the limits of its control. It acknowledged the craftworkers' notion of masculinity by granting them a preferred status in the community, keeping their wages high, providing good homes, and allowing the formation of union locals without retaliation. The company also permitted the immigrant workers to maintain "ethnic enclaves" without mandating intrusive Americanization projects.⁵

Nevada Consolidated had successfully maneuvered through a turbulent two decades of industrial relations to gain the workers' consent of their economic control by extending that control further into the cultural sphere of the working-class. Nevada Consolidated's system, described by Elliott as "semi-feudal," required micromanagement of the local labor market and interference into workers' cultural institutions that was not practiced at the Kimberly mines.

There, the company had opted for the advanced capitalist notion of individualism and depersonalization. The Kimberly miners, in turn, reacted to market forces rather than directly challenging Consolidated Coppermines' domination. By the end of the 1920s, both companies had
established hegemony in Ely district, mediated through the informal equilibriums at the McGill and Kimberly.

II.

Once the prosperity of the 1920s ended, three conditions converged to disrupt the Ely-district's informal equilibrium. None of these conditions can be seen as sufficient to topple the existing system of industrial relations, yet each signified the intrusion of external forces that presented both the workers and the company an opportunity to maintain the status quo or to opt for change. These forces exposed the contradictions inherent in both welfare and open-shop capitalism as they increasingly conflicted with a federal labor policy that sanctioned collective bargaining.

The first threat to the informal equilibrium was upheaval in labor market conditions caused by the copper industry's falling economic fortunes during the Great Depression. Welfare capitalism or reliance on market forces were useless if they failed to provide for the workers' material subsistence. Economic insecurity during the 1930s led workers to reject the district's existing systems of class domination and move toward collective solutions suggested by New Deal labor legislation.

A second necessary condition affecting the district's industrial relations was government support for unionism,
which stood in opposition to the existing social relations. Government sanction was important because it allowed unionized workers to simultaneously express citizenship and class-consciousness. Defining themselves as both members of the working class and as American citizens, workers could morally justify collective action when it was backed by the government’s imprimatur. Unions were now seen as patriotic, American institutions. Workers rejected the hegemonic notion that equated unionism with radicalism and began expanding their locals once they perceived the state as an ally that could successfully compel employers to collectively bargain.

The final condition that could potentially upset the district’s informal equilibrium was the international union’s support of local organizational efforts. To the Ely workers this meant the assignment of an organizer to their area. The union organizer served the function of what Gramsci termed the "organic intellectual," helping the working-class realize itself as a distinct class by providing an explicit critique of ruling-class domination and by formulating a working-class alternative to the received order. The organizer also possessed the knowledge to mount an effective campaign through a systematic, educational process.6

The organizer’s strategy held immediate and long-term goals. The organizer had to convince workers that
unionization could successfully provide concrete economic gains and more control of the job process. This was accomplished through an economic and moral critique of existing institutions. In addition to this activity, the organizer as "organic intellectual" also fulfilled a political function by performing the initial task of mobilizing the working class against capitalist hegemony.\textsuperscript{7}

The "outside" organizer was crucial in districts where this type of intellectual did not emerge from the workers themselves. Although there were some rank-and-file leaders in the Ely district, their enthusiasm was tempered by company intransigence and fluctuated with changing economic conditions. In 1941, Mine-Mill belatedly began activity in the Ely area as part of their larger strategy of organizing the nation's copperworkers. Until then, the Ely-area workers were on their own.

III.

The carefully-constructed system of class domination in the Ely district was predicated on a stable economic and social environment. Faced with increasing economic insecurity after 1930, Ely-district workers responded to the government's support of organized labor by reviving dormant Mine-Mill locals at the smelter and mines. Industrial unionism at the smelter threatened the craft locals by organizing workers on a company-wide basis. Between 1933
and 1938, Ely-area workers mounted three unsuccessful attempts to replace the prevailing informal equilibrium with formal collective bargaining agreements. By 1940, however, economic stability had returned to the district, industrial unionism had been discarded, and company hegemony was again acknowledged.

The Great Depression hit the Ely district in January 1930. Tumbling copper prices forced Nevada Consolidated to lay off nearly 400 employees, many of whom left the district to look for job opportunities elsewhere. The future was equally bleak for those who remained, as conditions steadily deteriorated for the next four years. By October 1931 the company had cut wages ten percent and the plant was operating at only forty percent capacity. The union locals could not withstand the hard times that descended on the district. Down to just twenty-three members, Local 233 disbanded in November.8

Nevada Consolidated tried to soften the economic hardship. The company instituted "work-sharing" plans that kept more workers on their payroll, extended credit to some workers, and encouraged private charities to provide relief to the unemployed. However, the company simultaneously continued to cut production and to reduce the size of its labor force. Workers and their families were devastated, holding little hope for recovery until the summer of 1933.9

Franklin Roosevelt's election victory and the ensuing
"Hundred Days" of New Deal reform legislation galvanized the Ely district. During the summer and fall of 1933, the NIRA received widespread approval from both the district’s merchants and working class. The NIRA’s Section 7(a) unleashed a spontaneous wave of union formation. Ely-district workers, like thousands across the country, responded to the NIRA with patriotic fervor. For the first time, the federal government seemed to be firmly on labor’s side.10

Because the Depression had made it clear that the companies could no longer guarantee economic security, workers rekindled a militant spirit that recalled an earlier era. A speaker at the district’s 1933 Labor Day celebration declared that the NIRA represented the "principles that Labor has fought for through years past." Among these were "a voice in industry, work for the jobless, and shorter hours at a living wage."11

Ely-area workers believed that unionism would be an integral part of Roosevelt’s recovery plan. "Proceeding under the tenets of the NRA," workers at both the Ruth pit and the McGill smelter renewed their Mine-Mill charters. The Ruth miners organized Mine-Mill Local 124 with 383 members. At McGill, the smelter workers revived Local 233, which rapidly swelled to 500 members within a few months.12 Although the AFL also organized several locals at the smelter, the Mine-Mill locals’ large membership figures
indicate that most workers organized along industrial lines.\textsuperscript{13} This resurgence was accompanied by mass demonstrations of class consciousness held outside the company's purview. Both locals jointly planned a "huge" Labor Day parade and the Ruth miners union announced its first annual dance in October.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevada Consolidated's initial response shows that it interpreted this revival of unionism within the framework of the informal equilibrium. In August 1933 the company announced a wage increase for all employees based on a sliding scale that linked wages to the prevailing price of copper. Although there is no record that employees actually received a raise, it provides an instructive example of the company's strategy for containing unionism through economic incentives. Nevada Consolidated would repeat this tactic several times over the next decade whenever union activity increased.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite the enthusiasm for the NIRA throughout the district, Nevada Consolidated refused to recognize the Mine-Mill locals. The company initially stalled collective bargaining negotiations until completion of the copper industry's National Recovery Administration production code. The copper industry's code, an essential part of the National Recovery Administration's plan to raise commodity prices by allowing producers to voluntarily limit production, would not be approved until April 1934.\textsuperscript{16}
Even after the code went into effect, Nevada Consolidated continued to delay collective bargaining negotiations. In November 1934, Henry J. Meyer, a representative of Local 233, complained to the National Labor Board, the ineffectual precursor to the NLRB, about the company's refusal to sign an agreement. The company apparently responded to these charges by dismissing Meyer, who filed a discriminatory discharge claim in March 1935. Despite such intransigence, Mine-Mill locals at both the company's mine and smelter remained active.

Ely-district unionism received another boost with the passage of the Wagner Act and the subsequent rise of the CIO. Although enacted in July 1935, the full effect of the law was not felt in the district until it was upheld by the Supreme Court in April 1937. Membership waxed and waned from the spring of 1935 to the summer of 1936, averaging about 350 members at the smelter and approximately 230 at the Ruth mine.

The CIO's growing power encouraged further unionism throughout the district, commencing in the late summer of 1936 and cresting in the fall of 1937. Along with the increased activity at McGill and Ruth, miners employed by Consolidated Coppermines formed Kimberly Local 363 in June 1937, claiming 313 members by September. In the town of Ely, workers in occupations traditionally excluded from AFL craft representation also turned to the CIO, forming the
White Pine Central Labor Union under Mine-Mill’s jurisdiction. So strong was the CIO in the district that in July, 1937, Sam W. Wolfe, a CIO organizer speaking in Boca, California, claimed that Ely copper miners were "100 per cent" CIO. Although he slightly exaggerated the district’s CIO membership at that time, Mine-Mill membership records indicate that out of approximately 1500 workers, almost 800 McGill smelterworkers and 600 miners at Ruth and Kimberly had paid their membership dues.

Despite their impressive numerical strength, the Ely-district Mine-Mill locals again failed to obtain a collective bargaining agreement. Carl Barber, the head of Local 233’s grievance committee, testified at a later NLRB hearing that the company did informally recognize the union during this period. He recalled that between 1933 and 1938 "numerous grievances were adjusted" between management and Mine-Mill officers at both the smelter and the mine. In 1936, the locals submitted a collective bargaining agreement for Nevada Consolidated’s approval. Although "some discussion" followed, the company refused to negotiate and ultimately rejected the proposed contract. Nevada Consolidated continued to interpret worker demands as a function of the informal equilibrium. Instead of recognizing the union, the company responded with a wage increase and hinted that "the number of days of employment each month...would be increased."
The climax of 1930s CIO unionism in the Ely district came in the spring and summer of 1938. That year, the national split between the AFL and CIO reached Nevada. Until this time, there appears to have been a bipartisan spirit among the state's AFL and CIO unions. In the Ely area, the Mine-Mill locals had remained members of the AFL's White Pine County Central Labor Council (WPCLC) and continued to pay per capita dues to the state's AFL council. The WPCLC recognized Mine-Mill's traditional industrial jurisdiction at the smelter and mines, and craftworkers held both Mine-Mill and craft membership cards. This local harmony would be threatened by events at the state and national level.

At the May 1938 Nevada State AFL convention, a representative for AFL president William Green red-baited Nevada CIO officers and rejected any notions of cooperation between the two federations. Gene Keefe, president of the Nevada AFL, expressing regret over the controversy, blamed the conflict on disagreements between international union officers. However, acting on Green's orders, the Nevada AFL expelled the state's CIO unions.

Anticipating the split, twenty-five delegates representing the state's industrial unions met at Ely a day before the AFL convention to discuss plans for a statewide CIO council. The meeting was also attended by Utah State Senator E. M. Royle, secretary of Mine-Mill District 2 and
George Cole, "a personal representative" of Reid Robinson. In June 1938, the first convention of the CIO’s Nevada Industrial Council (NIC) was held at the Ely Labor Temple. The NIC included delegates from CIO locals in Las Vegas, Silver Peak, Pioche, and Goldfield as well as the three Ely-district locals. Indicative of the district’s statewide CIO leadership, all three of the council’s elected officers were from the Ely area. Ignoring the national dispute between the two federations, the council urged cooperation with both the state’s AFL craft unions and independent railroad brotherhoods. Despite such optimism, the CIO was already encountering employer intransigence at the Kimberly mine.

The Kimberly miners were the first Ely-area local to petition for an NLRB election. In June 1937, miners had formed Local 363, the first Mine-Mill local ever at the Kimberly mines. The local’s initial organizational activity appears to have been well coordinated. At a special July election to select the local’s officers, free buses transported the miners from Kimberly and Riepetown to the Ely Labor Temple.

Unlike their IWW predecessors, the Kimberly miners did not profess radical goals. Local 363 president L. L. Brown announced that he wished "to build up an organization that the citizens of White Pine county and J. B. Haffner, general manager of the Consolidated Coppermines Corporation, would
be proud of [sic]." He urged harmony among the members and "cooperat[ion] in making the union a true and patriotic American organization."\(^{30}\) Despite Brown's sanguine pronouncements, the local's membership rapidly declined after this meeting. This rapid shift from active unionism to apathy indicates that the informal equilibrium still existed at the mines. However, by June 1938, as economic conditions worsened, the Kimberly local rebounded.

In their first step toward possible NLRB certification, Local 363 members successfully petitioned for an NLRB election to determine if the local represented a majority of the Kimberly miners.\(^{31}\) By this time, the union clearly intended to establish formal collective bargaining as the basis for its industrial relations with Consolidated Coppermines. A handbill circulated among the miners proclaimed that Local 363 "stands for improved working conditions and protection of the rights of all workers." Reflecting a militancy that was nonexistent the year before, the local's 1938 platform demanded a "fair day's pay for a fair day's work," an eight-hour day, collar-to-collar, holiday, and overtime pay, seniority rights, a five-day grievance procedure, and "compensation for disability due to industrial diseases." It listed "negotiation, arbitration, mediation, and legislation," as the means for attaining its program.\(^{32}\)

On the same day the NLRB election was announced, both
companies posted notices suspending production for a minimum of thirty days, beginning June 16 and eventually extending until August 1. The decision affected "at least 1000 men" in the Ely district, although 200 would remain at Kimberly and "several hundred" at McGill and Ruth to do "development and repair work." The companies insisted the layoff was due to oversupply, "constantly shrinking business," and excess production.33

Consolidated Coppermines soon reversed its position. In the midst of the Kimberly miners' NLRB campaign, Consolidated Coppermines announced that, unlike Nevada Consolidated, it would not suspend operations.34 Because there is no record of the local's support prior to the election, it is unclear whether the company's action had any effect on the outcome. What is certain is that Mine-Mill apparently won the election by the slimmest of margins: one vote.35 However, the NLRB, unable to determine the validity of four disputed votes, never compelled Consolidated Coppermines to recognize this victory.

In July 1938, Nevada Consolidated announced production would resume at Ruth and McGill, and "at least 450 men" would be rehired on a five-day week basis beginning August 1.36 This date marked prosperity's return as rising production ended the first challenge to company hegemony.37 Conditions reverted back to the pre-Depression days. At the McGill smelter, a small group of craftworkers maintained a
Mine-Mill local, while union organization severely declined at both the Ruth and Kimberly mines. The informal equilibrium of the 1920s had returned.

After the Kimberly debacle, local officers believed that successful organization could only be accomplished if the international union assigned a full-time organizer to the district. While economic insecurity and government support for unionism proved necessary preconditions for destabilizing the informal equilibrium, an experienced international union organizer would also be required to help their locals establish formal industrial relations with both companies.

In August 1938, at Mine-Mill's annual convention, the delegates from Locals 233 and 363, joined by representatives of Pioche, Nevada Local 407, submitted a resolution imploring the union to aggressively organize their state's mining and metals industry. The resolution described conditions throughout the state, and particularly in the Ely district, where members were "having a hard struggle" keeping their Mine-Mill locals active.38

Delegates listed several cases where employers had opposed unionization. Kimberly Local 363, whose NLRB case had been pending "for some time," had encountered "considerable trouble in obtaining recognition." Although Local 363 won their election by one vote, Consolidated Coppermines "refused to grant...union recognition [or]
Similarly, the workers at McGill 233 and Ruth 124 had "no working agreements." The blame rested on the companies. Although the resolution did not specifically delineate their grievances, the Nevada delegates charged that the mining companies in White Pine County, Nevada are responsible for a number of things that break up union organization, discourages [sic] the members, [and] which have all been in violation of the Wagner Act and the National Labor Relations Board.

The solution had to come from the international union. Although active members were "trying to hold the unions together," they needed "an outsider with considerable experience in the labor movement,...who has had experience in negotiating contracts through the efforts of the Labor Board" [emphasis mine] to assist Kimberly, Ruth, and McGill locals. This type of organizer could "really put the locals in White Pine county, Nevada where they belong and [allow them to] receive their just dues under the protection of the" Wagner Act. The delegates requested that George Cole (who had attended the recent Nevada State CIO convention in Ely) be assigned to White Pine County, "to bring the organizations up and assist with the negotiations" pending in Kimberly, and at other Nevada mines.

The international union did not respond to the Ely delegates' plea. Instead, the convention chairman referred their resolution to the union's organization committee for future consideration. Mine-Mill would not assign anyone
to the Ely district until 1941, by which time the enthusiasm of the 1930s had faded and workers were responding to new developments in the area’s industrial relations.

Three outcomes resulted from turmoil and activity of the depression decade. First, Mine-Mill locals had failed to establish the primacy of industrial unionism over craft unionism, thus allowing the AFL trade unions (which had been devastated by the depression) to gain a foothold among the craftworkers that they would exploit in the early 1940s. Second, the miners at Kimberly, and to some extent Ruth, became disillusioned with Mine-Mill because of the international’s failure to support their organizational attempts. The miners remained skeptical toward attempts to revive their locals until 1943. Finally, the informal equilibrium of the 1920s returned as both companies successfully resisted the workers’ attempts to establish formal collective bargaining.
NOTES


5. This concept is applied to Irish copperworkers in Butte, Montana in David M. Emmons' The Butte Irish, (Urbana, 1989), 61-93.

6. This interpretation of the role of the union organizer as intellectual was first suggested by Jay Coughtry and his work with Mine Mill organizers at the Basic Magnesium Plant in Henderson, Nevada during World War II (unpublished paper). Professor Coughtry also directed me to Tim Patterson's "Notes on the Historical Application of Marxist Cultural Theory," Science and Society, 39 (Fall 1975), 257-291. Patterson applies this notion to American country singers prior to the advent of the commercial recording industry. See also Adamson, Hegemony and Revolution, 142-146. Adamson writes: "In the case of the proletariat under capitalism, one would include as organic intellectuals all those striving to create a new proletarian culture as well as production functionaries in a narrower sense, such as shop foremen, machine technicians, and trade union economists." I would add union organizers to this list.

7. This was particularly true prior to the "labor-capital" accord of the post-World War II era. As Nelson Lichtenstein convincingly argues, the postwar "settlement" was not a
determined outcome, but was the result of a capitalist counteroffensive during and immediately after the war. Labor's growing power during the 1930s and 1940s was, above all, a political threat to the capitalist class. Lichtenstein writes: "The economic power wielded by American trade unions was by its very nature political power, for the New Deal had thoroughly politicized all relations between the union movement, the business community, and the state." Lichtenstein, "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era," in Gary Gerstle and Steve Fraser, eds., The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980 (Princeton, 1989), 122-152, (quote on 124).

8. Elliott, History of Nevada Mines Division, 231-235. By 1931 production was under thirty percent of capacity and the price of copper fell to barely above eight cents per pound from a 1929 high of eighteen cents. By the summer of 1932 the plant operated on a 15-day per month basis, and payroll had been cut almost thirty percent from the previous year. The company lost over $2 million in 1932. Despite the optimism caused by the NRA, the company suffered its worst year in 1933, when copper reached its lowest price ever at less than five cents per pound. During this period, Kennecott acquired full control of Nevada Consolidated, completing a process that had begun in 1915.

9. Ibid., 248-9; Elliott, Growing Up in a Company Town, 138. During the Depression, workers and their families had two choices: leave the district or stay and try to survive. One McGill resident, born in 1927, remembered that his father, a railroad worker, moved his family to Idaho. They did not return until 1940, when conditions improved. He recalled that Nevada Consolidated "curtailed people down so far that all the people that were here couldn't make a living. So some had to get out so the others could get enough work to live. My dad was one of them that had to get out, he was one of the young ones." Oral interview of Jay Carson by David M. Anderson, July 9, 1993. Another McGill resident, whose family remained in the area recalled the stark conditions at the smeltiertown. He remember that the Red Cross and Community League would distribute sacks of flour, and rabbits, and "fat dogs," to the starving residents. Oral interview of Wendell Knighton by David M. Anderson, July 10, 1993.

10. Elliott, History of Nevada Mines Division, Kennecott Copper Corporation, 244-5; Elliott, Growing Up in a Company Town, 139. For the positive effects of Depression-era national labor legislation see Michael Wallace, Beth A. Rubin, and Brian T. Smith, "American Labor Law: Its Impact on Working-Class Militancy, 1901-1980," Social Science
Interpreting labor law as "a major vehicle by which the state mediates class conflict within a market-dominated capitalist economy," (22) they show that prolabor legislation increases militancy "directly, through the creation of an atmosphere favorable...to strike actions," and "indirectly, by strengthening...the organizational capacity (i.e. unionization) of workers...." (10). The most noted example of labor equating the NRA with patriotism is in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s The Age of Roosevelt: The Coming of the New Deal (Boston, 1958). 138-140. Schlesinger cites the use of patriotic imagery by the UMW in their effort to organize coal workers after the passage of the NIRA. UMW organizers compared Section 7(a) to the Emancipation Proclamation and their handbills read: "The United States Government Has Said LABOR MUST ORGANIZE."


12. Mine Mill records, which record the number of members who had paid dues, show Local 124 with 383 members and Local 233 with 291 at the end of August, 1933, see the "IUMMSW Register of Local Unions, 1932-1942" (bound ledger), IUMMSW. The day after the wage increase was announced one newspaper reported that officials of Ruth 124 and McGill 233 "revealed" the organization of Mine-Mill locals at both sites and placed membership of Local 124 at "approximately" 300, and of Local 233 at "approximately" 350. Ely Daily Times, August 25, 1933. The Ely Record noted that workers had organized the two locals, and claimed "more than 300" workers at the mine, "about 400" at the smelter, Ely Record, September 1, 1933. Indicative of the rise in unionism, the newspaper noted the formation of a new AFL "Federal Labor union" in the Ely district whose "membership will be recruited from members of other unions and also from persons not members of any union." Ely Daily Times, August 30, 1933.

13. The "Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, July 1932-June, 1934 (Nevada)," Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly (Carson City, 1934) lists unions that had reported to the Commission. This report does not contain the Mine-Mill locals, but shows the AFL had two unions in McGill: the Plumbers Local 611, and the Carpenters Local 1572, 32. The next report shows AFL locals for the plumbers, boilermakers (no number), and moulders (no number) at McGill, and also includes Mine-Mill Locals 233 and 124. "Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Labor, July 1934-June, 1936 Nevada," ibid. (Carson City, 1936).

14. The Ely Record, October 13, 1933. The "Ruth Miners Union" claimed "nearly 1,000" members in the district, a figure that probably represented the combined total of the
miners and smeltermen.

15. *Ely Daily Times*, August 24, 1933. There was no record that workers ever received this increase. An editorial entitled "Copper Operators Optimistic" also noted the "already posted notices of wage increases" by Nevada Consolidated, and generally looked at the state of the industry in the wake of the NRA. The writer did not, however, mention the formation of the union locals. *Ely Daily Times*, August 26, 1933.


17. A. M. Rosseter to Henry J. Meyer, December 3, 1934, IUMMSW, Box 851, Folder 28, "NLRB Correspondence and Decisions, 1934."

18. R. S. Wagenet to Frank W. Ingram, April 30, 1935, *ibid*.

19. "IUMMSW Register of Local Unions, 1932-1942," bound volume, IUMMSW.

20. *Ibid*. Beginning in July 1936, membership in Local 233 steadily increased, until October 1937, when membership peaked at 801 members. Similarly the Ruth miners' local increased from 169 members in July 1936 to 319 members in August 1937. At Kimberly, the first Mine Mill local was formed June 1937, and claimed 313 members by September 1937.

21. *The Ely Record*, April 23, 1937. Approximately 20 members joined the Ely local of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. Officers were to be elected April 23, 1937 "following the regular meeting of the Central Labor union at Merricourt hall." This was an industrial union "embodying workers of Ely not affiliated with local craft unions." Officers were elected and over 30 applications for new members were received and would be initiated on May 10, 1937. Plans were made for "an intensive membership drive."

22. *The Ely Record*, July 23, 1937. Although the union was not ready to reveal its plans, and most members had not revealed their cards publicly, Wolf said that steps would be taken to improve working conditions. Perhaps to diminish the CIO's radical image, he further asserted Mine-Mill would work peacefully to achieve its aims. For membership figures see "IUMMSW Register of Local Unions," *ibid*.

During a 1942 NLRB hearing, the Trial Examiner's report also noted: "The Smelter Workers commenced its organization of the company's employees in 1933 and unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate a contract with the Company in 1936 or 1937." 38 NLRB 1346, 1349n.


27. Ely Daily Times, May 9, 1938. Delegates from Las Vegas, Goldfield, Silver Peak, and Pioche locals also attended.

28. Ely Daily Times, June 21, 1938. The officers were Eugene Franks, president and Ralph Hoy, secretary-treasurer, from Kimberly, and R. Butner, vice-president, from McGill. Officers claimed the meeting was "formed as a necessity" following the group's ouster from the AFL convention. The newspaper report also read: "Leaders said no split was seen in the ranks of Nevada labor but the rank and file was urged to get together for their own interest...."

29. The Ely Record, July 23, 1937. On the same day, Nevada Consolidated and Consolidated Coppermines resolve of a long-standing property dispute, which resulted in a doubling of Nevada Consolidated's production and the additional employment of 150 workers.

30. The Ely Record, July 30, 1937.

31. The Ely Record, June 3, 1938. H. E. Knowlton, an NLRB representative, conferred with Consolidated Coppermines officials and Kimberly union officers. Knowlton indicated he would hold an election to see if the union "has the majority of employees of the company for the purpose of collective bargaining under the" Wagner Act. The company's attorney, George Thatcher was also in town.


33. The Ely Record, June 3, 1938. Kennecott was also closing its operations in New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, Alaska, Montana, and Mountain City, Nevada.

35. *Ely Daily Times*, June 14, 1938. 340 votes were cast, from a total of 367 voters. One vote was declared void, and four votes were challenged. The final vote was 168 for the union, 167 against.


40. *Ibid*.

41. *Ibid*. Also requesting Cole were Silver Peak Local 427, Goldfield Local 417 and the White Pine Industrial Union Local 312.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE "POSSIBILITIES" OF ORGANIZATION,
JANUARY 1941-SEPTEMBER 1941

As defense-era demand revived the copper industry, the informal equilibrium of the 1920s began to reappear. This was acutely evident in the waning unionism among the Ely-district workers. Between 1939 and 1941 the Mine-Mill locals at the McGill smelter and Ruth mine steadily declined, while Kimberly Local 363 disbanded in 1940. Beginning in the spring of 1941, the AFL began an offensive that threatened to unsettle the status quo and to undermine industrial unionism among the copperworkers. Mine-Mill leaders quarreled over the best approach to block the AFL and to organize the Ely district along industrial lines.

This debate centered on the selection of an organizer. It reveals internal fissures among the union leaders, showing how District Board Member Ralph Rasmussen, who desired to use his own rank-and-file organizers, opposed President Robinson's use of left-wing outsiders. Robinson's compromise choice, L. G. Robison, satisfied neither party. Although he conducted a brief and failed campaign, Robison's techniques give some insight into the intellectual function
of the labor organizer. Nevertheless, by the fall of 1941, the union had squandered an opportunity to organize the district.

In the spring of 1941, Nevada Consolidated signed its first ever collective bargaining agreement with the company’s train engineers and switchmen. Occupying a strategic place in the production process, these workers operated the train crews that transported ore from the Ruth and Kimberly mines to the McGill smelter. On March 27, 1941 the company agreed to a contract covering wages, hours, and working conditions with the independent Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers Local 593, the engineers’ bargaining agent.² A week later, the AFL-affiliated Switchmen’s Union Local 267 concluded negotiations in Washington, D.C. with a similar agreement.³ These two contracts marked a dramatic transformation in the Ely district’s industrial relations. By finally breaching Nevada Consolidated’s traditional intransigence, the trainmen gave the district’s other workers hope that the company would bargain with the remainder of its labor force.

In the wake of the trainmen’s contract, Ely district Mine-Mill officers and active members sent "urgent requests" to District Two Board Member Ralph Rasmussen asking for an organizer to help them capitalize on the new enthusiasm in the district.⁴ Based in Utah, District Two included the entire southwestern copper industry, encompassing the states
of Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. In April, Rasmussen submitted a report suggesting the Board consider "putting someone on in the future" in the Ely district. Later that month, he toured the Ely district to investigate the "possibilities" of organization.

Rasmussen immediately noticed the AFL's aggressive drive to obtain contracts for all the company's craft workers. He enviously described the AFL as the district's "fair-haired boys," because the AFL-affiliated switchmen was one of the two unions that had successfully coaxed Nevada Consolidated to the bargaining table. The AFL boasted a strength and appeal that the Mine-Mill locals could not yet match. At the smelter, Rasmussen found the AFL to be "well-represented" among the electricians, boilermakers, and especially the machinists, who he called "the best organized of the crafts." Given its strength in these three elite groups, the AFL initially considered approaching the company as a single unit but soon discarded this tactic because it lacked a majority of members among the other craftworkers. The AFL decided instead to seek separate contracts for each group, demanding a dollar per day wage increase.

Nevada Consolidated adamantly opposed the AFL offensive. An AFL representative told Rasmussen that he had asked the company for a "front door deal for the machinists" but "had been turned down flat." The company dubiously insisted that "they preferred to deal with one union for all
their men" and vowed that "every certification would have to be won the hard way"—by winning an NLRB election.10 Rasmussen laid a "50-50 bet" that Nevada Consolidated did not want to negotiate with any of the craft groups, regardless of the outcome of the elections. However, the company was vulnerable to the demands of the skilled workers, who were being lured by the high wages being paid on the West Coast. Rasmussen speculated that the machinists could prevail with their demands "due to the fact that the company is losing all their good mechanics to the shipyards and other defense projects."11

Rasmussen hoped that advantageous labor market conditions would also benefit the Ely district’s moribund Mine-Mill locals. Despite their officers’ enthusiasm, the McGill and Ruth locals were comprised of only twenty members apiece and were "for all practical purposes out of existence."12 Following the failed attempts in the 1930s, many smelterworkers had deserted the union, convinced that a contract was "impossible since they were turned down on their proposal some years ago." Remaining members were, according to Rasmussen, "willing and ready to go ahead now and rebuild these unions," even though their locals had been "dead for a long time." Active Mine-Mill members wanted to beat the AFL to the bargaining table, although some were machinists who also belonged to the AFL craft union and stood to gain either way. The Mine-Mill machinists had been
"double-heading" or holding cards in both unions, but they favored industrial unionism and rejected the notion of "separate contracts" for the AFL craft unions. 

For their part, local officers took measures designed to encourage recruitment. They agreed to reduce their reinstatement fee to attract former members and also decided to spend all the money in their coffers—$900 at Ruth and $400 at McGill—on an organizing drive built around the demands of a pay raise (although they had "comparatively good wages"), seniority, a dues check-off, and a better vacation clause. Rasmussen noted that the cloud of pessimism that had pervaded the Mine-Mill locals since the late 1930s had lifted; the trainmen’s contract had rekindled extinguished aspirations of the past and finally "stimulate[d] some life and some hopes for organization."

Because of the contracts, however, Rasmussen was cautious about immediately challenging the AFL. The AFL had "done a lot of work," he noted, while Mine-Mill was "in somewhat of an unfavorable predicament." Nevertheless, the AFL had several weaknesses. Its strength was concentrated in only three of the six craft locals at the smelter and therefore could not match Mine-Mill’s potential appeal to a broader base of workers. Additionally, the AFL was suspicious of the NLRB and what it saw as the Board’s pro-CIO bias. Many AFL officers were therefore reluctant to test their support against the CIO in a certification
election. Rasmussen was "surprised" at the AFL's "apparent lack of confidence in the NLRB," particularly after the Board had recently forced many notorious open-shop employers to the bargaining table. Rasmussen also counted on craftworkers resenting the AFL's autocratic methods. Although the AFL professed "'democracy'," and local autonomy, the federation had "slapped [the switchmen's union] with a $20.00 assessment fee before the ink was dry on [their] charter."¹⁶

Local Mine-Mill officers believed they could exploit these weaknesses, but only with the international union's support. Rasmussen noted that fatalistic members "who have always hung crape [sic] on everything in the past, are convinced that the job can be done with some help from" Mine-Mill. Rasmussen's own assessment of the situation was cautiously optimistic. Despite the AFL's initiative, there was "no question" that Mine-Mill could "rebuild a very important section of our jurisdiction ...[within a] short period of time"; however, Mine-Mill had to move quickly to prevent the AFL from signing separate contracts for the craftworkers. Mine-Mill had "by far the best chance" to organize the area's workers along industrial lines, but if they failed to act the AFL would split the copperworkers into a "dozen, or more craft units." Reflecting on the change in worker and employer attitudes in the wake of the trainmen's contract, Rasmussen mused that "someone is going
to have this company under contract before long."^{17}

Although Mine-Mill's Executive Board had targeted the Ely district for organization, Robinson and Rasmussen clashed over the selection of organizers. This debate was an important manifestation of a larger power struggle between the two, who were also split on tactics concerning an ongoing contract dispute with Utah Copper at this time."^{18}

Each man pursued a different agenda. On one hand, Robinson continued his organizational strategy, begun in the late 1930s, of using hand-picked, left-wing activists. He defended his choices by citing his successful record and uncanny instinct for organizational activity."^{19} Rasmussen, on the other hand, wanted District Board members to retain a large measure of autonomy from the international. His strongest support was in the copper districts west of Salt Lake City and into Nevada, and he tried repeatedly to fill his district with rank-and-file organizers from that area. He was, in effect, trying to accomplish on a regional level what he accused Robinson of doing on a national level. Throughout the next two years, this friction led to compromise choices unsatisfactory to either Rasmussen or Robinson and hampered efforts to successfully organize the Ely district.

Calling the Ely district "too important to lose," Rasmussen requested that two organizers be assigned there
immediately. He chose two members from District Two, one from Utah and one from Nevada.20 Arguing that a successful campaign would benefit the entire union, Rasmussen defended the expense of two organizers: "we will never regret the spending of money for organizational activity here at this time."21

Ignoring Rasmussen's suggestions, Robinson appointed L. G. Robison, a rank-and-file organizer from Rasmussen's current Utah Copper campaign at Bingham Canyon. Robinson justified his decision to use only one organizer by claiming that District Two was "loaded to capacity with organizers," and the union's dwindling finances made it "impossible" to add another one. Robinson also claimed that "past experience" had shown that his opinions on "organizational matters...have been substantially correct."22

Rasmussen angrily charged that countermanding a Board Member's recommendation was "uncalled for and wholly out of line with the proper functions of [the union president's] good office." He argued that, despite its ambitious plans, the union was not yet completely committed to organizing the important Western copper mines and smelters, where he claimed "less than half...[were] receiving any attention." The opportunity was at hand for launching a concerted campaign to organize all Kennecott's properties. The large potential membership only justified hiring two organizers because "they could pay their way with the new members they
could bring into the organization."23

Rasmussen asserted that Robison, his "most important" organizer, should not be removed from the Utah Copper campaign. The transfer would also be a personal hardship for Robison, who had unexplained family problems. Robison was "the type of fellow who does not do justice to himself or the cause unless Mrs. Robison is with him." Robison's removal provided fodder for a growing separatist movement among Utah members opposed to Robinson. Rasmussen warned that if Mine-Mill did not act quickly and with a substantial commitment, "we might as well make the A. F. of L. a present of [the Ely district]."24

By the time Rasmussen voiced these objections, Robison had already been sent to the Ely district. On April 28, Robinson ordered him "to start organizational work" and to determine how "an immediate drive can be successful."25 During his brief tenure in the Ely district, Robison was distracted by his desire to return to his family and to resume work on the Utah Copper campaign. Confessing that Board Member Rasmussen was "somewhat exercised," Robinson solicited Robison's own opinion about his transfer.26

Robison's poignant response reveals the daily sacrifices made by union organizers. They were paid low wages, traveled long distances, constantly feared harassment, intimidation, and violence, and, for those that were married, experienced long periods of separation from
their families. For organizers who did not rise to an administrative position, their career was a balancing act between professional and personal concerns. When they did not organize an area, they carried this loss with them as a personal failure.

Like many others who travelled to Nevada during the early 1940s, Robison confronted a severe housing shortage caused by the influx of defense workers. He found the Ely area to be "a very expensive place to live" with not "much chance to find living quarters for a family." A single room at a "second rate hotel" was "very scarce and hard to get," and was expensive at $3.00 per day. Even after he obtained more "satisfactory" living quarters, he longed for his wife and children left behind in Utah. Robison remarked that he "would much rather have my family here than be separated" and planned to get a larger "place to live" for his family "as soon as the kids are out of school." When asked by Robinson if he resented the transfer, Robison replied that he was "more than [just] a little" disappointed by the move. Nevertheless, he passionately summed up his commitment to the union:

I have always felt that it was my duty to the organization to go where I was sent and to do the best I could.... I shall to the best of my ability try to [carry] on as best I can. My feeling has always been that we must learn to subordinate self to the common good if we are to be of value to the organization. We must all realize that the working force of the International must be directed [by the union’s officers] and even though it is sometimes inconvenient for us, we must make the best of the
situation....29

Robison yearned to return to work on the "very important" Utah Copper campaign, but he agreed that the Ely district was equally vital to the union and that his leaving Utah would "not...hurt the situation there."

Robison remained in the Ely area for only twenty-four days.30 However, during his brief stay he managed to provide an extensive analysis of the district that showed the rising presence of the AFL and subsequent reformation of the informal equilibrium. While he grappled with the unique character of Ely-district industrial relations, Robison's tactics also reveal the intellectual function of the union organizer.

Robison echoed Rasmussen's contention that the AFL was experiencing a period of rising aspirations. Robison found that many workers saw no distinction between craft-based and industrial unionism. He commented that most of the workers "seem[ed] to think the crafts are OK," including "quite a few" Mine-Mill members. Robison advised "not interfer[ing] with the crafts," but believed a slow, wise campaign could organize the workers "without trouble." He predicted that a "letdown" would occur once the AFL failed to secure a contract with Nevada Consolidated. Then the workers could "be shown the absolute necessity of organizing industrially if they are to better conditions."31

Robison's correspondence indicates that informal
equilibrium had indeed returned. The McGill smelterworkers maintained a small core of active union members, while the Kimberly miners discarded any semblance of unionism. Similarly, the companies resorted to their old tactics. Nevada Consolidated attracted the stable smelterworkers' loyalty with paternalistic welfare capitalism, while Consolidated Coppermines confronted the more transient miners with antiunionism. If spontaneous unionism occurred, it would not be among the smelterworkers, but among the miners, a fact that Robison failed to grasp. In what would become a key point of disagreement over tactics, Reid Robinson, who sensed the unique situation in the Ely district, advised Robison to first concentrate on the miners because they would "be easier to organize...than the smeltermen," and that "success" there would spread to McGill.  

Robison, however, did not recognize the dynamics of industrial relations in the Ely district. He believed that Mine-Mill should "try to encourage the group that is working at McGill and give them what assistance is possible." During open meetings, the workers at McGill "seemed very receptive" to Robison's message. Besides a core of active members, there were "some pretty live union men" that Robison believed "should come along." One glaring weakness for organizing the plant industrially was clearly evident. At the meetings, Robison observed the "complete absence" of
foreign-born workers, who made up "quite a large number" of the smelter's laborers and semiskilled industrial workforce.\textsuperscript{33} Despite this intraclass division, he nonetheless recommended that organization begin at McGill.

His conclusion ignored Robinson's suggestion that initial organization should center on Ruth and Kimberly, where conditions at the mines contrasted sharply with the smelter town. Robison found there was little AFL presence at the mines--they had "nothing" at Kimberly and "very little" at Ruth. But the miners were not necessarily hospitable to the CIO either. Mine-Mill had "the past to overcome" at the mines because of its lack of support during the late 1930s.\textsuperscript{34}

Robison found "rotten" conditions at Kimberly. Above ground, living costs were high and living conditions "very bad." Underground, the mines were unventilated, the company used the speedup and the illegal one-man system, and the accident rate was "terrible." A legacy of union corruption and a highly mobile work force were Robison's chief obstacles at the mines. When the Kimberly local had been declared defunct in 1940, there apparently had been a "financial scandal" which further discredited the union. There were quite a number of union men in Kimberly, but these were transients who, because conditions were "so bad," only "stay[ed] long enough for a road stake," shuttling between Nevada and Climax, Colorado. This unsettled
environment was made worse by the presence of antiunion foremen and workers. He observed "quite a gang of finks" employed at the Kimberly mines, including some "head finks,"--foremen "who made themselves infamous by their... activity in Silverton, Colorado."\(^{35}\)

Despite "plenty of dissatisfaction because of conditions," wages were "as high or higher than surrounding camps." Wages throughout the district had improved since the trainmen signed their contracts, as part of the companies' two-pronged strategy to defuse growing unionism. "Evidently" aware of "considerable union sentiment in the district," both companies granted a twenty-five cent wage increase on May 1. Although the wage increase was a typical Nevada Consolidated response, Consolidated Coppermines went one step further in making known its displeasure with increased union activity, briefly laying-off about sixty miners when it cut thirty minutes off the workday at Kimberly. The ostensible reason for this move was the company's belated recognition of the three-year-old federal Wage and Hour Law which mandated a shorter workday. However, the antiunion message was clear when they hired these workers back a few days later.

Robison aptly described the district's two systems of industrial relations. Nevada Consolidated used "the old paternalism more," he noted, "with pretty good effect," while Consolidated Coppermines had "a decided antiunion
complex" and would "prob[ably] fight [Mine-Mill] every inch of the way." Both the wage increase and the layoff "cooled the boys off there for a time," slowing union activity for several weeks.36

Robison launched the Ely organizational drive with a mass meeting in McGill on April 30, his first night in the district, and continued to hold these gatherings throughout his stay. He then began establishing a network of contacts to better assist him with an educational campaign. Two weeks after his arrival, he wrote to the international union requesting a list of workers who had written "urgent requests" to Rasmussen in April. Meanwhile, he started circulating among the "right people"—those employees and other Ely-area residents sympathetic to Mine-Mill’s brand of unionism. At the old Wobbly stronghold of Riepetown, he found a supporter in Mrs. Corak, who operated the Miners Club, "a combination boarding house and saloon," and presumably a haven for conferences to learn the local gossip. Before leaving, he planned to distribute the CIO News, using the McGill and Ruth officers to help out at their respective sites, while trying to get enough men to "cover the different shifts" at the Kimberly mine.37

Robison’s attitude mirrored Rasmussen’s when assessing the union’s chances in the area. In the middle of his campaign, he saw a "grand opportunity" for Mine-Mill to make "some real progress," but later learned of four internal
weaknesses within the locals that made organizing the district difficult. First, rank-and-file workers resented that fact that officers had used the locals as "political stepping stones." For example, R. N. Gibson, Nevada’s Labor Commissioner, began his political career as a Mine-Mill officer in Local 124. Second, there were a "number of old feuds" among the remaining members. Robison recommended that any organizer who came to the area "listen much and talk little on some of these pet peeves." Third, many long-time members characterized any Mine-Mill representative as "either a drunkard[,] a thief[,] or a son of a bitch of some kind." Robison noted that the district was "no pleasant place" for an organizer until a turnover in labor force brought "new blood" into the district. Finally, because of the combination of these conditions the locals had "stagnated," with little interest left outside a core of active members. Nevertheless, Robison predicted that the situation "will correct itself if new membership can be brought in and some activity stirred up." 

Robison also stressed the statewide significance of the Ely-district copper industry. Nevada Consolidated’s treatment of its workforce was carefully observed by miners everywhere, who Robison claimed "badly needed" organization. In some of the state’s other mining towns, "things [were] in bad shape"—workers received low wages ($4.25 per day), companies ignored overtime provisions, and used antiunion
tactics "unknown in organized districts." Organizing Nevada Consolidated was, as Robison concluded, "the key to entire state of Nevada." 40 

Robison would not witness any changes in the Ely district. On May 24, Reid Robinson ordered him to return to the Bingham Copper campaign. 41 Whether this move was simply the result of Robison's dissatisfaction, Robinson's frustration that he was not getting the best work out of the organizer, or Rasmussen's constant pressure is unknown. Despite Robison's departure, neither Robinson nor Rasmussen intended to neglect the Ely district. They clashed once more over the selection of the most suitable organizer for the district.

Again claiming to have received "many urgent pleas" from the Ely district, Rasmussen submitted another roster of Utah and Nevada rank-and-file organizers. He warned that if an organizer was not immediately sent to the Ely district, the "recent program will die out for want of aid." This would not only destroy the members' morale, it would be "another broken promise... chalked up against the International." And, he cautioned, Mine-Mill was "not good for many more of them" in the Ely district. 42

Reid Robinson also wanted to place the organizer of his choice in the Ely district. Less than a week after Robison's transfer, Howard Goddard, Robinson's organizational assistant, indicated that the union was
planning to assign another organizer to Ely district and asked Robison for a "complete report on the status of organization," including "all contacts [and] activities." Ignoring Rasmussen, Robinson began his own search for a replacement and by this time had apparently decided to select someone outside of Rasmussen's District Two stronghold. In June, he remarked that he was "still searching for a competent organizer for Nevada" and would "try to get one in there as quickly as possible." Throughout the summer, Rasmussen continued to prod Robinson. In a report to the Executive Board, Rasmussen noted that the Ely-district locals were in "serious condition" because of "lack of help." Although the members' "numerous requests" had been relayed to Robinson, "to date, nothing has been done toward rebuilding" their locals, which were "situated in a very important section" of the copper industry. Rasmussen optimistically believed that a "constructive ... program" could easily organize all the employees at the McGill smelter "within a reasonable length of time." Rasmussen appealed to Robinson for "immediate ... help" in the Ely district.

At the same time, Local 233 officers were lobbying the international union to send another organizer before the workers' enthusiasm completely dissipated. In May, Local 233 financial secretary E. H. Hakenson urged starting another campaign with dedicated, "live wire" organizers.
Goddard assured him that the union was "making every effort to secure" the type of organizer Hakenson requested, but they were in short supply. Increased organizational activity throughout the "entire CIO" had "developed to such an extent" that it was "very difficult to obtain competent organizers on the spur of the moment." Goddard confided that he had several people in mind and would, in time, make the necessary arrangements to place one in White Pine County.\(^6\)

Hakenson, who was one of the "double-heading" machinists, reported that "several brothers stressed the urgent need for speed" in sending an organizer because of the AFL "activities." He was particularly distressed that the rival federation’s progress had occurred while Mine-Mill’s international leaders debated over the selection of an organizer. By mid-June, the AFL was on the verge of filing a petition for an NLRB certification election. The craft locals had been "rapidly" expanding by utilizing CIO tactics. Hakenson noted that the AFL was "taking in employees engaged in repair work whom formerly they wouldn’t consider." Mine-Mill members in the skilled trades were also being pressed to shift to AFL.\(^7\)

Hakenson cited a vast pool of workers--"between three hundred fifty and four hundred men under thirty five years of age"--that the union needed to actively recruit because "a great many...[had] never belonged to a labor union."
Hakenson advised that July would be a good time to send an organizer when the local was "shifting in the [new] officers," and there would be "three or four members who can and will render splendid service." He claimed all they needed was "someone to 'spark' and to direct our organizing activities."48

Throughout the summer of 1941, the union failed to respond to Hakenson's entreaties. At Mine-Mill's annual convention in August, Robinson promised the Ely delegation that there would be an organizer in their district within thirty days. However, Robinson's vow came too late to stop the AFL offensive. That same month, the machinists at both McGill and Ruth and the Ruth electricians filed petitions for NLRB certification elections.49

Rasmussen continued to debate the organizer question with Robinson. In September, Rasmussen complained that an organizer had not yet been appointed to the area and suggested four potential candidates, again drawn from the Nevada-Utah rank and file.50 By this time, Robinson had finally selected George Haskell, a former Teamster organizer from California, who had been recommended by Maurice Travis, a Mine-Mill international representative based in Martinez, California.51

Robinson's and Travis' joint opposition to Rasmussen's candidates is crucial to understanding the internal dynamics within Mine-Mill at this time, as well as explaining the
type of organizer that Robinson preferred. They viewed
Rasmussen’s recommendations as provincial and unwilling to
make the sacrifices that the job required, sacrifices, that
even conservative CIO president John L. Lewis knew left-wing
organizers gladly accepted. Despite his professed
commitment to the union, Robison’s case of homesickness
underscores this point.  

The supply of dedicated organizers was a finite
quantity. If Robinson rejected Rasmussen’s selections out
of hand, then he had to find substitutes, preferably leftist
organizers that agreed with his progressive vision of the
union’s future. By the 1940s, the West Coast had developed
a strong contingent of left-wing labor activists. In an
environment that contained Harry Bridges, the doyen of
American left-wing unionism, such organizers flourished— and
Robinson wanted them. Getting them approved by a Board that
preferred organizers drawn from their own membership was
another matter.

Robinson submitted Haskell’s name to the Executive
Board in late August. By the end of September, the divided
Board had yet to decide on his appointment. Trying to
rally support for Haskell, Paul E. Burns, a business agent
for Mine-Mill Local 50 in San Francisco, strongly
recommended him for the post. Possibly prompted by Travis,
Burns praised Haskell’s earlier work for the Teamsters in
Los Angeles, and testified that he was Local 50’s “most
In September Goddard informed Hakenson about Haskell’s appointment. Goddard explained that until the Board approved or rejected Haskell, it would "be a practical impossibility to assign anyone" to the Ely area and again noted there was "acute shortage of organizers throughout the International Union."56

On September 27, Haskell was belatedly approved by the Executive Board. Informing Hakenson of the good news, Goddard reminded him to give Haskell "all possible assistance in familiarizing him with the local situation and acquainting him with the membership," and recommended that the two combine on a "program of organization" for the Ely district.57 The "live wire" organizer was finally on the way.
NOTES

1. "IUMMSW Register of Local Unions, 1932-1942," bound volume, IUMMSW.

2. For the engineers' contract see Ely Daily Times, March 27-29, 1941. The newspaper reported that negotiations "had been underway for some time," before an agreement was reached. The engineers' local also included "firemen, hostlers, and hostler helpers," and had been represented in the negotiations by, G. W. Burbank, a national representative of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE). The contract negotiations were noteworthy for "a fine spirit of cordiality and sincerity manifested...at all times." On March 28, 1941 a banquet, the "first of its kind in the district" was held to "acknowledge... the cooperative spirit between the employees and the company" and included Nevada Consolidated and BLE officials.

3. Ely Daily Times April 4, 26, 1941. The two parties agreed to terms on April 4 and the contract was signed on April 26. Both the engineers and switchmen had been organized in some form since 1916.

4. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

5. IUMMSW Executive Board Minutes, 1916-1958, vol. 7, 28. IUMMSW.

6. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

7. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 7, "Ralph Rasmussen." Rasmussen commented that the newly-signed contracts "furnish... the basis for most of the enthusiasm here."

8. Ibid. At the smelter, at least a majority of both the boilermakers and electricians were members of craft unions, and the highly-skilled machinists, which included several officers of Mine-Mill Local 233, claimed eighty members out of a unit of eighty-eight men by December 1941. 39 NLRB 198, 1035.
9. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 7, "Ralph Rasmussen." The electricians, painters, and blacksmiths were "not organized at all." The AFL decided instead to seek separate contracts for each group, demanding a dollar per day wage increase from their $7.15 per day salary. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 7, "Ralph Rasmussen."

10. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 7, "Ralph Rasmussen."

11. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 7, "Ralph Rasmussen."

12. L.G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 3, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison."

13. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

14. Ibid.

15. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 17, "Ralph Rasmussen." Rasmussen claimed that Mine-Mill's presence at the smelter had already affected the AFL's tactics. He met with the AFL's regional representative, a man named Owens, during an AFL open meeting. Owens counseled the craft workers to discard the notion of a single contract for the entire metal trades, because of Mine-Mill "interference" and the "the fact that many of the crafts are not organized at all...."

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.


19. Critics saw Robinson infusing the entire organization with left-wing sympathizers, at best, and with Communists, at worst. See Jensen, ibid., 70, 111. Jensen argues that during 1941, Executive Board Members "resented the fact that Robinson did not counsel with them, that he did not work through them, and that he frequently did not inform them of the instructions he gave to the organizers." Jensen also claims that, by Mine-Mill's 1943 convention, Robinson "had control over most of the organizers who were welded into an effective unit" and were the "source of Robinson's power." Jensen's thesis maintains that Robinson was using subversive tactics to ultimately and autocratically control the union,
and that organizational disagreements were "based upon more than mere personal ambition." Robinson's defenders, some of whom were Mine-Mill members and organizers themselves, insist his appointments were not ideological but sought the best candidate for the job, and dismissed any criticism as the specious grumbling of Robinson's failed challengers.


20. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 24, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen." Rasmussen's choices were J. Frank Marble of Local 347 in Garfield, Utah and Ed Church of Local 466 in Mountain City, Nevada.

21. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

22. Reid Robinson to Ralph Rasmussen, April 28, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen." Robinson declared the organization of McGill and Ruth was "the most important job" in District Two, but he could not "overlook the vital importance of the drive at Utah Copper." He instructed Rasmussen to fill Robison's vacated position and "devote the major portion" of his time to Utah Copper.

23. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, April 30, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

24. Ibid.

25. Reid Robinson to L. G. Robison, April 28, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943."

26. Reid Robinson to L. G. Robison, April 12, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943."

27. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 3, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943." About his living accommodations, Robison also commented that "I have decidedly got to get some thing[sic] much more reasonable than this."

28. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 15, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison." In the interim the union provided him with a $3.00 per diem, an amount that would be rescinded once his family joined him. Reid Robinson to L. G. Robison, May 12, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943."
29. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 15, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison."

30. L. G. Robison to Howard Goddard, May 28, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison." On May 28, Robison wrote that he had been working at Bingham until May 1 [sic] when he was "sent to Nevada" by Robinson and had "been working there since." However, Reid Robinson "told" him to return to Bingham. He was in Nevada 25 days--from April 30 to May 24. Robison held a meeting in McGill on the night of April 30. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 3, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943"


32. Reid Robinson to L. G. Robison, April 28, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 41, Folder 11, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943."

33. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 3, 1941, IUMMSW, "L. G. Robison, 1941-1943." Robison hinted at simmering animosities between the Anglo-American workers and the "new" immigrants, noting that "evidently the foreign born haven't yet got over the things that were said in Local 233['s] meeting some time ago."

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.; L. G. Robison to Howard Goddard, June 1, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison."


38. L. G. Robison to Reid Robinson, May 15, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison."

39. L. G. Robison to Howard Goddard, June 1, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison."
40. Ibid.

41. L. G. Robison to Howard Goddard, May 28, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 35, "L. G. Robison."

42. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, June 11, 1941. IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen." Rasmussen suggested E. D. Church, Dick Tolman and Ray Leavitt for Ruth and Kimberly; Frank Marble for McGill. Tolman, Leavitt, and Marble were from Utah locals; Church was from Nevada.


44. Reid Robinson to Ralph Rasmussen, June 24, 1941. IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

45. "Report of Activity and Conditions of Local Unions in District #2," IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

46. Howard Goddard to E. S. Hakenson, June 14, 1943. IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."

47. E. S. Hakenson to Howard Goddard, June 21, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."

48. Ibid.

49. 38 NLRB 1346.

50. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, September 19, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 27. Rasmussen's recommendations were for Kimberly: Albert Frantz, Local 99 (Park City, UT); Dick Tolman, Local 151 (Eureka, UT); and E. D. Church, Local 466 (Mountain City, Rio Tinto, NV). For McGill he recommended: Chick Mills, Local 347 (Garfield, UT).

51. Travis, a Communist Party member, had joined Mine-Mill's California organizational staff in 1941 after his expulsion from the Steelworkers' Pittsburgh, California local earlier that year. Jensen, ibid., 138-9. Critics like Jensen claim that Travis was an agent of the Communist Party who masterminded Robinson's move to the left. Those who hold to this interpretation are divided on the question whether Robinson was an accomplice to Travis's schemes or merely an unwitting dupe. Like all anti-Communist theories this interpretation requires the belief that Communists possessed qualities that allowed them to run roughshod over Mine-Mill's democratic procedures.
52. Indicative of the lack of commitment from Rasmussen's selections, in 1943, two of his rank-and-file candidates who had promised to work for the union withdrew from consideration after their names had been placed before the Board. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, March 9, 1943 and March 11, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 30, "Ralph Rasmussen."

53. Two other reasons constricted Robinson's choices: First, in 1941, neither Robinson nor Travis possessed the means to ram the organizer of their choice down the throats of the Executive Board. For example, Robinson could not prevent the Board from discharging Harold Rossman, Robinson's selection as editor of the Mine-Mill edition of the CIO News, who the Board claimed was promoting Robinson's program through the paper by ignoring all locals except those on the West Coast. Although Robinson exposed Rossman's critics as anti-Semites, he was unable to block the firing. See, "Meeting of the Executive Board of the IUMM & SW," vol 8, (Girard, Kansas, 1942), IUMMSW, 21-22. Second, Rasmussen, as well as other Board Members were also selecting organizers based on their ideological views. Rasmussen, who favored regional autonomy and AFL-type leadership, consistently pushed for organizers, if not loyal to him, then certainly familiar with and sympathetic to his philosophy. Those who claim that Rasmussen's selections were ideologically "pure" are simply incorrect; in their own way, they were as politically motivated as Robinson.

54. Howard Goddard to David Sanchez, September 17, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."

55. Paul E. Burns to Howard Goddard, September 25, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."

56. Howard Goddard to E. S. Hakenson, September 16, 1941. IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."

57. Howard Goddard to E. S. Hakenson, September 27, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 34, Folder 6, "Correspondence with Local Unions--1941, Howard Goddard."
CHAPTER FIVE

"SUCH CONTENTED WORKERS," OCTOBER 1941-DECEMBER 1942

Arriving in McGill, Nevada, on October 2, 1941, Mine-Mill organizer George Haskell quickly noticed a phenomenon he would encounter throughout his five-month organizational campaign: "Never in my life," Haskell wrote after that first day, "have I seen such a contented bunch of workers."1 Within two years, these same workers would be members of one of America's most progressive unions.

Haskell recognized the outward manifestation of the informal equilibrium at McGill that acknowledged company hegemony. The smelterworkers maintained a small union local, while the miners eschewed unionism and used geographical mobility to register displeasure with their deplorable conditions. The only difference from the 1920s was the growing presence of the AFL craft unions. Haskell promoted industrial unionism as a means of unraveling Nevada Consolidated's system of class domination. Although Haskell's campaign failed, it illustrates the organizer's function as an "organic intellectual," by encouraging the formation of a collective opposition to company hegemony.

In September 1941, Robinson's assistant, Howard
Goddard, officially appointed Haskell, then living in San Francisco, as an international organizer for the Ely district. Goddard, aware of Robison's earlier warnings, advised Haskell to "spend the first week or so...getting acquainted with the local people." Arriving in the Ely district on October 2, Haskell ignored Goddard's recommendation to proceed cautiously and immediately called a meeting of the members of Local 233 to familiarize himself with what he called the workers' "organizing problem." Despite the apparent lack of militancy, Haskell echoed Robison's belief that the potential for mass organization existed among the McGill smelterworkers.

While it was clear to Haskell that working conditions at the smelter were "very good," the company appeared vulnerable to unionism. The workers desired a contract, a dues check-off, and a revision of the existing vacation policy of five days off after six years employment—demands Nevada Consolidated traditionally refused to negotiate. Haskell settled on these three issues—contract, check-off, and vacation—as his "talking points toward organizing" others at the smelter.

Haskell favored directly criticizing Nevada Consolidated to raise the workers' consciousness. The active McGill Mine-Mill members, however, disapproved of this strategy. They remembered the international's failure to support them in the past and were wary of provoking a
confrontation with the company. Now that prosperity had returned to the copper industry, most members preferred instead to mediate their grievances through the informal equilibrium. The day Haskell arrived, cautious members warned him that if he "had any intention of saying anything against the management, or the company, [he] had better pack up and go back where [he] came from."\(^5\)

Forbidden from criticizing Nevada Consolidated and thus unraveling its welfare capitalist hegemony, Haskell opted for an approach he termed "diplomatic organizing," which required a time-consuming educational campaign. For example, he showed Mine-Mill-negotiated contracts and other literature on industrial unionism to the "new workers" who "have no idea at all what unionism is." He also utilized standard tactics: distributing copies of the CIO News at the plant’s entrance, canvassing workers’ homes, and holding frequent meetings. Haskell decided to continue organizational activity in McGill where, despite his reservations, there was "a lot more enthusiasm towards organizing" than either Ruth or Kimberly.\(^6\)

Although the two mining towns were "the ones that really need[ed] organizing the most," severe obstacles existed at both sites. Haskell found such terrible conditions and antiunionism at Kimberly that he termed it nothing more than a "transient camp." The miners "stay long enough to get a stake and then pull out as soon as they get
it, if they are able." Haskell received a cool reception, remarking that "[a]ll the men act as though they are afraid to be seen talking to an organizer." 7

Attitudes toward the union were no better at Ruth, where there was "little interest left" in Local 124. Only a handful of members were willing to assist in reorganization despite a "standing offer" of fifty cents paid any member who enrolled a new recruit (Haskell noted that "so far no one has earned that offer"). The Ruth miners told Haskell that "the international let them down last time they started a drive by taking the organizer out just when they had started to accomplish something." They promised to remain uncommitted until Mine-Mill assigned a full-time organizer "to finish what he starts." Haskell hoped that if the Ruth and Kimberly miners saw the results at McGill "they in turn will fall right in line." 8

Remarkably, Haskell seemed on the verge of a breakthrough by the end of his first month in the area. On October 29, he invited the district’s workers to an open meeting to discuss "contracts, vacation, seniority, checkoff and job security." 9 Haskell was initially disappointed because only 108 men had attended, until members informed him that it was a "pretty big gathering for this area." Featuring speeches by several Utah CIO officers, including Rasmussen, the meeting surpassed even their limited expectations. Indicative of the local’s apparent progress,
six new members joined that night. This meeting did not mark a turning point, however. Instead, it would be Haskell’s last successful venture in the Ely district.

The initial setback occurred at the end of October when Haskell first learned of the coming NLRB hearings on the petitions submitted by the Ruth International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and International Association of Machinists (IAM), which represented both the mine and smelter. The Board informed the startled Haskell that hearings would be held in early November. Haskell found the IAM’s petition particularly alarming because Local 233’s president and financial secretary were both machinists. He secured a delay until December 9 and set about gathering witnesses to block the certification elections. At the hearings, the NLRB denied Mine-Mill’s claim that the plant should be organized as an industrial union. The Board also rejected the IBEW’s petition, but approved the IAM’s request for a certification election.

Just prior to the NLRB hearings the United States entered World War II, creating novel conditions that thwarted Mine-Mill’s campaign for more than a year. The coming of the war heightened community loyalty toward Nevada Consolidated. This is understandable given the anxiety that prevailed immediately after Pearl Harbor. Seeking security, workers and their families retreated further into Nevada Consolidated’s paternalism to cope with the initial
pressures generated by the war’s outbreak.\textsuperscript{13}

The citizens of White Pine County responded to pleas for increased production and civilian mobilization with an intense fervor. The area’s Mine-Mill locals would not be revitalized until the crisis finally abated in January 1943. Using its familiar power to interpret the meaning of war production and to effectively mobilize the entire population, Nevada Consolidated dampened unionism by sheer domination of the economic and social life of the Ely district, especially at McGill.

Even before the full impact of the war was realized, the Pearl Harbor attack unleashed a wave of anti-Japanese hysteria and prompted an intensive civilian defense program. Nevada historian Russell Elliott, a McGill native, recalled the "tense" atmosphere in his hometown immediately following the outbreak of the war. By December 11, following a petition by the Ruth miners, more than one hundred of the district’s Japanese workers were placed under house arrest with the full approval of Nevada Consolidated’s management. Elliott claims the primary cause of the hysteria was fear of sabotage because of copper’s importance as a strategic metal. However, festering racism, exacerbated by the company’s segregationist housing policies, also contributed to the wave of paranoia that swept the area.\textsuperscript{14}

Both Haskell’s reaction and Mine-Mill’s official response to the arrest and subsequent removal of eighty to
one hundred Japanese nationals, reveal their attitudes concerning the treatment of foreign-born workers during World War II. While the evidence is unclear, Haskell apparently defended the civil rights of the Ely-area Japanese workers after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. His efforts were not completely sanctioned by Mine-Mill. Allen McNeil, who had replaced Howard Goddard as Reid Robinson's assistant, admonished Haskell for not being "sufficiently tactful," although McNeil was "sure [that Haskell was] perfectly right in what [he] did in regard to protecting the Japanese workers at McGill." Haskell's defense of the Japanese workers may have alienated him from Local 233's rank and file, who later backed Nevada Governor E. P. Carville's opposition to a proposed 1943 plan to import Japanese workers into the state to relieve a chronic labor shortage.

Despite its role in the internment of Japanese workers, Nevada Consolidated otherwise responded more constructively to the war's outbreak by establishing a comprehensive community defense plan. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the company organized several defense committees, including an "anti-sabotage" council. The Red Cross began classes on first aid, and the company allowed "about 35 men per day" to donate blood. Haskell witnessed the complete mobilization of the town's population, noting that "[e]very man and woman in McGill and Ruth have registered with the Civil Defense,
and have all been assigned to jobs[,] such as warden, firemen, etc." Female stenographers and clerical workers donated their services, and the Boy Scouts collected "newspapers, pots, pans, and everything that is of need." Nevada Consolidated thus effectively nullified one of Mine-Mill's trump cards: linking unionism to full production.

Mine-Mill's wartime organizing strategy—termed the "productionist ethic"—urged workers to join unions because organized labor was best suited to guarantee uninterrupted production during the war. Mine-Mill hoped to link full production, patriotism, and unionism through the following circular argument: "[I]n order to get the best kind of production, we have to be well organized,...because only organized workers can really get the best advantage out of producing." Antiunionists were therefore "enemies of our country" because "those who sabotage the union campaign ...are also sabotaging the production campaign of the company, and are consequently not doing the best they can for their nation in these critical times." McNeil urged Haskell to make "judicious use" of this argument to recruit the McGill workers.

Establishing a "management-labor" council to oversee production soon after the war's outbreak, Nevada Consolidated warded off criticism that they omitted labor's voice from their wartime production plans. Satisfied that their employer was promoting all-out production, the Ely-
area workers instead saw unionism as unpatriotic and antithetical to the war effort. They wanted to cease organizational activity, because "in so doing we are not cooperating with the government." Nevada Consolidated rewarded this sentiment with their typical response—a timely twenty-five-cent wage increase,—"which," the hapless Haskell moaned, "only makes matters a little more complicated."20

Prior to December 7, Haskell still believed the workers were slowly being drawn into the union. By January, however, their attitude changed to hostile rejection. Early in the campaign, he easily distributed 500 copies of the CIO News; by mid-December, only 100 workers accepted the free newspaper. Haskell noted that "some of the men take a copy and throw it [on] the ground, others give me a growl." When canvassing door-to-door, he was invited into only "5 or 10" of the town's 500 homes. The workers "claim they are either too busy or they don't want to have anything to do with the CIO." The open meetings, which originally "had a fairly good turnout, had "gradually dwindled down to nothing but members," and even they, Haskell starkly observed, "have given up." He still thought organization was possible if the members "would only plug for me on the inside... but they won't do it." Haskell was so isolated that he was forced to hire a Boy Scout to distribute union literature because the members refused to help.21
Declaring he had "used diplomacy long enough," Haskell started a leaflet campaign aimed against Nevada Consolidated, which, he warned McNeil, "may not be mild." Haskell requested that McNeil dig up "any dirt on Nevada Consolidated that they are dishing out anywhere in the country" to use in his handbills. McNeil cautioned Haskell to only give the workers "some of the facts" about Nevada Consolidated "without entering into a full-fledged attack on them." With the informal equilibrium firmly entrenched, these aggressive tactics proved even less effective than Haskell's earlier "diplomatic" approach.

Before leaving the district, Haskell admitted the benefits workers derived from Nevada Consolidated's welfare capitalism had stalled the drive. He tried several approaches but he could never find the right message or tactics to persuade a significant number of workers to join the union. Haskell asserted that "to an outsider" the benefits of welfare capitalism "are just a coverup for the things they haven't got"--a contract, vacation, seniority, and union recognition: "It can be plainly seen from the sidelines, but is not believed by the workers, even our members can't be convinced of the fact." Haskell "pounded away continually" on these issues, but without results.

After reviewing Haskell's dismal reports, McNeil concluded that Mine-Mill was "wasting a good deal of time in McGill." Contrasting Haskell's lack of progress to Mine-
Mill's "rather successful" negotiations with Nevada Consolidated at their Santa Rita, New Mexico operations, McNeil wondered "what the devil is wrong with these people around McGill in our own union." On February 6, he recommended Haskell's transfer to the Miami-Globe region in Arizona. The dejected Haskell accepted the move where, he hoped, "some good can be done."

In the ten months following Haskell's transfer, Local 233's membership dwindled to twelve active members and the local failed to attract a single recruit for an entire year. Not until January 1943 did this trend dramatically reverse. In the interim, unionism throughout the district declined.

Both Robinson and Rasmussen agreed that Mine-Mill should continue organizational activity. In late February 1942, Robinson received Executive Board approval to hire two organizers for Nevada, "who would be mutually agreed upon between" him and Rasmussen. Although it initially appeared that they would quickly assign another organizer to replace Haskell, once again this decision was delayed.

In the meantime, activity among the locals deteriorated. Other national unions were aware of Mine-Mill's declining presence. In March, District 50, the United Mine Worker's catchall industrial union, apparently considered organizing the Ely copperworkers. McNeil informed Rasmussen of rumors about a man named "Mitchell,
from District 50 from the Coast," who "expects to go into McGill" and try "to swing some of our boys his way." McNeil urged Rasmussen to "put a stop to any such development before it gets underway." Mine-Mill also had to contend with both companies, who again trotted out traditional and timely tactics to suppress unionism. In June 1942, Nevada Consolidated and Consolidated Coppermines announced "double increases" of fifty cents per day for all day wage earners, that reports claimed "raised the [district's pay] scale considerably."

Everything seemed to be coming apart for Mine-Mill in the Ely district. In a September memorandum to Robinson, McNeil wrote that "indications [for] organizational possibilities exist," but advised against a campaign because of "lack of funds and personnel." McNeil's views on the Ely district paralleled his assessment of the entire District Two, where the locals were "lagging" and there was a "serious need for stabilization." Because of numerous problems—including "obtaining maximum dues payments"—he counselled that it would be "unwise" for the union to begin new organizational activity.

By the beginning of 1943, Local 233 even began debating whether to withdraw from the international union. On January 9, Hakenson wrote McNeil requesting that the international union send a representative to their January 13 meeting, when the smelterworkers would consider a motion
to leave Mine-Mill. Robinson ordered Glen Freeman, an organizer in the Utah Copper campaign who had briefly spent some time in Ely a year earlier, to attend the meeting and oppose the motion. The smelterworkers may have been merely trying to attract an organizer into the district, where unionism was reviving at the Kimberly mines. There is no record of a vote on the motion and Local 233 remained in the union; nevertheless, its message was clear: unless the international union supported the local there was no guarantee it would remain affiliated with Mine-Mill. The activity at Kimberly soon reversed this sentiment. Over the next seven months, Mine-Mill began a torrid campaign to organize the Ely-district copperworkers.
NOTES

1. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, October 3, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

2. Howard Goddard to George Haskell, September 27, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

3. Howard Goddard to George Haskell, October 2, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35 Folder 6, "George Haskell."

4. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, October 3, 1941, Mine Mill, Box 35 Folder 6, "George Haskell."

5. George Haskell to Allen D. McNeil, January 17, 1942, IUMMSW Mill, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell." Haskell recalled "That was the sentiment of the entire membership."

6. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, October 11, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell." Haskell did not limit his efforts to the smelter workers. To further ingratiate himself into the community, Haskell offered to help local bartenders in a jurisdictional dispute between the AFL and CIO, believing that if Mine-Mill aided this group it would help promote unionism among the copper workers. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, October 3, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

7. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, October 11, 1941, Mine Mill, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

8. Ibid.


10. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, November 1, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

11. George Haskell to Howard Goddard, November 1, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

12. 38 NLRB, No. 240.

13. For descriptions of the social disruption and pressures caused by the war, see the collection of oral interviews in Mark Jonathan Harris, Franklin D. Mitchell and Steven J. Schechter, The Homefront: America during World War II, (New
Interviewees stress the ambivalence, upheaval, and loneliness that accompanied mobilization.


15. Allan D. McNeil to George Haskell, December 23, 1941, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell." Considering Mine-Mill’s civil libertarian reputation among ethnic and racial minorities, it is somewhat surprising the union did not issue an outright condemnation of the Japanese internment, although their views were much more liberal than prevailing attitudes at the time. McNeil outlined for Haskell the union’s stance concerning foreign-born workers:

"Our position is...that of fighting for all workers, so long as they are honest workers. It is also true that we should keep our eyes peeled for Axis agents at this time, which might include Japanese. I don’t think, however, that we should jump on the wrong foot and assume that every Japanese worker, especially those born in the United States, are necessarily Axis agents."

Regarding "Japanese" and even "Spanish-speaking workers," McNeil advised "teaching our members the meaning of international solidarity on a union basis" through an "educational program" for "getting work done in support of the defense program." He counseled Haskell to discuss "all these points" with the workers.

16. E. P. Carville Papers, Nevada State Archives, Carson City, Nevada. Box 023, File 023. Thanks goes to Andy Russell for directing me to this document.

17. George Haskell to Allan D. McNeil, January 17, 1942, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

18. Lichtenstein, *Labor’s War at Home*, 95. Lichtenstein, who used this term to characterize CIO head Philip Murray’s views, argues that productionism limited progressive goals and were part of a larger, nationwide conservative shift. See also Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, 1977); Harvey A. Levenstein, *Communism, Anti-Communism, and the CIO* (Westport, 1981); Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American..."

19. Allan D. McNeil to George Haskell, January 20, 1942, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

20. George Haskell to Allan D. McNeil, January 31, 1942, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

21. Ibid.

22. George Haskell to Allan D. McNeil, January 17, 1942, IUMMSW, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."

23. Allan D. McNeil to George Haskell, January 20, 1942, Mine Mill, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."


25. Allan D. McNeil to George Haskell, February 6, 1942, Mine Mill, Box 35, Folder 6, "George Haskell."


28. Executive Board Minutes, 1916-1958, vol. 7, IUMMSW, 129, 132. Rasmussen claimed that "now was the time to do some work in White Pine County," and recommended Brother Winterow, "who was president of the local there, at least be assigned as a part time organizer."

29. Allan D. McNeil to Ralph Rasmussen, April 27, 1942. IUMMSW Mill, Box 301, Folder 27, "Ralph Rasmussen."

30. Ely Daily Times, June 17, 1942. Under this new rate, miners would receive $7.65 per day and mechanics would receive $8.40 per day, with "time and half for time over forty hours per week maximum."


CHAPTER SIX

"TWO-BIT RAISES" AND FORMAL EQUILIBRIUM,
JANUARY 1943-SEPTEMBER 1943

By the beginning of 1943, conditions in the Ely district again seemed favorable for union organization. First, Mine-Mill assigned a seasoned organizer who devised a strategy that successfully attracted support away from the AFL. Second, the federal government was on the union’s side. The NLRB helped the Kimberly miners complete a rapid and spontaneous organizational campaign by blocking a potential AFL counteroffensive. Finally, unstable labor market conditions that led to worker discontent underpinned the upsurge in union activity. By September 1943, Mine-Mill-affiliated locals served as the bargaining agent for all the Kimberly miners and for most of the workers at Ruth and McGill.

A primary cause of this transformation was a change in the Ely-area workforce, exacerbated by an "acute" labor shortage in the copper industry beginning in the summer of 1942. The military’s "insatiable demand" for copper, the drafting of young male workers, and the appeal of higher-paying West Coast defense production jobs forced Nevada
Consolidated and Consolidated Coppermines to hire new workers from outside the district to maintain full production. Fluidity in the labor market led to the increased presence of employees who held no previous loyalty towards Nevada Consolidated.

At Kimberly, government sanctions prevented the miners from leaving the area, cutting off their usual method of registering discontent. The clearest indication of worker resistance was increased absenteeism. Chafing at rising living costs and "frozen" into their jobs by government order, the Ely-district copperworkers sought to remedy increasing wartime constrictions through unionization.

Not surprisingly, the impetus for the successful 1943 drive came from the miners themselves. Keith Norton, an active Mine-Mill member at Kimberly, helped spur the sudden burst of unionism. On January 15 he wrote Reid Robinson requesting a charter for the burgeoning Kimberly local. Norton had attracted 177 initiates in just three days and promised 400 more within a short time. Confident that the entire camp of 855 workers would join the union, he wanted Mine-Mill to send "the best [organizer]... available." Even before an organizer arrived, the newly-christened Kimberly Local 642 had successfully petitioned for an NLRB election. Robinson later singled out Norton for "hav[ing] done an especially good job of laying the ground work."

When Robinson failed to respond to his first letter,
Norton sent an urgent telegram imploring the international to take action and invited Robinson himself to visit the area himself to see that "these boys want action." Norton belatedly replied on February 2, promising to assign an organizer "immediately." The same day he responded to Norton's plea for assistance, Robinson ordered Mine-Mill Board Member and organizer Claud Lovelett, testifying in another NLRB case in San Francisco, to inspect "spontaneous organization" in the Ely area.

The surge of unionism at Kimberly was felt throughout the district. At McGill, Local 233 began expanding rapidly. Claiming only eight active members in January 1943, it had forty-eight workers enrolled a month later, with thirty-one more promising to join. Forty-five of these initiates took the oath on February 17, coinciding with Lovelett's arrival in McGill. Unlike the situation faced by Haskell in 1941, Lovelett found workers at both the mines and smelter eager for organization. His primary task would be to prevent the companies and the AFL from winning back the workers' loyalty.

Ely-area employers had historically paid higher rates than other Western copper districts primarily because of the dangerous underground mining at Kimberly and because of Nevada Consolidated's policy of welfare capitalism. As noted in Chapter Five, both companies had increased wages twenty-five cents in January 1942. Another fifty-cent pay
raise followed later that year, keeping wages ahead of other Western copper districts.  

This system began to unravel in January 1943 when Montana miners were awarded a wage boost that put their scale ahead of the Ely district. On March 6, both companies responded by announcing that they had filed requests with the War Labor Board (WLB), the government agency overseeing wartime wage adjustments, to equalize wages with Montana. It appeared once again that the companies would stave off another attempt to organize the area—until Lovelett learned there was no record of the companies' request.

In late March, Lovelett confirmed that the WLB’s Nonferrous Metals Commission (NMC) had yet to receive an application from either company for a wage increase. Armed with a case of employer duplicity, Lovelett predicted that this news "will do [Mine-Mill] a lot of good" especially with workers reluctant to join. The news "caused quite a stir," when he told the Kimberly miners, then awaiting their NLRB election, that no request had been submitted.

After the companies reestablished the validity of their requests, Lovelett switched tactics, denigrating the wage increase as a "two-bit raise" in his handbill campaign. Nevada Consolidated workers responded enthusiastically to this message. In his report after visiting the district, Rasmussen wrote: "This is the first time the workers in this
section of the country have ever been really riled [sic] up about anything,...with the two-bit deal...they are fighting mad." Rasmussen admitted he had "almost given up hopes of ever seeing the boys at McGill in their present healthy and enthusiastic frame of mind." He also claimed that almost every smelterworker had paid or promised to join Local 233.15

In mid-March Local 233 officers sent a letter to the NMC rejecting the wage increase, which they now interpreted as a tactic to subvert their organizational campaign. An appeal to an institution outside the district, this document marked the demise of the informal equilibrium. Declaring that they were "not a party" to the company’s request "in any way[,] shape[,] or form," the smelterworkers voiced the "strongest possible protest against this so-called wage increase." More importantly, they viewed it as "a method devised to purchase votes for themselves and against our union in the forthcoming [NLRB] election."16

They further claimed that the company "had ample time to [increase wages]," but only posted the wage increase once they observed the campaign’s "splendid progress." Local 233 officers urged the NMC to reject any wage increase "not negotiated with and agreed to by the company’s employees." Realizing their important position in the production of war materiel, the officers threatened that if the increase was approved, it would "deal a serious blow to morale of
employees" and would decrease copper output in a plant that was "vital to the war effort."  

Having built up some antipathy toward the companies, Lovelett turned his attention to the AFL, which was attempting to stem the resurgence of industrial unionism. On March 4, the AFL expelled Mine-Mill from the White Pine County Central Labor Council (WPCCLC). (Despite the statewide dispute between the AFL and CIO in the 1930s, Mine-Mill had later rejoined in WPCCLC.) The AFL barred the CIO only after the Kimberly miners submitted their NLRB petition requesting a single industrial union at the mine.  

Rasmussen noted that the Ely district campaign had "broken wide open" after the AFL barred Mine-Mill from the WPCCLC. He also claimed the AFL was "blasting the hell out of us with the Las Vegas Scandal," referring to the arrest of a Mine-Mill organizer during an embattled campaign against the AFL at the Basic Magnesium plant. The AFL was also accusing Mine-Mill of being a Communist union.  

Fearing that red-baiting might derail his organizational drive, Lovelett countered with an anti-AFL leaflet campaign and actively courted AFL members to switch to the CIO. He convinced many AFL machinists, whose own negotiations with Nevada Consolidated had stalled, to sign Mine-Mill membership cards. Correctly sensing the mood of the workers, Lovelett chose the proper moment to attack both
the AFL and the companies.

Reid Robinson, however, disapproved of Lovelett's decision to go on the offensive. Robinson lauded the Ely campaign's "rapid progress" but objected to negative campaigning. After seeing one of Lovelett's handbills, Robinson warned him that "it will do our program no good to carry on a campaign of vilification with the AFL." Perhaps fearful of the AFL's entrenched presence in the district, he suggested Lovelett use a "positive approach, outlining [the] CIO and International Union program." Robinson also advised Lovelett to treat the wage increase issue "very carefully." By referring to the twenty-five-cent wage increase as a "two-bit" raise (as Lovelett did in his handbills), it appeared that Mine-Mill was "ridiculing" the offer. Robinson believed the companies' requests to be genuine and, even if they were not, worried that the union could not promise the workers a larger increase from the NMC.21

Lovelett defended his strategy on both counts. He was "not carrying on any extensive campaign against" the AFL, but explaining the "difference between the two organizations --especially the gains made by Mine-Mill in WLB cases in 1942 and the CIO program." He argued that the AFL was "not using any discretion, calling Mine-Mill and the CIO "a bunch of Reds and God knows what else." [emphasis in original]. He also ignored Robinson's advice about the disputed wage request. Not only would he continue mocking the companies'
"two bit raise," but he would also "protest long and loud" about their claim to bring wage rates up to regional standards. Lovelett saw "no reason why the Company should all at once try and keep the wage here on an even keel with other camps." It would take a larger raise than twenty-five cents to maintain Ely's higher rate. For example, common laborers were only making, what Lovelett facetiously termed, "the large sum" of $5.90 per day.\textsuperscript{22} Whether Lovelett's arguments were decisive in winning converts to the union is unclear; what is certain was the Kimberly miners' mass support for Mine-Mill in their NLRB election.

Given the union's lack of success in the Ely district, Mine-Mill's Kimberly election victory was a watershed event, establishing an industrial union in the district and demonstrating the AFL's limits. At the March 16 hearings the NLRB allowed the AFL to contend for twenty-two craft workers at the mine, but the AFL quickly relinquished this claim.\textsuperscript{23} Lovelett was "positive" that the AFL, facing certain defeat, withdrew from the Kimberly election to avoid setting a precedent for McGill and Ruth and thus "having to admit [a] second defeat" if it was rejected by the Nevada Consolidated workers in their election.

In the final balloting, held on May 12, to select Mine-Mill or no union, the Kimberly miners overwhelmingly favored the CIO by a 440 to 76 margin.\textsuperscript{24} The Kimberly victory proved the decisive turning point. Lovelett remarked that
it "strengthened [Mine-Mill's] position in this [a]rea to a great extent," and provided momentum for organizing Nevada Consolidated.25

The AFL, not company opposition, became Lovelett's most pressing problem. At the McGill-Ruth NLRB hearings held shortly after the Kimberly election, Mine-Mill successfully argued that the workers at the smelter and the mines should be combined into one industrial unit for the purpose of collective bargaining. This seemingly insignificant victory represented a dramatic departure from the status quo. Ruth and McGill were traditional rivals in local sporting events, and there was little evidence of cooperation between workers in two communities. By melding the two locals into one unit, Lovelett undermined one of Nevada Consolidated's strategies for blunting worker consciousness.26

Mine-Mill tried to block the AFL's request for a "globe election." Under this procedure, the NLRB allowed skilled workers to determine if they wished to remain in smaller craft units or the plantwide industrial unit.27 Mine-Mill's attorney, Abraham Isserman, argued against separate elections for the craft workers, terming them "globaloney elections" in a legal brief submitted to the NLRB.28

Citing the unique job structure in the copper industry, Isserman made a strong case for industrial unionism. If craft unions remained, workers who routinely were trained at several tasks would be required to join a different union
every time they moved to a different job classification. He also showed that the "craft tradition" no longer existed at Nevada Consolidated. Instead of hiring skilled journeymen, the company employed unskilled workers who then learned their craft at the plant. Isserman concluded by listing similar cases where the NLRB ruled in favor of one industrial unit.29

Although Mine-Mill claimed membership of sixty-three percent of Nevada Consolidated’s 1,130 employees, the AFL wanted to ensure it represented the craft workers in the smaller units where it still held a majority—the bricklayers, painters, plumbers, iron workers, carpenters, boilermakers, and electricians. The AFL countered Isserman’s arguments by correctly noting that Butte, Montana Mine-Mill industrial units had long coexisted with craft units.30

Lovelett privately accused the NLRB of favoring the AFL. He charged that Trial Examiner Louis Penfield "was by no means neutral," but, in fact, sided with the AFL. Lovelett had "a dirty hunch" that Penfield "was not C.I.O." In "many instances" Penfield "reminded Mr. Olds [Fred Olds, the AFL’s representative] of things that he would have forgotten otherwise."31 Ultimately, the Board agreed with the AFL, separating all the workers into twelve classifications to decide if they wanted to be represented by the CIO, the AFL, or no union at all.32
In the midst of the campaign, Lovelett found himself embroiled in a feud with Robinson. The dispute surfaced after an April 20 letter from Robinson reminding Lovelett to keep his travel expenses within the limitations ($35.00 a month) set by the union's governing board. Lovelett fired back a letter accusing Robinson of "trying to throw every obstacle in my way," claiming that "this campaign has done more to pay its own way here than any I have seen put on in a good long time." Two weeks later, Robinson demanded an explanation for Lovelett's "caustic attitude" and challenged the organizer to list "specific instances" when Robinson impeded his work. Lovelett, who had "intend[ed] to let the matter drop," recounted an incident in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho in 1941 when he was denied a proper organizing budget that another organizer was later granted. After this exchange, neither man mentioned the dispute for the rest of the campaign.

Lovelett continued to attack the AFL. To do this, he solicited testimonials from other CIO unions that had rejected the AFL. During a meeting immediately after the NLRB hearings, Lovelett read aloud from a letter sent by Karl Jensen, secretary for the San Joaquin County (California) Industrial Union Council, consisting of former AFL unions that had bolted to the CIO. Urging the Ruth-McGill workers to vote for Mine-Mill and the CIO, Jensen criticized the AFL for "its continuous system of internal
disputes, Strikes, Lockouts, and high dues, assessments and High Initiation [sic] fees...without many of the privileges [sic] of a democratic organization," adding that these were "benefits which we now enjoy through CIO affiliation."

Jensen likened the AFL's leadership to fascist tyrants: "We have three world dictators that we are now putting every effort of manpower and money to the front to whip,...let us keep our doorstep clean here at home....VOTE CIO." Lovelett admitted that "these kind of letters [do] a lot of good in a campaign of this kind."38

On July 1, Lovelett confided that the campaign was "continuing to make progress" but there were "great odds" since the AFL had an advantage of being able to place a great number of organizers in the area. Lovelett colorfully noted that although the AFL had "the town full of their pie carders," he remained confident Mine-Mill could compete for, if not win, every craft unit. He had been told by a "good many" of the craftsmen that they did not see a craft unit as "any benefit to them when they knew the large majority of the employees would choose the CIO as their bargaining agency." Additionally, the AFL conceded the groups that typically supported the CIO--the common laborers or the operating engineers--which included the vast majority of the plant.39

Another method Lovelett used to draw worker loyalty away from the company was to cultivate a political
consciousness among the workers. Lovelett encouraged Mine-Mill members to confront their political representatives about national labor issues. His primary target was the AFL-backed Senator Pat McCarren, a professed "friend of labor," who Mine-Mill had targeted as an enemy of the CIO hiding behind a facade of solidarity with organized labor. During the Senate debates considering the antilabor Smith-Connally bill, Lovelett noted that "all local unions," aware of McCarren's habit of avoiding casting a vote on labor bills, were "putting heat on [McCarren] to declare himself [against the bill] and get off the fence."40

Robinson approved of this type of activity, encouraging Lovelett to pressure politicians "to sit down with [the members] in Ely and discuss various legislative matters."41

In August and October 1943, McCarren spoke at the Ely and Pioche, where Mine-Mill members directly asked McCarren to explain his poor record on labor legislation.42 This was a far cry from the Senator's past evasiveness. During a 1938 speech at Ely, for example, McCarren refused to comment on "the conditions or differences of view which may exist within the great body of labor" during the Kimberly miners ill-fated attempt at NLRB certification.43

At McGill, Lovelett successfully utilized the grassroots techniques that Haskell found ineffective. Where Haskell worked alone, Lovelett established a rank-and-file organizing committee that functioned with "some results,"
canvassing and recruiting non-members. He also found innovative ways to maintain the members' interest in the campaign. Because of a nearly four-month "lull" caused by delay between the hearings and the election, Lovelett thought he could get better attendance at the meetings if he showed the members "some of the war pictures...ready for release" and requested a motion picture projector from Robinson.

As the elections neared, the union began a coordinated and concentrated effort to ensure victory. In mid-August Robinson, wanting "to leave no stone unturned to win this very important election," offered Lovelett "some additional assistance in the form of a budget for hand bills, radio time, [and] house-to-house contacts...." Since there was no local radio facility in the district, Lovelett continued to use leaflets to publicize the campaign. The organizational committees continued house-to-house campaigning, and Lovelett, noting that "some additional help would be of great assistance," hired two full-time workers as assistants.

Lovelett's choices for these assistants reveal the political acumen behind his decisions in the days leading up to the NLRB election. Because the Mexican workers at Ruth were disappointed when their candidate was defeated for Local 124's presidency, Lovelett employed a Mexican worker from Ruth in hopes of regaining their support. At McGill,
Lovelett was "very hesitant" to hire part-time workers, because it had a "bad effect" on volunteers who received no pay for their efforts. E. S. Hakenson, the long-time Local 233 officer, took a leave of absence to work full time. Despite his efforts, Lovelett still failed to convince a majority of the skilled workers to switch their allegiance to Mine-Mill. Just prior to the election, Lovelett correctly predicted that while the union would probably lose some of the craft units, it would be the choice of the vast majority of Nevada Consolidated’s workforce.47

In the NLRB election, Mine-Mill received wide support among the industrial workers, but five craft groups chose to remain with the AFL. On September 2 and 3 the workers of McGill and Ruth voted to determine their collective bargaining representative. Although Mine-Mill did not sweep the election, it was nevertheless a victory for the new regime of industrial relations as nearly all the production and maintenance workers in the mines and the smelter gained union recognition. Indicative of the campaigning done by both Mine-Mill and the AFL, 798 of the 925 eligible voters participated in the balloting.48 Had the election been a decided by a simple majority vote, Mine-Mill would have won easily, garnering fifty-eight percent of the eligible voters and seventy-one percent of the ballots counted. In the total balloting, the AFL locals fared poorly with just 215 votes or twenty-three percent of the eligible voters and
only twenty-eight percent of the valid ballots.49

In the Ely area, the elections were considered a sweeping CIO success. The *Ely Daily Times* headline blared: "C.I.O. Wins Election As Bargaining Agency With Nevada Consolidated, Nevada Mines," although the accompanying story noted that five craft units had voted for the AFL.50 Coupled with the union’s recent victories at Kennecott’s Utah and New Mexico properties, the Ely victory was a key step to realizing company-wide bargaining. To be sure, the election signified a new capitalist era, as the Ely district’s labor relations quickly conformed to the postwar model of institutionalized collective bargaining punctuated with intermittent, and sometimes bitter, strikes.

The Mine-Mill organizers in the Ely district from 1941 to 1943 played an integral role in the formation of this new regime. Although they encountered frustration from many internal and external sources, they helped the area’s workers achieve union recognition, an almost impossible task before the dislocation caused by World War II. To some extent, external conditions set the limits for the "organic intellectual." As Haskell discovered, welfare capitalism was not easily cast aside. Even though he failed to win the workers’ loyalty, he continually exposed the shortcomings of Nevada Consolidated’s policy, albeit to deaf ears. Lovelett, on the other hand, found both old and new workers receptive to his message. Through a sustained critique of
the companies and the AFL, coupled with skillful campaigning, he helped establish Mine-Mill as an entrenched presence in the Ely district.
NOTES

1. For an overview of the national discussion of the labor shortage in nonferrous metals see "Recent Productivity Changes in Copper Mining." *Monthly Labor Review*, (August 1943), 258-264. The local press extensively covered this issue. See *Ely Daily Times*, July 17, 1942; July 21, 1942; Workers volunteered to leave the state. Answering a government appeal, 40 Nevada miners volunteered at the Reno sheriff's department for work in Hawaii. This "record volunteer total" came despite the McCarran-Murdock subcommittee's finding that there was a labor shortage in western mining. *Ibid.*, July 21, 1942; August 14, 1942; August 21, 1942. The shortage resurfaced a year later when the Army twice furloughed ex-miners to return to their peacetime profession. See "Copper Records," *Business Week*, (February 13, 1943), 52-58; "Double Draft," *ibid.*, (April 8, 1943), 98; "Still a Big Issue," *ibid.*, (July 24, 1943), 94-96; *Ely Daily Times*, June 16, 1943; June 23, 1943. The labor shortage at the state level is mentioned in *ibid.*, August 10, 1942. The labor shortage occurred despite the addition of more miners. Matt Murphy, state mine inspector, said that Nevada mines were employing "at least" 2,500 more miners than they were two years before. *Ibid.* October 12, 1943; November 2, 1943; April 4, 1944; May 16, 1944. The increase in population is noted in *ibid.* November 3, 1943. A housing shortage in Kimberly is mentioned in *ibid.*, July 2, 1943.

2. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1943. White Pine County District Attorney John Bonner claimed absenteeism was "serious from a labor standpoint." He noted that absenteeism caused a "41 percent turnover in employees," citing an eleven percent labor shortage at Kimberly and a twelve percent shortage at the nearby Minerva district. Bonner blamed excessive alcohol abuse for the problem. He targeted the area's saloons, which stayed open twenty-four hours, and called for a voluntary closure order which was discussed by local leaders but not enacted.

3. Keith Norton to Reid Robinson, January 15, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 141, Folder 642, "Ely." An outsider to the district, Norton claimed to have been blackballed for organizing Local 466 in Mountain City, Nevada four years previously. He worked as a miner at Kimberly until March 1941 when he was injured and became a watchman. Norton also had a pecuniary motive. He heard that another Mine-Mill organizer in the
area collected a fee for every new initiate and therefore expected a bonus for his efforts. Norton claimed that "Cole," a Mine-Mill organizer, had received a fee for each new recruit, which Robinson denied. In 1941 Mine Mill organizer George Haskell had claimed there was a standing offer of fifty cents for each new initiate. Norton may have heard about this offer. The number of workers at Kimberly is taken from 48 NLRB, No. 158, 1276n.

4. Ibid., p. 1274-1279. The Kimberly workers had notified Consolidated Coppermines that it "represented a majority of the employees in an appropriate bargaining unit. Local 642 submitted 591 application-for-membership cards, 481 that were signed between January and March 1943. Consolidated Coppermines employed "approximately 855 workers in the unit...."

5. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, March 29, 1943, IUMMSW, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."


7. Reid Robinson to Keith Norton, February 2, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 141, Folder 642, "Ely."

8. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, February 2, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett." Allan D. McNeil to Claud Lovelett, February 6, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett." Detained in San Francisco, Lovelett apparently did not leave for McGill until February 16 or 17, after he completed his testimony. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, February 14, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."


11. Ibid., January 18, 1943.

12. Ibid., March 6, 1943; Ely Record March 12, 1943.

13. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, March 28, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."


15. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, March 19, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 30, "Ralph Rasmussen."
16. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, March 19, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 30, "Ralph Rasmussen."

17. Ibid.


19. Ralph Rasmussen to Reid Robinson, March 9, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 301, Folder 30, "Ralph Rasmussen."

20. Ibid.

21. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, March 29, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

22. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, April 4, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

23. 48 NLRB, No. 158.


27. Between 1937 and 1939 the original Wagner Act NLRB rarely approved minority craft units within a plant, promoting instead the concept of industrial unionism through the creation of a single bargaining unit. These decisions aided Mine-Mill, whose leaders argued that only industrial unions could be the effective bargaining unit because copper production required a varied work force comprised of skilled and semi-skilled labor. Amidst charges of CIO favoritism, accusations of Communist domination by a celebrated Congressional investigation, and a "purge" of board personnel, a reconstructed NLRB reversed its earlier position. By 1940 the Board began routinely certifying smaller craft units among larger industrial units under the "globe doctrine." James A. Gross, The Reshaping of the National Labor Relations Board: National Labor Policy in Transition, 1937-1947 (Albany, 1981), passim. Gross deftly traces the transformation of the NLRB between 1937, when the
Wagner Act was declared constitutional, and November 1940 when Harry Millis was appointed NLRB chairman. See Chapter 1 for early board policy upholding industrial unionism; see Chapter 12 for changes under Millis. Still the best work on the wartime NLRB is Fred Witney’s Wartime Experiences of the National Labor Relations Board, 1941-1945 (Urbana, 1949). Witney claims that the NLRB was "deeply concerned with the preservation of majority rule" during the war, but was opposed by Congress, who limited the Board’s ability to invalidate separate craft contracts. Ibid. 162. The term "globe doctrine" derives from the NLRB’s 1937 decision in the Globe Machine and Stamping Co. case, (3 NLRB 294). This was originally to be used only "where a smaller craft unit and a larger industry unit were equally plausible." Workers in craft groups were allowed to indicate their preference by ballot to allow the Board to decide "whether to leave the craft group in the smaller bargaining unit or to combine it with the larger group." Harold S. Roberts, Robert’s Dictionary of Industrial Relations (revised edition, Washington D.C., 1971), 166.


30. 51 NLRB, No. 180.


32. 51 NLRB, No. 180.

33. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, April 20, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

34. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, April 25, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

35. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, May 12, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."
36. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, June 4, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

37. Karl Jensen to Steptoe Mine and Smelter Workers, May 21, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

38. Claud Lovelett to Karl Jensen, June 2, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

39. Claud Lovelett to Abraham J. Isserman, July 1, 1943. IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

40. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, May 23, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

41. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, August 17, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

42. The Pioche Record, September 2, 1943.

43. Ely Record, June 3, 1938.

44. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, July 1, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett"; Claud Lovelett to Abraham J. Isserman, July 1, 1943. IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

45. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett, July 9, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

46. Reid Robinson to Claud Lovelett and Keith Norton, August 17, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

47. Claud Lovelett to Reid Robinson, August 19, 1943, IUMMSW, Box 40, Folder 25, "Claud Lovelett."

48. The local newspaper reported "lively" voting in the certification election, estimating 800 votes would be cast. Ely Daily Times, September 3, 1943.

49. Of the twelve separate units that voted, Mine Mill prevailed among the watchmen, bricklayers, steelworkers, truck drivers and warehousemen, cooks and waitresses, engineers, and production and maintenance employees. The painters, carpenters, boilermakers, electricians, and plumbers retained their AFL craft affiliation. 52 N.L.R.B. No. 232, 1397-1404. Of the groups that voted for Mine Mill, the union received 84 percent of the vote. Similarly, the AFL received 72 percent of the craft vote.

EPILOGUE

Mine-Mill's victory in the 1943 NLRB election signified the final rejection of the informal equilibrium by the Ely-district's workers. From that point on, conflict between labor and capital would be conducted through the post-World War II model of collective bargaining.

Nevada Consolidated's welfare capitalism could not survive in this new environment. The company began privatizing the company towns in the 1950s, selling its homes to the residents. Speaking about this decision, J. C. Kinnear's son and successor, John Jr., claimed that the company had "acted very wisely in removing one of the last vestiges of outmoded paternalism." This move stemmed from the changing attitude of the "average employee" who had acquired a "more independent attitude," and "preferr[ed] to deal on a basis of partnership with his employer." Kinnear correctly noted that the company's policies had become anachronistic amid the advancing depersonalization of labor relations after World War II.¹

However, Kinnear wrongly assumed that postwar workers desired to deal with employers on an individual basis. Instead, workers relied on the institutional structure of
the labor union to confront their employers. Although capitalist hegemony remained, the new process through which capital and labor confronted one another had rendered obsolete the companies’ prewar methods for blunting class consciousness. Even as their separate interests were formally mediated through the increasingly bureaucratic mechanism of collective bargaining, conflict between labor and capital continued.

Through their Mine-Mill locals, copperworkers openly challenged their employers. In some ways, worker militancy reflected that of the early twentieth century. The Ely-district joined other Mine-Mill locals in waging a series of strikes against the nation’s copper companies throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. At the McGill smelter, workers staged several wildcat strikes protesting the company’s time-and-motion studies and speedup policy, both of which violated their existing contract. At other times the copperworkers used brief walkouts to mediate their grievances. When asked why the union had changed, one long-time Mine-Mill officer replied in words that indicated paternalism was long gone: "Any company or corporation is out to make as big a profit as they can for their stockholders....How they do it, they don’t care, just as long as they do it."²

Unlike some Nevada locals, the Ely-district Mine-Mill locals remained affiliated with the international union
throughout the Cold War period. After World War II, Mine-Mill confronted the combined forces of government repression, employer opposition, and interunion raiding. Reid Robinson was ousted in 1947 amid charges he had solicited a $5,000 loan from a brass company executive. Mine-Mill, long branded a "red" union, then came under fire from the government and the increasingly conservative labor movement: first, from the refusal of its officers to sign Taft-Hartley noncommunist affidavits, and second, from the CIO’s charges of "Communist influence." Expelled from the CIO and hounded by government authorities throughout the 1950s, Mine-Mill waged a valiant but doomed struggle against the forces of capitalist reaction, ultimately merging with the United Steelworkers in 1967. That merger signalled the end of radical unionism in the nonferrous metals industry born seventy-five years earlier.3

Today, the massive smelterworks at McGill sits abandoned. A few weeds have grown around its aging walls which are surrounded by a chain-link fence warning potential trespassers that they are approaching private property. Copper production at the site ceased in the early 1980s, and some of the district’s residents still blame the union for Kennecott’s departure. The neat company houses are still occupied, but the sleepy town displays little of its former vibrancy as a thriving smel tertown. The massive slag pit spills into the valley to the west like a frozen black
river, the remnant of eighty years of environmental despoliation.

To the south, the great open-pit, which continued expanding until the 1960s, is periodically worked by gold-mining companies. Its deep holes are filled with greenish-yellow water, colored and poisoned by the chemicals used to leach the precious metal from the rock. The mining town of Ruth, moved several times to make room for the enlarging pit, contains several blocks of houses in neat rows. The buildings at Kimberly have been bulldozed and its underground mines have been caved in to deter intruders. This site now serves only the interest of archaeologists, who scour for artifacts that may give some glimpse into the lost lives of early twentieth-century copper miners.

Although the county seat of Ely has survived, the barren mines attest to the area’s decline as the state’s leading mineral producer. The rise and fall of the Ely district mirrors the common history of many western mining towns. Labor and capital struggled early on to construct a mutually-agreeable system of industrial relations. At Ely, this was first resolved with the informal equilibriums of the 1920s. However, resulting contradictions and changing external conditions led to the destruction of this system. In its place, a formal structure emerged that lasted until the district’s ore finally petered out in the 1980s. Ely copperworkers and Mine-Mill organizers played a key role in
bringing about the new order. Although the Cold War "social accord" soon solidified in capital's favor, this was not yet determined in 1943, when unionism became entrenched in the area. To be sure, once Mine-Mill was established in the district, nobody would have seen "such contented workers."
NOTES


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