

# ***Company Town/Labour Town : Local Government in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1917-1926\****

by David FRANK \*\*

In the early years of the twentieth century the northeast coast of Cape Breton Island was a booming industrial frontier. The coal and steel industries of this district played a large part in the Canadian economy, and in Cape Breton County they created the most dynamic industrial community in the Maritime Provinces. Although the roots of industry reached back to the 1820s, unprecedented growth took place from the 1890s to the 1910s. The population of the coal district more than tripled and by 1921 included more than 40,000 people. The newly-arrived Dominion Coal and Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Companies built steel plants, opened collieries, created new settlements and expanded old ones.<sup>1</sup>

The influence of the coal companies on the life of the coal industry was pervasive. It was often echoed in local place-names. Communities such as Dominion and Dominion No. 6 were named for the collieries of the Dominion Coal Company. In New Waterford streets were named in honour of company directors J. H. Plummer, Sir Henry Pellatt and E. R. Wood. Most importantly, the coal companies enjoyed great economic power in the mining district. As the only important employers in the coal towns, they dominated the local labour market. In Glace Bay in 1930 the Dominion Coal Company employed two-thirds of the male work force. Furthermore, as the owners of company stores and company houses, the coal companies were also powerful merchants and landlords. When the huge British Empire Steel Corporation merger was completed in 1921, the

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<sup>1</sup> Studies of industrialization in the Maritimes include T. W. ACHESON, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910", *Acadiensis*, I (Spring 1972): 3-28, and Del MUISE, "The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1867-1900", in *Cape Breton Historical Essays*, eds.: Brian TENNYSON and Don MACGILLIVRAY (Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980), pp. 76-94. The context of economic development and corporate crisis in the coal industry at the end of the First World War was examined in David FRANK, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation", *Acadiensis*, VII (Autumn 1977): 3-34.

concentration of economic power in industrial Cape Breton seemed most complete.

In 1908 the *Canadian Mining Journal* described the largest of the Cape Breton coal towns in these words: "Everybody in Glace Bay is either the servant of the Coal Company, or the servant of the servant of the Coal Company." Disappointed union organizers agreed. In 1911 a correspondent in the *Eastern Labor News* reported sadly: "Glace Bay is gently moving to that status which will enable it to take rank with the finest corporation-owned cities and towns on the North American continent ... anybody with half an eye can see that the Coal Company has complete control over the doings of the town."<sup>2</sup>

But were the Cape Breton coal towns company towns?

Discussions of the concept of the "company town" have generally agreed that the term describes communities inhabited mainly by the employees of a single company which also dominates other important aspects of community life.<sup>3</sup> Rolf Knight has made a useful distinction between "company towns" and "single-enterprise communities"; he suggested that company towns must be regarded historically as one type of single-industry community in which the company's control extends into most parts of the community's social life.<sup>4</sup> Another helpful study has distinguished three historical stages in the "rise and decline of a company town": (1) the temporary work camp, (2) the "fully developed paternalistic town", and (3) the "small, declining village of homeowners".<sup>5</sup> Other studies have also noted a further episode in the life of the company town: some communities have enjoyed new stability as a result of changing resource demands, economic diversification, or government policy.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Canadian Mining Journal*, 11 June 1908; *Eastern Labor News*, 18 February 1911.

<sup>3</sup> The most useful definition of the company town is provided by Horace B. DAVIS, in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1931), Vol. IV: 119-23: "A community is known as a company town when it is inhabited solely or chiefly by the employees of a single company or group of companies which also owns a substantial part of the real estate and houses." According to Davis, a company town is "typically unincorporated; it may, however, be part of a larger, incorporated municipality or it may be a separate incorporated town."

<sup>4</sup> ROLF KNIGHT, *Work Camps and Company Towns in Canada and the U.S.: An Annotated Bibliography* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1975), pp. 7-11: "Single-enterprise communities are relatively small, semi-isolated industrial towns where the jobs are overwhelmingly provided by a single company, but where that company is not necessarily involved in the running of the community itself ... Company towns ... refers to communities where most of the housing and other basic services are owned or directly controlled by the company owning the single predominant industry for which the town was established. Not only the work scene but most other settings of social life are controlled by the company."

<sup>5</sup> JAMES B. ALLEN, *The Company Town in the American West* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> R. T. JACKSON, "Mining Settlements in Western Europe: The Landscape and the Community", in *Urbanization and Its Problems*, eds: R. P. BECKINSALE and J. M. HOUSTON (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), pp. 143-70; NORMAN GIDNEY, "From Coal to Forest Products: The Changing Resource Base of Nanaimo, B. C.", *Urban History Review*, 1 (June 1978): 18-47.

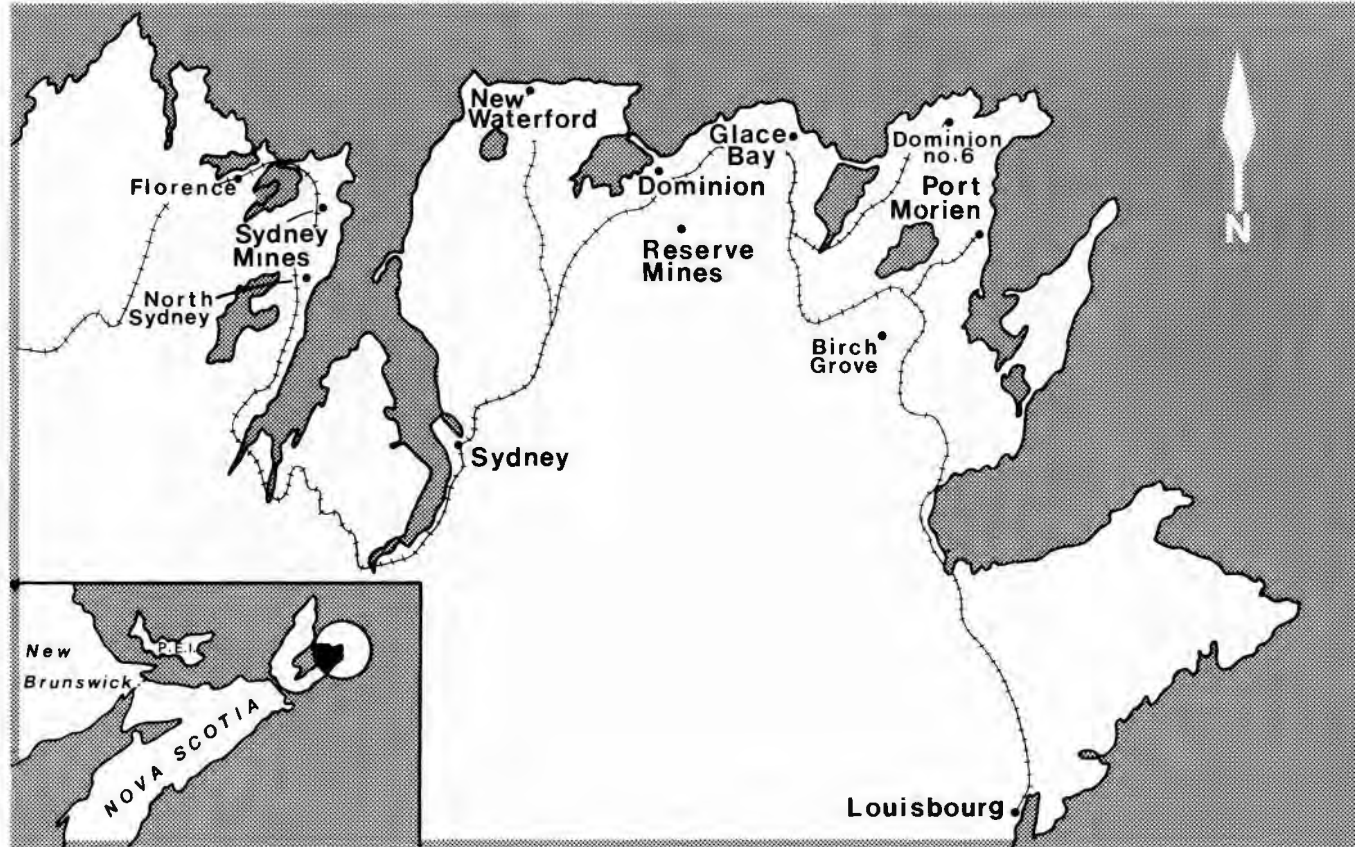
Like many single-industry communities, the Cape Breton coal towns also experienced this general pattern of growth and expansion, decline and stabilization. But the history of the Cape Breton coal towns in the 1920s also suggests the importance of a neglected theme in the life of the single-industry community: the transition from "company town" to "labour town". By the 1920s the Cape Breton coal towns could no longer be regarded as company towns. "Glace Bay is a labour town", declared the *Maritime Labor Herald* in 1922.<sup>7</sup> In the labour town community life was influenced less by the paternalism of a predominant employer than by the demands of working-class institutions such as the trade union and the labour party.

The rise of the labour town reflected a general change in the balance of power in coal mining society. In the years at the end of the First World War the residents of the coal towns successfully challenged the power of the coal companies in several ways. Established in 1917, the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia won union recognition, wage increases and the eight-hour day. The union also began to call for public ownership of the coal industry. When the British Empire Steel Corporation attempted to introduce large wage reductions, several years of bitter industrial conflict followed. The coal miners' strikes enjoyed strong support in the coal towns and the miners were able to defeat some of the wage reductions and preserve their union. These were also years of political transformation. Under the banner of the Independent Labor Party, labour candidates achieved unprecedented success in the coal towns, where they led the polls in federal and provincial elections; in 1920 the labour ticket captured more than sixty-five percent of the coal miners' vote and returned four members to the provincial assembly.

Changes in the realm of local government provided a significant illustration of the growth of working-class influence in the coal towns. In three of the towns labour candidates won control of the town council, an institution which in the past had often been dominated by company officials. At the town hall the labour mayors and labour councillors pursued policies which distinguished clearly between the interests of the community and those of the company. The labour towns challenged the coal companies on numerous issues, including the use of company police and the assessment of taxes; in the industrial conflict of the time they repudiated the corporation and gave their support to the coal miners. Persistently, the labour towns eroded the traditional authority of the coal company in the mining towns. Although the coal miners' search for power did not begin or end at the town hall, the history of local government in the coal towns in the 1920s provides insight into the close connection between industrial conflict and community life in the single-industry town.

<sup>7</sup> *Maritime Labor Herald*, 4 March 1922. The transition from "company town" to "labour town" was also noted in an historical sketch of Sudbury: William E. KON, "Boom Town into Company Town: The Story of Sudbury, *New Frontier*, I (November 1936): 6-9: "The great Canadian comedy of rugged individualism has passed through the primary stages of Boom Town, Company Town, and is now on its way to the last lap of Union Town."

# INDUSTRIAL CAPE BRETON



## I

By the time of the First World War, the days had long passed in the Cape Breton coalfield when, as one writer recalled, "every colliery was a kingdom of its own, with the mine manager the big boss".<sup>8</sup> Since the 1890s the enlarged scale of mining operations and the rapid growth of population had created communities which transcended the old colliery kingdoms. The rapid expansion of Dominion Coal and Nova Scotia Steel and Coal ended the pattern of seasonal operations and economic marginality associated with the nineteenth-century industry. Economic, geographic and cultural factors contributed to the growth of large centralized communities in which the great majority of the coal miners resided; in 1921 the three major towns had populations of 5,615 (New Waterford), 8,327 (Sydney Mines), and 17,007 (Glace Bay). In these towns the residents enjoyed a significant amount of self-government, a feature not always associated with the company town. The incorporated municipalities included Sydney Mines (1889), Glace Bay (1901), Dominion (1906) and New Waterford (1913). Smaller settlements, including Reserve Mines, Florence and Dominion No. 6, remained unincorporated districts under the formal jurisdiction of the county council (See Map).<sup>9</sup>

Although the social composition of the mining towns offered opportunities for working-class influence, in all the coal towns local government was first dominated by company officials, local merchants and professional men. The immense personal authority of the mine manager, who often ran for office, compelled deference, especially when unions were weak. Ethnic and religious loyalties, often reinforced by the direct intervention of the clergy and lay societies in politics, also influenced voting patterns. Provincial legislation presented other obstacles: the municipal franchise included all taxpayers, but only ratepayers were eligible for office. "For a long time", recalled one coal miner, "the miners themselves wouldn't vote for a miner. They'd figure he wouldn't know enough." A common recollection of this period was that the establishment of effective trade unionism in the coal industry in 1917 was decisive in giving the coal miners the confidence to seek control of local government.<sup>10</sup>

The evolution of town politics in Glace Bay revealed the gradual erosion of the coal company's influence in local government. The first mayor of Glace Bay, David M. Burchell (1901-7), was also superintendent of the Dominion Coal Company's stores. Under his stewardship the town acquired a basic network of unpaved roads, an electric light plant, a

<sup>8</sup> Miners' Memorial Museum, Glace Bay, Clipping dated December 1932, Stuart McCawley Scrapbook, p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> On the evolution of local government in Nova Scotia, see S. A. CHESLEY, "A Glance at the History of Municipal Government in Nova Scotia", in UNION OF NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPALITIES, *Proceedings, 1916* (Halifax: Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, 1916), pp. 27-34; and J. M. BECK, *The Evolution of Municipal Government in Nova Scotia, 1749-1973* (Halifax: Queen's Printer, 1973).

<sup>10</sup> NOVA SCOTIA, *Towns Incorporation Act, Revised 1913* (Halifax: King's Printer, 1913), Sections 26, 53, 54, 61, 71; Interviews with Angus F. MacDonald, 1975, Francis McEachern, 1976, Archie McIntyre, 1976.

water system, town hall, police force, fire department, and a public debt of more than \$750,000. These heavy capital expenditures aroused the opposition of many middle-class ratepayers, and in 1907 John C. Douglas, lawyer, landlord, and publisher of the *Glace Bay Gazette*, won the mayoralty. Nevertheless, the coal company retained a strong influence on the council, and in 1909 seven of the twelve councillors were company officials. During the bitter strike of that year the coal company was able to win the support of the town council for the use of military forces in Glace Bay. At first the council divided evenly on the company's request for military aid. On the deciding vote of Mayor Douglas, a supporter of the United Mine Workers (UMW), the council rejected the need for troops and repudiated any expenses in this connection. A week later the issue was reconsidered. On this occasion the company officials attended in full force, two middle-class councillors changed their vote, and a resolution was endorsed to support the use of troops.<sup>11</sup> The following year "friends of the working men" were elected in five of the six wards, but with the decline of the UMW after the defeat of the strike, the company regained its influence on the council. An analysis of the composition of the town council in 1917 reveals: four mine managers, two petty mine officials, one railway station agent, one company relief association official, one merchant, one contractor, one clerk, and one coal miner.

The turning point came in 1918. The incumbent mayor was Allan J. MacDonald, a lawyer, landlord, and son of the town's most prominent Tory, Senator William MacDonald. In 1918 Mayor MacDonald was challenged by Alonzo L. O'Neill. A former councillor, O'Neill had been a supporter of Mayor Douglas in 1910. Together with his brother, O'Neill was part-owner of a small store, but, most significantly, he was also a working coal miner. O'Neill polled 1,556 votes to MacDonald's 924 votes. The election of a coal miner as mayor was regarded as a triumph by the town's working-class voters.<sup>12</sup> The highlight of the election campaign was the emergence of the Independent Labor Party (ILP) in town politics. Under a manifesto headed "Corporations vs The Masses", the ILP ran candidates in five of the six wards. "'Government for the People by the People' should no longer be a dream", the ILP declared; "The day is here. The fight is on." The manifesto outlined no specific aims, but appealed strongly for working-class votes: "The miners are noted for doing things with a vim, they stand together when they get after a thing. 'They drive her' as the saying goes. That is right boys, go to it. You pay the taxes and you have a perfect right to have a voice in how the money is to be expended."<sup>13</sup> All five candidates were elected. Following the 1919 election, in which the

<sup>11</sup> Glace Bay Town Council Minutes (hereafter GBM), 7, 14 July 1909; *Toronto Star*, 16 July 1909. On the history of Glace Bay, see the anniversary booklets published by the town, *Town of Glace Bay: 50 Years* (Glace Bay, 1951), and *Town of Glace Bay: 75 Years of Progress* (Glace Bay, 1976). I would like to thank Mayor Dan A. Munroe and Town Clerk Bruce Sterns for permission to examine the town records, which included council minutes, annual reports, and assessment rolls.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Joseph Nearing, 1976.

<sup>13</sup> *Canadian Labor Leader*, 9 February 1918.

second seat in each ward was filled, a decisive change was evident in the occupational composition of the council: one mine manager, one colliery engineer, one contractor, two machinists, seven coal miners.

Similar changes took place in the other municipalities in industrial Cape Breton. In Sydney, Sydney Mines and on the county council, labour candidates won limited influence; in Dominion, Glace Bay and New Waterford labour candidates captured control of the town councils and the mayoralty. Table 1 shows the number of members elected to the town councils as labour candidates in the three major mining towns in the years 1918-26. Without formal records on the activity of labour candidates in town politics, only partial evidence was available for the construction of this table, which probably underestimates the strength and influence of the labour councillors.<sup>14</sup>

Table 1. — LABOUR COUNCILLORS, 1918-1926.

Year	Sydney Mines (Total Councillors = 8)		New Waterford (Total Councillors = 6)		Glace Bay (Total Councillors = 12)	
	Mayor	Councillors	Mayor	Councillors	Mayor	Councillors
1918	—	—	1	3	—	5
1919	—	4	1	4	—	6
1920	—	3	1	4	—	4
1921	—	—	1	6 (6)	—	5
1922	—	—	1	5	1	6
1923	—	3 (2)	—	2	1	7 (7)
1924	—	3 (3)	—	4	1	6
1925	—	1	1	5	1	6
1926	—	—	—	3	1	5

( ) = Result after byelection.

The labourites enjoyed their greatest success in Glace Bay, the largest of the coal towns, and in New Waterford, the newest and most isolated of the towns. When the ILP named a full slate of candidates in New Waterford in 1918, all four candidates were elected with large majorities. James Ling, an ILP leader whose sons worked in the mines, became Cape Breton's first labour mayor; Ling was re-elected four times as mayor; later Patrick G. Muise won the labour nomination and served

<sup>14</sup> Information for Table 1 was generated from newspaper reports of local politics during this period. Only those directly reported as "labour" candidates were counted as labour councillors; in addition there were also individual councillors who were workers by occupation, belonged to the miners' union, or supported the labour members on key issues. For a general review of the history of Sydney Mines, see Mrs R. G. BAIN, compiler, *History of the Town of Sydney Mines* (Sydney Mines: Town of Sydney Mines, 1951), and for New Waterford, T. D. BOUTILIER, ed., *The New Waterford Story, 1913-1963* (New Waterford: Town of New Waterford, 1963) and a revised edition, *New Waterford Sixty* (New Waterford: Town of New Waterford, 1973). I would like to thank Mayor Arnold Baxandale and Town Clerk Mrs Lois Gordon of Sydney Mines, and Town Clerk Francis MacKinnon of New Waterford, for permission to examine the town records.

frequently as mayor until 1953. In Sydney Mines, however, the ILP ran fewer candidates and never captured control of the council. Unlike Dominion Coal in the southern part of the coalfield and unlike its predecessors on the northside, the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company (which took over from the General Mining Association in 1901) had not become directly involved in town politics; none of the Scotia mine managers served in public office. As a result middle-class politicians, such as Mayor Alex McCormick (1915-26, 1932-45), were able to remain in office without opposition from labour candidates. Mayor McCormick often relied on the coal miners' vote in Sydney Mines and pursued policies similar to those of the labour councils in the other mining towns.

Although the election of Mayor O'Neill in 1918 had demonstrated the importance of the miners' vote in Glace Bay, the labourites in this town failed to nominate a candidate for mayor until 1922. A hoist operator at No. 10 colliery, councillor Hector MacDonald twice declined to run because he was not prepared to sacrifice time and wages to take office. After O'Neill's two terms in office, the miners supported E. M. Forbes, a young barrister often hired by the miners' union; with the miners' support, Forbes served two terms as mayor. The most important labour politician to emerge in Glace Bay was Dan Willie Morrison. An early supporter of the UMW, Morrison had also served as an elected checkweighman at the Caledonia colliery and as a town councillor in 1914; following his wartime service in the army, he was re-elected to both positions. In 1920 Morrison won election to the provincial assembly as a labour and veterans' candidate. In 1922 Morrison won a large majority over two opponents and became the town's first labour mayor. A popular individual who was also district president of the UMW for fourteen years, Morrison remained mayor (with the exception of one term in the 1930s) until his retirement in 1950.

Class-conscious and civic-minded workers, the labour councillors of the 1920s believed that their towns were best governed by men representing the working-class majority of the population. Ideologically, the labour councillors were rarely known as radicals or revolutionaries. It was with more licence than accuracy that an observer in 1925 claimed that "The Communist Party" controlled three town councils and "can elect town councillors in the mining districts anytime it wants to"; indeed the New Waterford council passed a resolution objecting to this report.<sup>15</sup> Nominated by ILP meetings and endorsed by union locals, the labour councillors of the 1920s were usually men active in a variety of local organizations: the miners' union, the veterans' association, the cooperative stores, the labour newspaper, the hospital boards, and the fraternal societies. In their nominations the labourites often deferred to ethnic and religious shibboleths in local politics in order to avoid divisions at the polls. In New Waterford the selection of candidates involved a careful attempt to provide an ethnic balance. One ILP activist recalled: "We would nominate a

<sup>15</sup> Stuart McCawley, *Standing the Gaff: The Soreness of the Soul of Cape Breton* (Glace Bay: n.p., 1925), p. 12; New Waterford Town Council Minutes (hereafter NWM), 2 June 1925.



Frenchman, a good Protestant, another man who would represent the middle outfit [Scottish and Irish Catholics] ... There was never any conflict about religion or anything else here; we kept that in the background."<sup>16</sup>

Typically the labour platform proposed few unusual measures: "more efficient service, more judicious use of money, regular returns for your money, proper enforcement of all laws for the protection of life, property and moral conditions". But at the heart of the appeal for labour votes was the belief that local politics were linked to broader working-class concerns. In 1922 the *Maritime Labor Herald* urged: "It is the duty of every labouring man and of every citizen who wishes Glace Bay to progress, to vote for the men who represent the wealth-producing element of the community and whose platform of principles lays down the guiding principle that to labor should belong the wealth labor creates." Similarly, the labour platform in New Waterford in 1925 stressed the importance of maintaining working-class solidarity in that critical year of the industrial conflict: "Labor is on trial, and it is up to labor men to present a united front. UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL."<sup>17</sup>

## II

The rise of working-class influence in local government was reflected in numerous civic policies in the coal towns. The town councils objected to evictions, protested coal prices, requested free coal for families on the poor list, and took up the grievances of company tenants and retired and injured workmen.<sup>18</sup> In Sydney Mines the council endorsed union resolutions in favour of the eight-hour day, approved a civic minimum wage of 35¢ an hour, and in 1920 appointed Forman Waye, the labour MLA and steelworkers' organizer, as assistant town engineer.<sup>19</sup> In Glace Bay the council gave close attention to the improvement of labour standards for town employees. The labour councillors inserted an eight-hour clause in town contracts and won recognition of a new union among workers at the town electric plant. In setting hours and wages, the council followed the standards established by the coal miners in their agreements with the coal company: when the miners won an eight-hour day in 1919, the town proclaimed an eight-and-a-half-hour day, which was improved to eight hours in 1920; when the union won a 55¢ advance in daily wages in 1920, the town employees were granted the same increase.<sup>20</sup>

The most dramatic change in local government was the restriction of the authority of the company police. To supplement the authority of the existing town police forces, previous councils had followed the practice of

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Angus F. MacDonald, 1975.

<sup>17</sup> *Maritime Labor Herald*, 4 March 1922; *Sydney Post*, 31 January 1925.

<sup>18</sup> GBM, 11 July 1917, 26 February 1919, 18 February 1925, 31 March 1926.

<sup>19</sup> Sydney Mines Town Council Minutes (hereafter SMM), 31 March, 14 April, 5 August 1919, 10, 25 May 1920.

<sup>20</sup> GBM, 7 June 1922, 3 December, 30 April 1919, 2, 23 June, 25 August 1920, 5 April, 25 October 1922.

appointing members of the company police force as special, unpaid town police officers. In Glace Bay, for instance, twenty-one special police were appointed, including Captain D. A. Noble, head of the company police force. Labour spokesmen vehemently objected to the very existence of a private police force in the mining communities. The abolition of the practice of swearing in company police as town officers was a significant measure of the collapse of the company's influence on the town councils. In Sydney Mines Mayor McCormick ended the arrangement in 1915; an attempt to reintroduce the system in 1917 was defeated on McCormick's deciding vote.<sup>21</sup> In 1918 the initial labour group on the Glace Bay council failed in their attempt to abolish the appointment of company police; with increased numbers, they succeeded the following year. Subsequently the Glace Bay council declared itself "unalterably opposed" to the practice and supported the union's campaign for complete abolition of the company police force.<sup>22</sup> In New Waterford the town council also refused to swear in company police and endorsed the union position. One councillor, who had been elected as a labour member, was censured by the council for accepting employment as a company policeman and was forced to quit his council seat.<sup>23</sup>

The town councils also enjoyed some success in raising company taxes. In 1916 Mayor McCormick announced plans to increase the company's assessment in Sydney Mines. According to a town report, company property was assessed at twenty-five percent of its true value and more than \$3 million in property was exempt from taxes until 1928; under these conditions the company's taxes had never exceeded \$15,000 a year and had dropped from seventy-four percent of the total tax in 1898 to thirty-four percent in 1916. When the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company passed to American control, however, President F. J. Crockard agreed to revisions in the assessment. By 1919 Scotia had accepted an assessment of \$1.2 million, which constituted about half the total assessment in Sydney Mines.<sup>24</sup> In Glace Bay the traditional arrangement provided that Dominion Coal would match the assessment for the remainder of the town and thus pay half the town's property tax. In 1919, however, the Glace Bay council broke this arrangement and unilaterally increased the company's assessment from \$2 million to \$2.5 million. Dominion Coal protested and successfully appealed to the courts. Subsequent negotiations were fruitless; the company insisted that the fifty percent arrangement was a fair basis for taxation, while the town claimed that a new inventory of the company's assets was needed. The council then attempted to raise the total assessment by increasing the valuation of other properties in the town. A more aggressive town assessor was appointed; his new survey of property

<sup>21</sup> SMM, 15 July 1915, 10 January 1917.

<sup>22</sup> GBM, 13 March 1918, 26 March 1919, 7 July 1920; *Sydney Post*, 25 June 1920; *Sydney Record*, 28 June 1920.

<sup>23</sup> NWM, 6, 13 July 1920, 15 February 1921.

<sup>24</sup> SMM, 26 December 1916, 24 April, 10, 27 May 1918, 1 April 1920; A. C. McCormick, Leonard Hollett, D. C. McDonald to F. J. A. Crockard, 24 April, 10 May 1918, and "Statement of Town's and Company's Assessment", documents included in the council minute-book.

included considerable increases in the assessment of the local branches of the Royal, Commerce and Nova Scotia banks. To the delight of the council, the courts supported the town's revisions. The tax burden for property owners, especially the chartered banks, was increased, and under the customary parity principle Dominion Coal was forced to match the increased assessment. As a result of these efforts by 1925 the town's total assessment was raised by about \$1 million to more than \$5 million.<sup>25</sup>

Table 2. — MUNICIPAL DEBT (\$ 000)\*.

Year	Dominion	Glace Bay	New Waterford	Sydney Mines
1909	6.8	837.3	—	225.4
1917	14.5	907.4	47.0	323.5
1918	12.4	897.8	60.7	313.8
1919	11.0	896.5	53.5	313.8
1920	19.7	1,114.0	54.0	305.5
1921	42.0	1,265.4	110.3	413.8
1922	45.8	1,350.5	109.7	436.1
1923	50.0	1,336.9	112.7	451.3
1924	45.4	1,499.3	107.3	590.6
1925	—	—	—	—
1926	53.5	1,507.0	115.0	571.7

Source: NOVA SCOTIA, *Journals of the House of Assembly, 1909-1927*, "Statistics of Incorporated Cities, Towns and Municipalities of Nova Scotia".

\* Total debt shown includes bonded debt, floating debt, overdue sinking fund payments, miscellaneous debts. Information for 1925 was not available.

Nevertheless, none of the coal towns escaped financial crisis during the 1920s. The growth in municipal debt, shown in Table 2, was the result of debts incurred in the construction of services in earlier years, and of new spending which the town councils found essential. In Glace Bay the town's main school building was destroyed by fire in 1920, and the town undertook large expenditures to finance a new building. Two issues of bonds were required, and these were placed with difficulty and on poor terms. In the end Glace Bay boasted the "best school building in Eastern Canada", but the town's capital debt was increased by \$475,000.<sup>26</sup> In Sydney Mines the town council continued to approve capital spending in the expectation of a wider tax base when long-term tax concessions to the Scotia company expired in 1928. But the closure of the Sydney Mines steel plant and the Jubilee colliery threw the town into crisis. Employment, population and assessment all declined after 1921, and in 1926 Scotia

<sup>25</sup> GBM, 30 April, 5 November 1919; *Sydney Post*, 4 September, 26 November 1919; GBM, 3 December 1919, 2, 23 February, 9, 16 March, 8 June 1921; *Sydney Post*, 8 March 1920; GBM, 3 December 1921, 10 January 1923, 4 February, 13 May 1925; *Sydney Post*, 27 November 1922.

<sup>26</sup> GBM, 6 July, 7 September 1921; SMM, 5 January 1923; GBM, 15 April 1920, 26 May, 3 December 1921; *Glace Bay Annual Report, 1920*; *Sydney Post*, 3 February 1921. Between 1917 and 1926 tax rates were also raised substantially in the coal towns.

secured from the courts a one-third reduction in its assessment.<sup>27</sup> Finally, as the information in Table 3 shows, the deepening economic crisis of the 1920s confronted the towns with a steep rise in uncollected taxes.

Table 3. — TAXES IN ARREARS (\$ 000).

Year	Dominion	Glace Bay	New Waterford	Sydney Mines
1917	1.2	47.2	7.8	62.9
1918	1.0	51.6	10.0	25.8
1919	1.7	55.2	12.3	30.0
1920	1.7	48.3	14.7	35.6
1921	2.3	55.5	20.4	49.7
1922	3.7	84.1	30.3	59.0
1923	3.3	95.5	27.1	61.1
1924	5.7	117.0	28.6	83.6
1925	10.8	190.8	39.2	110.4
1926	8.8	171.5	34.6	134.4

Sources: NOVA SCOTIA, *Journals of the House of Assembly, 1918-1927*; *Submission on Behalf of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, February 1938*, pp. 33-35.

Nothing revealed the essential interdependence of industrial and residential life in the coal towns more clearly than the problem of underground subsidence. The mining communities were also the physical site of the coal industry. As a result the mining operations literally undermined the community. According to one report, the main intersection in Glace Bay, Senator's Corner, had fallen fifteen inches in a five-year period. When Dominion Coal offered to deed all company-owned streets to the Town of Glace Bay, the council was understandably reluctant to assume liability for the future subsidence of the roads.<sup>28</sup> The most serious conditions existed at Reserve Mines, one of the small, unincorporated mining settlements. In this community underground subsidence had cut off the water table in some sections of town, leaving the wells dry or filled with surface water. To remedy the problem, the company delivered water door to door by a horse and cart which travelled to a standpipe at the Glace Bay town limits. Doctors were alarmed by the dangerous conditions in this district and public meetings called for action, but neither the company nor the county council was prepared to install the necessary water and drainage systems. In 1925 county medical health officer Dr A. S. Kendall noted the obvious contrast between conditions in the county and the towns:

<sup>27</sup> SMM, 12, 26, 28 January 1926.

<sup>28</sup> Beaton Institute of Cape Breton Studies (Sydney), Pamphlet Collection, *Mine Subsidence in Glace Bay, N.S.* (Glace Bay: n.p., [1933?]); GBM, 12 May 1926; Interview with Dan A. MacDonald, 1976. For one homeowner's case against the company, see Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Records of the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, C4455, John Allan MacDonnell vs. Dominion Coal Company Ltd.

"The Town Councils have done very well in this regard. It is the County Councils that have not."<sup>29</sup>

Basic services in the incorporated towns were superior, as large capital expenditures were undertaken by the towns during the expansionist years and the services were often maintained by repairs. By the 1920s, however, existing services in the coal towns had become inadequate and the councils were besieged by complaints. In attempting to improve services, the town councils experienced considerable frustration. The problems of divided authority appeared endless. When a delegation of residents from New Aberdeen demanded repairs to a road in their neighbourhood, the company claimed the street belonged to the town, and the town insisted the street belonged to the company. Similarly, in 1924 the Town of Glace Bay, concerned by the drain on its water system, conducted an inventory of water taps and discovered the company was connecting houses to the town water lines without authorization.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike municipal reformers in many urban centres, the labour councillors showed little interest in the principle of municipal operation of services. They believed that in the single-industry town responsibility for some basic services should be assumed by the principal employer. As a result, they sought greater integration of the existing town and company utilities. In Glace Bay and Sydney Mines the towns failed to win company support for plans to enlarge the water systems; as a result there were no major improvements in water services in the 1920s. In the case of power supplies, there was a revealing contrast in the policies pursued by councillors in Glace Bay where the labourites were dominant and by councillors in Sydney Mines where the middle-class councillors were strongest. In Glace Bay the town had owned a small electric power plant since 1902. Rather than expand this operation, in the 1920s the town arranged to buy additional power from the colliery power plants. Full integration of the system was achieved when Dominion Coal built a large new power station in 1930. In Sydney Mines, however, the town council attempted to replace an obsolete private utility with a new municipal power plant. This plan was blocked by the provincial legislature, which insisted the town must first purchase the existing utility. Ultimately the local system was absorbed by the Boston-based utility, the Cape Breton Electric Company.<sup>31</sup>

The situation in New Waterford was less complex but equally troublesome. Here the Dominion Coal Company supplied water and power for town and collieries alike. This arrangement spared the town large capital expenditures, but caused other difficulties. As the company insisted the utilities must operate on a strict profit-making basis, the town often

<sup>29</sup> *Sydney Post*, 4 February 1920; NOVA SCOTIA, *Royal Commission respecting the Coal Mines of the Province* [Duncan Commission], "Minutes of Evidence" (typescript held at Public Archives of Nova Scotia), pp. 1236-45, 1433-45.

<sup>30</sup> GBM, 12 March 1920, 11 September 1924.

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see FRANK, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners", pp. 178-84.

failed to persuade the company to extend services.<sup>32</sup> And during the strikes in 1922 and 1925 the shutdown of the Waterford Lake power plant suspended light and water services not only for the collieries, but also for the entire town. Finally, the company's control of services in New Waterford precipitated the tragic climax of the industrial conflict: in June 1925 the struggle for control of the Waterford Lake power plant erupted in a bloody confrontation between the coal miners and the company police. This episode resulted in the death of one coal miner and proved a turning point in the long strike.

### III

During the 1920s a close connection prevailed between local government and the industrial conflict which culminated in the strikes of the years 1922-25. The town councils frequently intervened in the conflict and actively assisted the coal miners in their struggle against the wage-cutting British Empire Steel Corporation. In 1922 Mayor James Ling of New Waterford served as the union representative on a conciliation board and his minority report reflected the union's views. In March 1922 Mayor Morrison of Glace Bay organized a delegation of civic leaders to take the coal miners' case to Ottawa.<sup>33</sup> Following the appointment of a royal commission on the steel strike of 1923, the Glace Bay and Sydney Mines councils sought to have the enquiry extended to the problems of the coal industry as well.<sup>34</sup> In 1922 and 1926 the Glace Bay council petitioned for the parole of men jailed as a result of raids on the coal company stores.<sup>35</sup> In 1924 all three towns petitioned the federal government for the release of J. B. McLachlan, the imprisoned union leader; on his release the Glace Bay council ordered the flag flown at the town hall to welcome his return.<sup>36</sup> During the hard winters of unemployment and distress in the coalfields in the 1920s, the town councils allocated thousands of dollars for food, clothing and fuel; in the strikes the towns supported the work of local relief committees. In 1926 Glace Bay issued \$8,000 worth of bonds for relief purposes, and as the information in Table 4 shows, all the towns sharply increased their spending on charities and relief during the 1920s.

During the 1925 strike the town councils continually sought to resolve the explosive situation. When the strike began in March, the New Waterford council denounced the corporation for "abruptly breaking off negotiations" and "arbitrarily locking out its employees"; the council appealed to the provincial and federal governments to help relieve distress and to bring pressure on the corporation to reach a settlement. The Glace Bay council addressed a similar resolution to Nova Scotia Premier E. H. Armstrong stating that "the Town has reached the limit of its financial

<sup>32</sup> NWM, 1 May, 17 July 1923.

<sup>33</sup> *Labour Gazette*, XXII (February 1922), pp. 142-81; GBM, 20 March 1922.

<sup>34</sup> SMM, 27 November 1923; GBM, 26 September, 17 October 1923.

<sup>35</sup> GBM, 10 May 1922, 23 June 1926.

<sup>36</sup> SMM, 11 January 1924; NWM, 15 January 1924; GBM, 17 January, 5 March 1924.

Table 4. — SUPPORT OF THE POOR AND OTHER CHARITIES (\$).

Year	Dominion	Glace Bay	New Waterford	Sydney Mines
1917	156	7,230	932	473
1918	418	7,326	1,197	651
1919	62	7,950	820	543
1920	56	7,141	1,078	1,087
1921	113	8,415	994	1,740
1922	56	12,634	499	1,844
1923	81	9,637	655	2,134
1924	176	9,602	1,056	1,148
1925	—	—	—	—
1926	351	18,388	2,221	1,975

Source: NOVA SCOTIA, *Journals of the House of Assembly*, 1918-27.

ability to relieve distress". On the invitation of the New Waterford council, representatives from the four mining towns formed a joint committee to urge the government to assist in reaching a settlement of the strike. On 15 May a joint resolution was endorsed by all the town councils and this statement effectively articulated the common concern of the coal towns:

... conditions in the coal mining industry have been such as to create wide-spread poverty among the miners as well as among the merchants and other citizens dependent upon the miners ... rendering almost impossible the performance of normal municipal functions through lack of income, and bringing to the verge of starvation many of our citizens, and causing to leave the town many of our most valued citizens.

Each of the coal towns depended on the coal industry "for its very existence as an organized social unit"; unless there was a settlement of the industrial conflict, the resolution appealed, "disaster will inevitably ensue".<sup>37</sup>

Three times during the 1920s the Canadian armed forces arrived in the coal towns to do strike duty, but the British Empire Steel Corporation's appeals for military aid received no support from the town councils and only deepened divisions between corporation and community. On the first day of the 1922 strike, H. J. McCann, general manager of Dominion Coal, twice appealed to Mayor Morrison to call out troops under the provisions of the Militia Act. Morrison issued public statements denouncing the use of troops as "unfortunate and ill-advised, and totally unnecessary". The town council endorsed his actions, protested the use of troops, and repudiated the expenses. In New Waterford Mayor Ling rejected a similar request and the council stated "they did not consider there was any need of sending soldiers to the place". The refusal of the towns to endorse military action forced the company to turn to a county court judge for the necessary requisition.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> NWM, 17 March 1925; GBM, 6 March 1925; SMM, 14 April 1925; GBM, 15 May 1925; NWM, 15 May 1925.

<sup>38</sup> GBM, 23 August 1922; Public Archives of Canada, W. L. M. King Papers, D. W. Morrison to W. L. M. King, 17 August 1923. These and other protests helped achieve the

To ensure order in the coal towns during the strikes, however, the town councils on several occasions appointed large numbers of special police; these forces were drawn largely from the ranks of the veterans' association and the miners' union. In Glace Bay 250 special police were named in 1922 and 120 police in 1923, and similar forces were formed in New Waterford in 1922 and 1926.<sup>39</sup> Under the authority of the town police committees, the special police patrolled the towns and enforced temperance and orderly behaviour as never before. One former member of the special police in Glace Bay recalled: "All roads leading in and out of town were manned by this force day and night, and all cars entering town were searched for liquor. This, I am sure, prevented bloodshed in our town during the strikes of the 1920s."<sup>40</sup> For the coal towns, the arrival of troops was not only an affront to civic pride but also an assault on the civic purse. Under the Militia Act, the costs of transporting and maintaining the troops were charged to the municipality. In Glace Bay bills from the Militia Department were ignored and never admitted into the town's financial records. Upon the receipt of one such bill, a rhyming reply to the Prime Minister appeared on the front page of the *Maritime Labor Herald*. "Send the Bill to Besco", written by local poet Dawn Fraser, gave voice to community feelings:

Your bill for those toy soldiers was received, oh, Mr. King,  
 But does that few odd thousand cover everything  
 From the time of the invasion till the time they went away —  
 Is just three hundred thousand all we have to pay...  
 But it grieves us to inform you we're a little bit hard pressed,  
 And we have an empty feeling in the region of our vest...  
 So I fear this little item will have to wait a while;  
 But we hasten to assure you we will place your bill on file.  
 Ain't it something awful how long some bills will run?  
 I remain, yours most sincerely, Dan Willie Morrison.<sup>41</sup>

The nature of class conflict in the coal towns tended to unite most members of the community around the interests of the working-class population. Most local businesses were tiny ones: in Glace Bay more than half the businesses rated by R. G. Dun and Company in 1926 were worth less than \$2,000; ninety percent were worth less than \$10,000 and none exceeded \$50,000. Few businessmen could abandon the distressed towns, for their capital was committed and they had extended thousands of dollars in credit to their coal miner customers.<sup>42</sup> Concerned over the economic future of

amendment of the Militia Act in 1924. For an important discussion of this issue, see Don MACGILLIVRAY, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: the Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s", *Acadiensis*, III (Spring 1974): 45-64.

<sup>39</sup> GBM, 23 August 1922, 11 July 1923; NWM, 16 August 1922, 30 June 1925.

<sup>40</sup> *Cape Breton Post*, 2 February 1976.

<sup>41</sup> *Maritime Labor Herald*, 23 May 1924. The complete verse also appears in Dawn FRASER, *Echoes from Labor's War: Industrial Cape Breton in the 1920s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1976), pp. 80-1.

<sup>42</sup> Duncan Commission, "Minutes of Evidence", p. 720. Information on business size was compiled from R. G. DUN AND COMPANY, *The Mercantile Agency Reference Book for the Dominion of Canada* (July 1917), pp. 371-73; Dun's Reference Book (July 1926), pp. 404-5; the data for 1917 and 1926 are presented in tabular form in FRANK, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners", p. 137.



the towns, middle-class citizens directed their greatest hostility towards the corporation. As the town of Sydney Mines plunged into virtual bankruptcy, relations between company and community grew embittered. "This Company had its very fat years", former mayor Senator John McCormick told a public meeting, "it would be a breach of faith for these concerns to break faith with this and other towns."<sup>43</sup> In the 1925 strike citizens' committees in Glace Bay and Sydney Mines, composed of leading clergy and businessmen, supplemented the union's efforts to collect relief and promoted the resumption of negotiations between company and union.<sup>44</sup> In Glace Bay businessman Stuart McCawley published a popular pamphlet, *Standing the Gaff: The Soreness of the Soul of Cape Breton*. The pamphlet strongly attacked the management of Besco and supported the coal miners: "Every element in our community is behind the men. The miner, by his clean, decent stand has won the respect and confidence of all people."<sup>45</sup>

However, there were also differences in the views of the labour councillors and middle-class citizens. Ratepayers objected to increases in property taxes imposed by the town councils. In 1921 a proposal to disenfranchise poll-tax payers, who outnumbered the ratepayers, gained some attention in Glace Bay.<sup>46</sup> In 1927 Sydney Mines town clerk D. C. McDonald proposed a substantial property qualification for town councillors; vigorously attacked by Mayor Morrison of Glace Bay, this suggestion was rejected at the meetings of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities.<sup>47</sup> In 1925 differences also emerged over tactics for the settlement of the strike. By the third month of the strike the union appeared to be near defeat. At this stage many citizens hoped the coal miners would abandon their union and accept compulsory arbitration in order to end the dispute: "No decent union man wants to break up his union and swallow his hard fought for principals [*sic*]", wrote McCawley in the *Glace Bay Gazette*, "but a mighty lot of them are hoping for somebody to start something of that kind so there will be a clean-up."<sup>48</sup> These tensions appeared at the Glace Bay town council in the form of a resolution to apply for the use of compulsory arbitration under the province's new Industrial Peace Act. At first Mayor Morrison and the labour councillors were able to block discussion of the resolution. On 15 May, however, the debate was renewed. Visiting spokesmen from the union locals and "the Business portion of the citizens" were also heard in the debate. In the absence of one of the labour councillors, the controversial resolution was endorsed by a six to five vote.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>43</sup> SMM, 10 October 1921.

<sup>44</sup> Duncan Commission, "Minutes of Evidence", pp. 1754ff.

<sup>45</sup> MCCAWLEY, *Standing the Gaff*, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> *Sydney Post*, 17 March 1921.

<sup>47</sup> UNION OF NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPALITIES, *Proceedings, 1927* (Halifax: Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, 1927), pp. 91-92; UNION OF NOVA SCOTIA MUNICIPALITIES, *Proceedings, 1928* (Halifax: Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, 1928), pp. 15-16, 103-4.

<sup>48</sup> *Glace Bay Gazette*, 18 May 1925. The pamphlet was written somewhat earlier, for a notice appeared in the *Gazette*, 15 May 1925.

<sup>49</sup> GBM, 13, 15, 20 May 1925.

For their part, the coal companies left no doubt as to their attitude to the town councils during the 1920s. In Glace Bay, Dominion and New Waterford, town finances were thrown into chaos in 1925 when the coal company refused to continue the collection of poll-taxes through the company check-off; in Sydney Mines, where this method had not been used, the company refused to introduce it.<sup>50</sup> In the Fall of 1924 there were reports that the company planned to name candidates for the Glace Bay town council in the spring elections.<sup>51</sup> Most dramatically, in 1925 the *Besco Bulletin*, an official company publication, called for the virtual abolition of self-government in the coal towns. In most municipalities, the *Bulletin* noted, the coal companies paid "a very large proportion of the whole tax, and in none of them have the Companies any representation on the Councils". In Glace Bay the company's share of taxes was stated to be 49.0 percent, in New Waterford 68.9 percent, in Dominion 66.6 percent, in Sydney Mines 42.5 percent. The companies, the *Bulletin* warned, "cannot be expected to approve any plans or to consent to any expenditures in respect to which they have no voice. Provision should be made for the representation of the Companies in the Councils of all the municipalities in some fair proportion to their share of the taxes."<sup>52</sup> But this was a proposal framed in despair. In 1926 the corporation began to collapse and in 1930 the new Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation took control of the industry.

#### IV

From their origins in the nineteenth century, the Cape Breton coal towns owed their existence to the coal industry and the coal companies. But as the studies of Herbert Gutman and other historians have reminded us, economic power within the industrial community was not always matched by equal social and political power.<sup>53</sup> In the Cape Breton coal towns, the employers' authority did not remain unchallenged. In the 1920s the distinction between company and community emerged clearly in the transition from "company town" to "labour town".

The rise of the labour town in industrial Cape Breton strengthened the position of the coal miners in their community. By taking control of the town hall, the coal miners removed one local institution from the company's control. The coal miners also undercut the company's authority by challenging their employers on issues such as law enforcement, taxes,

<sup>50</sup> GBM, 14 October, 25 November 1925; NWM, 1 September, 1 November 1925; SMM, 12 November 1926.

<sup>51</sup> *Maritime Labor Herald*, 6 December 1924.

<sup>52</sup> *Besco Bulletin*, No. 10 (11 April 1925).

<sup>53</sup> H. G. GUTMAN, "The Workers' Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age", in *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal*, ed.: H. Wayne MORGAN (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963). See also: LEON FINK, "Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor in Local Politics, 1886-1896" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rochester University, 1977); D. J. WALKOWITZ, *Worker City, Company Town: Iron and Cotton-Worker Protest in Troy and Cohoes, New York, 1855-84* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978).

assessments, and services. In the course of the strikes, the coal miners turned the influence of local government against the company, rejecting appeals for military aid and furnishing assistance to the coal miners. The rise of the labour town also contributed to the growth of a long tradition of labour politics and social action in the coal towns. The coal towns have not prospered since the 1920s, but they have survived; ultimately the perseverance of the coal-mining community was rewarded with the achievement of public ownership in the coal industry in 1967.<sup>54</sup>

The history of the coal towns in the 1920s confirms the importance of understanding municipal reformers within the context of the prevailing social structure and class relations in the individual community.<sup>55</sup> The labour councillors of the 1920s had little in common with the better-known urban reformers of the era. The labour councillors saw themselves as part of a broader social movement in which the animating force was not civic patriotism but working-class solidarity. Because the coal miners believed in public ownership of the entire industry, they showed no interest in extending municipal ownership of company utilities. The timing of the emergence of the labour town was also notable. The coal miners did not seek and gain control of local government until after they had established effective trade unionism and collective bargaining in the coal industry. Determined to strengthen the labour cause, the coal miners used their votes to take control of a key community institution. Certainly many of the coal miners' achievements in local government in the 1920s were modest ones, and to this extent theirs was an experience in political frustration; the economic life of the coal towns continued to depend mainly on the fortunes of the industry and the controlling companies.<sup>56</sup>

The place of the single-industry town in Canadian working-class history has received little attention. The most influential study of single-industry towns in Canada concluded in 1971 that these were places with little community spirit and little interest in local government; unions were

<sup>54</sup> For insights into labour and politics in Glace Bay in the 1930s, see William J. WHITE, "Left Wing Politics and Community: A Study of Glace Bay, 1930-1940" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977). The arrival of public ownership is examined in Allan TUPPER, "Public Enterprise and Social Welfare: The Case of the Cape Breton Development Corporation", *Canadian Public Policy*, IV (Autumn 1978): 530-46.

<sup>55</sup> For studies of urban reform movements in Canada, see the essays in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, eds: G. A. STELTER and Alan ARTIBISE (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), and a special issue of the *Urban History Review* (October 1976). For a discussion of American studies, see David C. HAMMACK, "Problems in the Historical Study of Power in the Cities and Towns of the United States, 1800-1960", *American Historical Review*, 83 (April 1978): 323-49.

<sup>56</sup> Aneurin Bevan recalled his pursuit of power in the Welsh coal towns: "'The place to get to is the Council. That's where the power is.' ... I discovered when I got there that the power *had* been there, but it had just gone" (Michael FOOT, *Aneurin Bevan*, 2 vols (St. Albans: Paladin, 1975), I: 86-87). As urban reformers, labourites and socialists often followed the same limited programme of objectives as middle-class reformers. Sidney WEBB's *The London Programme* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1891) was little more than an elaboration of Joseph Chamberlain's "civic gospel" in Birmingham, and as the essays in Bruce M. STAVE, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1975), suggest, American municipal socialists rarely ventured beyond the limits of progressive reform.

“seldom militant” and residents passively accepted the rule of “impersonal forces outside their community”.<sup>57</sup> But this study lacked an historical dimension, and the description failed to encompass the experience of the Cape Breton coal towns. In one of his many insights into Canadian labour history, Clare Pentland has invited us to consider a somewhat different pattern: events in towns such as Lethbridge, Alberta and Kirkland Lake, Ontario played a significant part in the evolution of the national industrial relations system in Canada, and “the atmosphere of many company towns has been the atmosphere of permanent class war.”<sup>58</sup>

The concept of the labour town invites comparisons — comparisons within industries, between regions, and across time. The study of labour and politics in Canada has tended to focus on the national and provincial settings, with some attention to developments in the metropolitan centres. But Canadian workers may well have enjoyed greater political importance elsewhere. In industrial communities where workers made up a large majority of the population, the growth of unions often led workers to seek additional forms of power within their communities. The importance of this neglected theme in Canadian social history will become clear when a larger number of local studies are completed.<sup>59</sup>

### RÉSUMÉ.

*Cette étude attire l'attention sur une étape jusqu'ici négligée dans l'histoire de la ville à industrie unique au Canada, soit le remplacement de la « domination patronale » par la « domination ouvrière ». Vers la fin de la Première guerre mondiale, des élus ouvriers prirent le contrôle des administrations municipales dans les villes charbonnières du Cap Breton. Les conseils municipaux y défirent les compagnies minières sur maintes questions d'intérêt général et appuyèrent les ouvriers mineurs dans leurs revendications. La montée de ce pouvoir des travailleurs éroda celui des compagnies minières et contribua à l'établissement d'une concertation durable entre politique ouvrière et action communautaire dans les centres charbonniers du Cap Breton.*

<sup>57</sup> Rex LUCAS, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single-Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 96, 140. For additional views of the single-industry town in Canada, see KNIGHT, *Work Camps and Company Towns*, and G. A. STELTER, ed., “Canadian Resource Towns in History and Development”, special issue of *Plan Canada*, 18 (March 1978).

<sup>58</sup> H. C. PENTLAND, *A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Background of the Canadian System of Industrial Relations* (Ottawa: Task Force on Labour Relations, 1968), pp. 28-30.

<sup>59</sup> The labour town was not unique to Cape Breton: in the 1930s a “Workers’ Town Council” ruled Blairmore, Alberta; Allen SEAGER, “The Pass Strike of 1932”, *Alberta History*, XXV (Winter 1977): 9-11. The number of labour candidates reported in 1920 suggests ample scope for further study of this theme: 271 labour candidates ran for office in 44 municipalities; 111 candidates were elected, including mayors in Westville, Moncton, Sault Ste. Marie, Port Arthur and Fort William; *Tenth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada* (Ottawa: Department of Labour, 1921), pp. 54-57.