

THE NEW IMMIGRATION AND STRIKES IN PENNSYLVANIA BITUMINOUS COAL

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Scholars have been hard put to specify what particular features of American life derive in some distinctive way from immigration. . . . The importance of immigration. . . as a source of distinctions, divisions, and changes within the United States — remains as yet only dimly grasped.¹

John Higham

Although our understanding of immigration's effects on American life is feeble, the subject has always absorbed a number of Americans. That interest became an obsession for some in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the stream of immigration to the United States was fed increasingly by Southern and Eastern-European sources. The Slovaks, Poles, Italians, Austrians, and others who dominated immigration by the 1890's were dubbed "new immigrants" by some social observers.² Concern over the effects of the new immigration on all aspects of American life became so strong by 1907 that Congress established a commission to study the phenomenon in detail.³

The American labor movement has long attracted attention as a feature of American life in which immigration and ethnic diversity played an important role. In the coal industry, Yankee and "old stock" immigrant miners asserted that the new immigrants undermined labor organization and working conditions. Coal-mining unions in Pennsylvania were so convinced of this that, from the late 1880's through the 1890's, they sponsored laws aimed at keeping new immigrants out of the coal fields.⁴ Despite the convictions of the miners' unions and the theories of later observers, neither the role new immigrants played in labor protest in the Pennsylvania bituminous coal fields, nor the larger role of the new immigration in the American labor movement, is adequately understood today.

The young economist appointed to head the Immigration Commission, W. Jett Lauck, was particularly interested in the effects of new immigrants on labor conditions in the Pennsylvania coal fields.⁵ A Progressive reformer, Lauck supported immigration restriction on the grounds that the new immigrants were undermining labor conditions both by increasing the labor supply (thus driving down wages) and also by breaking down labor organization, making it impossible for miners to fight effectively for better wages and working conditions.⁶ Using the Connellsville coke region of Pennsylvania from 1882 to 1894 as a representative case, Lauck roundly blamed the new immigrants for the problems of

unions in Pennsylvania bituminous coal: "The unions were inundated by the flood of recent immigrants and the various strikes were merely the convulsions that marked their advancing dissolution."⁷ Lauck claimed to discern four ways in which this deluge of new immigrants had destroyed labor organization among coal miners in the Connellsville region. First, differences in race, language, and religion among groups of new-immigrant miners and between new- and old-immigrant miners were manipulated by mine operators to undermine worker solidarity. Secondly, the new immigrants "would not keep up their membership in the unions during the periods between strikes," leaving unions ill-prepared to support long strikes. Thirdly, although no miners of any ethnic group had a great deal of money saved, Lauck argued the new immigrants' financial resources were even slimmer than most, making them more willing to capitulate to operators's demands. The fourth factor weakened unions more subtly: "after each strike numbers of the natives, and British and German immigrant workmen, refusing longer to tolerate the conditions imposed, left the region" for work in other fields where "wages and working conditions were better." According to Lauck, Connellsville-area unions thus lost "the hardiest, most resourceful, and most aggressive" miners who were so essential for successful strikes.⁸

Beyond Lauck's vivid narrative account, the Commission was hard-put to make a case showing that new immigrants weakened labor organization. According to the Commission's own statistics, new immigrants throughout the country seemed to join unions at no lower rate than Yankee or old-immigrant miners. In regions where fields were unionized, new-immigrant miners were likely to join unions; where fields were unorganized, new-immigrant miners, like their fellow Yankee and old-immigrant miners, were unlikely to be union members.⁹

Despite problems with statistical documentation, Lauck argued throughout the Immigration Commission's reports that new immigrants undermined labor organization among bituminous coal miners. The same view has been one element in the theory of the traditional school of American labor historians. Selig Perlman, in his well-known work *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, proclaimed that the immigrant character of American workers has been a major factor militating against their class consciousness. But Perlman, unlike the Immigration Commission, did not attribute any characteristics especially disruptive of unionization to Southern and Eastern European immigrants in his *Theory*. Rather, every new wave of immigrants "generally of a new nationality" threatened older groups of workers in the various industries; Perlman claimed that "the strongest animosity" among workers was directed against recently arrived immigrant groups competing for their jobs, not against their employers. For Perlman, relatively unrestricted immigration before 1917 had allowed one wave of immigrant groups after another to wash out the foundation of American labor organization and working-class consciousness. Yet while his theory seems intuitively plausible and was widely accepted for decades, Perlman never attempted to ground his theory in the bedrock of historical fact. Recent scholarship has

tended to question both his roseate painting of American economic opportunity and his assertion that immigrants inevitably drew the hostility of fellow workers.¹⁰ One work that strongly challenges the view that unions were debilitated by immigrants is Victor Greene's *The Slavic Community on Strike*.

Studying strike activity in Pennsylvania's anthracite coal fields from 1880 to 1902, Greene confronts the same question that the Immigration Commission posed over half a century earlier: what role did the new-immigrant miners play in coal miners's strikes and unionization? But contrary to Lauck in 1909 and Perlman in 1949, Greene concludes that the new-immigrant miners actually were essential for the establishment of a strong labor organization in the Pennsylvania anthracite fields. Greene argues that poor union leadership, the hostility of operators, and petty regional differences among native miners were the real reasons anthracite miners had difficulties unionizing. And he documents that all of these factors plagued the anthracite miners long before the arrival of the new immigrants.¹¹

Greene's research corrects the stereotype of the new-immigrant miners as docile animals who obediently followed operators' commands. His work documents not only that very few Slavs ever acted as strike-breakers in the anthracite region, but also that their support of strikes was often shockingly violent. Indeed, the Slavs occasionally started strikes themselves, independent of native miners. But Greene may go too far when he claims that "it is chimerical to ascribe the delay in unionization to the Slavs".¹² For while the Slavs in Pennsylvania anthracite plainly were not involved in traditional anti-union tactics, their mere presence in the mining force may well have made unionization a more difficult affair than it would have been with a more culturally homogeneous group of workers. Indeed, one fact that pervades Greene's study is a rather consistent mistrust among union leaders and native and old-immigrant miners of the Slavs. Deserved or not, such feelings were undoubtedly one obstacle to union power, though how great an obstacle is more difficult to determine. Thus the hostility Perlman saw as a major factor militating against unionization and working-class consciousness in America emerges in Greene's work, though the importance of such mutual hostility is not clear. In Greene's study there also emerges a point made by the Immigration Commission: Slavic miners were rarely dues-paying union members during his study period. But he never seriously addresses how this may have hindered unionization.¹³

The evaluations of the relationship between labor organization and immigration propounded by Lauck, by Perlman, and by Greene contradict one another on many points. Questions about this relationship are not new, but even today answers remain clouded by uncertainty. How, specifically, did new Southern and Eastern Europeans in the Pennsylvania bituminous fields affect strike activity? Did activity increase, or decrease? Were strikes less successful in forcing operators to meet demands? Did miners' unions find themselves less in control of strikes as increasing numbers of miners spoke totally different languages and

felt strong bonds of cultures and values far from those of union leaders and older miners? To what degree did older workers shift their antagonism from operators to the new flood of immigrants, as Perlman suggested? Was this shift in antagonism manifested in less strike activity, or was it reflected in less unity among striking workers? To be sure, strike activity is only one aspect of labor organization, but the number of questions that arise surrounding strike activity alone suggests the complexity of the issue at hand.

These questions point a way towards analyzing events that transpired in the Pennsylvania coal fields during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As the Pennsylvania coal industry expanded to feed the industrializing East's energy demands, the percentage of new-immigrant miners increased in Pennsylvania fields from practically none in 1880, to 18.7 percent in 1890, to 37.7 percent in 1899.¹⁴ Fortunately for the labor historian, the Bureau of Labor under Carrol D. Wright's direction carefully investigated virtually every strike in the United States from 1881 to 1894.¹⁵ These Bureau reports, covering much of the period when new immigrants were entering the American labor force, offer a wealth of opportunities to focus, in a quantitative way, on lingering questions surrounding the relationship between immigration and strike activity. And since social scientists such as W. Jett Lauck based many of their conclusions about this relationship on developments in the Pennsylvania bituminous coal fields, those same fields provide an ideal area to study using the Bureau of Labor's statistics.

The data are especially useful because they are organized by state and industry, and they include strike locations, allowing the researcher to break down strike activity in an industry below the state level. Since new immigrants did not comprise the same proportion of miners in each bituminous coal-producing county, this refinement provides a check on conclusions about their effects on strike activity that a strictly statewide analysis would give. But the data is not without problems. A major obstacle for the investigator of strike activity among ethnic groups is that the Reports do not give information on the ethnic composition of the strikers, the whole body of miners in an affected strike area, or the miners hired afterwards. From any source, information on the more general question of a county-level description of miners' ethnic make-up on either the county or the state level has proved even more elusive. Nevertheless, census reports on the ethnic composition of the county population from one decade to the next are available. While the link between the ethnic make-up of a county's entire population and the ethnic make-up of its mining force is by itself tenuous, additional links from census data and narrative accounts help to make useful distinctions concerning the ethnic character of a county's mining

Four bituminous coal-producing counties in Pennsylvania were chosen for detailed study: Fayette, Westmoreland, Clearfield, and Tioga. Fayette County includes the "Connellsville coke region," which Lauck studied in depth to describe how new immigrants destroyed labor unions between 1882 and 1894.

Located in southwestern Pennsylvania, Fayette borders West Virginia, and Pittsburgh is within thirty miles of its northwestern corner. Westmoreland County is just north of Fayette, and even closer to Pittsburgh. Clearfield and Tioga Counties are both somewhat farther from any major industrial centers. Clearfield is in west central Pennsylvania, while Tioga is in the north central region with New York state forming its northern border. Table 1 presents population growth and increases in coal production during the study period for these four counties. As the table shows, only Tioga County did not share in an overwhelming increase in population and coal production. Still, none of the counties were population centers nor did any of the four contain large cities, even the two near Pittsburgh. In 1890, Fayette County's largest town was Uniontown (pop. 6359); Westmoreland's was Greensburg (pop. 4204); Clearfield's was Clearfield (pop. 2248); and Tioga's was Blossburg (pop. 2568).¹⁶ Thus the new immigrants who were in these counties during the study period probably found work in only a few industries including coal, not in a broad range of industries as was the case in Allegheny County, which includes Pittsburgh.

Table 1: POPULATION AND COAL PRODUCTION, FAYETTE, WESTMORELAND, CLEARFIELD, AND TIOGA COUNTIES:¹⁷
1880, 1894.

		1880	1894	% change
Fayette:	population	58,842	92,168	57
	coal (short tons)	2,356,983	6,684,153	184
Westmoreland:	population	78,036	131,761	69
	coal (short tons)	3,357,558	7,739,080	130
Clearfield:	population	42,408	73,984	74
	coal (short tons)	1,722,711	4,156,310	141
Tioga:	population	45,814	51,022	11
	coal (short tons)	938,517	684,627	-27

The numbers and proportion of new immigrants among these four counties varied distinctively. When these variations are placed in the context of the size of each county's mining force, important differences emerge in the ethnic composition of the miners from one county to the next. These differences are suggested when the ratios of all new immigrants (including women and children) to all bituminous miners are compared (Table 2). In 1880 all four

Table 2: NEW IMMIGRANT POPULATION COMPARED TO MINERS IN FAYETTE, WESTMORELAND, CLEARFIELD, AND TIOGA COUNTIES: 1880, 1894.¹⁸

	1880	1894
F: new imm. total pop. (and %)	76 (.1)	7,834 (8.5)
number of miners	2,267	6,371
new imm. / miners	.06	1.2
W: new imm. total pop. (and %)	275 (.4)	9,268 (7.0)
number of miners	4,498	8,417
new imm. / miners	.06	1.1
G: new imm. total pop. (and %)	181 (.4)	2,667 (3.6)
number of miners	3,029	7,036
new imm. / miners	.05	.38
T: new imm. total pop. (and %)	277 (.6)	1,011 (2.0)
number of miners	2,372	1,704
new imm. / miners	.11	.59

W = Westmoreland, F = Fayette, C = Clearfield, T = Tioga

counties had miniscule proportions of new immigrants. They did not constitute more than .6% of the entire population of any of the four counties. Even if every new immigrant had been a coal miner, they would have accounted for no more than 11 per cent of the bituminous mining force. By 1894, an increased influx of immigrants in all the counties resulted in higher proportions than in 1880. But significant differences have emerged. Fayette and Westmoreland had attracted far more new immigrants than Clearfield and Tioga. The ratio of new immigrants, including women and children, to miners in both counties was over one to one, easily enough to constitute a substantial proportion of miners. And a contemporary observer corroborates that there were large numbers of new-immigrant miners in Fayette County, Andrew Roy, a mine inspector at the time, wrote that by 1891 "the majority of the Connellsville coke and mine workers were Slavs, Huns, and Poles."¹⁹ The ratio of new immigrants to miners was almost as high in Westmoreland as in Fayette; it is thus likely that the proportion of new immigrant miners in Westmoreland was similar to that in Fayette. Contrasting markedly with these two counties were Tioga and Clearfield. The ratios of new immigrants to miners were much lower: .59 and .38 respectively. Further, one historian has estimated that Tioga County had very few new-immigrant miners as late as 1902.²⁰ This suggests that Clearfield County had proportionally even fewer new immigrants among its miners, for the ratio of new immigrants to miners is lower in Clearfield than in Tioga in 1894. While these

ratios, based on data for the first and last years of the study, are not refined enough to permit the tracing of subtle year-by-year variations in the ethnic make-up of each county's mining force, they allow plenty of room for reasonable conjecture about the period in general. From 1880 to 1894, new immigrants probably reached majority proportions in the bituminous mining forces of Fayette and Westmoreland Counties; but in Tioga and Clearfield they never approached dominance.

In light of these ethnic differences among the four counties, the strike data becomes more relevant to questions concerning strike activity and new immigrants. The first question concerns strike activity itself: did strike activity in the Pennsylvania bituminous coal fields increase or decrease from 1881 to 1894, as new immigrants grew from a negligible fraction to 25 per cent of the entire state's mining force?²¹ This study uses strikers per thousand miners per year as the index of strike activity; higher numbers indicate more strike activity among the miners.²² Before discussing the results of this index (Table 3a), an important limitation should be noted that applies to all the indices based on the Bureau of Labor Reports. While the state-level data for Pennsylvania bituminous coal is sound every year, the county-level data is problematic from 1882 to 1885. In each of these years, the Reports list a number of fairly large general strikes with no location more specific than "Western Pennsylvania."²³ This makes it impossible to use data on these strikes in any of the county-level tables, though some of the study counties may have been involved. Fayette County may have been especially affected, since its strike activity is so much lower than state-wide activity only during these four years. Westmoreland and Clearfield may also have been affected, though strike activity from 1882 to 1885 does not seem to be a departure from their general pattern in other years. These strikes probably never involved Tioga miners, however; Tioga County is one of the easternmost bituminous coal-producing counties in Pennsylvania.

Strike activity among bituminous coal miners statewide was roughly cyclic. Major peak years were 1884, 1889, and 1894; trough years were 1882, 1888, and 1892. But this is not to suggest any well-defined link between strike activity and the business cycle. As two leading strike historians have noted, the theoretical problems involved in relating strike activity to economic interest in any way are "forbidding."²⁴

The data show several facts important to understanding how the increasing numbers of new immigrants related to strike activity. First, out of the top five years of strike activity on the state level from 1881 to 1894, the top four were from 1889 to 1894. This period of high strike activity, coming at the latter end of the study, is also the period of the greatest proportion of new immigrants in Pennsylvania's bituminous mining force. Further, throughout the entire study period the counties with the largest proportions of new-immigrant miners, Fayette and Westmoreland, generally showed more strike activity than the others. Fayette had only one year without miners striking, and Westmoreland had only

three; while Clearfield had six and Tioga had nine. Omitting the years 1882-1885, when problems with some of the strike locations make the data unreliable, Fayette County's strike activity exceeded that of all three other counties for every year except 1893 (Tioga registered 918 to Fayette's 49 in 1893); Fayette miners were also more strike-prone than miners in the state as a whole except for during 1892 and 1893. And strike activity among Westmoreland miners usually exceeded activity among Clearfield and Tioga miners as well. Thus the influx of new immigrants in the mining force did not inevitably result in decreased strike activity. Rather, on the state level strike activity was highest in the years when new immigrants comprised the highest proportion of mine workers, and likewise the counties with the highest proportions of new immigrants were also marked by the greatest strike activity.

But this pattern, which could be interpreted as supporting Greene's contention that new immigrants enhanced strike activity, should not obscure other trends in the data that counter such a conclusion. For the data also show that on both the state and county level the years with the lowest strike activity, as well as the years with the highest, coincide with increasing proportions of new immigrants. The three least active years on the state level were 1888, 1892, and 1893; during these years, one recalls, new immigrants were increasingly present in the coal mines. And in Fayette and Westmoreland, the counties with the highest proportions of new-immigrant miners, the lowest strike activity as well as some of the highest occurred during these later years. Further, Fayette's strike level fell below the state's in 1892 and 1893, and the years when Fayette and Westmoreland went without strike activity were likewise late in the period (after 1888). Unfortunately the Reports discontinued detailed information on strike locations after 1894, preventing any conclusions about whether this reduced strike activity became the dominant feature in these two heavily new-immigrant counties. But since all Pennsylvania's bituminous counties participated in the 1894 suspension, large proportions of new immigrants did not render impossible this massive strike. No facile relationship exists between new immigrants in the mines and strike levels among miners.

A basic index of strike activity based on strikers per thousand workers is only a starting point for understanding how strikes changed during the period when new immigrants increasingly entered the coal mines. Another useful indicator is the success rate of strikes throughout the period. In this study, a "successful" strike is one which fully or partially meets its goals. The success rate is the percentage of all strikers who participated in successful strikes. Success as an interpretive tool has serious limitations, however. For example, an increasing success rate may be totally unrelated to worker power if it results from strikers setting more modest goals than in previous years, while a decreasing success rate may reflect a shift to more ambitious goals rather than any decline in worker power. Further, even if success rates did reflect worker power relative to mine-operator power, it remains unclear whether the change in power is due to a

change in the absolute power of workers or of operators. This study does not use success rate to measure changes in worker power, however. Rather, the analysis uses success rate as an indicator of worker attitudes. Extended periods of low success are isolated to determine when worker frustration was likely to be at a peak. The assumption is that regardless of the modesty or boldness of strike demands, long periods of thwarted strike goals probably frustrated workers and strike leaders. If some of these periods coincided with an influx of new immigrants, it would not be surprising to see workers palliating their frustration by blaming the newcomers, regardless of the actual role most of those newcomers played in the strikes.

Table 3a (left): STRIKERS / THOUSAND MINERS / YEAR

Table 3b (right): SUCCESS RATE (number of workers in successful strikes / total number of strikers x 100)²⁵

Year	State	F	W	C	T	S	F	W	C	T
1881	373	1,278	273	63	*	37%	0	50	100	*
1882	211	60	71	38	30	20%	56	31	0	0
1883	440	22	165	156	*	27%	0	0	0	*
1884	615	43	109	*	*	3%	0	100	*	*
1885	525	32	190	*	*	39%	100	14	*	*
1886	456	1,482	1,239	598	*	51%	99	84	12	*
1887	440	2,669	53	50	393	98%	97	100	75	100
1888	113	895	12	*	*	39%	41	0	*	*
1889	1,156	3,592	*	*	*	83%	70	*	*	*
1890	706	1,603	1,193	*	1,054	65%	57	1	*	100
1891	830	2,527	246	45 ^a	*	17%	1	5	53 ^a	*
1892	117	*	*	27	*	4%	*	*	42	*
1893	174	49	*	*	918	2%	0	*	*	0
1894	910	2,104 ^b	288 ^b	* ^b	* ^b	73%	0 ^b	0 ^b	* ^b	* ^b

^a A 6,300-man strike involving six counties – including Clearfield – was listed in the 1891 data, but since there is no way to determine how many of these miners were from Clearfield it has been omitted.

^b On April 21, 1894, in response to a declining price scale in the midst of the depression, the UMW called a nation-wide suspension. All the bituminous regions of Pennsylvania faithfully participated; Andrew Roy wrote that by April 30 only 2,400 of 184,000 bituminous miners in the entire country were still working – chiefly in West Virginia and Virginia; Pennsylvania anthracite workers also continued working.²⁶ This suspension, according to *Strikes and Lockouts* (1896) involved 56,000 strikers. How many from each of the study counties participated cannot be determined and has been omitted from this table, but we can assume that participation was high in all counties on the basis of Roy's report.

The success rates both for bituminous coal strikes statewide and for strikes in study counties fluctuated a great deal, but only occasionally did the rates drop below twenty per cent (Table 3b). But during three consecutive years late in the period, from 1891 to 1893, the statewide rate sank below that mark. And although the statewide rate increased radically in 1894, it is deceptively high due to the method of calculation.²⁷ On the county level as well, new immigrants and low success rates often coincide. In Fayette County from 1891 to 1894, the success rates were negligible. The rate in Westmoreland County dropped and remained low even earlier, beginning in 1888. These extended periods in which strikers lost most of their struggles with operators were in the latter years of the study, coinciding with the greater proportions of new immigrants among the miners. The data suggest that the process of frustration and blame outlined above might well be expected in the early nineties, when success rates were low and new immigrants were moving into mining jobs.

But an important feature of the data is that it does not support any clear relationship between new immigrants and strike failure. The years 1889 and 1890, years in which new immigrants were becoming prevalent in the mining force, were marked by high success rates in the state as a whole as well as in Fayette County. Nor were low success rates confined to the later years when new immigrants were becoming prevalent. As early as 1881, Fayette had no successful strikes, and in 1882 both Clearfield and Tioga miners experienced only failure in their strikes. Further, major strike failures in the later years were not only characteristic of the counties with high proportions of new immigrants. In Tioga County, for example, a large strike failed in 1893. Yet the fact remains that periods when few miners experienced strike success were also periods when new immigrants entered the mines in increasing numbers, which helps to explain some of the animosity older miners felt towards the newcomers.

While suggesting that there were periods of low strike success that coincided with increasing proportions of new-immigrant miners, the data on strike success cannot establish any links between new-immigrant miners and strike failure. But there are other aspects of strikes that new immigrants may have affected that elude an admittedly inadequate measure of strike success. For example, strikes may have become less subject to union control; they also may have become less unified. The Bureau of Labor's reports can illuminate both of these issues (Tables 4a and 4b).

Before considering the changing percentages of strikers in union-called strikes, a brief review of mining-union development in Pennsylvania between 1881 and 1894 is appropriate. Following the collapse of the Miners' National Organization in 1876, miners organized chiefly in Knights of Labor locals. But in 1885, however, a rival group — the National Federation of Miners — established itself on a nation-wide scale. The Knights of Labor responded by organizing a national district composed of miners so that by 1886 there were two rival national mining unions; two years earlier there had been none. But by 1890 the

Table 4a: PERCENTAGE OF STRIKERS IN UNION-CALLED STRIKES

Table 4b: INDEX OF SOLIDARITY

for Pennsylvania bituminous coal: state and selected counties.³⁰

Year	(a) State	F	W	C	T	(b) State	F	W	C	T
1881	21%	0	38	100	*	.94	.96	.83	.87	*
1882	53%	0	69	0	0	.86	.89	.74	.95	.16
1883	91%	0	0	83	*	.93	.90	.87	.96	*
1884	68%	100	0	*	*	.97	.97	.98	*	*
1885	53%	0	0	*	*	.96	.94	.94	*	*
1886	43%	7	60	75	*	.90	.91	.91	.94	*
1887	41%	3	93	100	0	.89	.99	.50	.98	.57
1888	55%	56	0	*	*	.86	.93	.18	*	*
1889	89%	90	*	*	*	.86	.97	*	*	*
1890	89%	87	93	*	0	.90	.96	.97	*	.65
1891	84%	100	74	100	*	.90	1.00	1.00	.58 ^a	*
1892	93%	*	*	100	*	.87	*	*	.98	*
1893	73%	88	*	*	0	.86	.93	*	*	.73
1894	99%	96 ^b	100 ^b	* ^b	* ^b	.91	1.00 ^b	1.00 ^b	* ^b	* ^b

a,b See explanations with Tables 3a and 3b.

rivalry was ended. Both groups consented to the formation of the United Mine Workers of America.²⁸

Table 4a presents data relevant to the control of bituminous mining strikes from 1881 to 1894. This table shows strikers in union-called strikes as a percentage of all strikers. While such data cannot be considered a measure of union power relative to operators, it does reflect the degree to which strike activity was controlled by labor organizations; the higher percentages mean a greater degree of control.²⁹ Increased control, in turn, may reflect better organization throughout the union movement, an increasing belief among workers that the union knows when conditions are best to strike, or declining resources among workers preventing them from mounting independent strikes. (This list is not definitive, nor are the factors cited here mutually exclusive.) According to both Perlman's theory and the Immigration Commission's argument, the influx of new immigrants into the mining force led to increased hostility among the workers themselves. One expects that this increased hostility, if it were an important factor militating against unionization, would have manifested itself in declining union control over strikes during times when many new immigrants were entering the work force, especially in areas where new immigrants were prevalent.

The data contradicts this expectation. Union control was far greater in the statewide industry after 1888 when new immigrants were increasingly working

in the coal mines. On the average, 89 per cent of all the strikers each year were in union-called strikes after 1888, as opposed to 53 per cent before. On the county level, the pattern of increasing union control in the later periods emerges again, especially in counties with high proportions of new immigrants. In Fayette County, the percentages jumped from lows in 1886, 7 per cent and 1887, 3 percent, to levels approaching those statewide by 1888 and after. Union control in Westmoreland was more sporadic, but one can discern the same general trend. After 1886 and 1887, when union control was 60 per cent and 93 per cent respectively, union control dropped to 0 per cent. But in the 1890's it was high again: 93 per cent in 1890, 74 per cent in 1891, and 100 per cent in 1894. Any link between new immigrants and reduced union control of strike activity is further belied by events in Tioga, a county with few new immigrants. Tioga miners struck independently of unions in each of their four strikes in the study period. Yet one cannot conclude that large proportions of new-immigrant miners were necessary for high or increased union control over strikers. Clearfield County contained low proportions of new immigrants throughout the study period, but unions always controlled high percentages of strikers there.

In addition to union control, another important dimension of strikes is the degree to which workers in affected fields supported strikes on their behalf. For, even though the United Mine Workers may have ordered every strike in Fayette County in 1891, only half of the miners in the fields may actually have struck. Such activity among miners can be revealed by an index of worker solidarity: the number of strikers as a percentage of the total number of workers in the fields being struck. Indeed, historians, social scientists, and fellow miners have charged new immigrants with imposing communication problems on labor organizers, with provoking the hostility of native and old-immigrant miners, and with working obediently for mine operators regardless of working conditions. If these factors were important enough to influence strikes, the effects should stand out in an index of strike solidarity. As increasing proportions of new immigrants entered the coal fields, strikes should have become less and less unified.

Table 4b is an index of the solidarity for Pennsylvania bituminous coal strikes during the study period. The state index generally declined from 1881 to 1894, suggesting that new immigrants were associated with declining strike solidarity. Two periods emerge from the statewide index: before 1886, when worker solidarity in strikes was generally well above .90 (except for 1882, when the index dropped to .86); and after 1886, when the index fell below .90. Not until 1894 did the state index rise above .90 again. Since the later period also experienced greater proportions of new immigrants in the bituminous mines, one might conclude that new immigrants did lead to lower strike solidarity. But the refinement provided by the county measures prevents that mistake.

First, the counties with the lowest proportions of new-immigrant miners, Tioga and Clearfield, also had the lowest strike solidarity in the later years of the study. In fact, Tioga had low strike solidarity throughout the period. Though

gradually increasing throughout the period, solidarity among Tioga miners never surpassed the state-wide level. And although Clearfield County miners maintained generally high solidarity levels throughout the period, usually above the state level, in 1891 even Clearfield sank to .58 (note, however, that Clearfield's 1891 data is incomplete). On the other hand, the two counties with high proportions of new immigrants, Westmoreland and Fayette, registered very high solidarity levels in the later years. Westmoreland, as usual, did not exhibit trends as clearly as Fayette; although its level of strike solidarity surpassed the state's in 1886, the levels in 1887 (.50) and 1888 (.18) were very low. Yet after 1889, Westmoreland's strikes were consistently more solid than the state average, and these were undoubtedly the years when new immigrants comprised the greatest proportion of Westmoreland's miners. But it is Fayette County that provides the most compelling evidence against the theory that new immigrants lessened miner solidarity and thus undermined labor unions. For it was during the later years of the study that Fayette was marked by comparatively stunning strike solidarity. Fayette County's index equalled or surpassed that of both the state and the other three counties from 1887 to 1894. Ironically, W. Jett Lauck considered Fayette a classic example of how new immigrants undermined coal-workers' unions.

The guiding issue throughout this study, of course, has been how new immigrants affected strike activity in Pennsylvania's bituminous coal fields. But the usefulness of any study depends on recognizing its limitations. Among the problems with the data that have been noted throughout, the fact that there is no way systematically to uncover the ethnicity of the strikers is especially limiting. Also, while the study has focused solely on various measures of strike activity, strikes are only one aspect of labor organization, albeit an important one. New immigrants may have affected labor organization in important ways that simply elude quantification. At this point it is important to distinguish that, insofar as new immigrants did increase the labor supply, they probably did drive down wages and thus made the miner's lot worse.³² This, however, had nothing to do with ethnicity; it was a function of supply and demand.

Despite its limitations, this study does establish certain facts about strikes in Pennsylvania's bituminous coal fields from 1881 to 1894 that are contrary to traditional views of new immigrants' relationship to labor organization. First, increased proportions of new-immigrant miners did not result in less strike activity. The years when new immigrants were most prevalent in mines throughout Pennsylvania were among the years with the greatest strike activity, and miners in counties with higher proportions of new immigrants struck at relatively high rates. Thus Perlman's claim that a new wave of immigrants caused older workers to ignore disputes with their employers to bicker among themselves instead is not borne out by the study. Old workers may indeed have disliked the new immigrants, but their animosity towards the mine operators as reflected in strikes was as great, or greater, than before.

Second, union control over striking miners as measured by the percentage of workers involved in union-called strikes also increased when new immigrants were entering the mines. This too is inconsistent with Perlman's and the Immigration Commission's view that new immigrants led to a fragmented work force. Whatever fragmentation existed did not prevent unions from increasingly assuming leadership roles in strikes.

Third, strike solidarity was often greatest in the counties with high proportions of new immigrants, especially during the later years of the study period when new immigrants were most prevalent in the mining force. This, more than any other finding, presents a problem for the argument that new immigrants weakened strikes and fragmented workers. To be sure, the study has shown that a period of high strike failure did coincide with years when new immigrants were increasingly employed in the coal fields. But the data also show that one cannot attribute these failures to a decline in strikes in ways this study has not measured; for instance, new immigrants were purportedly reluctant to support unions financially, a claim the truth of which has gone untested here. But on the basis of actual strike activity, the new immigrants have received more than their share of blame for labor failures.

Perhaps it is best to conclude by recalling John Higham's assertion that "immigration. . .as a source of distinctions, divisions, and changes within the United States — remains as yet only dimly grasped." Indeed, understanding the new immigrants as a source of change in strike activity and unionization is tricky business. While this study has not shown definitively how the new immigrants in Pennsylvania's bituminous coal fields affected strikes it has shown that a decline in strike activity, union control, and strike solidarity cannot be associated with an increase in the proportions of new-immigrant miners from 1881 to 1894. A more complete analysis would incorporate accounts in local newspapers and the foreign language press of strikes in the study counties, along the lines Greene pursued for the Slavic anthracite miners. It would also use a comparative industry analysis to comprehend the degree to which structural factors in the division of labor, in the market, and in the industry determined strike success or failure. Preliminary research compiled in the process of this study shows extraordinary variation between strike activity among anthracite and bituminous miners; ethnicity cannot begin to account for the differences. The way all these factors interweaved into a complex pattern of labor activity has yet to be described.

EXPLANATORY APPENDIX

The data base for the strikes in this study is the Bureau of Labor's *Strikes and Lockouts*, 1887 and 1896. Each report recorded strikes by state, industry, and year, but the relevant industry heading that included bituminous coal strikes changed from the 1887 to the 1896 report. In 1887, two headings were relevant:

“gas and coke,” and “mining”; in 1896, “coal and coke” alone included all bituminous strikes.

Over the fourteen years covered in the reports, these categories included a total of 550 strikes — seven of which I immediately dropped because they involved only iron-ore miners. Each of the remaining strikes had to be placed definitely in a county. Using a combination of atlases, U.S. Geologic Survey maps, and two maps from the 1880's, I was able to place all but thirty-one relatively small strikes. (Some of these were placed but could not be used because the name applied to two — or sometimes three — mining towns in different counties.) In the process I also separated 115 strikes that involved only anthracite workers — an essential omission, because the two were truly separate industries.³³ Amsden and Brier did not, apparently, make this distinction between anthracite and bituminous strikes in their study, presumably because they were studying the emergence of a national coal mining union which, in theory, did not exclude anthracite workers although in practice the UMW did not establish itself firmly in Pennsylvania anthracite until 1902.³⁴

In addition to the thirty-one unplaceable strikes (which occurred in such memorable cities as “Funkstown” and “Bean”) there were thirty-one strikes whose locations were given only as “Western Pennsylvania.” I have discussed in the study itself how the omission of these strikes from the county-level data may have affected county statistics. All of these were included in the state data for bituminous coal; I was also able to identify a number of unplaceable strikes as bituminous strikes because they involved coke workers; coke was not produced in the anthracite region during this period. Thus, a total of fewer than twenty small strikes were omitted from the bituminous coal data. All thirty-one small strikes, however, in addition to the “Western Pennsylvania” strikes between 1882 and 1885, were unavailable as data for the county-level statistics. It is unlikely that these strikes greatly affect any of the data I have compiled for any given year since they were generally small.

As for the number of miners from one year to the next — essential for deriving the statistics “per miner” used in Table 3a — published information was available only for miners in all Pennsylvania bituminous coal (*History of Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal*). To determine the year-to-year number of miners on the county level, I devised a special kind of interpolation. Since coal production fluctuated so much from year to year, I found a simple interpolation of miners based on census reports far too inaccurate. Yet, because productivity changed so rapidly during the study period, I could not use any static relationship between production and mine-workers either. I decided to determine the productivity at each census of the industry — 1880, 1889, and 1902. Productivity increased in all cases, but at different rates. I then interpolated *productivity* for each year, which I applied to year-to-year, county production levels available from *History of Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal*, using this simple relationship to determine number of mineworkers:

$$\text{number of mineworkers} = \frac{\text{total county production/yr}}{\text{interpolated productivity/yr}}$$

When applied to all Pennsylvania bituminous coal (the actual numbers are available in *History of Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal*) the method was accurate within five per cent, except for one year with a ten per cent error.

NOTES

1. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New York: Atheneum, 1975), 5. I wish to thank Olivier Zunz for his encouragement and suggestions during the preparation of this paper, which was originally submitted for the History Major's Seminar at the University of Virginia which he led, Spring 1979.

2. U.S. Cong., Senate, *Immigrants in Industries: Bituminous Coal*, v. 1, S. Doc. 633 (Washington, D. C.: GPO, 1911), 251. In the reports, "new immigrant" refers to foreigners born in Russia, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Italy, the Slavic states, and Greece. This study uses the term in the same way, though one should note that during the period 1881 to 1894 most of the new immigrants in the coal fields were Slovaks and Poles. Hereafter referred to as, "*Immigrants: Bituminous Coal*."

3. The Immigration Commission, also known as the Dillingham Commission, was created through Section 39 of the 1907 Immigration Act. U.S. Cong., Senate, *Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission*, v.1, S. Doc. 747 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1911), 15.

4. Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike* (Notre Dame, Ind: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 115, 118.

5. Carmen Grayson, "Immigration Restriction as Reform: W. Jett Lauck and the Dillingham Immigration Commission," unpublished paper, Univ. of Virginia, 17-18.

6. Grayson, 17.

7. *Immigrants: Bituminous Coal*, v. 1, 334.

8. *Immigrants: Bituminous Coal*, v. 1, 333-4.

9. *Immigrants: Bituminous Coal*, v. 1, 330, 654; v.2, 66, 196.

10. See also Melvin Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM, 1975), for an overview of criticism of the view that the United States was a land of greater economic opportunity for immigrants. Herbert Gutman's *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1977), contains several essays in which Gutman points out that strikers persuaded foreigners transported by railroads to strike sites not to scab.

11. Greene, XV, 211-2.

12. Greene, 211.

13. Greene, 95. Greene never explicitly sets himself against Perlman's theory in this book, although his thesis clearly contradicts Perlman's to the extent that Perlman argued that all new waves of immigration hurt labor organization.

14. *Immigrants: Bituminous Coal*, v. 1, 257.

15. Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, *Strikes and Lockouts* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1887); Tenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, *Strikes and Lockouts* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1896) v. 1.

16. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1895), 379, 380, 383, 391.

17. Population for 1880 from Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Compendium of the Tenth Census* (revised ed.), pt.1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1885), 527. For 1894, population was interpolated linearly from *Population: 1890*, 36-37; and from *Twelfth Census of the United States population*, pt. 1 (Washington, D. C.: 1901), 36-37.

Coal production for 1880 is from Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Mining Industries of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1886), 684; for 1894, from Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Mines and Mineral Resources, *History of Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal* (1962), 26, 30, 42, 45.

18. Population for new immigrants for 1880 from Census Office, *Compendium*, pt. 1, 527; for 1894, interpolated linearly from Census Office, *Population: 1890*, 653-4, and Census Office, *Twelfth Census Population*, pt. 1, 779-80.

Data for the numbers of miners in 1880 is from Census Office, *Mining Industries*, 684. For 1894, numbers of miners are derived using the interpolation explained in the Appendix from data on coal production found in Pennsylvania Mines and Mineral Resources, *Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal*; and from numbers of miners found in Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Mineral Industries at the Eleventh Census* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1892), 405-6; and Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, *Mines and Quarries, 1902* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1905), 696-7. Due to the general suspension of 1894, I did not use the 1894 interpolated figure for number of miner productivity. Instead, I used a three year average of interpolated numbers of miners from 1892 to 1894.

19. Andrew Roy, *A History of the Coal Miners of the United States* (Columbus, Ohio: Trauger, 1907), 292.

20. I.M. Marcus, "Labor Discontent in Tioga County, Pennsylvania: A Test Case of the Gutman Thesis," *Journal of Labor History*, 14 (1973), 418.

21. This percentage is interpolated from the figures documented by note 12.

22. "Strikers per thousand workers per year" is computed by summing the strikers in all strikes in a given area in a given year, dividing that sum by the total number of miners in that area in that year, and multiplying the quotient by 1000. One drawback of the measure is that it will convey an inflated sense of strike activity in the general work force if most of the strike activity in a study period is among a group of workers who strike repeatedly,

Edward Shorter and Charles Tilly discuss various ways to measure strikes in *Strikes in France, 1830-1968* (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), 357-59.

23. There is no doubt however that all strikes located in "Western Pennsylvania" were bituminous, since anthracite was mined only in the far eastern counties of the state.

24. Shorter and Tilly, 341.

25. The data on which this index is based comes from *Strikes and Lockouts* for the number of strikers in relevant strikes each year; as explained in the Appendix from Census Office, *Mineral Industries* and Bureau of the Census, *Mines and Quarries, 1902* (for base figures on numbers of miners), and from Pennsylvania Mines and Mineral Resources, *Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal* (for yearly figures on coal production in each of the study areas).

26. Roy, 304-7

27. The success rate for 1894 is inflated because all strikers were counted as involved in a successful strike, even though the strike was not a success everywhere; while succeeding in 95 firms and partly succeeding in 209, it failed in 159 (Tenth Report, *Strikes and Lockouts*, v. 1, 1126).

28. Roy, 243-59. Amsden and Brier argue that despite the rivalry between the Knights of Labor and the National Federation, their philosophies were very similar: both favored arbitration and conciliation, though both increasingly relied on strike tactics; both resorted to politics and legislation as well as strikes; both sought to build powerful district and state

organizations. See Jon Amsden and Stephen Brier, "Coal Miners on Strike," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 7 (Spring 1977), 609.

29. Of course, "union-called" versus "independent" strikes is in a sense a false dichotomy, for there were no doubt degrees of union support that cannot be discerned in this classification scheme.

30. Both indices are derived wholly from data in *Strikes and Lockouts*. The success or partial success of a strike was determined by Bureau of Labor investigators. Although data includes descriptions of grievances for most strikes, the grievances remedied in a partially successful strike were never specified.

31. Table 4b is based on the sum of the number of strikers in relevant strikes divided by the total number of workers in the firms those strikes affected. Amsden and Brier also use this measure (613). The meaning of "solidarity" is not beyond dispute, however. For instance, it does not tell how "hard" the miners struck once they left work. Did some begin to return a few days later? If so, which ones? These are inevitable problems with historical data. Without access to narrative sources, often foreign language presses, the meaning of these figures is less than lucid. But Greene's research has established that, at least among anthracite miners, new immigrants were not at all "soft" strikers.

32. Grayson, 29.

33. See Amsden and Brier's description of the "miner" (598), and compare proportions of miners and miners' wages in the bituminous and anthracite industries over the late nineteenth century. See Census Office, *Mining Industries* (1880), 625-6; Census Office, *Mineral Industries at the Eleventh Census*, 399, 402; Bureau of the Census, *Mines and Quarries, 1902*, 668, 671.

34. Greene, 177.