

# The Miners and the Mounties: The Royal North West Mounted Police and the 1906 Lethbridge Strike

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Article abstract

This essay explores the nature of the relationship between police and workers using the 1906 strike of Lethbridge coalminers as a case study. Following a discussion of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks it examines in detail the relationship between the Lethbridge strikers and the Mounted Police. This interaction was extremely complex with each party having an influence on the other. Consequently, no definitive conclusion can be drawn as to the interpretative debate between pluralist theory and class conflict theory insofar as police-striker relations are concerned.

# The Miners and the Mounties:

## The Royal North West Mounted Police and the 1906 Lethbridge Strike

William M. Baker

### I

ACCORDING TO JOHN SEWELL, Canadian policemen "are talked about as either heroes or bums, and not much in between."<sup>1</sup> Such a depiction hides more than it reveals, because few segments of Canadian society consistently hold to either side of the dichotomy. Indeed, nearly every Canadian has ambivalent views of the police depending, for instance, on whether the police are handing that citizen a speeding ticket or rousting drug dealers loitering around his or her kids' school. It is true, as Talbot *et al.* claim, that "there are probably very few countries in the world where ... citizens have a better relationship with their police than Canada."<sup>2</sup> What other

<sup>1</sup>J. Sewell, *Police: Urban Policing in Canada* (Toronto 1985), 14. The term "police" itself is not easily defined and thus, as D.H. Bayley has put it: "the boundaries of a history of the police are both ambiguous and arbitrary, depending on definitions of the word *police*" (Bayley, "Police: History," in S.H. Kadish, ed., *Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice* (New York 1983), 1120. As used in this paper the term refers to persons employed by the various levels of government and authorized by them to maintain order and enforce laws. Thus, the military is included, as well as more conventional policing forces. For other useful encyclopedia discussions of the term see M. Punch, "Police," in A. and J. Kuper, eds., *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (London 1985), 604-5; D.J. Bordua, "Police," in D.L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (n.c. 1968), vol. 12, 174-81; B. Smith, "Police," and W.H. Hamilton and C.C. Rodee, "Police Power," and H.B. Davis, "Policing, Industrial," all in E.R.A. Seligman and A. Johnson, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, (New York 1934), XII, 183-96; and C.D. Shearing and P.C. Stenning, "Police," and D. Forcese, "Policing," both in J.H. Marsh, ed., *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton 1985), III, 1439-41.

<sup>2</sup>C.K. Talbot, C.H.S. Jayewardene and T.J. Juliani, *Canada's Constables: The Historical Development of Policing in Canada* (Ottawa 1985), v.

William M. Baker, "The Miners and the Mounties: The Royal North West Mounted Police and the 1906 Lethbridge Strike," *Labour/Le Travail*, 27 (Spring 1991), 55-96.

country is symbolized in a positive and humane light by a police force as Canada is by the RCMP?<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Canadians share with other peoples a deep-rooted, traditional fear of a body which has been granted a monopoly of the legal use of force against its citizens and have seen or heard of the abuse of that power.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps this ambivalence is shared by academic historians in Canada, but despite the obvious importance of the police, historical assessment of Canadian society have devoted little attention to police history. Beyond the few studies of the Mounties, such as those by Macleod and Walden, academic historians have left police history a virtual *tabula rasa* in Canada. Indeed, the only reasonably comprehensive history of Canadian policing was prepared by three members of the University of Ottawa's Department of Criminology.<sup>5</sup>

The disinterest of Canadian historians in the police has meant that leading journals have carried few articles or reviews related to police history. Readers of *Canadian Historical Review*, *Labour/Le Travail*, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, *Urban History Review* and *Acadiensis* from 1981 to 1989 were presented with but three articles and one research note devoted wholly or significantly to Canadian police history, most by the same author.<sup>6</sup> Of a sample of seven books on police

<sup>3</sup>On the positive image of the Mounties, see K. Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth*, (Toronto 1982); R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement 1873-1905* (Toronto 1976), ix; and C. Betke, "Pioneers and Police on the Canadian Prairies, 1885-1914," *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers*, (1980), 9-32.

<sup>4</sup>Many sources comment on the fear aroused at the time of the introduction of police forces and discuss the gradual reduction of this fear, but given the constant and frightening examples of the use of policing forces throughout the world, it is doubtful that fear of the police can ever be completely eradicated from the public consciousness. See T.A. Critchley, *A History of Police in England and Wales 900-1966* (London 1967), xiii; H. Pelling, *Popular Politics and Society in Late Victorian Britain* (London 1968), 69; J.H. Skolnick, *Justice Without Order: Law Enforcement in Democratic Society* (New York 1966), 1; Walden, *Visions of Order*, 33 and 77; R.D. Storch, "The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850-1880," *Journal of Social History*, 9 (1975-6), 481.

<sup>5</sup>Talbot *et al.*, *Canada's Constables*. At first blush this work, which is based on the authors' *The Thin Blue Line: An Historical Perspective of Policing in Canada* (Ottawa 1983), appears to be an apologia. The authors received a contract from the Canadian Police College and the introduction to the earlier work contains the following: "it is to these early unsung heroes that this book is dedicated, for it is to their credit that the thin blue line still holds quite magnificently today" (v). Yet the content of the book is by no means uncritical of the police. Perhaps the preface was mere window-dressing to pacify the sponsor.

<sup>6</sup>Greg Marquis seems to be one of the few Canadian historians actively pursuing the topic. His publications demonstrate not only an awareness of police historiography outside the country but also a fine sensitivity to the nuances of documentary evidence. See G. Marquis, "'A Machine of Oppression Under the Guise of the Law': The Saint John Police Establishment," *Acadiensis*, 16 (1986), 58-77; G. Marquis, "Working Men in Uniform: The Early Twentieth-century Toronto Police," *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 40 (1987), 259-77; and

history which one might have expected to see evaluated in the above journals only two were reviewed.<sup>7</sup> Not one of these journals reviewed Talbot *et al.*, *Canada's Constables*.<sup>8</sup> Equally remarkable is the fact that not even *Labour/Le Travail* reviewed Haring's blockbuster, *Policing A Class Society*.

Scholars approaching the history of relations of police and strikers from a police-centred focus have presented a dualistic interpretation of the police. Desmond Morton's influential 1970 *CHR* article<sup>9</sup> established that on numerous occasions the militia had been used for strike duty, and that "the reality of class conflict

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G. Marquis, "The Contours of Canadian Urban Justice, 1830-1875," *Urban History Review*, 15 (1987), 269-73. The other articles were T. Thorner and N.B. Watson, "Keeper of the King's Peace: Colonel G.E. Sanders and the Calgary Police Magistrate's Court, 1911-1932," *Urban History Review*, 12 (1984), 45-55. Additional recent publications in other sources of direct relevance to Canadian police history are N. Rogers, "Serving Toronto the Good: The development of the city police force 1834-84," in V. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto 1984), 116-40; T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto 1985), 214-29; P. Craven, "Law and Ideology: The Toronto Police Court, 1850-1880," in D. Flaherty, ed., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law, Volume II* (Toronto 1982), 249-307; G. Marquis, "Police Unionism in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto," *Ontario History*, 81 (1989), 109-28; B. Rawling, "Technology and Innovation in the Toronto Police Force, 1875-1925," *Ontario History*, 81 (1989), 53-71; and G. Homel, "Denison's Court: Criminal Justice and the Police Court in Toronto, 1877-1921," *Ontario History*, 73 (1981), 171-84. The focus of many of these articles is on police courts rather than on the man on the beat.

<sup>7</sup>The seven books were all published between 1981 and 1985. Six were relatively prominent, foreign publications: V. Bailey, ed., *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth Century Britain* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1981); E. Monkkonen, *Police in Urban America, 1860-1920* (New York 1981); S.L. Haring, *Policing a Class Society: The Experience of American Cities, 1865-1915* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1983); C. Emsley, *Policing and Its Context: 1750-1870* (London 1983); C. Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (London 1984); R. Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes: 1839-1985* (London 1985). The seventh was Talbot *et al.*, *Canada's Constables* or their earlier *Thin Blue Line*. Of the seven, Steedman was reviewed by B. Curtis in *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 35 (1985), 193-4 and Geary was reviewed by R. Warburton in *L/LT*, 21 (1988), 293-4. This trend seems to be continuing for, to date, none of the journals has reviewed J. Morgan, *Conflict and Order: The Police and Labour Disputes in England and Wales, 1900-1939* (Oxford 1987). Neither the *CHR* nor *Acadiensis* has a regular review section of non-Canadian books, but both have periodic historiographical or review essays. J. Weaver's review essay "Staying on the Straight and Narrow: Recent Books on Violence, Crime, and the Question of Order in Nineteenth-century Urban America," *L/LT*, 8/9 (1981/82), 296-308, included an evaluation of two books concerning police history.

<sup>8</sup>Sewell's *Police* was reviewed by J. Taylor in *Urban History Review*, 14 (1985), 213-4 but in none of the other periodicals.

<sup>9</sup>D. Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order," *CHR*, 51 (1970), 407-25.

in Canadian society emerges from the study of aid to the civil power." (424) On the other hand, Morton's account notes that "dramatic incidents of labour strife in the United States had only the palest reflection in Canada," and that the "most violent clash between militiamen and strikers which took place at Valleyfield in October 1900" was really a pretty mild affair. (421) Even at the time of publication, Morton's statistics were problematical since they were simply raw totals of militia involvement, giving no sense of how usual it was for the militia to be involved in strikes, and providing no comparison with the frequency for other countries.<sup>10</sup> In summary, there was an interpretive ambiguity in Morton's article: on the one hand troops had been used to suppress strike agitation, an activity which served the interests of employers; on the other hand this was to be expected at the time and the degree of repression involved was minor.<sup>11</sup>

This dualism is evident in the writing of other police historians. In his study of the Mounted Police to 1905, Rod Macleod argued that in most industrial disputes the police were "effectively neutral," operating as "honest brokers to the general satisfaction of both sides and as often took the part of labour as of management." Yet Macleod also asserted that the laws the police were expected to enforce "heavily favoured management and barely permitted unions to exist."<sup>12</sup> S.W.

<sup>10</sup>It is unclear whether or not the strike involvement of policing authorities in Canada has been comparatively high. The 11 cases of military involvement during 1895-1904 and 17 during 1905-14 seem approximately equivalent in relative terms to the estimate of 118 cases of National Guard intervention in labour conflicts in the U.S.A. during 1885-95 cited in J.M. Cooper, *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport, Conn. 1980), 13. On the other hand, the British military was only called out 24 times in the 39 years before 1908 (Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 17) whereas in Canada during the same period there were at least 32 military interventions in industrial disputes (J.J.B. Pariseau, *Disorders, Strikes and Disasters: Military Aid to the Civil Power in Canada, 1867-1933* (Ottawa 1973), 78-84).

<sup>11</sup>Morton's and Terry Copp's continued involvement in both labour and military history is unusual amongst Canadian historians. Their text, *Working People: An Illustrated History of Canadian Labour* (Ottawa 1980), provides somewhat greater recognition of the role of the police than does B.D. Palmer's *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983). In the index to the Morton and Copp book there are 28 entries under "military forces in aid of the civil power," "police" (excluding "police unions") and "Royal Canadian Mounted Police." Palmer's index has six entries under the RCMP but omits the other categories. A non-academic article by Morton helps to clarify his attitude towards the police. In it he declares: "the basis of effective policing...is the sense that police men and women are our neighbors, sharing our values and our confidence. They are not an army of occupation...Supporting our local police is more than a bumper-sticker slogan...It should start with...human contact...It should continue with a little hard reflection on the framework of law and punishment in which police officers carry out our responsibilities." The police, therefore, are 'us' — all of us — not 'them.' See D. Morton's column in *The United Church Observer*, New Series, 4, 8 (February 1986), 23.

<sup>12</sup>Macleod, *NWMP*, 157.

Horrall's article on the Mounties and 1919 demonstrates the covert infiltration and surveillance of labour organizations by the RNWMP, but also suggests that the police actually attempted to cool off the Red Scare hysteria rampant in Ottawa.<sup>13</sup> The survey of Canadian police history by Talbot *et al.*<sup>14</sup> evinces another type of duality. For these authors, local police forces were usually pro-labour, whereas the Mounties were usually anti-labour.<sup>15</sup> In general, then, the image emerging from the works of historians of Canadian policing agencies is that they occupied an ambiguous position in their relationship with labour.<sup>16</sup>

Recent pronouncements by leading Canadian labour and working-class historians contain few qualifications of the role played by the physical arm of the state. In his review of Craven's *An Impartial Umpire: Industrial Relations and the Canadian State, 1900-1911*, Ian McKay castigated the author for ignoring the actual or implied state violence which underlay the government's industrial policy.<sup>17</sup> Elsewhere, McKay proclaimed that "Whatever William Lyon Mackenzie King's impenetrable doctrines of conciliation amounted to, they barely concealed the crucial fact that, in defence of capitalism, the state was prepared to kill."<sup>18</sup> In their extremely valuable statistical study of Canadian strikes, Cruikshank and Kealey also have noted the importance of the state's "enthusiastic recourse to

<sup>13</sup>S.W. Horrall, "The Royal North-West Mounted Police and Labour Unrest in Western Canada, 1919," *CHR*, 61 (1980), 169-90.

<sup>14</sup>Talbot *et al.*, *Canada's Constables*, 63-4, 116-21, 130-2, 267 and 280-1.

<sup>15</sup>The phenomenon of local police being ineffective as an anti-strike force has been noted in both Britain and the United States. In both countries this ineffectiveness has been considered as an important contributor to the use of external policing forces and of centralized authority over policing in strikes. See Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, 148-228; B.C. Johnson, "Taking Care of Labour: The Police in American Politics," *Theory and Society*, 3 (1976), 89-117; H. Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth-Century American Industrial Cities: Paterson, New Jersey: A Case Study" and "Two Lockouts in Pennsylvania, 1873-1874," both in his *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York 1977), 234-60 and 321-43. Harring argues that the examples cited by Johnson and Gutman were anomalies, largely inapplicable after the 1870s (see Harring, *Policing a Class Society*, 102-6). In the Canadian context, Sewell maintains that in 5 of the 6 cases dealt with in I. Abella, ed., *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949* (Toronto 1974), local police sided with strikers (see Sewell, *Police*, 223).

<sup>16</sup>The ambiguity is most explicitly examined in the studies by Marquis as cited earlier. An exception to this interpretation is L. and C. Brown, *An Unauthorized History of the RCMP* (Toronto 1973). They suggest that the Mounties were an absolutely reliable anti-strike force. A brief historiographical account of relations between the RCMP and labour is found in H.C. Klassen, "The Mounties and the Historians," in H.A. Dempsey, ed., *Men in Scarlet* (Calgary 1974), 183-5.

<sup>17</sup>*LILT*, 8/9 (1981/82), 369-70.

<sup>18</sup>I. McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," *Acadiensis*, 13 (1983), 43. The policing force involved was the militia. McKay's source is, of course, Morton's *CHR* article.

coercion." They further have asserted that "Workers remained aware of the state's potential for violence and behaved in a generally disciplined fashion."<sup>19</sup>

Such statements are useful in flagging the importance of the police in industrial disputes, but are insufficiently rigorous in their historical analysis. In his review of Craven, for example, McKay asks: "How can one write the history of industrial relations and the Canadian State and not once refer to the fact that from 1895 to 1904 the militia were called out 11 times (71 days) and no less than 17 times (1232 days) from 1905 to 1914?" What McKay does not note is that the militia were called out in but one of a hundred strikes and that there was no increase during the latter interval in the percentage of times the militia were called out compared to the number of strikes (1.07 per cent for 1895-1904; 1.06 per cent for 1905-1914).<sup>20</sup> There was, however, a significant increase in the days served by the militia in the latter period even when the increase of workers' strike-days is taken into account.<sup>21</sup> As to the state being prepared to kill in defense of capitalism, one might ask what state, of any sort, has not been prepared to kill in defence of what it considered to be its vital interests. But that would merely be saying that other states are just as bad; in fact, the record of many other states and their policing forces have been considerably worse. The Canadian militia was, evidently, responsible for the death of one striker between 1867 and 1914,<sup>22</sup> and four other persons were killed in strike-related violence during this period.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, the period 1890 to 1909 saw more than 300 strike-related deaths in the United States;<sup>24</sup> 20 deaths and 600 injuries occurred in a single coal strike in France in 1907-08;<sup>25</sup> and two persons were killed by troops and over 200 injured in strike-related violence in Liverpool

<sup>19</sup>D. Cruikshank and G.S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *L/LT*, 20 (1987), 96, 98-100.

<sup>20</sup>Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes," 134. The estimates (98) of percentage of strikes involving military intervention is marginally lower.

<sup>21</sup>The number of striker-days increased something like four-fold (estimated from Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes," 86; and McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes," 16) whereas the number of days of militia involvement increased seventeen-fold.

<sup>22</sup>D. Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power," 416, 421.

<sup>23</sup>Three of the four were strikers, killed, it appears, by company guards. The other was a company guard (see S.M. Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* (Ottawa 1968), 94-5 and 112). On a statistical basis, therefore, one might say that strikers were as prepared as the state to kill in defence of vital interests. Employers were even more prepared. The statistics are derived from J.M. Torrance, *Public Violence in Canada, 1867-1982* (Kingston 1986), 243. It seems inconceivable that these figures are complete but they do indicate a low level of lethal strike violence. It appears that another 13 persons died in strike-related violence between 1914 and 1984 (see Torrance, *Public Violence*, 243-4).

<sup>24</sup>Harring, *Policing a Class Society*, 101, 269-70.

<sup>25</sup>Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, 280.

during 13-15 August 1911.<sup>26</sup> Canada may not have been a "peaceable kingdom," but in comparative terms it witnessed but a modest degree of civic bloodshed;<sup>27</sup> not an insignificant fact since it stands to reason that there is a correlation between a low level of social violence and a low level of police violence.

The Cruikshank and Kealey assertion that workers, being aware of possible state violence, kept themselves on a tight leash is dubious, since it implies that higher levels of collective violence in other countries were the result of a weaker threat of state repression. It suggests that workers were not naturally peaceable, and that it was the threat of repression that kept the workers in line. It is often thought, however, that police intervention promotes outbreaks of violence. Indeed, this seems to be the implication of a statement later in their article that "collective violence occurred in 36 of the 46 cases of military intervention" ([100] — note that making the statement in reverse order presents a very different causal analysis). And what of the state's "enthusiastic recourse of coercion?" According to Cruikshank and Kealey, the percentage of total strikes with military intervention between 1891 and 1940 averaged 0.6 per cent over the five decades, never exceeding 1 per cent in any decade (98). The statistics are not conclusive, since they include instances when the military was put on alert but was not deployed. More importantly, however, they do not include intervention by other policing agencies, whether national, provincial, or municipal. The frequency of the utilization of the physical arm of the state in strikes is, therefore, considerably understated, but by how much is anyone's guess at this point. Such statistics will only become meaningful, however, when one has comparative data. How frequent was police involvement in strikes in the USA, Great Britain, and so forth? How prevalent was police involvement in other large social gatherings such as political rallies, rock concerts and hockey games?<sup>28</sup> It may be that in Canada the state enthusiastically resorted to coercion in strike situations but the case cannot be made on the basis of the data presented, namely that the military were involved in but one strike out of one hundred.

These examples are not meant to denigrate the work of individuals who are, after all, amongst the most prolific and insightful of Canadian historians. Rather,

<sup>26</sup>E. Wigham, *Strikes and the Government 1893-1974* (London 1976), 25. Troops opened fire again on August 17 at Llanelly in Wales killing two more persons (see *ibid.*, 26). Infamous "Bloody Saturday" of the Winnipeg General Strike saw one killed and 30 injured (see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 176) while in the Regina Riot one policeman was killed and "scores of trekkers, citizens and policemen" were injured (see L. Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Montreal 1987), 195).

<sup>27</sup>Torrance, *Public Violence*, 57-66.

<sup>28</sup>As soon as this question is asked it becomes apparent that the mere presence of policing authorities in strike situations is not necessarily very instructive. It is interesting that despite a strike of more than 80,000 miners in the West Riding of Yorkshire in 1893 some 259 constables, nearly a quarter of the West Riding force, were sent to patrol the Doncaster Races (see Geary, *Policing Industrial Disputes*, 7 and 17).



they demonstrate how easily taken for granted and easily dismissed are the police even by sensitive and sophisticated historians of Canadian labour. They, at least, pay some attention to the police and recognize their significance. Few other Canadian labour historians even bother with the police. Perhaps, however, this omission is an important statement of interpretation, for in leaving out the police, such historians are, in effect, saying that state violence was not much of a factor in Canada labour history.<sup>29</sup> While Canadian historians have paid scant attention to police/labour relations, outside the country it seems to be a burgeoning field, especially in Britain and the United States, the two countries with the greatest influence on Canadian policing.<sup>30</sup> The literature being produced is broad both in terms of coverage and approach, and is susceptible of categorization in a variety of ways. For purposes of examining police/labour relations, however, a rather crude distinction can be made between two conceptual frameworks. As M. Punch puts it: "Theories on the police differ widely: a Marxist would see them as pawns of ruling-class hegemony aimed at oppressing the working class, whereas a functionalist might emphasize the integrative role they play in promoting social solidarity."<sup>31</sup> The functionalist or pluralist perspective on the police is seldom articulated with much clarity or analytical rigour, being more an unstated premise,<sup>32</sup> but in essence this view considers that police serve society as a whole and that police enforcement of the law and maintenance of order is, on the whole, beneficial. This conceptual framework does not necessarily lead to an unsophisticated or uncritical examination of the police. The pluralist approach need not entail a belief that all

<sup>29</sup>It appears that labour historians in other countries also have given little attention to the police. For example, Morgan, *Conflict and Order*, 7, maintains that historians of British workers have dismissed the police as "a monolithic class enemy" or as "an irrelevance." If true, this seems curious since the nature and operation of policing forces is surely an important mechanism for evaluating a society.

<sup>30</sup>Useful entry points to the literature are the bibliographies in Morgan, *Conflict and Order*; and Haring, *Policing a Class Society*. Neither British nor American police historians make much use of the historiography of the other country. For example, Morgan lists neither Haring's book nor his earlier articles; Haring does not include two significant studies by R.D. Storch ("The Plague of Blue Locusts: Police Reform and Popular Resistance in Northern England, 1840-1857," *International Review of Social History*, 20(1975), 61-90; and "The Policeman as Domestic Missionary: Urban Discipline and Popular Culture in Northern England, 1850-1880," *Journal of Social History*, 9 (1975-6), 481-509).

<sup>31</sup>Punch, "Police," 605. Some analysts draw further sharp distinctions within each camp: on the one hand between functionalism and pluralism, with the latter being further divided into the "labelling perspective" and "conflict theory"; on the other hand, within the Marxist perspective, between instrumentalist and structuralist approaches. See S. Brickley and E. Comack, eds., *The Social Basis of Law in Canada* (Toronto 1986), 15-21.

<sup>32</sup>Though not specifically addressing the role of police, a useful discussion of the liberal pluralist view of the state is presented in R.A. Dahl, *Pluralist Democracy in the United States: Conflict and Consent* (Chicago 1967).

social groups have an equal or just share of power or that social change will occur without conflict between competing groups. In the realm of police-labour relations, for example, many of the works in this genre, which include the bulk of Canadian police historiography, are highly critical of the police. Nevertheless, the perspective is fundamentally optimistic, maintaining that abuses of police power can be overcome by the vigilance of citizens in maintaining and developing their civil rights and their control over the police.

The second conceptual framework views the police as agents not of society as a whole but of the capitalist class. Police are the physical force which promotes and secures the conditions favourable for the accumulation of capital, particularly in keeping the working class under control. Again, this perspective need not lead to unsophisticated or even ungracious evaluations of the police. Practitioners of this type of police history usually acknowledge that in a democratic society the police are partially limited in their powers of repression because of the necessity to maintain some semblance of the legitimacy of the system. Nevertheless, the class-conflict approach is fundamentally antagonistic to the police and views the "law and order" enforced by the police as class-biased tools of domination.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond conceptual frameworks, Anglo-American police historiography, taken as a whole, demonstrates that the nature, role, activities and characteristics of police forces have differed greatly from one another depending on location, time-period and circumstances. For example, a two-person police force in a rural area necessarily carried out its duties in a different manner than a large metropolitan force; indeed, even their duties differed markedly. In the 1970s, police were more technologically-sophisticated and more attuned to a bureaucratic ideal than they were a century before. Police in a society with a low level of lethal personal violence are likely to behave differently than those in a violence-prone society. Police forces also vary greatly in their degree of affinity with, and support from, the community or society in which they operate. Given these differences, and that police normally are agents of both service and repression, and given that even the term "law and order" is at times mutually exclusive, it is hardly surprising that there is no

<sup>33</sup>Dividing police historiography into two camps may be a useful heuristic device, but it glosses over many nuances and significant differences within each group. Within the pluralist perspective, for example, the range extends from conservatives to social democrats. Within the class-conflict perspective, a supposed example of a Marxist interpretation has argued that the police sided with the US working class (see Johnson, "Taking Care of Labour"). However, Haring, *Policing a Class Society*, 261-2, asserts that Johnson's work not only is severely deficient but also is definitely not a Marxist work. No less a figure than E.P. Thompson has argued that the rule of law was better than the rule of no law, that law could bind the rulers as well as the ruled, and that the ruled could, on occasion, use the law as a tool against the ruling class. See E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: the Origin of the Black Act* (London 1975), 258-69.

consensus among academics or the public on the police.<sup>34</sup> There is none because there is not, nor ever will be, a definitive explanation of the nature and function of

<sup>34</sup>These themes are discussed in many of the works already cited. In addition, from the large volume of scholarly works on the subject, the following items have been found useful in comprehending the range of interpretations of policing and its history: G.E. Berkley, *The Democratic Policeman* (Boston 1969); R.S. Bunyard, *Police: Organization and Command* (Plymouth, UK 1978); M.E. Cain, *Society and the Policeman's Role* (London 1973); I.A. Cameron, *Crime and Repression in the Auvergne and the Guyenne 1720-1790* (New York 1981); Centre for Research on Criminal Justice, *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An analysis of the US police* (Berkeley 1977); R.C. Cobb, *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest 1789-1820* (Oxford 1970); R. Lane, *Policing the City: Boston 1822-1885* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967); P.K. Manning, *Police Work: The Social Organization of Policing* (Cambridge, Mass. 1977); J.F. Richardson, *The New York Police, Colonial Times to 1901* (New York 1970); R. Sykes and E. Brent, *Policing: A Social Behaviorist Perspective* (New Brunswick, N.J. 1983); S. Walker, *A Critical History of Police Reform: The Emergence of Professionalism* (Lexington, Mass. 1977); S. Walker, *Popular Justice: A History of American Criminal Justice* (New York 1980); D. Philips, "'A Just Measure of Crime, Authority, Hunters and Blue Locusts': The 'Revisionist' Social History of Crime and the Law in Britain, 1780-1850," and S. Spitzer, "The Rationalization of Crime Control in Capitalist Society," both in S. Cohen and A. Scull, eds., *Social Control and the State: Historical and Comparative Essays* (Oxford 1983), 50-74 and 312-33; D. Humphries and D.F. Greenberg, "The Dialectics of Crime Control," and S.L. Harring, "Policing a Class Society: The Expansion of the Urban Police in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," and S. Spitzer, "The Political Economy of Policing," all in D.F. Greenberg, ed., *Crime and Capitalism: Readings in Marxist Criminology* (Palo Alto 1981), 209-54, 292-313 and 314-40; D.H. Bayley, "The Police and Political Development in Europe," in C. Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton 1975), 328-79; S. Cohen, "Policing the Working-Class City," in B. Fine, et al., eds., *Capitalism and the Rule of Law: From Deviancy Theory to Marxism* (London 1979), 118-36; H. Hahn, "The Public and the Police: A Theoretical Perspective," in H. Hahn, ed., *Police in Urban Society* (Beverly Hills 1971), 9-33; R. Liebman and M. Polen, "Perspectives on Policing in Nineteenth-Century America," *Social Science History*, 2 (1978), 346-60; E. Monkkonen, "Toward a Dynamic Theory of Crime and the Police: A Criminal Justice System Perspective," *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 10 (1977), 157-65; E. Monkkonen, "From Cop History to Social History; The Significance of the Police in American History," *Journal of Social History*, 15 (1982), 575-91; C.D. Robinson, "Ideology as History: A Look at the Way Some English Police Historians Look at the Police," *Police Studies*, 2 (1979), 35-49; A. Silver, "The Demand for Order in Civil Society: A Review of Some Themes in the History of Urban Crime, Police and Riot," in D.J. Bordua, ed., *The Police: Six Sociological Essays* (New York 1967) 1-24; J.H. Skolnick, "Professional Police in a Free Society," in J.T. Curran, et al., eds., *Police and Law Enforcement 1972* (New York 1973), 61-76; S. Spitzer and A. Scull, "Privatization and Capitalist Development: The Case of the Private Police," *Social Problems*, 25 (1977), 18-29; S. Spitzer and A. Scull, "Social Control in Historical Perspective: From Private to Public Responses to Crime," in D.F. Greenberg, ed., *Corrections and Punishment* (Beverly Hills

police forces. In his favourable review of Harring's book, John T. Cumbler concluded:

It is amazing considering the evidence available that anyone will argue with this work, but it is clear that despite the depth of his research and the strength of his analysis, there are those who will not accept the conclusions of this work. Their rejection will be ideological not historical.<sup>35</sup>

Equally, however, and despite the excellence of Harring's work and the enormous stimulation it provides, acceptance of his conclusions would be just as "ideological not historical" as rejection. The historical record does not provide such clear answers either to current analysts or to contemporary participants and observers of events. Certainly, at least, the record of the Mounted Police during the Lethbridge coalminers' strike of 1906 carried a mixed message, not least for the strikers themselves.

## II

THE LETHBRIDGE COALMINERS' STRIKE began in March 1906.<sup>36</sup> The recently-formed Local 574 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) District 18 had proposed a contract to the coal company which would have given the Lethbridge miners parity with their unionized brethren in the Crowsnest Pass. Parity meant increased pay, shorter hours, a grievance procedure, and union recognition. The company, in 1906 properly termed the Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company (AR&I) but more popularly known as the Galt company after its founder, Sir Alexander Tilloch Galt, and his son and AR&I president, Elliott

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1977), 265-86; and R. Swift, "Urban Policing in Early Victorian England, 1835-86: A Reappraisal," *History*, 73 (1988), 211-37.

<sup>35</sup>*Labor History*, 27, 1 (Winter 1985-6), 128. Cumbler was correct, of course, in believing that eminent police historians of a different ideological perspective would reject Harring's book out of hand. See, for example, Roger Lane's review in *Journal of American History*, 71 (1984-5), 650-1; and James Richardson's review in *American Historical Review*, 89 (1984), 1401. Wilbur Miller's review in *Journal of Social History*, 18 (1984-5), 490-1, is more evenhanded, and concludes that the book "is a must for historians and others interested in the impact of industrial capitalism on America." The present writer is in full agreement with this sentiment.

<sup>36</sup>Relevant secondary sources on the strike include Craven, 'An Impartial Umpire,' 264-9; A.A. den Otter, *Civilizing the West: The Galts and the Development of Western Canada* (Edmonton 1982), 282-304; Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 127-8; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 156-7; W.M. Baker, "The Miners and the Mediator: The 1906 Lethbridge Strike and Mackenzie King," *LJT*, 11 (1983), 89-117; C.J. McMillan, "Trade Unionism in District 18, 1900-1925: A Case Study," MBA Thesis, University of Alberta, 1969, 49-57; and A. Seager, "A Proletariat in Wild Rose Country: The Alberta Miners, 1905-1945," PhD Thesis, York University, 1982, 208-17.

Torrance Galt, declined to bargain with an organized body of men as had been its practice for two decades. Its key management personnel — A.M. Nanton of Winnipeg, managing director; P.L. Naismith, general manager; and W.D. Hardie, mine superintendent — refused to negotiate and started to fire miners who had joined the union. As a consequence virtually all the miners, more than 500 in total, walked out.

The nine-month strike that followed was a significant test of strength. For the UMWA it was an opportunity to expand its recently-established foothold in the Crowsnest Pass. Accordingly, it provided considerable financial, organizational, and logistical aid to the Lethbridge strikers. For the well-established, locally-powerful and economically-diverse AR&I, involved in land development, irrigation projects and railways as well as coal mining, it was an occasion to halt the unionization drive which, it was perceived, would limit management's freedom of action and control. Consequently, the company simply dug in its heels and adopted a stance of sheer intransigence.

Neither party was able to defeat the other. The company reopened the mine in late May but the more than 200 inexperienced men working by October were never able to come close to acceptable production targets. Still, management remained confident that in the long term the company would emerge victorious, and thus remained steadfast in refusing to negotiate. The strikers, for their part, had succeeded in maintaining unity despite ethno-religious differences among themselves and had severely limited the availability of skilled miners.

What brought things to a conclusion was the fact that the public interest was involved since the strike hurt the local economy, and eventually contributed to a serious shortage of home-heating fuel on the prairies during the severe winter of 1906-7. Therefore, various representatives of the so-called public became involved, including the federal labour department in the person of W.L. Mackenzie King.<sup>37</sup> It was King's intervention that brought about a form of negotiation and a settlement of the strike in early December. Indeed, the outcome of the strike could be termed a victory for the strikers. They won a significant pay increase, a grievance procedure, and the right to belong to the union. The settlement was not a signed agreement with the union but even that was accomplished half a year later.

Such a bald summary ignores an important dimension of the strike: the supposedly high level of violence and the heavy involvement of the RNWMP. There were, in fact, two so-called riots, a half-dozen occasions when large groups of strikers and their families harassed strikebreakers, various instances of assault, charges of obstructing police officers, at least one case of arson, and no fewer than 13 separate explosions. As for the police presence, at one point shortly after the strike began, the Mounties had 34 officers and men on strike duty, 48 Mounties on call in Regina and Fort Macleod (amounting to over 10 per cent of the total

<sup>37</sup>See Baker, "Miners and Mediator."

RNWMP force at the time),<sup>38</sup> — and had sworn in a dozen special policeman. Given the manpower shortage, and that the suppression of crimes of violence against persons and property was the top priority for the police,<sup>39</sup> the RNWMP commitment to the Lethbridge strike was enormous, and indicates the Mounties' sense of apprehension. In fact, however, little seriously harmful violence occurred during the strike. Moreover, one might have anticipated that violence and police involvement in the strike quickly would have brought matters to a head — most likely to the detriment of the strikers. Yet not only did the contest continue for months after the peak of both the violence and the police presence but also the strikers emerged triumphant at the end. On the face of it, at least, neither the violence nor the involvement of the RNWMP had harmed the strikers' cause. How and why had this occurred?

By 1906 the Mounties had been connected to the miners of Lethbridge for two decades. Indeed, the establishment of Division K (Lethbridge) owed much to the perceived need to be close by the "unruly" miners. Many of the day-to-day activities of the police related to the miners; the Mounties had also played a modest role in the industrial disputes of 1887, 1894, 1897, and 1903.<sup>40</sup> Even so, the rapid turnover of constables meant that few Mounties in 1906 had much experience either with Lethbridge miners or industrial conflict. Nor could they turn to their commander, J.O. Wilson, for expert guidance. He had joined the force in 1879 and had risen through the ranks because of his general competence. But he lacked experience with strikes, and had taken over the Lethbridge division only a month before the outbreak of the strike.<sup>41</sup>

No doubt there were strikers as recently arrived in Lethbridge as Wilson. Indeed, in that era the level of geographic mobility of the population throughout North America, certainly in Western Canadian cities, was high. Single, unattached miners were notorious for being on the move. Miners appearing before the Alberta Coal Commission of 1907, for example, had worked all over the world — Austria,

<sup>38</sup>Talbot *et al.*, *Canada's Constables*, 62-3.

<sup>39</sup>T. Thorne, "The Not So Peaceable Kingdom: A Study of Crime in Southern Alberta, 1874-1905," MA thesis, University of Calgary, 1975, 45.

<sup>40</sup>den Otter, *Civilizing the West*, 123 and 275-8; Glenbow Alberta Archives, R.B. Deane Papers, "Labour Troubles — A Lock-out of Miners"; and National Archives of Canada (NAC), RG18, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Papers (RCMP Papers), A1, vol. 91, file 148-94, Deane to Commissioner, 31 January, 2 and 28 February, 6, 9, 16, 30, and 31 March, and 30 April 1894, and vol. 94, file 285-94, E.T. Galt to L.W. Herchmer, 15 March 1894; RCMP Papers, B1, vol. 1392, file 127-1897, Deane to Commissioner, 31 August 1897, vol. 1401, file 237-1897, vol. 261, file 790-03, J.V. Begin to Commissioner, 24 October 1903, Galt to F. White, telegram, 21 October and 23 October 1903, White to A.B. Perry, telegram, 22 October 1903, White to Galt, telegram, 22 October 1903, and vol. 250, file 177-03, Begin to Commissioner, 2 November 1903.

<sup>41</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 96, file 413; vol. 249, file 131-03; and vol. 315, file 202-06, R. Belcher to Commissioner, 13 February 1906.

France, England, Wales, Nova Scotia, South Africa, Australia, Pennsylvania, Montana — before landing in Southern Alberta.<sup>42</sup> What is noteworthy about Lethbridge miners, however, is not their considerable transience but the degree of their persistence. Approximately half the 1906 Lethbridge miners had settled in the city or environs, had purchased a town lot, built a modest house, and established a family. A number, precisely how many is impossible to determine, also had acquired homesteads and worked their farms in the summer when the Galt mines usually closed.<sup>43</sup> Clearly, the range of opportunities for miners and their children in Lethbridge was much greater than in most mining communities, including agriculture, commercial, service, industrial, and even professional options.<sup>44</sup> Thus by 1906, many Lethbridge miners, had passed the sojourning stage as their years of local residence turned into decades.<sup>45</sup> In short, there were a number of 1906 strikers who were well-acquainted with the community, with the history of industrial strife in Lethbridge and elsewhere, and with the standards, practices, and laws of the country. Indeed, such persons probably had a much better sense of the police than vice versa.

Of the several concentrations of miners in Lethbridge, the most important was in Stafford Village ("Number Three") because it was adjacent to the mine. Its population, mainly miners and their families, contained a large proportion of non-Anglos. This community, named after a former mine manager,<sup>46</sup> was not part of the city proper<sup>47</sup> and so was not under Lethbridge town police jurisdiction.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Provincial Archives of Alberta (PAA), Alberta Royal Commission on the Coal Mining Industry, 1907, Minutes of Evidence.

<sup>43</sup>For example, Frank Sherman, President of UMWA District 18, took out a homestead near Taber, some 30 miles east of Lethbridge (*Lethbridge Herald*, 6 June 1907). A variety of sources, including Lethbridge assessment records and city directories, local histories such as West Lethbridge Book Society, *The Bend: A History of West Lethbridge* (Calgary 1982), and the *Cummins Rural Directory Maps for Alberta, 1923* (available at NAC) provide strong evidence that many miners and/or their families became involved in farming or *vice versa*.

<sup>44</sup>For example, by the 1920s the male descendents of Michael Vaselenak Sr., a Slovak miner who had come to Lethbridge in 1887, had been occupied as farmers, a merchant, a machinist, a teacher and a lawyer (see *The Bend*, 217-22; and Glenbow Alberta Archives, Acc. 5390 (Uncatalogued), John Vaselenak Papers).

<sup>45</sup>Some of the miners had been in the city for more than 15 years by 1906.

<sup>46</sup>On William Stafford, the first mine manager, later mine inspector for the Territorial government, and who in 1891 had been petitioned by 200 miners to run for mayor of Lethbridge, see den Otter, *Civilizing the West*, 191-3 and *passim*.

<sup>47</sup>Staffordville, as it was also known, emerged after Galt Mine No. 3 began production in 1892. This community was hived off from Lethbridge and possessed few of the amenities of the town. Moreover, its residents possessed no political rights in the municipality (nor did they pay Lethbridge taxes except for schools). Such exclusion was probably intentional and demonstrated that "foreign" miners were not really accepted as citizens. Stafford was not incorporated into Lethbridge until 1913 although its residents had long wanted annexation so that they could receive proper city services, such as water, and a political voice in

Stafford was within the RNWMP sphere of police authority. Its strategic location, just outside the entrance to the mine, meant that the village was both the scene of most of the disturbances that occurred during the strike, and where miners and Mounties came face to face.

### III

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE STRIKE Mounties and miners viewed each other with suspicion and apprehension. The gulf between the police and the strikers (especially that half termed "foreigners" — Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Italians, and other eastern Europeans) was enormous. To the police, the "foreign" miners of Lethbridge were a troublesome, violent, treacherous, drunken, uncivilized lot of brutes who lived "in a piggish sort of way" and could only be kept in line by the use of force.<sup>49</sup> For the Mounties, then, strike duty promised to be a disagreeable assignment.<sup>50</sup> Nor were the strikers looking forward to being associ-

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municipal affairs (see A. Johnston and A.A. den Otter, *Lethbridge: A Centennial History* (Lethbridge 1985), 88; and A. Johnston et al., *Lethbridge: Its Coal Industry* (Lethbridge 1989), 35). Interestingly, the mayor of Lethbridge at the time of Stafford's incorporation was W.D.L. Hardie, who had been mine manager during the 1906 strike.

<sup>48</sup>The Lethbridge police force consisted of but three men whose main function was to attempt to enforce municipal bylaws. Because the Mounted Police barracks were within the city, because the Mounties had provided municipal policing services in Lethbridge in the past, and because the Mounties were much more numerous and organized than the town policeman, the RNWMP were seen by townsfolk and the Mounties themselves as the real police force in Lethbridge [see den Otter, *Civilizing the West*; and J.H. Carpenter, *The Badge and the Blotter: A History of the Lethbridge Police* (Lethbridge 1975)]. During the 1906 strike itself, the city police played an insignificant role. Their presence was largely ignored by the Mounties as exemplified by Wilson's refusal to obey the order of the city police to get a license for his dog (Lethbridge Public Library, Police Daily Journals, vol. 5, 33, report of H.M. Parry, Chief Constable, 21 March 1906).

<sup>49</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 21, file 373-88, R.B. Deane to Commissioner, 1 July and 1 August 1888, and vol. 101, file 37-95, J.H. McIlfree to F. White, 4 January 1895, with extract from Deane's weekly report; *Lethbridge News*, 18 May 1906; and Deane Papers, "Labour troubles," 3.

<sup>50</sup>During the Lethbridge strike, at least four constables deserted, while three others "committed breaches of discipline and asked to be dismissed at the expiration of their punishment" because the men found police duty at the mine "most distasteful." See RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, "Lethbridge — coal miners strike at — 1906," White to E.T. Galt, 19 July 1906. On the general problem of desertion from the force see Macleod, *North West Mounted Police*, 83-4. It seems that the use in labour disputes of any policing force, whether municipal or national, militia or army, was not welcomed by the force itself since such activity threatened to damage efficiency, to drain morale, and to reduce public popularity (see L.W. Bentley, "Aid of the Civil Power: Social and Political Aspects 1904-1924," *Canadian Defense Quarterly*, 8, 1 (1978), 47; and G. Davidson-Smith, "The Military in Aid of the Civil Power: Limits in a Democratic Society," *Canadian Defense Quarterly*, 13, 4 (1984), 27-33).



ated with the police. Their prior contact had usually been in circumstances in which the Mounties appeared as punitive enforcers of 'middle-class' laws and morality. East European miners not only found few men of similar ethnic background in the force, but also remembered brutally repressive policing authorities in their homelands. In fact, each group desired minimal contact with the other, although it was thought in some quarters that the Mounties were a bulwark against the subversion of the country by "aliens," labour "agitators," and political radicals.<sup>51</sup> By and large, the Mounties neither had interfered with nor assisted the East European miners because, according to one of Wilson's predecessors, as long as "foreigners" did not disturb their neighbours, "it did not very much matter whether they damaged one another's [sic] skulls or not."<sup>52</sup> English-speaking miners were not quite so distant from the police, and they shared rather similar views about the "foreigners" in their midst. Yet even they probably held less than positive views of the Mounties: "The middle class expects help from the police, the working class expects trouble."<sup>53</sup>

Given this initial precondition of reciprocal fears, anxiety, and opposition, it is not surprising that there was little contact between the two parties in the early days of the strike. In contrast, P.L. Naismith, AR&I general manager, having visited police headquarters to request protection for the mine property and working miners, explained the situation to Wilson. The recently-arrived Wilson accepted, in entirety, Naismith's evaluation of the situation: that the newly organized UMWA local was making unreasonable demands; that "serious trouble" was to be expected since "the men are very much worked up"; and that after a month or so "the men will have cooled down somewhat."<sup>54</sup> Wilson made no attempt to consult with union leaders either to express his concern about preserving order or to discern the temper of the strikers,<sup>55</sup> and he immediately requested reinforcements.<sup>56</sup> Detective-Sergeant G. Goodwin did attend a miners' meeting when strike action was debated. Such a gathering was bound to be excited, but Goodwin thought that it demon-

<sup>51</sup>Walden, *Visions of Order*, 129-35.

<sup>52</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 21, file 373-88, Deane to Commissioner, 1 July 1888.

<sup>53</sup>B. Jackson, *Working Class Community: Some general notions raised by a series of studies in northern England* (New York 1968), 116. On the hostility of English workers to the police in the mid-19th century, see B. Weinberger, "The Police and the Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Warwickshire," in Bailey, *Policing and Punishment*, 65-93.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, telegram, 27 February 1906. A number of the telegrams in this file, such as this one, were originally sent in cipher. See also *Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Wilson to Commissioner, 27 February 1906.

<sup>55</sup>One can assert this with confidence since it is most unlikely that had such a consultation taken place it would have gone unrecorded in Wilson's reports.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Wilson to Commissioner, 27 February 1906. The commissioner's office alerted the Fort Macleod division to be prepared to send men if required (see *Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, McIlfree to P.C.H. Primrose, 28 February 1906).

strated "great unrest" and that the Hungarians and Slavs were "very rowdy."<sup>57</sup> In short, the meeting verified to the police that the strikers, especially the "foreign" element, posed a threat to peace and order.

Such a perception was reinforced as soon as the strike began on 18 March. That night there was an explosion outside the house of a non-union man. The blast was designed to frighten rather than injure, but it made Wilson most apprehensive. He viewed the strikers' possession of powder and dynamite, which they had purchased from the company for blasting, as a "grave source of danger." Consequently, he requested reinforcements and ordered continuous patrolling for a month in order to protect company property, "and also to allay the excitement among the Non-Union men caused by last night's explosion."<sup>58</sup>

A week later Wilson was still very anxious. The company had warned him to expect trouble on the weekend of 17-18 March, for this was when the strikers would be paid what was coming to them.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Wilson understood that the strikers were heavily armed with revolvers and other weapons and that some had been soldiers.<sup>60</sup> He called for substantial reinforcements, believing that "my small force would not be much against five hundred men especially if crazed by drink." Contemplating what might happen, he believed that after reading the Riot Act, which he acknowledged would not be understood by many "foreign" strikers, he might have to give an order to fire. He said that he hoped it would not come to this, but made no attempt to reach out to the strikers in order to prevent a tragedy.<sup>61</sup> Rather, evidently viewing the strikers as the enemy, he wanted his force strengthened.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Goodwin to Wilson, 1 March 1906.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 9 March 1906. The one-month period may be another indication of the impact Naismith's initial evaluation had had on Wilson.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, telegram, 14 March 1906. The Company's general manager sent a wire to RNWMP Comptroller Fred White requesting more police (see *Ibid.*, Naismith to White, telegram, 14 March 1906).

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, E.H. Bolderson, "Crime Report — Strike at Lethbridge — Re Sale of Arms of Late in Lethbridge," 14 March 1906. Reports of arms appear to have been greatly exaggerated. None of the four firms dealing in arms in Lethbridge kept proper records and only two purchasers could be named. Ironically enough, at least one of these was a strikebreaker.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Wilson to Commissioner, 14 March 1906. It is axiomatic that any police or military force desires to be present with ample strength or not at all rather than with numbers of questionable adequacy (see, for example, J. Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns* (London 1974), 48-50). Wilson's failure to attempt to explain to the strikers in advance such things as the Riot Act, which he knew would not be comprehended in the heat of the moment, is in marked contrast to the present-day situation in Toronto where two policemen are permanently designated to explain the law to management and strikers in an attempt to prevent altercations (see *Lethbridge Herald*, 17 June 1981, E6).

A swift response came from the commissioner of the Mounties, A.B. Perry. He had already promised general manager Naismith that "everything possible will be done to protect your property,"<sup>62</sup> and now not only sent reinforcements, increasing Wilson's manpower to some 58 men available for strike duty, but also kept another 21 in readiness in Regina.<sup>63</sup> In addition, a plainclothes policeman, Constable Gorski, was planted amongst the East European miners.<sup>64</sup> Perry also advised closing bars to preserve peace, arranging to use fire hoses to prevent bloodshed, and swearing in special constables to augment the regular force. He further ordered Wilson to instruct the policemen "to act patiently and firmly" and to "take no side in the strike but ... protect Company's property from injury and any men who desire to work."<sup>65</sup>

Wilson followed all the suggestions. But the ostensible neutrality of the police was questionable, and not merely because the sending of reinforcements pleased the company. In the first place, when Wilson decided to place his main force in railway cars on the mine property,<sup>66</sup> it was understood that the company would provide accommodations and food. Secondly, Wilson acknowledged that his outlook and actions had been "guided to a large extent" by Naismith and W.D.L. Hardie, the mine manager. Finally, all eleven special constables were company employees.<sup>67</sup> In effect, Wilson was deputizing non-union miners at the request of company officials. He figured this was unexceptionable, because the Mounties were not paying them; nor were any "foreigners" sworn in. In fact, however, he was conferring significant legitimacy and legal authority upon men who were so far from being neutral that they might be called company guards.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Perry to Naismith, 14 March 1906.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, Perry to Comptroller, telegram, 15 March 1906. The reserve force in Regina was not sent.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Perry to Wilson, 14 March 1906.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Perry to Wilson, telegram, 15 March 1906.

<sup>66</sup>In part, this was because both hose and water were available there.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, telegram, 15 March 1906; Wilson to Commissioner, 15 March 1906.

<sup>68</sup>The RNWMP Controller questioned the arrangement but seemed satisfied with Wilson's response (see *Ibid.*, White to Perry, telegram, 23 March 1906; Wilson to Commissioner, 25 March 1906; and Perry to Comptroller, telegram, 25 March 1906). It is not clear exactly how much authority was granted special constables. A justice of the peace could appoint them for a period not extending beyond the end of the year and it appears that in a formal sense these "specials" held all the powers, privileges and duties of regular constables (see *The Ordinances of the North-West Territories, 1905* (a consolidation) (Edmonton 1907), chapter 33, An Ordinance respecting Constables). The situation in Montreal in the 1880s respecting special constables had been similar. See G.S. Kealey, ed., *Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889* (Toronto 1973), 229-30.

If the Mounties remained suspicious of and hostile to the strikers by mid-March, those sentiments were reciprocated. The strikers complained, for example, that the police had accompanied a company official who went into miners' homes to get strikers back to work. To union officials, this was a form of police intimidation, for the presence of Mounties might overawe "those foreigners who do not understand that this is a free country and that no man needs work if he don't wish to."<sup>69</sup> It reinforced their view that the police had been brought in at the instigation and for the benefit of the company, rather than to preserve the peace which the strikers claimed they had no intention of breaching. The strikers publicly expressed their opposition to the police at a mass meeting on Saturday 10 March, when they passed a resolution protesting such police action and directed that copies be sent to the press and politicians.<sup>70</sup> By mid-March, the gulf between strikers and police was even wider than it had been at the beginning of the strike.

Several developments in mid-March narrowed this gap. Until then, the strikers had treated working miners going to and from the mine to concerts of rough music. They banged tin cans, blew horns and mouth organs, and waved flags.<sup>71</sup> Wilson decided to end these activities and to charge the leaders with intimidation despite his depiction of a procession on 15 March as "orderly and good natured."<sup>72</sup> Thus, when a crowd of about 50 gathered close to the mine shaft to 'razz' the strikebreakers about 4 p.m. the next day, six Mounties warned them against following and intimidating. But as three strikebreakers made their way home from the mine, a crowd which grew to about 150 including women and children fell in behind the police, all of whom were mounted, and began to serenade the so-called scabs. Five Mounties pulled revolvers and "presented them to the persons forming the procession," while the sixth dismounted and made an arrest. The noise then ceased and strikers politely asked what wrong they were doing. A deal was then struck: the arrested striker would be released and the strikers would stop following the working

<sup>69</sup>*Herald*, 15 March 1906. The UMWA District 18 solicitor had complained about a similar sort of police "presence" in a case of eviction from company housing in Lille nine months earlier. At that time, the Comptroller of the NWMP indicated that this had been an error of judgment. See R.C. Macleod, "The Problem of Law and Order in the Canadian West, 1870-1905," in L.G. Thomas, ed., *The Prairie West to 1905: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Toronto 1975), 212-5.

<sup>70</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Copy. Resolutions Passed by the Lethbridge Miners Union on March 10th 1906.

<sup>71</sup>The symbolism of all this was important. The music was dissonant rather than harmonious, thus registering the disapproval of the strikers towards strikebreakers. The flags were threatening rather than celebratory: one was black, while another was white with "cure for scabs" written on it. For analysis of the import of such activities, see E.P. Thompson, "Rough Music: Le Charivari anglais," *Annales: E.S.C.*, 27(1972), 285-312; and B.D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivaris and Whitecapping in Nineteenth-Century North America," *LJLT*, 3(1978), 5-62.

<sup>72</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 16 March 1906.

miners. A side action flared up when the crowd, "apparently incited by some women," went after two other men, but this was quelled by the police and by several of the strikers who "went through the crowd and urged them to keep quiet." The crowd eventually dispersed and "men who appeared to be leaders" assured the police "that they will give the scabs no more trouble." True to their word, the strikers allowed the non-union men to go to work the next day without interference. During the incident, according to witnesses, no attempt was made by any member of the crowd to use violence against any person and no resistance "by word or gesture" was made to the police.<sup>73</sup>

Such behaviour did not go unnoticed by Wilson. In fact, he considered the drawing of arms an "error in judgement" and expected that union leaders would make "some capital" out of it. But the incident was also evidence that no extreme threat to law and order existed. The same lesson was apparent in other instances. There had been a gunshot on the 15th, but the culprit proved to be "an old Frenchman about 70 years old" who intended no harm and was released. Wilson gained confidence not only because of the arrival of reinforcements on the evening of 16 March but also because actual experience had demonstrated that the strikers were not out to destroy lives and property. By 17 March, Wilson could understand even that the explosions which had occurred the two previous nights were symbolic demonstrations rather than genuine dangers.<sup>74</sup>

Events, or rather the lack of events, on 17 March consolidated Wilson's sense of assurance. That day was when Naismith and Wilson had feared that all hell would break loose. It did not. Indeed, for two weeks afterward almost complete tranquillity prevailed. As Wilson reported: "the town people say that they never remember seeing the Village of Stafford so quiet and orderly."<sup>75</sup> Things were so peaceful that Wilson cut the RNWMP complement at the mine from 34 to 8 men.<sup>76</sup> While this was still an important commitment, since Wilson expected to have to keep the full contingent there for months, it was a significant reduction and caused Naismith real qualms.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, Sergeant Major C.C. Raven to Wilson, 17 March 1906; William Gardiner's declaration, 17 March 1906; and John Harvie's declaration, 17 March 1906. The account given is pieced together from these sources. The chronology in Raven's report differs in that he claimed that pistols were not drawn until after he'd arrested the striker and the crowd started to rush him.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 16 and 17 March 1906.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 20 March 1906. See also *Herald*, 29 March 1906.

<sup>76</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 22 and 25 March and 1 April 1906; and R. Belcher to Commissioner, 29 March 1906. Wilson's monthly report for March stated that the police complement at the mine was two noncommissioned officers and six men (see *Ibid.*, A1, vol. 315, file 202-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 17 April 1906). The company put on several guards of their own (see *Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 22 and 24 March 1906).

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 22 March 1906 and Naismith to White, 23 March 1906.

If Wilson was becoming less apprehensive, the strikers also seem to have been adapting to the presence of the police. The first ten days of the strike had not occasioned instances of police brutality. This interval also demonstrated that inappropriate police actions could be challenged by public complaints. In addition, the incident of 16 March had shown the strikers that they could make an agreement with the Mounties. In short, the strikers' actual experience modified their stereotype of the police. Indeed, by 17 March, it seemed appropriate to Frank Sherman, the President of UMWA District 18, to visit Wilson.

Sherman began by apologizing for his tardiness in consulting with the Mounties because he wanted to be cooperative and because he did not agree with the view held by many strikers that the police sided with the company.<sup>78</sup> He acquired information about the Riot Act and the law regarding intimidation in order to inform his men. Indeed, his stated intent was to designate about 50 union men, with badges, to maintain order amongst the strikers and for them to report any wrongdoing to the police.<sup>79</sup> He sought Wilson's assurance that access to bar-rooms would be restricted as he feared what might happen if booze flowed freely. He also questioned Wilson about a rumour that 150 Mounties were escorting strikebreakers to Lethbridge since such action would certainly create trouble.<sup>80</sup> Wilson was quick to deny the rumour, doubting that the company intended to commence operations in the near future. Sherman, undoubtedly relieved, explained that the union did not object to the company operating the pumps and maintaining its mine property.

The full significance of this discussion was not immediately obvious. Wilson's report indicated his suspicion of Sherman and his predilection to think ill of the strikers. In an earlier letter to his superior, Wilson had stated that the strikers should consult with him if they had any complaints,<sup>81</sup> yet when their representative requested an interview Wilson was "much surprised." Every comment the commanding officer made about Sherman's motives was negative. He did not even make much of the District 18 president's statement on allowing the pumps to operate,<sup>82</sup> despite the fact that the opposite was one of the company's key arguments in demanding police protection.<sup>83</sup> At no time did he express appreciation for Sherman's concern to maintain peace or for the steps the union was taking to preserve order.

<sup>78</sup>Information on the meeting is contained in *Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 17 March 1906.

<sup>79</sup>It does appear that the strikers formally established their own security force, but it may be that some sort of informal system was developed.

<sup>80</sup>In a letter to W.A. Galliher, M.P. for the Kootenay riding, Sherman had indicated that if the company attempted to import strike breakers he could not guarantee what the strikers, who had been "very peaceful and well behaved" until then, would do (see *Ibid.*, Sherman to Galliher, 12 March 1906).

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 15 March 1906.

<sup>82</sup>This was, in fact, the normal position adopted by the UMWA.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, Naismith to White, 23 March 1906.

Yet even at the time of the interview, several important developments were obvious. In the first place, Sherman's initiative in itself suggested the strikers' more moderate attitude toward the police. The interview enabled Sherman to present the strikers' viewpoint and to indicate their desire to preserve order, thereby making possible a more amiable relationship between the strikers and the police. Moreover, the exchange of information that took place was crucial: Sherman became informed about the details of relevant sections of the Criminal Code; Wilson learned about the desire and plans of the union to maintain peace; Wilson scotched the report about the alleged arrival of protected strikebreakers; Sherman indicated that the strikers had no qualms about the mine being kept in running order; Wilson explained that the police were bound to preserve property and protect working miners but did not intend to force the strikers back to work or defeat the strike. In short, this direct communication between the two parties allowed them to exchange valuable information and to relieve anxieties and animosities.<sup>84</sup>

Despite Wilson's initial suspicions, the most plausible explanation of Sherman's visit is that in his desire to further the strikers' cause, he was genuinely concerned to preserve peace, to stay within the law, to avoid conflict with the police, and to exchange information with the Mounties which would calm the situation. Wilson himself seems, gradually and partially, to have come to accept that explanation, for his evaluation of events shifted subtly after the interview. He reacted calmly to Constable Gorski's report that a number of "foreigners" said that Sherman had gone to the town of Taber to get arms for about 150 men and then "they were to form a ring about the Police Camp and prevent any scabs from going to work; the scabs were to be shot but not the Police." At the beginning of the strike, even just prior to his discussion with Sherman, Wilson might have found the report plausible. Now, however, he dismissed it: "How such stories could be circulated among the foreigners I am at a loss to know, but it shows how grossly ignorant they are to place any stock in such wild rumours."<sup>85</sup>

The calm which existed during the last two weeks of March had several sources. Wilson believed that the show of force by the police had been crucial.<sup>86</sup> This factor should not be discounted, but at the very least needs to be supplemented. In the first place most of the strikebreakers, some with families, had moved into

<sup>84</sup>As indicated earlier Wilson had made no attempt to confer with union leaders. He had entertained the idea in regard to the charge of police intimidation but decided against it. During the interview with Sherman on 17 March Wilson offered to go with him to explain the law and the role of the police to the strikers, but as Sherman did not seem overly enthused this was not done.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 19 March 1906. Wilson does not seem to have considered whether Gorski was getting "straight goods" or whether the miners knew that this newcomer was a spy of some sort and therefore fed him a line.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 19 March and 17 April 1906.

railway cars at the mine.<sup>87</sup> This meant that the strikers were no longer confronted, twice daily, by a score of men<sup>88</sup> travelling between their houses and the mine, men who not only refused to accept the standards of the vast majority but also threatened to undercut the strength of the collectivity. From the strikers' perspective, those they called scabs had been sealed off, ostracized, almost imprisoned.<sup>89</sup> Certainly, this reduced the opportunities for the outbreak of violence. An even more important factor in explaining the tranquillity was the self-control exercised by the strikers. Actual experience demonstrated the absurdity of Naismith's and Wilson's notion that the strikers were a crazed and violent mob of "foreigners" who had no respect for the law and who could only be kept in line by force. In short, the evidence suggests that substantial violence was averted at least as much because the strikers were generally peaceable as because the police were present. Even if this were not the case, the strikers were anxious to avoid confrontations with the police because they well understood the harm that violent episodes would do to their cause, particularly with regard to public opinion.<sup>90</sup>

The factors helping to curb violence were of a long term nature and operated throughout the strike. They must be kept in mind when examining the series of incidents which occurred between 31 March and 4 April. In the first place, despite sensational press and police reports, the violence associated with these incidents actually was quite limited and verifies rather than contradicts the generalization that the strikers were, in the main, nonviolent and accepted police authority. Secondly, two major elements which had contributed to peace in the two weeks preceding — a lack of new strikebreakers and a lack of contact between strikers and strikebreakers — no longer prevailed by the end of March. Indeed, this was a crucial time both for the company and the strikers. A strike merely of a few weeks' duration was not terribly damaging for either side but by the end of March the significance of a lengthy struggle was becoming apparent. The striking miners had to face the issue of how they were to survive without pay. Company officials had to wonder how the mine ever could resume operations without its skilled work force. The simplest solution to both problems was for the men to return to work but as neither party would accept the other's terms for this to occur, the struggle narrowed at this juncture to the question of whether or not the strikers would go back to the mine.

<sup>87</sup>This was first reported by Wilson on 22 March but they may have been there for a couple of days by that time (see *Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 22 March 1906).

<sup>88</sup>Naismith said about 30 men were working (see *Ibid.*, Naismith to White, 23 March 1906).

<sup>89</sup>S.A.B. Crabb to Editor, n.d., in the *United Mine Workers Journal* (Indianapolis), 28 June 1906, (hereafter *UMW Journal*).

<sup>90</sup>Gorski's report specified directly and Sherman's visit implied this realization by the strikers (see RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 17 March 1906).



A test of strength occurred on 31 March when a blacksmith/teamster decided to quit the strike and go back to work.<sup>91</sup> The strikers needed to demonstrate their disapproval of such action and to warn others that it was unacceptable, perhaps even dangerous, to follow his example. The company, in order to encourage others to follow suit, needed to show that this striker safely could return to work. Not surprisingly, mine manager Hardie turned to the Mounties to secure safe passage to the mine for the blacksmith and his belongings. Four Mounties were detailed for this duty, although they were instructed merely to prevent a breach of peace and not to assist in moving furniture. The ensuing events can be reconstructed from the somewhat-contradictory police reports. While a wagon was being loaded at the blacksmith's house, a crowd of between 20 and 50 "foreigners" gathered and began to hoot and yell. When the wagon started to pull away with the blacksmith walking behind it, and RNWMP Corporal Brewer walking behind him, the din escalated with much jeering, whistling, and beating of cans with sticks. Corporal Brewer told the crowd to stop making such a racket. He then grabbed a man who struggled to escape with the help of others in the crowd. During this tussle, Constable Kelly drew his pistol, believing that a man with a stick was about to hit Brewer. According to Kelly's account, he told the man that he would "hit him a crack" with his pistol. The strikers' own, more-plausible account is that Kelly threatened to shoot. In any case, the man dropped his stick and Kelly put his pistol away. Meanwhile, Brewer had lost his prisoner. The Mounties, obviously thinking that discretion was the better part of valour, turned and escorted the blacksmith and his possessions to the mine, with the crowd, still beating cans, following.

The aftermath of this incident is highly instructive. One could easily envisage Wilson calling for reinforcements, for instructing his men to bring charges of intimidation, disturbing the peace and illegal assembly against strikers who acted in this manner, and for taking a tough line. None of this transpired. Indeed, the Mounties were put on the defensive, not the strikers. Sherman had seized the initiative by phoning Wilson to complain "that the police had pulled their revolvers and threatened to shoot some men who were holding a procession." Wilson had not even heard about the incident from his own people at this point, but promised Sherman that he would make an immediate inquiry. Sherman's complaint shaped the entire nature of Wilson's investigation, which focused, in the event, on whether or not the police had been at fault rather than upon the actions of the crowd. In short, the accused became the police rather than the strikers.

Wilson's interviews with the Mounties involved in the incident did not substantiate the "threat to shoot" charge, but did clarify that such a threat, if made,

<sup>91</sup>Information related to the incident of 31 March comes from *Ibid.*, "Memorandum of evidence taken in complaint made by Mr. Sherman that a Constable did draw his pistol and threaten to blow out the brains of certain men at Stafford Village at about 2:00 p.m. of the 31 April [sic], 1906"; Wilson to Commissioner, 1 April, 1906; and Perry to Comptroller, 3 April 1906.

was unacceptable. Indeed, the record demonstrated that the police had been warned frequently against even drawing firearms unless absolutely necessary. One of the difficulties, according to the commanding officer, was that the Mounties only had pistols — “under similar circumstances, if armed with clubs, they would draw them and use them instead of pistols.” Wilson made other criticisms: 1) sending an escort was a mistake — a patrol should have been nearby to act if violence had threatened, but not a designated escort; 2) no arrests should have been attempted by a few Mounties when confronted with a large crowd of excited people; 3) the blacksmith should not have walked behind the wagon but have ridden it, thereby allowing the horses to trot off; and 4) “In this instance, I feel sure, had Corporal Brewer been a live man, of good judgement, he would have avoided any trouble, but unfortunately he is one of the slowest men I have ever seen.” Wilson issued new orders to his men in accord with these findings, and also removed Kelly, though not Brewer, from strike duty.<sup>92</sup> Wilson also recognized that the company’s effort to recruit workers posed a threat: “There is plenty of time yet for serious trouble in this strike if the Company attempts to hire individual men who wish to return to work, and if they attempt to put men to work in place of all the Union men there is sure to be trouble, and it will take a considerable force to handle the situation.” It is clear, from Wilson’s failure to call for reinforcements at this time and his disinclination to provide escorts for returning miners, that he preferred the RNWMP not be placed in the position of helping the company hire strikebreakers, even though Wilson acknowledged the company’s right to hire non-union men. In other words, on the strikebreaker issue, Wilson sided with the strikers. It was not that he wanted to help the strikers win the struggle; rather, he was concerned with preserving order. Wilson was also responding to pressure applied by the strikers. Sherman not only had complained to Wilson about the “threat to shoot” but also had caused police actions in Lethbridge to become, once again, a matter of scrutiny in Ottawa.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup>It was not an unusual tactic of police forces to transfer unpopular policemen (see Emsley, *Policing and Its Context*, 156-7).

<sup>93</sup>Sherman had telegraphed Alphonse Verville, the Labour M.P., with the strikers’ version of the incident, claiming that “if this continues fear serious bloodshed,” and directing Verville to take steps in Ottawa (RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Sherman to Verville, copy of telegram, 31 March 1906). Verville was the newly elected M.P. for Maissonneuve and President of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada. Earlier in the strike he had asked embarrassing questions in the House of Commons about police involvement (see *Ibid.*, copy of seven questions raised by Mr. Verville on 21 March 1906; *Ibid.*, Answers to Inquiry by Mr. Verville, M.P.; *Canada: House of Commons Debates, 1906* (Ottawa, 1906), 573-4 (26 March); and *Herald*, 29 March 1906). In regard to the 31 March incident, the RNWMP comptroller in Ottawa sought and received information from the commissioner (see RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, White to Perry, telegram, 2 April 1906; and Perry to White, telegram, 3 April 1906). At the same time Ralph Smith, the MP for Vancouver District, asked for copies of correspondence relating to the strike and the calling in of the Mounties [see *Debates, 1906*, 998 (2 April)]. These were returned without discussion on 6 April, 1906.

Moreover, the threat of the union pressing charges against Kelly hung over Wilson's head for a week after the incident and led him to address Sherman in most courteous terms.<sup>94</sup>

It would be absurd to think that the Mounties suddenly had become partners with the strikers. Nonetheless, Sherman's skilful tactics again had put the Mounties on the defensive, forcing them to justify their actions in public and in private, encouraging them to recognize that the company's attempts to hire jeopardized the peace they were trying to maintain, and compelling them to modify their crowd-handling tactics. This was quite an accomplishment in the wake of an incident in which the strikers could have been castigated as violent hooligans.

Demonstrations against non-union men had been a prominent feature of the strikers' prosecution of the strike from its inception. The results of the 31 March incident, including the revised tactics of the police, did nothing to diminish such activities. At noon on 3 April, a crowd composed mainly of women jeered at and threw snow at a strikebreaker who was attempting to move furniture from his house to the mine camp.<sup>95</sup> A couple of Mounties eventually moved in, but the women were not cowed and some altercations occurred. In fact, a union source boasted: "We have Slav woman who went out and whipped one of the police to a standstill."<sup>96</sup> Only one man was arrested. The next day he received a 15-day jail sentence. Beyond this the strikers paid no legal consequences for harassing working miners. Undoubtedly, the story of the noontime confrontation was related at the supper tables of the strikers and fuelled their resolve to maintain pressure on their backsliding brethren.

Early on that evening of 3 April three working miners — Louis Albert, Andrew Robi, and Steve Ungvarie — went to fetch a dozen chickens and board up the windows of Ungvarie's house. Their noisy presence attracted a crowd of up to 300 men, women and children who jeered, whistled, and shouted threats at the three-

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The return was Sessional Paper No. 80 for 1906 but was not printed. Nonetheless the correspondence had been made public. Smith, Verville, or other parliamentarians or reporters could have raised the matter if they had considered that anything untoward had occurred. The fact that this did not happen should not blind one to the important fact that the police, once again, had come under public examination.

<sup>94</sup>On this matter see RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 1 April 1906; Wilson to Sherman, 7 April 1906; and Sherman to Wilson, 8 April 1906. For a brief discussion of the dynamics of constables being judged on an alleged misconduct by senior officers of the same policing force, see Cain, *Society and the Policeman's Role*, 244-5.

<sup>95</sup>Information on this incident is located in *Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 3 and 4 April 1906; and *News*, 6 April 1906. Material on this case is scanty, probably because it paled in significance beside the "riots" of the evenings of 3 and 4 April, and the reconstruction of events requires some speculation.

<sup>96</sup>Peter Patterson to Editor, 6 May 1906, in *UMW Journal*, 17 May 1906. Constable Fitzgerald wanted her arrested for assault but Wilson "thought it better not to bother with women..."

some. Stones, bottles, bricks, and sundry items were flung in their direction. Two of the non-striking miners left the fenced yard with a tub of chickens and were allowed to proceed without injury, though chased by stones and threats. The third, Louis Albert, stopped to closed the gate and with his left hand, in which he held a hatchet as well as a pair of boots, took a swipe at a youth who was bothering him. The response was immediate. One member of the crowd, Karl Theodorovics, hit the strikebreaker with a rock. Albert went down; the strikers moved in on him. At this point Sergeant Bolderson came to the rescue and put himself between Albert and the crowd. Bolderson was hit with flying stones but managed to protect the injured man and, with the assistance of a few more Mounties, to get him back to the safety of the mine property. The RNWMP halted the pursuing crowd and it gradually dispersed, though evidently in bad humour.<sup>97</sup>

Both altercations on 3 April tested Wilson's revised tactics: no police escorts; no pistols or even clubs drawn; no arrests in crowds. The results were not entirely satisfactory to Wilson, for one man had been wounded, Mounties had been attacked though not seriously injured, and the crowd had not been very manageable. For Wilson, even the policy of not drawing pistols seemed to have promoted violence, not suppressed it: "It has been circulated among them [the "foreigners"] that the Police cannot draw their arms[;] consequently their fears of our power has been lessened."<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the Mounted Police image of the strikers reverted somewhat towards its original view: a "mob" of "foreigners" who had been involved in a "riot."<sup>99</sup> Wilson's suspicion of the strikers revived: "the foreigners are by some means kept worked up."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Wilson half-plied that a labour conspiracy was afoot since he mentioned that a Winnipeg strike<sup>101</sup> was having a bad effect on

<sup>97</sup>Information on the events of the evening of 3 April is located in *Herald*, 5 April 1906; *News*, 6 April 1906; RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 4 April 1906; *Ibid.*, Bolderson, "Crime Report — Re. Riot on evening of Tuesday, 3 April, 1906," 6 April 1906; *Ibid.*, Wilson, "Crime Report — Re assault on Louis Albert by Karl Theodorovics, causing actual bodily harm, on the 3rd of April, Inst. at Stafford Village," 10 April 1906; *Ibid.*, Wilson, "Crime Report — Re. Disturbance at Stafford Village, April 3rd 1906," 10 April 1906; *Ibid.*, Bolderson, "Crime Report — Re. Strike at Lethbridge. Assault on Louis Albert," n.d.; and PAA, Acc. 78.235, Supreme Court Criminal — Fort Macleod, Box 11 (1-C-1) (henceforth Alberta Supreme Court Records), files 848 and 850-55.

<sup>98</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 4 April 1906.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.* Given the technical definition of "riot" in the Criminal Code (see *Canada: Revised Statutes, 1906*, chapter 146, section 88), this depiction of the incident was not incorrect, but was hardly the only term that might have been used. The charges against those eventually brought to trial were not for rioting but for unlawful assembly and disturbing the peace. Wilson's use of the terms "foreigner," "mob," and "riot" is a potent indicator of his emotional attitude and interpretive understanding.

<sup>100</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 4 April 1906.

<sup>101</sup>A brief description of the strike of Winnipeg street railway workers in March and April is given in Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 84-5.

the one in Lethbridge, and also noted that the Taber miners nearby were expected to go on strike shortly.

Given his frame of mind, Wilson's response to the "riot" was predictable: the power of the police had to be demonstrated through greater vigilance, increased manpower, and judicial prosecution. Wilson's immediate reaction upon learning of the altercation had been to send eight mounted men to patrol the miners' village for several hours, and the following day he arranged to augment the contingent at the mine encampment. In addition, he asked the commissioner to increase his strength by 20 men. Finally, he pressed charges against nine men, convinced that convictions would "have a good effect."<sup>102</sup> In short, Wilson believed that a tougher stand was required to make the "foreigners" toe the line and to show everyone that punishment would be meted out to those who overstepped it.

From the strikers' perspective, police behaviour during both incidents on 3 April had been acceptable. No escorts had been provided for strikebreakers and the police had not used weapons to threaten the strikers. In reality the Mounties had allowed the strikers to do their job for the police had not stopped the strikers from showing their displeasure with strikebreakers. Indeed, the Mounties had not prevented the strikers from demonstrating their physical power — something that would have deterred other strikers who may have been considering returning to the mine. The police had not even prevented the strikers from punishing a hatchet-wielding strikebreaker who, from their perspective, had attacked a defenseless boy. In other words, the Mounties had allowed the strikers to accomplish their primary goals without direct confrontation. But this was a reciprocal arrangement. The strikers had allowed Sergeant Bolderson to rescue Albert, and had halted when told by the police to stop following the strikebreakers. Moreover, despite Wilson's analysis, the strikers had not run amok but actually had shown considerable restraint. Nobody, not even Albert, had been seriously injured, and no property had been destroyed. Since protection of property and persons was the mandate of the police during the strike, the police had few grounds for complaint based on the actual behaviour of the strikers. The 3 April incidents demonstrated a kind of saw-off between the strikers and the Mounties. The strikers had been able to demonstrate their unwritten code of conduct, or law, while the police had been able to demonstrate theirs. The strikers accepted the line drawn by the Mounties, while the Mounties tacitly acknowledged the legitimacy, or at least the predictability, of strikers' demonstrations against strikebreakers.<sup>103</sup> A *modus vivendi* had been established between the two groups and their separate rules of law.

<sup>102</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 4 April 1906.

<sup>103</sup>Aside from Wilson's earlier report that problems could be expected if men left the strike and went back to work, Bolderson stated in his crime report that Ungvarie had that very day quit the strikers, as though that was sufficient explanation for the crowd gathering at Ungvarie's house. Actually, other evidence indicates that Ungvarie and the two others had been working for weeks, for the names of all three were on an anonymous letter of 18 March

This *modus vivendi* was challenged but not, in the final analysis, overturned by what the Mounties again called a "riot" at dusk on the following day, 4 April.<sup>104</sup> At about 7 p.m., three strikers and two working miners were carrying on a discussion near the boundary of the mine property. After they had evidently drifted onto company land, a Mountie went over to disperse the strikers. They started to move off, but then one of them, Sam Popovitch, stopped and, according to the policeman, acted as follows:

[He] put up his fist and shook it at me and called me something in a loud voice; I at the same time was motioning them to move on. He then called in a loud voice [""] you God damned son of a bitch Policeman you no good [""]; he repeated this twice and other things which I could not understand; he said also [""] me fix scab last night me fix Policeman to-night [""]; he was all the time shaking his fist at me...<sup>105</sup>

The constable then attempted to arrest Popovitch but was impeded by the drunken Wasył Weidok. The ruckus and calls for assistance on both sides quickly brought reinforcements, eventually resulting in a crowd of more than 200 strikers and family members, some carrying sticks or clubs, facing six policemen and two company night watchmen. And while people gathered, the evidently dull-witted Corporal Brewer pursued Weidok, who'd run off. Predictably, other strikers tried to rescue Weidok and Constable Fitzgerald had to come to Brewer's aid. It was at this point, when only 15 or so strikers were on hand, that the most intense fighting of the whole affair took place. Fitzgerald, who had not fared very well in his scuffle with a woman the day before, was hit in the stomach as he stooped to remove one man's hand from the prisoner's legs. Fitzgerald then began to use his own club, with such force that he broke it, and felt compelled to draw his revolver. Two other Mounties also waded in with truncheons and hands and thrashed about in the growing crowd, which in turn was using sticks, throwing rocks, and yelling "scabs" and other epithets in several languages. The police managed to retain Popovitch and Weidok, and got them to the guard car, although fighting, rock-throwing, and

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which threatened the working miners (see *Ibid.*, "David and Goliath" to Joseph Oros, 18 March, translated copy enclosed in Wilson to Commissioner, 24 March 1906).

<sup>104</sup>Information on the incident of the evening of 4 April is to be found in *Herald*, 5 and 12 April 1906; *News*, 6 April 1906; RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 4, 5, 6, and 8 April 1906; *Ibid.*, Perry to Comptroller, telegram, 5 April 1906; *Ibid.*, "Re Disturbance at No. 3 Shaft Stafford Village on the night of 4th April, Evidence taken under oath," enclosed in Wilson to Commissioner, 5 April 1906; and Alberta Supreme Court Records, file 849. In the account which follows only direct quotations are given specific references.

<sup>105</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 328-06, "Re. Disturbance... 4th April..." enclosed in Wilson to Commissioner, 5 April 1906. It is judicial records rather than RCMP Papers that provide the first name of Popovitch [see PAA, Acc. 69.210, Justices of Peace Files, Box 89/JP (Robert Belcher), Return for 1906].

yelling continued sporadically for a while, the crowd gradually scattered.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, union officials helped the police quiet and disperse the crowd.<sup>107</sup> Yet no authority was able to prevent the strikers from punishing the three strikebreakers who had been involved in the incident of 3 April and who had compounded their sins in the strikers' eyes by giving evidence to the police against some of the strikers involved. Despite police patrols, within hours the houses of those three working miners were dynamited or burned, though none were destroyed and, since they were vacant, nobody was injured.<sup>108</sup> It was hardly coincidental that no strikebreaker testified against the strikers involved in the episode of 4 April.

Understandably police testimony initially alleged that the affray of 4 April had been a serious matter. It had involved direct fighting between Mounties and strikers and to a man, the police characterized it as a riotous gathering. Several declared that they had feared someone would be killed. Yet it could be argued that the degree of actual violence was limited and the amount of restraint exercised by the strikers was considerable. No one received other than minor injuries; the strikers concentrated their 'violence' on attempting to release Popovitch and Weidok rather than on attacking the police; some strikers had come armed with sticks but no firearms, knives, axes, iron pipes, or chains were in evidence, despite the earlier police reports that the strikers were well-armed; union officials had worked to calm the crowd; even the explosions were carefully targeted.

The police response to the 4 April events was dual in nature. On the one hand, the Mounties' initial explanation was that drunken "foreigners" had caused the confrontation and had only been held in check by force, although the assistance rendered by union officials was acknowledged. As a consequence of this view, Wilson requested 30 additional men, 10 of whom should be mounted, and 50 police truncheons. He posted extra sentries at the mine, and ordered constant mounted patrolling of the miners' village.

But on the other hand, the tough line towards the strikers was greatly softened by other instructions and actions, or lack of action. In the first place, Wilson ordered his men to "be careful not to appear overbearing" and to "remain strictly neutral between the Company and the Strikers." Moreover, Wilson tacitly acknowledged the fault of his men for the 4 April fiasco by reiterating proper arrest procedure: "Should the necessity for making an arrest arise, with any possibility of an attempt to rescue, it would be better to telephone to Barracks for a mounted party, should there not be sufficient men on duty at the time." Wilson was also at pains to give

<sup>106</sup>From the beginning of the incident to the dispersal of the crowd, about 30 minutes and certainly no more than 45 minutes had elapsed.

<sup>107</sup>A number of the reports suggest that more than one union official was involved, but only one was identified, as secretary of the union, rather than by name. The secretary was S.A.B. Crabb.

<sup>108</sup>There is no conclusive proof that the strikers were responsible but any other explanation seems unlikely.

close instruction on the use of arms: "You are instructed to avoid bloodshed and arms are only to be used in self-defense. Should the necessity for drawing arms arise (which should only be done in very grave and serious cases) they will be used as clubs, except in case of self-defense when a man's life is threatened."<sup>109</sup> Secondly, he was in contact with union officials to try to defuse the situation. The third example of Wilson's gentler approach was his unruffled response to actual and threatened explosions. True, he did have miners' houses searched for explosives, but none turned up and he suspended the hunt. The police seemed to have understood and largely accepted both their inability to prevent explosions and the reason for and nature of the blasts — that is, that strikers were not bombing inhabited dwellings. Thus, when Wilson heard that there was a threat to blow up an inhabited house, he was skeptical: "I do not place much stock in this..."<sup>110</sup> The fourth and most interesting illustration of the more accommodating approach of the Mounties was the lack of arrests stemming from the disturbance of 4 April. Aside from the "swearer" and the "drunk," both of whom received fines of \$5 and costs,<sup>111</sup> Wilson noted in his report that he considered that Belcher had taken "a fair view of the case." The lightness of the sentences and Wilson's comment cast grave doubt on the severity of the "riot" itself. Only one other man was arrested, the same Karl Theodorovics who had hit Albert with a rock on 3 April. Perhaps more arrests were simply impossible because of inadequate identification of the "rioters" or because some strikers went into hiding. Both explanations were given; but even Wilson found these excuses of his men peculiar and, indeed, they are unsatisfying. After all, the incident was supposed to have been a "riot," a serious challenge to established authority. In such a situation, as one analyst has argued, "to come back empty-handed would be to admit impotence. If rioters could not be found, they had to be invented."<sup>112</sup> Indeed, something like that had occurred in the aftermath of the 3 April "riot" when nine charges had been laid — in one case against a man who had simply been there. Why the difference after the second "riot"? Surely it might have been considered part of a trend of escalating violence and therefore have fit the pattern whereby "repression of crime grew more severe as criminal activity increased."<sup>113</sup> If it is true that "the police will endeavour to prove their own thesis

<sup>109</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Inspector Camies, 8 April, enclosed in Wilson to Commissioner, 8 April 1906. Before the fracas of 4 April ended, three Mounties and the two night watchmen had drawn their firearms.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 6 April 1906.

<sup>111</sup>These cases were tried by Inspector Belcher of the RNWMP who was also a Justice of the Peace. It was not unusual for the force in its various guises to fill the roles of investigator, arrestor, prosecutor, judge, and jailer (see Macleod, "Problem of Law and Order," 137; and Walden, *Visions of Order*, 15).

<sup>112</sup>Cobb, *Police and People*, 28.

<sup>113</sup>G.R. Elton, "Introduction: Crime and the Historian," in J.S. Cockburn, ed., *Crime in England 1550-1800* (Princeton 1977), 9.



about the origins, motivations, and leadership of a riot by the type [and number] of people they arrest,"<sup>114</sup> it would follow that the Mounties, on reflection, did not consider the incident a fundamental challenge. Undoubtedly they came to see that the outbreak of conflict had been accidental and might have been avoided had the police ignored the provocation given by Popovitch. Even with the eruption, union leaders had worked to restore order, the strikers had backed off, and nobody had been seriously hurt. The lack of arrests indicated that the police on the spot, if not Wilson himself, were satisfied that the so-called "riot" had been an unintended outburst and was inconsequential in terms of origins, motivation and leadership. In other words, for the Mounties there was an essential innocence in the actions of the strikers.<sup>115</sup> Given this perception, multiple arrests might well have been considered unnecessary and perhaps counterproductive, likely to result in greater unrest, not less. This was not a prospect the police could take lightly, for they were quite aware of the potential physical power of the strikers. There were, therefore, two rational grounds for the Mounties restraining themselves both in terms of crowd management and in terms of arrests: the fear of physical harm; and, more importantly, the promotion of their mandate to preserve order and prevent property damage. To a degree, therefore, the police collaborated with the strikers, a situation that should not be considered strange or unusual: "For in any urban community there would always be a certain degree of complicity between the police and those the police considered potentially dangerous. There was always a great deal of give and take, a carefully measured mutual toleration (combined with wariness)."<sup>116</sup>

For the strikers there was also much to be gained by cooperating with the police. Violence, or its threat, was not without utility for the strikers just as it was for the police. But just as the police could be taken to task for their actions before the bar of public opinion, so too could the strikers. Violence, especially clashes with the police, most certainly harmed the cause of strikers in the public mind for it undermined the image the union wished to project of miners being inoffensive, decent people who deserved better treatment from employers. It was even a source of doubt and division within the strikers' own ranks, as can be seen from Sherman's rather disparaging comments about "foreigners"<sup>117</sup> and the attempts of union officials to control the crowds. Retaining unity amongst the strikers, an essential

<sup>114</sup>Cobb, *Police and People*, 28.

<sup>115</sup>For a discussion of the Mounties' use of discretion and turning the blind eye and deaf ear, see Walden, *Visions of Order*, 40.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>117</sup>For example, at a Lethbridge Trades and Labour Council meeting in March, Sherman had stated that there was no danger of trouble from the strikers unless they were provoked by injustice "and then it is hard to say what these mixed nationalities will do" (See *Herald*, 15 March 1906). On 23 March 1906, the Winnipeg labour newspaper *The Voice* reported Sherman as stating in a public meeting that he "condemned the bringing of miners from central Europe, they being the most revolutionary Socialists and would yet make demands undreamed of by English laborers."

ingredient to the prosecution of the strike, would best be achieved by maintaining order and order would best be secured by working together with the police. This cooperation took place on two levels. Firstly, union officials played a role clearly visible to and welcomed by the police. The initiative of one executive member during the 4 April incident has already been mentioned. Other activities followed. On 6 April Wilson reported that "a very decent chap," an executive member of Local 574 named Holbrook, was doing everything he could to maintain order and had promised to assist Wilson in every way possible.<sup>118</sup> In addition, Sherman had returned to Lethbridge on 5 April, presumably an immediate response to the trouble. Evidently he encouraged the Mounties in the belief that Karl Theodorovics, the one extra man arrested for involvement in the 4 April incident, had been the principal instigator. At least, Wilson was informed that Sherman was glad Theodorovics had been arrested and that the UMW's lawyer would not defend him.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, it was at this time that Sherman renounced his intention of pursuing the charge against the Mounties in connection with the "threat to shoot" incident.

The strikers' cooperation with the police is also apparent in a much more subtle manoeuvre. Many of the supposed troublemakers disappeared from sight. Immediately after the 4 April dust-up a number of them went into hiding. But progressively many more strikers left town, especially bachelors who were considered to be both more volatile and more likely to quit the strike and go back to work. On both counts their departure promised to bring greater serenity and it appears that the union assisted them in leaving and in finding work elsewhere.<sup>120</sup> Although it would be foolish to think that the exodus was simply a matter of getting along

<sup>118</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 6 April 1906. Very little is known about Holbrook. One assumes that the Jno. W. Holbrook who chaired the nominating meeting at which Sherman was selected as the Labor candidate in the Provincial byelection was the same individual (see *Herald*, 29 March 1906; and *News*, 27 March 1906).

<sup>119</sup>The lawyer did act in the case. An examination of the evidence presented at the trial does not indicate that Theodorovics was especially culpable. But as he'd been involved in the Albert case, he was fingered for the incident of the 4th; union and police officials alike seemed quite content to place the blame on his shoulders (See Alberta Supreme Court Records, file 849).

<sup>120</sup>By 17 May, Inspector Carnies, the officer in charge of the mine camp detachment, reported that nearly all the single miners had gone, leaving miners who were property owners, and presumably family men, to carry on the strike (see RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Carnies to Wilson, 17 May 1906; also *Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 6 May 1906). On 8 June 1906, *The Voice* reported that 300 strikers had gone to seek work elsewhere, leaving 220 in Lethbridge drawing strike pay. It may be that property-owning married men were both more placid and less likely to go strikebreaking than single miners, but this common-sense assumption should be given only provisional acceptance. In the case of the 1906 Lethbridge strike, at least, the evidence on this matter is certainly inconclusive. No hard evidence exists to verify union assistance to strikers leaving Lethbridge, but it seems probable — not only because it would reduce union expenditure on strike pay, but also because there are examples of similar activities by the union in dealing with miners who

with the police, as though considerations of financial need did not impel many strikers to seek work elsewhere, it did have the effect of assuaging the concerns of the Mounties.

The upshot of the 4 April incident was reinforcement of the *modus vivendi*. Both police and strikers were able to see that it was in their interest to avoid confrontation with each other. Both saw that there was a line upon which they could agree without subverting the fundamental goals of either party. There was nothing insidious in this. Neither party had cause for shame. On the contrary, both sides were acting quite rationally in furthering their own interests. They discovered that cooperation was the best means to achieve their separate ends.

It would be an exaggeration to say that after 4 April the relationship between Mounties and miners was placid and uneventful. During the following months there were sporadic incidents and alarms. Periodic explosions continued, such as one which was most unusual in that it destroyed the verandah of an inhabited house, though even this one injured nobody.<sup>121</sup> Various types of confrontations between strikers and non-union men continued, including one case in which union official Sherman phoned Wilson to inform him that trouble was brewing because some of the working miners were challenging the strikers.<sup>122</sup> Yet throughout the strike, police involvement did not prevent strikers from using a variety of mechanisms to dissuade potential strikebreakers from going to work.<sup>123</sup> And despite the various threatening episodes which took place during the nine-month strike, after 4 April the tension between strikers and police subsided.

For months, however, Wilson clung to the interpretation that the tranquillity which prevailed was due to a strengthened force of Mounties.<sup>124</sup> There were always enough incidents to make this view plausible, but there was something absurd about a position which used both storms and calms as arguments in favour of retaining a significant police presence. In fact it would be more credible to think that if the

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came to Lethbridge looking for work during the strike. Moreover, the *News* of 14 April 1906 reported that 75 strikers were about to leave for the mines in San Coulee, Montana.

<sup>121</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 315, file 202-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 18 September 1906 (monthly report for August); *Ibid.*, vol. 316, file 238-06, W. Munday to Wilson, 13 August 1906 and Wilson to Commissioner, 14 August 1906; and Alberta Supreme Court Records, file 896.

<sup>122</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 15 April 1906; and *Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Camies to Wilson, 14 April 1906. Sherman's action is one more indication that union leaders worked with the police to maintain the peace.

<sup>123</sup>These techniques, ranging from threats of various degrees of seriousness to a train ticket out of town to a place where union work was available, continued throughout the strike and were relatively successful. Few of the original strikers went back to work and many incoming miners were dissuaded.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 315, file 202-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 17 April 1906 (monthly report for March). See also *Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 15 April and 2 May 1906.

police contributed to the maintenance of peace and order it was more a result of delicate tactics than large numbers. Yet Wilson went so far as to assert that he'd have to keep the men sent from other divisions until the strike was over.<sup>125</sup> But eventually he had to back off. On the one hand the commanding officer of the Macleod Division clamoured to have his men returned.<sup>126</sup> On the other hand the usual discipline problems within the ranks were exacerbated by the inactivity and distastefulness of guard duty during the strike. The result was everything from desertion to imprisonment, to dismissal from the force.<sup>127</sup> By mid-May, Wilson had reduced the mine camp detachment to a half-dozen men.<sup>128</sup> Given the exodus of strikers from Lethbridge the number of Mounties and miners confronting each other had, therefore, significantly decreased by mid-May. Two months later the RNWMP Commissioner ordered Wilson to remove the remainder and to notify company officials that "owing to stress of work, we can no longer furnish these men for that duty."<sup>129</sup> The order was not carried out immediately since it coincided with one of the sporadic episodes and might have given the appearance of withdrawing under pressure, but by early September all Mounties, save one, had been removed from duty at the mine camp.<sup>130</sup> For the last three months of the strike, then, the Mounties' involvement was negligible. Contrary to the claims of the company and the fears of Wilson, the strikers did not take advantage of this situation to destroy company property or to beat working miners. Aside from a couple of minor disturbances,

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 19 April and 2 June 1906.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Primrose to Commissioner, 22 April 1906.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 19 May 1906, Wilson to Assistant Commissioner, telegram, 15 July 1906, and McIlree (Assistant Commissioner) to Comptroller, telegram, 16 July 1906; White to Galt, 19 July 1906; White to A.M. Nanton, 1 August 1906; and *ibid.*, A1, vol. 315, file 202-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 20 June 1906 (monthly report for May), 24 July 1906 (monthly report for June) and 24 August 1906 (monthly report for July). Evidently, some Mounties did not find the duty repugnant. After his discharge, Sergeant G. Goodwin became a special constable at Coal Creek in the Crow's Nest Pass (*The Fernie Ledger*, 8 August 1906), and Corporal Brewer did the same thing for the Lethbridge mine (*Herald*, 6 September 1906). The monthly reports of the Lethbridge commanding officers both before and after 1906 demonstrate that breaches of discipline were frequent and, therefore, not solely related to strike duty (see, for example, RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 63, file 247-92, Deane to Commissioner, 31 August 1892; and *ibid.*, A1, vol. 334, file 184-07 (Wilson's monthly reports for 1907).

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 6, 17, 19, 21 May 1906; and Camies to Wilson, 17 May 1906, and Wilson to Naismith, 19 May 1906, both enclosed in Wilson to Commissioner, 19 May 1906.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, Perry to Wilson, telegram, 17 July 1906. See also *Ibid.*, McIlree to Comptroller, 16 July 1906.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, Wilson to Commissioner, 17 (2 letters), 18 (letter and telegram), 24, 27 and 30 July, and 7 September 1906.

things were extremely quiet and nonviolent right to the end of the strike at the beginning of December.<sup>131</sup>

## IV

THE FIRST CONCLUSION to be drawn from examining the relationship of police and strikers during the 1906 Lethbridge strike is that for both groups there were social boundaries to their behaviour. In part, those limits were established by society at large. The public expected police to act in an even-handed, neutral fashion within the context of the Criminal Code. Biased and aggressive police action towards peaceable strikers was not, therefore, acceptable. The public also considered that individuals had a right to work (or not work) if they wished. Thus it was not permissible for strikers to use violence, or its threat, to prevent a person from working.<sup>132</sup> Both police and strikers were hedged in by such public views and were entitled to take action to force the other party to accept them. But the boundaries to behaviour also included the lines drawn by the other social group. Through a multiplicity of mechanisms ranging from brute force to mild entreaties, police influenced strikers and vice versa.

The accommodation of strikers and police did not represent a true meeting of minds. RNWMP officers never developed much comprehension of the justification of the strike, expressing the wish more than once that the strikers would just go back to work. Wilson undoubtedly considered the miners an already-advantaged group of workers who were making excessive demands, especially since many were "foreigners." Certainly this would be the inference the Mounties would draw from their discovery that the average daily earnings of seven prominent strikers ranged between \$2.80 and \$5.03 for the six months prior to the strike, some four to eight times the \$.60 per day received by a RNWMP recruit at the time.<sup>133</sup> Other invidious comparisons could have been drawn by the police. If miners complained of harsh treatment by the company, ordinary Mounties might have responded that it was nothing compared to the authoritarian management procedures of the RNWMP whereby fines, jail sentences, and dismissals were quite normal prac-

<sup>131</sup>On the conclusion of the strike, see Baker, "Miners and Mediator."

<sup>132</sup>The term "public" is not, of course, very precise. It refers to those, presumably a majority, who hold the dominant, commonly-accepted ideas or notions within a society.

<sup>133</sup>S.W. Horrall, *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (Toronto 1973), 34. It was \$.75 a day in 1873, reduced to \$.40 in 1880, raised to \$.60 in 1905 and to \$.75 in 1912. However, the Mounties received food and lodging in addition to their pay and they had a pension plan. It is interesting that although there are few items in the Mounted Police papers related to the issues in dispute between management and labour during the strike, multiple copies of the list showing the strikers' pay were filed, though without comment or reference, in the Mounted Police papers. The company must have supplied the information, undoubtedly to shape the perceptions of the police.

tices.<sup>134</sup> If strikers argued the need to establish better economic conditions for their wives and children, Mounties might have noted that for most constables, marriage itself was unlikely both for financial reasons and because personnel were moved frequently. Clearly, Mounties had little sympathy for strikers. Yet there is little indication of strong police hostility toward the strikers once the initial negative stereotype had been overcome. Indeed, the Mounties did develop an independent judgement of what was required of them as witnessed, for example, by the decision in July, without consultation with company officials, to withdraw the force at the mine encampment.<sup>135</sup> It is true, of course, that the Mounties had accepted "direction" by company officials at the beginning and then retained a jaundiced view of the presumed violent proclivities of the "foreign" strikers. But then "it is the duty of the police to be two steps ahead of potential violence."<sup>136</sup> There were, moreover, other police activities which also demonstrated a lack of neutrality — but in favour of the strikers. Examples include the limited number of charges laid by the Mounties following the altercations of 3 and 4 April, and their unwillingness to provide escorts for working miners venturing out of the mine camp even though the police knew that the strikebreakers were at risk. The argument about the failure of the Mounties to act in a neutral fashion cuts both ways.

For their part, if the strikers ever saw the police as implacable opponents, their actions spoke differently. Of course they criticized RNWMP activity in the "police intimidation" case at the beginning of the strike and in the "threat to shoot" incident. Certainly strikers used abusive language toward the police, spread the rumour that the Mounties had corruptly and illegally secured a supply of beer and liquor for themselves,<sup>137</sup> and complained that the presence of the police was quite unnecessary.<sup>138</sup> But the hostility of strikers towards the police was actually quite muted and controlled. For the most part, the rank-and-file accepted the authority of the law enforcement officers. Little violence was directed against the police and at no time were highly lethal weapons such as knives and firearms used by strikers. Moreover, union leaders not only refrained from pressing very far their criticisms of police actions, but also cooperated with and assisted the Mounties in a variety of ways. In short, while the strikers were wary of the police and did not see them as allies, their actions indicate they did not view the Mounties as enemies. On occasion strikers even turned to the police to protect their rights: Theodorovics' complaint about being hit during the 4 April altercation was the most unusual case in point;

<sup>134</sup>The RNWMP Act (57-58 V., c. 27) printed in *The Revised Statutes of Canada, 1906*, chapter 91, provides numerous examples of autocratic administration. Since the force was a quasi-military establishment such organization was hardly surprising.

<sup>135</sup>RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 316, file 238-06, Perry to Wilson, telegram, 17 July 1906. See also *Ibid.*, McIlree to Comptroller, 16 July 1906.

<sup>136</sup>Cobb, *Police and People*, 19.

<sup>137</sup>Patterson to Editor, 6 May, in *UMW Journal*, 17 May 1906.

<sup>138</sup>See, for example, *Ibid.*; and Crabb to Editor, n.d. in *UMW Journal*, 28 June 1906.

Sherman's complaint about non-union men harassing the strikers on 14 April was another.<sup>139</sup>

During the strike each party learned things about the other that allowed for the establishment and maintenance of the *modus vivendi*. The strikers discovered that the police were not out to repress them brutally, were not the simple agents of the coal company, and were committed to the concept of police neutrality. The Mounties found that the strikers were basically peaceful, were not out to kill or maim non-union men, not intent on destroying company property, not desirous of violating the Criminal Code, and not eager to have violent confrontations with the police. Moreover, both the strikers and the police discovered the many ways of influencing the other party to abide by the principles of "right not might." That the police influenced the strikers is not to be doubted. Yet it is especially important to emphasize that through the skilful use of a wide range of activities, the strikers were able to have an enormous impact on the behaviour of the police. For if the police approached a reasonable facsimile of neutrality during the strike, pressure from union members had done much to bring this about.

No single case study can provide a definitive answer to such a major question of interpretation as the role and function of police *vis-à-vis* workers during strikes.<sup>140</sup> Yet for a particular episode to hold broad significance it must be related to general considerations, just as the utility of a generalization must be based, in part, on its fit with specific occurrences. In regard to the striker/police relationship, the 1906 Lethbridge strike illustrates very clearly that drawing a definitive interpretive conclusion is extremely difficult. From the perspective of the participants no absolute lessons could be drawn. To the strikers, the police were not at all as bad as might have been feared but they were dangerous nonetheless. And, of course, the police could say the same about the strikers. If the development of class consciousness, or indeed of pluralist consciousness, is a matter of historical experience, then one might venture, given the negative stereotypes that existed at the beginning of the strike, that in general the pluralist rather than the class outlook was strengthened by the relationship between police and strikers in the 1906 strike. But even if strikers' attitudes towards the police improved during the strike it does not necessarily mean the non-existence of, or even a decrease in, class (or at least occupational) consciousness. In the first place the strike was merely one point along a continuum. The perspectives of individual workers towards the police would have been shaped by a multiplicity of events over a long period of time. Secondly, it could be argued by strikers that police behavior in 1906 had been determined by the solidarity of the vast majority of the mining community and the strikers' skilful use of a variety of tactics ranging from shows of force to public appeals. Of course,

<sup>139</sup>Indeed, Sherman was forced to turn to the police in December for protection for his person and his house in Fernie (see *Frank Paper*, n.d., in *Herald*, 3 January 1907).

<sup>140</sup>Not, at least, without committing what D.H. Fischer calls the "telescopic fallacy." See his *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York 1970), 147-9.

such an argument could be met by suggesting that if this were possible, then the socio-economic system clearly was capable of reformation, thus strengthening the ideas of gradualism and pluralism. But if the "lessons" of the strike were ambiguous, this was not entirely disadvantageous for the strikers. For in terms of strategy, why would they come down firmly and uniformly on one interpretation of the police? Workers kept open their options in other areas, such as whether they wanted to overthrow the capitalist order or whether they wanted a larger slice of the pie. Workers needed to retain a wide repertoire in order to maximize their power. Certainly, if they painted the police as inveterate enemies and acted accordingly then it would no doubt be a self-fulfilling prophecy. But they also needed to retain in their minds the possibility that the police were agents of capitalists for such skepticism made them less vulnerable to potential manipulation and control. It seems that Canadian workers, as a body, kept open both options regarding the nature of the police, indeed of society and the state: the pluralist model and the class conflict model.

Perhaps modern academic analysts should do likewise. Taking the 1906 Lethbridge strike, for example, it is no easier now than it was then to draw interpretive conclusions about the relationship of strikers and police. Or, put another way, the conclusion to be drawn is that the relationship is vastly more complex than the simple dichotomy which has been posed. Stressing nuances and complexities is currently a growth industry in the field of labour history in Canada because the experience of past workers was neither one-dimensional nor straightforward, the 1906 Lethbridge strike being a perfect example of this reality. Thus for the case under examination the pluralist theory works; but the class conflict interpretation does as well. That this should be so is enormously frustrating and terribly inconclusive. One would like to be able to say that one theory is correct, the other quite wrong. But only if one wills it can one come to such a conclusion for the evidence will not substantiate it. The unfortunate academic is thus in the same boat as the object of the academics' study: the essential meaning of human affairs is not readily evident. Yet for all participants, then and now, the search for meaning is most instructive.

From the pluralist perspective, striker/police relations during the 1906 Lethbridge strike may be seen as demonstrating that the police did serve the public weal rather than the interest of the company; that the strikers were treated equitably by the police; that potential abuses of police power were checked by the efforts of the strikers to protect their civil rights; and that a non-elite social group was able to have an important influence on an essential appendage of the state. Moreover, the pluralist might also note that the intervention of the Mounties not only did not prevent the strikers from making significant gains in the end, but even might have made that success possible by preventing an alternate unfolding of events such as occurred in the same year at a lumber mill in Buckingham, Quebec. In that case company guards had been employed, three persons had been killed, the militia subsequently had been called in followed by regular troops, and the strike had been



lost.<sup>141</sup> Indeed, using another comparison even the *Macleod Advance* noted the difference the Mounties meant: "While in the States when a strike is in progress an armed mob of Pinkertons and thugs are maintained ... in this country a dozen of these Mounted Police have always been found sufficient to keep law and order."<sup>142</sup>

Yet pluralists would have some answering to do to explain why the police were far from objective at the beginning of the strike, did not consult with the strikers, and had to be pushed hard to bring them into a more neutral position. Does this sound like a social structure which represents the interests of the various groups as a general rule or merely on occasion? Does it not seem that the structural influences largely favoured the elites rather than workers? The pluralist response, of course, is that social groups do not have equal power or influence in a society and that in a society in transition, structural elements such as the law will usually favour established groups rather than emerging ones. But, the pluralist would conclude, the 1906 strike demonstrates beyond doubt that change was possible for those who worked for it.

From the class-conflict perspective the relationship between strikers and police demonstrated that first and foremost the physical force of the state was available to the company and was used to restrict the activities of the strikers. The mere presence of uniformed police who protected the employer's property and strike-breakers showed that the Mounties were agents of the mine management. In other words, whether or not actual violence was used to repress strikers is not the point; the threat of physical suppression always existed if the strikers went beyond carefully circumscribed limits. It is also apparent that the police comprehended and sympathized with management's perspective more naturally than with the viewpoint of the striking miners, as evidenced by Naismith's tutoring of Wilson and the latter's neglect to consult with union officials at the beginning of the strike.

On the other hand, class-conflict theory does not easily accord with the substantial degree of neutrality the police attained over the course of the strike and the failure of the Mounties to seize the opportunity for significant repression afforded by the "riots" of 3 and 4 April. The explanation that can be provided is that in a democratic but class-divided society a process of "legitimation" occurs.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>141</sup>J.C. Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1906* (Toronto 1907), 288; and P.L. Lapointe, *Buckingham 1906* (Asticou 1973). Wilson noted the different patterns of the two strikes in RCMP Papers, A1, vol. 315, file 202-06, Wilson to Commissioner, 19 October (monthly report for September) 1906.

<sup>142</sup>*Macleod Advance*, n.d., in *Herald*, 12 August 1906. The numerous Thiel detectives employed by the Winnipeg Street Railway Company during a strike in April 1906, had certainly exacerbated matters there (see Jamieson, *Times of Trouble*, 84, and the files of the *Voice*.) For a revealing debate on the use of Mounties or company guards, see RCMP Papers, B5, vol. 2478, file 57, Primrose to Commissioner, 22 April 1906; and Perry to Primrose, 26 April 1906.

<sup>143</sup>The nature and process of legitimation is discussed in R. Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society: An Analysis of the Western System of Power* (London 1969), 161-236.

Agencies of the state such as the police must be seen to be neutral, objective, merely serving the public will rather than being seen to act as the instruments of the ruling class. Only in this manner can the state retain its legitimacy in the public mind and continue to promote the interests of the ruling class if not the special requirements of particular members of that class. Moreover, it might well be argued that legitimation could be practiced in the 1906 Lethbridge strike because it did not involve a major crisis in the relations of labour and capital. The stakes for the particular individuals and organizations involved were not absolutely crucial. The strikers were supported by the powerful UMWA, had other occupational options in the Lethbridge region, and seldom worked the mines in summer in any case. The company's interest focused more on profiting from its extensive land holdings than on coalmining. In fact, the strike was probably of more concern to the company because of its land than because of the mine itself, since bad publicity about shortages of home heating fuel deterred settlers. Moreover, both groups could be relatively optimistic about the long term. The company estimated it had sufficient coal reserves to last another century. Miners could look forward to acquiring land of their own, or at least to balancing their reliance on the mine with other economic endeavours. In short, unlike in other strike situations, neither side was wholly dependent on the mine or, indeed, absolutely required an immediate decision, a fact which may account for the protracted nature of the dispute. It may also explain not only the restricted degree of violence by both the police and the strikers, but also the relatively good relationship that was established between the two parties. The Mounties were, of course, under federal control. It should be noted, therefore, that federal interests were focused on the agricultural development of the prairies and thus had little concern for issues related to industrial development.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, there is no evidence that Ottawa considered the Lethbridge strike to be much more than an isolated incident concerning a single mine out of hundreds — certainly nothing like the core of a broad upheaval which could be dangerous to the security and stability of the state. Thus, it could be argued that legitimation could be practiced because the company did not require abrupt, aggressive action by the police, because the strikers were not in a position which demanded an immediate resolution even if it meant violent challenges to police authority, and because the state was little concerned until the autumn when home-heating fuel shortages threatened.

Instructive as the concept of legitimation may be, pushed to the limit it becomes impossible to see where legitimation ends and a genuine legitimacy of a democratic society begins. It can become a type of paranoia in which every action by state agencies, no matter how noble and enlightened and progressive, is seen as an insidious snare for entrapping the unwary into an acceptance of social control. It would be silly to accept that things are necessarily as they seem on the surface,

<sup>144</sup> A. Seager, "West Canadian Collieries and the Riddle of the Crow's Nest Pass," paper to the Canadian Historical Association, Quebec, 1989.

but it would be equally foolish to maintain that they are necessarily *not* as they seem. Put in other terms, at some point in attempting to appear to play fair one actually does play fair — even if one does not so intend.

Finally, it might be thought that viewing the 1906 Lethbridge strike as a point in time and place can help to resolve the interpretive debate. But even from this angle the message is ambivalent. One might claim that the relatively good relationship which was established between police and strikers during the strike was the wave of the future as competing groups in the society learned how to get along with each other for the mutual benefit of all. Equally, however, one might claim that the relationship between police and strikers in 1906 in Lethbridge was an anomaly, or at least at a point of transition, prior to the establishment of thoroughly repressive and controlling policing of strikes. Further detailed studies of the relations of police and strikers in other locations and times, along with additional statistical and comparative analyses, no doubt will shed much light on the historical pattern in Canada. But it is difficult to believe that the interpretive issue will ever be conclusively determined.

Perhaps, indeed, the pluralist theory when it admits differential power wielded by various social groups is not so far removed from class conflict theory when it acknowledges the legitimation process. Each formulation is afflicted by an Achilles' Heel which each must have in order to retain its credibility and utility, but which go far to transform or undercut the basic theories themselves. Certainly, an examination of striker/police relations during the 1906 Lethbridge strike makes it difficult to accept one construct over the other. Most of the strikers, and the Mounties for that matter, probably could not decide, either.

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