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Conscripting Coal: The Regulation of the Coal Labour Force in Nova Scotia during the Second World War

COAL WAS IMPORTANT to the Canadian economy in the Second World War, as it was an essential commodity for both industrial and domestic use. Yet in Nova Scotia bituminous coal output declined from a wartime high of nearly 7.4 million short tons in 1941 to only 5.1 million tons in 1945. In the massive Dominion Coal Company mines, which accounted for close to 60 per cent of the province's coal production, output fell from 4.3 million short tons in 1941 to less than 3 million tons in 1945. Along with serious transportation difficulties, declining coal production in Nova Scotia forced Ontario and Quebec to become almost wholly dependent upon American coal during the Second World War, and coal imports from the United States nearly doubled between 1939 and 1945. A severe shortage of skilled labour lay at the root of the precipitous decline in coal output during this period. National Selective Service, the federal agency created in March 1942 to manage human resources in Canada, proved unable to solve the complicated labour problems plaguing the provincial coal industry. Government policy in this field was deeply affected by the turbulent history of labour strife between coal companies and the miners working in District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America. No industry was more tightly regulated than the coal sector during the Second World War, but the wartime administration completely bungled this opportunity to sort out longstanding grievances which plagued labour relations in this industry. This was an outcome with significant post-war implications for the regional economy in the Maritime Provinces.

While the impact of the war on other primary industries has been well-documented,¹ scholars of the Maritime coal industry have focused almost exclusively on the period prior to 1939, particularly emphasizing the bitter relations between coal companies and miners and the widening gap between militant rank-and-file workers and their increasingly conservative and bureaucratic UMWA leaders during the 1920s

1 See Laurel Sefton MacDowell, "Remember Kirkland Lake": *The History and Effects of the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners' Strike, 1941-42* (Toronto, 1983); MacDowell, "The 1943 Steel Strike Against the Wartime Wage Controls", *Labour/Le Travail*, 10 (Autumn 1982), pp. 65-85; Ron Crawley, "What Kind of Unionism: Struggles Among Canadian Steelworkers in the SWOC Years, 1936-1942", *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), pp. 99-123; and Jay White, "Pulling Teeth: Striking for the Checkoff in the Halifax Shipyards, 1944", *Acadiensis*, XIX, 1 (Autumn 1989), pp. 115-41. The author wishes to thank Peter Neary, James Struthers and the four anonymous *Acadiensis* reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this article. This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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and 1930s.² Michael Earle has provided an important account of the 1941 slowdown strikes in Cape Breton but ignores the critical period from 1942 to 1945 — the years of heightened government involvement in the coal industry.³ Other accounts of the war, both popular and scholarly, overlook the response of District 26 miners to government mobilization initiatives.⁴ A thorough examination of government records reveals that militancy among coal miners in Nova Scotia remained exceptionally strong during the period following the 1941 slowdown strikes, although this militancy did not manifest itself in the outbreak of large-scale strikes. Furthermore, the union leadership in District 26 worked, for the most part, in cooperation with rank-and-file militants to present a united front lobbying for monetary concessions and against arbitrary mobilization initiatives that would adversely affect the welfare of the miners.

An analysis of the wartime regulation of the coal labour force in Nova Scotia also tells us much about the management of human resources by the wartime Liberal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King. Despite the towering prominence of the 1942 and 1944 conscription crises in Canadian historiography and the related issue of military manpower supply,⁵ there has been little concerted effort to examine the mobilization of the civilian labour force during the war in general and the activities of National Selective Service in particular.⁶ Furthermore, those accounts which refer in passing to NSS and human resource policies conclude that the government “intervened massively” in the labour market, regulated the workforce to an “unheard-of degree”, and regimented the labour force “on a scope and scale that

2 See David Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917-1926”, Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979; Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation”, *Acadiensis*, VII, 1 (Autumn 1977), pp. 3-34; Frank, “Contested Terrain: Workers’ Control in the Cape Breton Coal Mines in the 1920s”, in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Toronto, 1986), pp. 102-33; Donald Macgillivray, “Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s”, *Acadiensis*, III, 2 (Spring 1974), pp. 45-64; Allen Seager, “Minto, New Brunswick: A Study in Canadian Class Relations Between the Wars”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 5 (1980), pp. 81-132; John Manley, “Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922-1935”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Fall 1992), pp. 65-114; Michael Earle and H. Gamberg, “The United Mine Workers and the Coming of the CCF to Cape Breton”, *Acadiensis*, XIX, 1 (Autumn 1989), pp. 3-26.

3 See Michael Earle, “‘Down With Hitler and Silby Barrett’: The Cape Breton Miners’ Slowdown Strike of 1941”, *Acadiensis*, XVIII, 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 57-90.

4 See Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 265-70; H.A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada: Their Development and Functioning* (Toronto, 1948), pp. 205-7; Stuart Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Conflict and Industrial Unrest in Canada, 1900-1966* (Ottawa, 1968), pp. 288-91.

5 See E.L.M. Burns, *Manpower in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1956); R. MacGregor Dawson, *The Conscription Crisis of 1944* (Toronto, 1961); C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments: The War Policies of Canada* (Ottawa, 1970); J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1990); Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto, 1977); Brian Nolan, *King’s War: MacKenzie King and the Politics of War, 1939-1945* (Toronto, 1988).

6 Respected scholars such as J.L. Granatstein and C.P. Stacey refer only in passing to the operations of NSS, and their accounts are not based on the NSS archival collection. By the same token, other works dealing with specific issues under the jurisdiction of NSS have made only limited use of the available archival material. See, for example, Ruth Roach Pierson, “They’re Still Women After All”: *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto, 1986) and Thomas Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1987), Chapters 7-8.

Canadian workers had never known before and have never known since”.⁷ A close examination of NSS records, however, reveals that government control of human resource mobilization policies during the Second World War was tenuous and halting and relied on measures emphasizing compromise, conciliation and decentralization. On paper, many mobilization regulations were complex and comprehensive, but in practice the government often did not get its way in an overheated labour market. Government bureaucracies had a limited record of constructive and comprehensive intervention in the Canadian labour force in the pre-war era, and they were overwhelmed by the demands of total mobilization during the war.

Once the Dominion government assumed full control of the management of Canada’s war effort in the latter months of 1939, three primary federal policy streams would have an impact on the lives of coal miners in Nova Scotia. Of primary importance were both the military manpower policies adopted shortly after Canada entered the war and the labour force mobilization schemes that remained essentially unrefined and undeveloped until the establishment of NSS in 1942. Second, the enactment and expansion of restrictive and bureaucratic wage control policies played a key role in shaping the response of local workers and their leaders to federal intervention in the coal industry. Finally, the complete control of coal supply and coal distribution by the federal government placed coal companies in the enviable position of having a direct link with key Ottawa officials responsible for influencing the course of government policy towards the Nova Scotia coal industry as a whole. The imposition of wartime controls in the areas of labour supply, wages and industrial output did not, of course, occur in a historical vacuum. Government officials were not dealing with a compliant and contented work force willing to adopt a conciliatory position regarding the strict regulation of their conditions. Decades of intense and bitter confrontation between the miners and the companies — companies usually supported by governments — carried over into the war years. This animosity rendered most attempts by Ottawa officials to regulate the coal labour force ineffective.

After the fall of France in the spring of 1940, the King government passed the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) that allowed for the compulsory conscription of Canadian men for home defence duty under the auspices of the Department of National War Services.⁸ Through the passage of Order-in-Council PC 4185 of 27 August 1940, all single or widowed men between the ages of 21 and 45 were eligible to be called for compulsory military training. The responsibility for administering the NRMA was removed from war services and transferred to the Department of Labour in September 1942. The other obvious path to military service in Canada was the voluntary enlistment of men in the armed forces, and less than 20 per cent of Canadian servicemen during the war were NRMA recruits. Both streams of military recruitment in Canada affected the Nova Scotia coal industry. More than 1,500 skilled coal miners from the province entered the military between 1939 and

7 Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, pp. 192-3; and J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, eds., *The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II* (Toronto, 1995), p. 10.

8 For an excellent overview of NRMA recruitment policies during the war, see “Report on the Operations of National Registration and Military Mobilization in Canada During World War II”, Volume 19, RG 35 (7), Inter-departmental Committees — Public Records Committee, National Archives of Canada [NAC], Ottawa.

1945. While some were no doubt conscripted into NRMA duty against their will, many miners who volunteered for active duty probably found life in uniform more appealing than the dreary world and the impoverished conditions of the coal mines. Once labour shortages in the coal mines became acute, officials were also confronted with the sticky problem of how to get former coal miners to leave the military and return to the mines.

Prior to the formation of NSS in March 1942, few measures were adopted to ensure the efficient mobilization of the civilian work force in comparison with the provisions of the NRMA.⁹ A series of reports in late 1941 highlighted the critical labour shortages that were plaguing many war industries and decried the lack of a coherent human resource strategy. Mackenzie King responded to these concerns by establishing NSS under the direction of Montreal industrialist Elliot Little. During the spring and summer of 1942, agricultural labour was frozen, men in designated age classes were prevented from entering non-essential industrial posts and a priority system guaranteed essential industries priority for scarce labour. Eventually, in January 1943 PC 246 codified all civilian mobilization regulations and served as the blueprint for labour force mobilization for the remainder of the war. The priority system remained the primary lever available to NSS officials to direct labour to the most essential use. Section 210 of PC 246 allowed NSS to direct men in age classes eligible for military service to terminate their employment and be directed to employment in more essential industries. In some industries — coal mining was the leading example — further special measures could be authorized to funnel labour into essential posts.

Despite the technically comprehensive nature of NSS regulations, however, NSS proved to be a paper tiger. Debates within cabinet in the latter portion of 1942 effectively hobbled the NSS bureaucracy by denying it effective leadership and a coherent guiding philosophy. With the full support of Mackenzie King, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, under the leadership of Donald Gordon, lobbied vociferously and successfully against Little's plans for a drastic programme of curtailment that would have freed significant numbers of workers for employment in essential civilian jobs.¹⁰ Rebuffed and bitter, Little resigned in November 1942. For the remainder of the war, the Department of Labour and NSS administered technically comprehensive mobilization regulations within a cabinet-sanctioned spirit of gradualism and compromise. Minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell proved to be one of King's most uninspired and listless lieutenants, a man who was viewed with an equal amount of contempt and suspicion by many cabinet officials and trade unionists across the country.¹¹ It was a telling sign of Mitchell's standing in the government that his

9 An overview of civilian mobilization policies in Canada during the war can be found in "The Development of National Selective Service Civilian Organization in World War II to December 31, 1945", *ibid.*

10 For an excellent account of the curtailment debate between WPTB and NSS officials in 1942, see Christopher Robb Waddell, "The Wartime Prices and Trade Board: Price Control in Canada During World War II", Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1981, Chapter 5.

11 Mitchell was a longstanding officer of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada in Ontario, having served on the Ontario Executive Board of the TLC between 1925 and 1932 before embarking on his political career. Mitchell's passive stance towards government control of union workers during the

department, which was in theory responsible for the equitable distribution of civilian and military human resources, was not included in the membership of the Cabinet War Committee. Little was replaced as NSS Director by Arthur MacNamara. MacNamara's distinguished civil service career spanned almost three decades. After serving as Deputy Minister of Labour in Manitoba during the Depression, MacNamara was summoned to Ottawa in 1940 where he became Chairman of the Dependent's Allowance Board within the Department of National Defence and Acting Chairman of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. After the assumption of his NSS duties, MacNamara was also named Deputy Minister of Labour in December 1942. MacNamara proved to be the living embodiment of the concept of gradualism espoused by the King government. Alternately termed the "Great Compromiser", the "Master Conciliator" and the "Man in the Asbestos Suit", MacNamara was an indefatigable negotiator who believed strongly in the values of compromise, conciliation and decentralization.¹² When it came to solving the particularly pressing crisis of manpower supply in the coal industry in Nova Scotia, therefore, MacNamara refused to adopt a rigid stance favouring compulsion of coal miners. Instead, he sought to temper strict legislative policies controlling the coal labour force with more conciliatory gestures designed to placate long-standing UMWA grievances, a position that placed him at odds with many officials within his own department, cabinet and the coal industry.

MacNamara's approach was hindered by the second wartime domestic policy initiative of the King government — wage control and labour relations strategies.¹³ In December 1940, PC 7440 dictated that the prevailing wage rates between 1926 and 1929 or higher levels established during the 1930s, a time period which saw successive rollbacks in the wages of coal miners, would be considered "generally fair and reasonable" limits for wages during the war. Workers could be protected from inflationary pressures through the payment of a cost-of-living bonus, however. In October 1941, PC 8253 replaced PC 7440 and encompassed virtually the entire workforce. It established the National War Labour Board to be chaired by the Minister of Labour and consisting of an equal number of business and labour representatives. The NWLB adjudicated wage disputes of a national character in a wide range of

war earned him the animosity of militant unions across the country. National labour organizations repeatedly called for Mitchell to resign during the war, while CCF MP Stanley Knowles also called on Mitchell to resign during his inaugural speech in the House of Commons. Mackenzie King contemplated sacking Mitchell in December 1942, while Grant Dexter, the noted columnist for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, astutely noted Mitchell's impotence in Cabinet. See *Canadian Unionist* (November 1942), pp. 135-6; *ibid.*, (December 1942), p. 164; *House of Commons Debates*, 3 February 1943, pp. 122-4; J.W. Pickersgill, ed., *The Mackenzie King Record, Volume I* (Toronto, 1960), p. 452; and Frederick Gibson and Barbara Robertson, eds., *Ottawa at War: The Grant Dexter Memoranda, 1939-1945* (Winnipeg, 1994), p. 330.

12 See *Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 August 1950.

13 For an overview of industrial relations policies adopted during the war, see MacDowell, "The Formation of the Canadian Industrial Relations System During World War II", in MacDowell and Ian Radforth, eds., *Canadian Working Class History: Selected Readings* (Toronto, 1992), pp. 575-94; Bob Russell, *Back to Work? Labour, State, and Industrial Relations in Canada* (Scarborough, 1990), Chapter 6; and Jeremy Webber, "The Malaise of Compulsory Conciliation: Strike Prevention in Canada During World War II", *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), pp. 57-88.

industries, including coal mining, while nine regional boards handled disputes of a purely provincial nature. Employers were forbidden from raising wages without the consent of the NWLB or a regional board, and the cost of living bonus could be denied to a sector of workers if their wages were considered too high. This bureaucratic, politically influenced and unwieldy process, which essentially froze wages for the duration of the war, was stridently opposed by organized labour.¹⁴

Organized labour was similarly displeased with the development of wartime labour relations policies. The cornerstone of Mackenzie King's labour policy was the submission of all labour disputes to compulsory conciliation. The 1907 Industrial Disputes Investigation Act prohibited strikes and lockouts in specific industries pending investigation by a conciliation board. Although declared unconstitutional in 1925 for infringing on provincial jurisdictions, the IDIA remained in effect for provinces which passed enabling legislation declaring it to apply in a given province. In 1939, using the sweeping powers of the War Measures Act, Mackenzie King moved quickly to apply the IDIA to 85 per cent of Canadian workers. PC 2685, enacted in June 1940, encouraged employers to negotiate in good faith with unions, but continued to mandate the submission of industrial disputes to conciliation boards while refusing to enshrine the principle of unfettered collective bargaining in Canadian law. In 1941, the formation of the Industrial Disputes Inquiry Commission added another layer of conciliation and investigation. Furthermore, in September 1941 the government mandated that all legal strike action in any war industry required a second strike vote in addition to the vote that had sent the dispute to the Industrial Disputes Investigation Commission in the first place. Until the passage of PC 1003 in February 1944 and the recognition of collective bargaining rights in Canada, therefore, Canadian workers and their unions were forced to deal with an exceptionally bureaucratic conciliation apparatus apparently designed solely to delay and postpone strike action. Additionally, wage levels were largely pre-determined by administrative fiat by the war labour boards. In response to these restraints, the Canadian economy witnessed a sharp spike in industrial unrest, culminating in the unprecedented wave of strikes in 1943.

While civilian labour force controls were not established until 1942, the regulation of an essential commodity such as coal was contemplated within the first weeks of September 1939.¹⁵ On 18 October 1939, James McGregor Stewart was appointed as Coal Administrator within the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. The Dominion Fuel Board, created in 1922 to monitor the Canadian coal industry and administer government financial assistance to coal companies, was placed under Stewart's control. Stewart supervised the administration of the Domestic Fuel Act, which allowed for a bounty to be paid on domestic coal used in the iron and steel industry, and he also executed all government orders-in-council relating to the movement and distribution of both domestic and imported coal. After all undertakings for the mining of coal were declared essential services in June 1941, the next major government

¹⁴ Russell, *Back to Work?* pp. 200-1.

¹⁵ For an overview of the regulation of the Canadian coal industry during the Second World War, see J. de N. Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply* (Ottawa, 1950), Chapter 4; and *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal* (Ottawa, 1946), pp. 532-63.

initiative in this area was the establishment of the Emergency Coal Production Board in November 1942. In an effort to revive the flagging coal industry, this board established a subsidy system that covered the operating losses of the coal companies together with the amount of their standard profits or 15 cents per net ton of coal produced, whichever figure was lower. This system was changed in 1944 to a flat subsidy system based on the productivity and financial position of provincial coal companies. In March 1943, the ECPB gained added power with the transfer of all coal functions from the Wartime Prices and Trade Board to the Department of Munitions and Supply. The Coal Administrator now became the DMS Coal Controller, with Ernest J. Brunning replacing Stewart as Controller in July 1943. Thereafter, the Controller supervised an increasingly complex and thorough series of regulations governing most aspects of coal supply and distribution in Canada. The Controller did not have any direct statutory control over labour supply, but he and C.D. Howe, the ubiquitous Minister of Munitions and Supply, and their equally zealous subordinates proved able to wield a great measure of influence over NSS labour policies in the Cape Breton coal fields.

Despite the temporary imposition of federal control over the coal industry and its labour force, Dominion bureaucrats were entering an arena with perhaps an unmatched record of poisoned labour relations in recent decades. Coal miners in Nova Scotia had emerged from the First World War in a moderately strong position and secured wage increases in 1919 and 1920. The British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco) and its successor, the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation (Dosco), enjoying a virtual monopoly on the production of coal and steel in the province, sought to pare these wages drastically throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Besco unilaterally reduced wages by more than one-third in January 1922. A major coal strike in 1922, a sympathy strike with Sydney steelworkers in 1923, and a two-month strike in 1924 crippled coal production in Nova Scotia. All these events led to the massive five-month strike of 1925 that was characterized by widespread violence and property damage but ended with a pay cut for the miners. A further wage cut of more than 12 per cent in 1932 led to agitation for improved pay scales throughout the 1930s, but District 26 miners ended the Great Depression in a worse economic position than they had held in 1920.¹⁶ Wage grievances were further exacerbated by the appalling working and living conditions endured by the miners.¹⁷ The parsimony of the coal operators guaranteed that any industry initiative to improve productivity and impinge on the workplace autonomy of experienced coal miners would be strenuously resisted.¹⁸

16 See *Labour Gazette* (October 1946), p. 9, and *ibid.* (March 1940), p. 131.

17 For a compelling account of the lives of coal miners in Nova Scotia, see Ian McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873-1927", *Acadiensis*, XVI, 1 (Autumn 1986), pp. 3-57.

18 The most obvious threat to the employment of coal miners was the mechanization of the coal industry, a company strategy that was strenuously resisted in the decades following the First World War. See Earle, "'Down With Hitler and Silby Barrett'", p. 62; and Del Muiise, "Debating Technology's Impact on Coal-Mining Before the Duncan Royal Commission of 1925", paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, June 1997. Eventually, the coal industry was rationalized and mechanized following the 1947 strike wave, leading to massive job losses in Cape Breton.

Nor could miners turn to government for a sympathetic hearing of their problems. In every strike in the interwar period, the provincial and federal governments intervened on the side of the coal operators. Government conciliation efforts were hopelessly inadequate in addressing the concerns of miners, and the full might of the state was used to suppress coal disturbances through the use of militia and police units. The standard government response to industrial unrest in the coal mines was the appointment of royal commissions, and Sir Andrew Rae Duncan presided over two commissions in 1925 and 1932 that failed to result in any improvements in the lot of coal miners. Indeed, the findings of the more significant 1925 Duncan Commission set the stage for a 10 per cent wage cut from the standard 1924 rates that remained in effect until the end of 1928. Similarly, the 1932 Duncan Commission recommended sweeping wage reductions and mine closures. When war broke out in 1939, the Dominion government looked to long-standing opponents of miners within industry and government circles to act as advisors in the determination of federal policy affecting the coal industry. One such prominent recruit was Michael Dwyer, a former Minister of Mines and Labour in the provincial Liberal government of Angus L. Macdonald; he was also a former president of the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, and a consistent opponent of union militancy. Dwyer served as the NSS Maritime Regional Superintendent between 1942 and 1945, and in the effort to boost bituminous coal production he proved to be a strong advocate of harsh and arbitrary action against UMWA members. When the Dominion government appointed another Royal Commission in 1944 to study the coal industry in Nova Scotia, it turned to Justice W.F. Carroll to act as chairman. Carroll was well-known to District 26 miners, having waged an unusually bitter and vitriolic election campaign in Cape Breton against UMWA leader J.B. McLachlan during the 1921 Dominion elections.¹⁹

The struggles of UMWA miners against business and government officials were matched by internecine conflict within the UMWA itself. In March 1919, the UMWA succeeded the Provincial Workmen's Association and the Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia as the bargaining representative of the miners. Under its international president, John L. Lewis, the UMWA was a conservative business union that demanded strict adherence to negotiated contracts.²⁰ When rank-and-file militancy swept the provincial coal industry during the early 1920s under the leadership of McLachlan, Lewis revoked the union's charter and appointed a provisional district executive that governed the district for much of 1923-24. Continued splits among the District 26 miners led to the 1932 formation of the breakaway Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, which provided an effective challenge to the UMWA until the dissident organization was re-integrated into the UMWA in 1936.²¹ The actions of the militant wing of the work force in District 26 would eventually dominate the union response to government initiatives designed to spur coal production during the war. Again, when Dominion bureaucrats looked to the

19 See MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, pp. 72-8.

20 For an excellent account of Lewis's life and career as the leader of the UMWA, see Melvin Dubofsky and Warren Van Tine, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (New York, 1977).

21 See Michael Earle, "The Coalminers and their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936", *Labour/Le Travail*, 22 (Fall 1988), pp. 99-137.

ranks of the UMWA to recruit officials, they chose men opposed to militant union activism. The most important conscript in this regard was John W. McLeod, who acted as the special NSS consultant on coal mining in the Maritimes from 1943 to 1945. McLeod was the president of District 26 between 1924 and 1927 and presided over the failed 1925 strike and the subsequent rollback in wages. McLeod, who worked as a Dominion Coal Company official after his removal from the District 26 executive, proved to be a bitter opponent of miner radicalism and, during his tenure with NSS, aligned himself squarely in the camp favouring strict compulsion of coal miners and penalties against union militants.

The outbreak of war in 1939 quickly exacerbated tensions between rank-and-file workers and their conservative union bosses and company officials. After voting down a proposed deal in August 1939, coal miners in Nova Scotia were working under the provisions of an unsatisfactory contract that had expired in February 1939. Furthermore, the District 26 executive and the Dominion Coal Company had established a dispute-settlement mechanism in 1938 that called for all grievances to be submitted to an arbitrator whose decision was binding. John McLeod occupied this position, and his decisions and the entire grievance mechanism were opposed by rank and file union members. Dissatisfaction with the contract and the grievance structure contributed to a wave of illegal strikes in the coal industry, with 39 and 55 strikes occurring in the provincial coal industry in 1939 and 1940, respectively.²² After a provincial inquiry resulted in the condemnation of rank-and-file militancy in November 1939, a major conference attended by union, company, provincial and federal officials was held in Glace Bay in January 1940. Against the wishes of many miners, the District 26 leadership and the Dominion Coal Company subsequently applied for a federal conciliation panel to report on the situation. Chaired by Ontario Supreme Court Justice C.P. McTague, the tribunal report appeared in March 1940 and recommended paltry wage increases for the datal workers and, with few exceptions, nothing for the skilled contract miners working directly at the coal face. The McTague Report also condemned the time-honoured practice of submitting wage agreements to the membership for ratification. A second conciliation panel under the chairmanship of Justice W.H. Harrison refused to endorse wage parity with Dominion employees for workers in two Dosco subsidiaries.²³

These two conciliation reports were condemned at the District 26 convention held in August 1940. Despite pleas from both federal and provincial officials and the UMWA executive, the convention rejected the McTague recommendations and refused to support the submission of the conciliation terms to a referendum of union members. The district executive was instructed to enter negotiations to exact wage concessions from the coal companies, with a strike ballot to be taken if an improved agreement could not be reached by 30 October 1940. After the conservative slate of UMWA officers were narrowly returned to office in the district elections in October, the union executive submitted the McTague and Harrison recommendations to a

22 See Earle, "Down With Hitler and Silby Barrett", notes 17-19.

23 DOSCO had allowed the Old Sydney and Acadia companies to go into receivership to exact wage concessions from the employees of these two firms. DOSCO regained control of these two companies in 1938 and refused to offer wage parity among coal miners in all of the mines under its control.

referendum. The ensuing vote witnessed the acceptance of the terms of the conciliation reports, although the militant Glace Bay locals rejected the deal, and the locals working in the Old Sydney and Acadia Coal mines refused to cast ballots. As worker unrest grew throughout District 26, another conference of all interested parties was held in Halifax in December. Again, UMWA representatives agreed that a second conciliation tribunal chaired by McTague would arbitrate the details of a new contract if company and union leaders could not reach agreement by 15 January 1941. Four days after the Halifax meeting, however, PC 7440 was issued, and the failure to obtain an agreement before the deadline guaranteed that the dispute would be settled by McTague, who was now responsible for ensuring that any wage agreement complied with the “fair and reasonable” standard of wages stipulated by PC 7440. In March 1941, McTague sided with the company’s view that it could not afford to pay wage increases. Some specialized workers of the Old Sydney and Acadia Coal companies were awarded small increases, but the full cost of living bonus called for by PC 7440 was denied to most District 26 workers due to the supposed poor financial condition of the industry.

Rank-and-file members of District 26 were outraged by this decision. Nevertheless, the union executive refused to submit the McTague decision to a referendum, voting instead by a margin of five to three to accept the contract. Immediately, miners in the Glace Bay, New Waterford and Sydney Mines sub-districts walked off the job for four days. After a petition was received calling for the removal of the District 26 officers, John L. Lewis of the international union appointed two representatives to travel to Nova Scotia to investigate the situation while simultaneously condemning the practice of work slowdowns and stoppages. In July, Lewis charged District 26 International Board Member Silby Barrett with the responsibility to end the slowdowns in the province. Barrett had a chequered reputation among the members of his union, having run the union’s affairs after Lewis had revoked the district charter in 1923. Barrett’s suspension of 13 prominent slowdown leaders only worsened the situation, but a tough stance from the coal companies that saw the dismissal of 400 men in Cape Breton eventually forced the miners to consider ending the slowdowns. The protest ended in September 1941, after the government and the coal companies offered some face-saving concessions, including the reinstatement of dismissed miners and the payment of a portion of the cost of living bonus to Dominion miners.

The slowdown strikes cast a long shadow over subsequent NSS efforts to increase coal production in Nova Scotia between 1942 and 1945. Many of the most radical UMWA men elected to office in District 26 in the 1942 elections, including Freeman Jenkins as president and Tom Ling as vice-president, were strongly opposed to NSS regulatory control.²⁴ Moreover, one of the key issues in the slowdown strikes remained unresolved into 1942. This was that the three largest Nova Scotia coal operators — the Dominion Coal Company, the Old Sydney Collieries and the Acadia Coal Company — all had different basic wage rates. A report issued by the National

24 Jenkins would eventually follow in the footsteps of John McLeod and become an exceptionally conservative and bureaucratic unionist who was virulently anti-communist. See Earle and Gamberg, “The United Mine Workers and the Coming of the CCF to Cape Breton”, pp. 23-4.

War Labour Board in March 1942 called for continued “supplementary negotiations” to “level up” the wage rates. This report also recommended that the Dominion government should be responsible for paying increased wages if the companies were unable to do so.²⁵ In practice, the latter recommendation enabled UMWA officials in District 26 to lobby company and government officials for increased wages for the duration of the war.

After the National Selective Service was launched in March 1942, it had no more success in solving the problems of the coal industry than had been the case with previous government interventions. Since NSS possessed little control over the civilian labour force before January 1943, complaints of drastic shortfalls in coal mines all across Canada could not be addressed effectively during the summer of 1942. Meanwhile, Wartime Prices and Trade officials were warning of an impending national crisis in the coal mines and insisting that the most urgent problem was “the provision of an adequate and contented staff of mine labour”.²⁶ Nor could this problem be addressed by simply transferring unskilled or inexperienced men to the mines, a strategy that would result in no increase in coal output. This observation would be largely ignored by NSS officials for the duration of the war. As events unfolded, the datal work force in the Nova Scotia coal fields, an employee class encompassing all underground workers not working directly at the coal face, continued to expand — while the production workers declined in numbers. Between 1940 and 1944, coal face workers declined by almost 29 per cent, while the number of underground datal workers increased by more than eight per cent.²⁷ The hard reality was that while many datal workers possessed the skills and qualifications to work at the coal face, NSS did not have the authority to compel them to do so.²⁸

While the calls of the WPTB for immediate action could be deflected by NSS officials, union demands could not be ignored. In the spring of 1942, festering labour resentments led the Dominion Coal Company to place full-page advertisements in the *Sydney Post-Record* urging coal workers not to support their union. District 26 officials countered by attempting to establish production committees to register grievances with company officials. President Freeman Jenkins blamed the “bungling and indifference” of company executives for the decline in coal production.²⁹ By the same token, Charles Millard, Canadian Director of the Steel Workers Organizing

25 See “Report, Finding, and Direction of the NWLB in the Matter of an Application of UMWA District 26, 23 March 1942”, Volume 33, file 7 — UMWA District 26 Glace Bay, 1940-1942, part 1, MG 28 I 103, Records of the Canadian Labour Congress, NAC. The NWLB terms for a general contract were eventually agreed to in July 1942. See *Canadian Unionist* (July 1942), p. 43; *Halifax Chronicle*, 15 July 1942.

26 Report of J.R. Hill on the Coal Situation, 11 August 1942, Volume 666, file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1, Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, Records of the Department of Labour, NAC.

27 The number of producers declined from a monthly average of 3,878 in 1940 to only 2,754 in 1944, while the number of underground datal men increased from 7,004 to 7,582. The total number of coal miners, including surface workers, declined slightly from 12,949 in 1940 to 12,469 in 1944. See ‘Coal Labour Survey’: file NSS Submission to Royal Commission on Coal, Coal Labour Survey, Volume 975, RG 27, NAC.

28 PC 246, issued in January 1943, allowed NSS to direct men to move from one industry to another, but it possessed no authority to direct the allocation of labour within a particular industry or company.

29 Minutes of UMWA Meeting to Establish Production Committees, 19 April 1942, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

Committee, maintained that the government's "vicious labour policy" of wage control was directly responsible for the decline in coal production. This trend, union leaders argued, could only be reversed if labour was made an equal partner in the industry. But while some NSS officials in Ottawa viewed the proposed establishment of labour-management production committees as the "germ of something which may prove to be of the utmost benefit",³⁰ others interpreted the UMWA proposal as nothing more than a publicity gimmick designed to counter company advertisements and to regain a measure of public sympathy after the slowdown strikes. John McLeod claimed that management had every right to be wary of entering into negotiations for the establishment of production committees. According to McLeod, the UMWA leaders now calling for production committees had been the leaders of the "infamous and shameful" slowdown strike that had strangled production in 1941 and caused many miners to enlist in the armed forces to escape District 26 radicalism.³¹

If the idea of production committees was a non-starter,³² the March 1942 NWLB call for a levelling-up of wages was irresistible. After company and union representatives failed to agree on how this would be done, NWLB officials recommended that a conference be held in Ottawa between Department of Labour, company and union officials.³³ On 7 and 8 October 1942, preliminary agreement was reached on a union claim for more than \$793,000 in wage stabilization. Since the Old Sydney Collieries was able to pay its share of the levelling-up funds, a balance of approximately \$550,000 would have to be paid by the government to many employees of the Dominion and the Acadia companies. Silby Barrett, the ranking UMWA official present at the Ottawa meeting, returned to Nova Scotia insisting that these wage disbursements had been promised on an annual basis and that no strings had been attached concerning production figures. Detailed negotiations followed, but these proved difficult, whereupon Barrett threatened further job action.³⁴

This development led Minister of Labour Humphrey Mitchell to inform the union leaders in December 1942 that the government's arrangements with the companies over wage subsidies would be designed to bring long-term stability to the entire coal industry. The intention of the government, he wrote, was: that the disbursements would be within the range authorized at the October meeting in Ottawa, that the agreement would "result in a materially improved rate" of coal production and that wages negotiated with the companies would be fixed for the duration of the war subject to cost of living increases granted by the NWLB.³⁵ Noting that the NWLB had already granted close to \$2 million in cost-of-living increases to Dominion Coal

30 Unsigned memorandum to Humphrey Mitchell, 14 May 1942, *ibid.*

31 J.W. McLeod to T.H. Robinson, 21 December 1942, *ibid.*

32 Production committees, formally termed Labour-Management Production Committees, would eventually become an important plank in the labour policies of Mackenzie King in the final two years of the war and the postwar era. See Peter S. McNnis, "Teamwork for Harmony: Labour-Management Production Committees and the Postwar Settlement in Canada", *Canadian Historical Review*, 77, 3 (September 1996), pp. 317-49.

33 R.H. Neilson to T.L. McCall, 26 September 1942, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

34 Silby Barrett to Mitchell, 30 November 1942, *ibid.*

35 Mitchell to T. Ling, Barrett, A. Scott, and F. Jenkins, 22 December 1942, *ibid.*

employees since the start of the war, Mitchell insisted that future production levels must be commensurate with the good will the government had shown. In sum, wage increases and labour stability were firmly linked. Barrett and Jenkins, however, denied that they had promised to forego further wage increases for the duration of the war and insisted that the wage increase to be granted in the levelling-up scheme must be retroactive to 1 October 1942.³⁶ While Mitchell agreed that the issue of retroactivity could be discussed, he insisted that Barrett had already agreed to a wage freeze for the duration of the war once the levelling-up was completed. In these circumstances the further negotiations between union and company officials that commenced on 4 January proceeded with great difficulty. At the end of the day, there was an agreement that \$560,000 of Dominion government money would be distributed to selected employees of the Dominion and Acadia companies.³⁷

In addition to providing wage subsidies, Ottawa also sought to address the crisis in the coal industry by modifying its military recruitment policies. In October 1942, a directive provided that, on request, any employee in the iron, steel and coal mining industries could postpone his military training to 15 February 1943.³⁸ Plans were also developed in late 1942 to release military personnel with coal mining experience back to the mines. This scheme initially applied to the western provinces only, but it was eventually extended to encompass the Maritimes as well.³⁹ Since the tangible results of the release of large numbers of men from the armed forces would not be apparent until the second half of 1943, complaints from WPTB officials continued to pour into NSS offices in the final months of 1942. The Canadian National Railways began to dip into reserve coal stocks in October 1942.⁴⁰ In that same month, James McGregor Stewart, the WPTB coal administrator, noted that the increasing dependence on American coal placed Canada in a highly vulnerable position in view of the wave of labour unrest sweeping American coal fields. Stewart insisted that “severe curtailment” of domestic coal usage would be necessary if the requisite numbers of men were not found and placed in coal employment.⁴¹ WPTB Chairman Donald Gordon felt that NSS should be more diligent in directing skilled men to coal employment. NSS Director Elliot Little, however, insisted that a piecemeal approach

36 Barrett to Mitchell, 31 December 1942, *ibid.*

37 It took almost six months before all details in the levelling-up scheme were worked out. The original \$500,000 was to be split four ways: \$285,000 to adjust general wage rates at DCC and ACC operations; \$68,000 to adjust rates paid to machinists in the Dominion Steel and Coal Company to the rates paid in railroad shops of Dominion Steel and Coal; \$70,000 to DSCC mechanics who did not receive a 10 per cent wage increase in 1940; and the balance to bring up rates of pillar work employees. In July 1943, \$470,000 of the levelling-up money had been distributed, but \$34,000 of this sum had been paid to clerical workers in the employ of the Acadia Coal Company. The Department of Labour eventually paid an additional \$34,000 to be distributed to non-clerical employees.

38 A. Taché to Divisional Chairmen and Registrars, 16 October 1942, Volume 150: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

39 H.F.G. Letson to GOC Pacific and Prairie DOCs, 24 November 1942, and Letson to Eastern DOCs, 13 January 1943, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-2-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Army Men, RG 27, NAC. Soldiers were allowed to be released for a three-month period at the sole discretion of the commanding officer. Soldiers were not paid by the Army during this period.

40 “Extract from Weekly Progress Report to the Chairman of the WPTB”, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

41 J. Stewart to Donald Gordon, ? October 1942, *ibid.*

directed at individual workers would be “only a drop in the ocean” and would have “no perceptible effect”.⁴²

Continued WPTB demands for action finally spurred serious debate within NSS in January 1943.⁴³ The immediate background to this was a survey, urged by McGregor Stewart and agreed to by Defence Minister J.L. Ralston, of all Army men stationed in Canada to determine the availability of experienced coal miners.⁴⁴ Around the same time, a WPTB survey showed that 1,700 men, including 938 certified miners, were urgently needed in Nova Scotia.⁴⁵ In these circumstances, Arthur MacNamara, the new NSS Director, succumbed to Stewart’s demands and agreed, on 14 January 1943, to appoint a special committee to deal with the coal labour situation. In doing so, however, the deputy minister made the remarkable assertion that the massive labour shortfalls in the coal industry could be overcome “without a great deal of difficulty”.⁴⁶ Chaired by C.F. Needham, the Coal Labour Survey Committee (CLSC) met for the first time on 19 January and remained the primary NSS advisory panel on coal labour problems for the first six months of 1943. A variety of measures were discussed though not immediately adopted. Chief among these was a stepping-up of the release of miners from military service and a proposal for a nation-wide publicity and morale-building campaign on behalf of the industry.

Meanwhile, on 5 March 1943 the responsibility for managing the production of coal was transferred from the WPTB to the Department of Munitions and Supply. McGregor Stewart now became DMS Coal Controller. The majority of WPTB employees working on the coal problem switched departments with him. Minister C.D. Howe quickly made his presence felt. He attacked the CLSC for providing no concrete solutions to the coal labour crisis and warned that the “alarming” possibility of massive production declines must be met with vigorous action.⁴⁷ He also attacked the optimistic assessment of the labour situation provided by Humphrey Mitchell, who had claimed that more than 3,300 men had been placed in coal employment across the nation.⁴⁸ Howe noted that this figure did not take account of separations from coal employment and that the majority of the coal placements had been farmers in the western provinces who would be leaving coal employment to return to their farms on 1 May 1943.⁴⁹ Noting that 2,748 coal miners — 1,700 of them in Nova Scotia — had enlisted between 1 April 1942 and 31 March 1943,⁵⁰ Howe asserted that the employment outlook in the industry was actually worse in the spring of 1943 than it had been at any time during the war.

Despite Howe’s condemnation of the NSS record, no comprehensive measures

42 E.M. Little to Gordon, 4 November 1942, *ibid.*

43 Stewart to Arthur MacNamara, 13 January 1943, *ibid.*

44 Stewart to MacNamara, 13 January 1943, Volume 154: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

45 W.R. Roberts to L.E. Westman, 12 January 1943, Stewart to MacNamara, 13 January 1943, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

46 MacNamara to C.F. Needham, 14 January 1943, *ibid.*

47 C.D. Howe to Mitchell, 27 February 1943, Volume 154: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

48 Mitchell to Howe, 3 March 1943, *ibid.*

49 Howe to Mitchell, 7 April 1943, *ibid.*

50 MacNamara to Mitchell, 16 April 1943, *ibid.*

were planned by NSS administrators in March and April of 1943, and business continued very much as usual. Working with the National Film Board, the CLSC continued to develop plans for the inauguration of the proposed publicity campaign. In the same spirit, the special provisions concerning the postponement of coal miners applying to Mobilization Boards were extended to the autumn of 1943. But these were limited measures, as were proposals to undertake a survey on absenteeism, to revive the production committee idea, to reduce the income tax rate for coal miners and to issue to the public “a full and frank statement” of the difficulties facing the government in this “most difficult of all labour supply problems”.⁵¹ Despite the hopes of NSS bureaucrats, the policy of returning military personnel to the coal mines was not very successful. Although 500 Army men had volunteered to return to coal employment in Nova Scotia, only 59 had actually been released.⁵² In the week ending 27 March 1943, only 99 placements had been made by NSS in Nova Scotia coal mines, with a net labour demand for an additional 1,471 workers.⁵³ Moreover, problems continued to be evident in the workplace. Absenteeism remained an issue, and datal men with mining certificates were refusing to move to producer positions at the coal face because of the increase in wages paid to all coal employees since the start of the war.

In effect, the first phase of the NSS response to the crisis in the coal industry in Nova Scotia came to an end in April 1943. UMWA wage demands had been addressed, at least temporarily, through the levelling-up scheme agreed to in January 1943. Also, some preliminary attempts to address labour shortages had been made through the automatic granting of postponements to coal miners and through the release of limited numbers of Army personnel. The Coal Labour Survey Committee had been formed to gather information and to report on all aspects of the labour crisis. Preliminary plans had been made to launch an advertising campaign to boost morale and to highlight the necessity of men volunteering for coal employment, although no campaign had yet been formally approved or funded. Finally, NSS officials had been put on notice that more serious measures might be needed to address the situation in Nova Scotia. At a meeting of the CLSC in April 1943, committee members agreed that some form of compulsion might be needed to secure the required numbers of workers. In the event, the second stage of the NSS response to the employment problems of the coal industry would involve the greatest single effort by the government of Canada to control a segment of the labour force during the Second World War.

Not surprisingly, C.D. Howe provided the spark necessary to wake NSS officials from their perceived lethargy. In a scalding denunciation of NSS policies, Howe went directly to cabinet in May 1943 to demand that the labour situation in the coal mines be rectified. Claiming that it was “unthinkable” for the War Committee not to take “drastic action to forestall so great a calamity”, Howe insisted that all production problems could be “wholly attributed” to the failure of NSS to provide an adequate

51 “Industrial Morale Program in the Coal Mining Industry”, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

52 Minutes of the Fifth CLSC Meeting, 21 April 1943, *ibid.*

53 Mitchell to MacNamara, 6 April 1943, *ibid.*

labour force in the mines.⁵⁴ In practice, the War Committee did reject some of Howe's demands, but his basic argument was accepted. At the 4 May cabinet meeting, it was agreed that action was needed to prevent miners from leaving coal employment and to compel all men with coal mining experience who were working in other industries to return to the pits. After brief consultations with company and union officials, PC 4092 was issued on 17 May 1943. This order-in-council added Section 210A to PC 246, stating that all employees in other industries had to register at a local NSS office reporting coal experience, and all employers with knowledge of former coal miners in their employ had to submit that information to NSS officials. No man with coal mining experience was allowed to remain in other employment beyond 1 June 1943 without the approval of an NSS officer. All men rejected by the armed forces on medical grounds or because of conscientious objection could be directed to coal employment under Section 202 of PC 246. No coal miner would be accepted by the armed forces for enlistment until 1 February 1944, and all miners seeking postponement from military service were not to be issued orders for medical examination or military training.⁵⁵

An extensive nation-wide publicity campaign accompanied the adoption of PC 4092. Department of Labour press releases insisted that only a domestic solution would satisfy Canada's hunger for coal, and that the "extraordinary measures" of PC 4092 would "open Mother Earth's storehouse still further".⁵⁶ Full-page advertisements describing the government's measure and the desperate situation in the coal fields appeared in major newspapers in all coal producing provinces during June 1943. The CLSC planned and coordinated a series of National Film Board productions about the coal industry.⁵⁷ Humphrey Mitchell capped the advertising offensive with a national radio address on 14 July. Claiming that he had no intention of "unduly disturbing the public mind", Mitchell exhorted men engaged in coal mining to fulfil their "patriotic duty" and avoid any dispute that would disrupt

54 Howe to A.D.R. Heeney, 4 May 1943, Volume 154: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

55 When drafting PC 4092, NSS officials were guided by British efforts to increase coal output. British coal miners were frozen in their positions in May 1941. By the summer of 1942, coal workers were no longer drafted for military service and some former coal miners were transferred back to coal employment. It is interesting to note the parallels between British and Canadian efforts to increase coal output during the remaining years of the war. To combat production declines and chronic absenteeism, wages for British coal miners were increased by 90 per cent between 1939 and 1945. As in the Canadian case, however, the removal of wage differentials between contract and datal miners only discouraged men from moving to or remaining in producing positions. In December 1943, a coal mining ballot scheme was inaugurated in the United Kingdom, and 21,000 draft-eligible men were chosen by ballot to enter the coal mines instead of the armed forces. Other British measures such as pit production committees could not arrest production declines or calm troubled relations between miners and coal operators. Between 1939 and 1945, coal output in Britain declined from 231 million tons to 175 million tons, output per man shift declined from 1.14 tons to one ton, and absentee rates increased from 6.9 per cent to 16.3 per cent. For excellent accounts of British coal control during the war, see W.H.B. Court, *Coal* (London, 1951) and Barry Supple, *The History of the British Coal Industry, volume 4, 1913-1946: The Political Economy of Decline* (Oxford, 1987), Chapters 11-14.

56 Department of Labour Press Release, 11 June 1943, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 2 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

57 Minutes of the Seventh CLSC Meeting, 7 June 1943, *ibid.*

production. He emphasized that the income taxes levied by the Dominion government did not, as UMWA leaders asserted, discriminate against coal mine workers.⁵⁸ In a remarkably inept example of scheduling, Mitchell's radio broadcast was immediately preceded by a CBC "Production Front" broadcast that originated from the Cape Breton coal mines. Reporter Allan May noted that the "chief cause" of resentment among the members of District 26 was the federal income tax. After interviewing several miners, May concluded that the miners were justified in their grievances. To say the least, his assertion was an inauspicious prelude to Mitchell's plea for labour peace and increased production.⁵⁹

In a bid to address one of the UMWA's primary grievances, NSS officials also formulated plans during the summer of 1943 to introduce a modified system of income tax deductions for coal miners. In August 1943, District 26 officials protested to Mitchell that increased rates of taxation on overtime work held back production, promoted absenteeism and dissatisfaction and denied UMWA men the chance to provide the "necessities of life".⁶⁰ In fact, discussions had already commenced among officials of the Departments of National Revenue, Finance and Labour looking towards the possibility of introducing a flat annual taxation rate for coal miners. Under existing tax rules, the wages a worker made in an individual pay period were assumed to be indicative of the wages earned over the course of a whole year. A miner working significant amounts of overtime, therefore, jumped temporarily to a higher tax bracket and a greater proportion of his wage was deducted from his cheque. To remedy this, government officials proposed that coal employees pay a constant flat tax rate based on projected annual earnings. After consultation with union representatives, a modified income tax deduction for coal miners came into effect on 31 August 1943. All coal firms with more than 25 employees were required to fill out forms indicating the expected annual earnings of each worker. The yearly pay was then correlated with existing tax tables and a constant tax rate was applied to the pay packet of an individual worker regardless of the number of hours worked or wages earned during the course of a two-week or monthly pay period.⁶¹

The publicity campaign mounted by the Dominion government in the final six months of 1943 provides a compelling example of the problems of history that confronted NSS and Department of Labour officials. They could not point to a time of harmonious relations between employers and employees, nor could they trumpet the economic prosperity or well-being of miners who had occupied the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder for many decades. Only an appeal to patriotism and the solidarity of the working class community could be offered to convince men to return to the coal companies. The prime NFB publicity release was titled *Coal Face, Canada*

58 National CBC Radio Address of Humphrey Mitchell, 14 July 1943, *ibid.*

59 'Production Front' CBC Broadcast, 14 July 1943, *ibid.* May interviewed Jim Hayes, a 60-year-old miner who had been working in the pits since he was 18. Hayes claimed he earned \$17.55 for five full shifts, but that he earned only an additional \$2.90 for a sixth overtime shift once he moved to a higher tax bracket, although he stated to May that he was "not howling or anything".

60 Jenkins to Mitchell, 11 August 1943, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

61 Income Tax Commissioner to All Coal Companies, 16 August 1943, Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 3 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

and featured Bruce Adams as the local boy who returned from the Army to work in the very mines where his father had been killed. After chronicling Adams's misgivings about returning to an environment he despised, the film documented his remarkable change of attitude as he explored the town and reacquainted himself with the people. As the film's narration explained,

. . . Bruce went on through the town, [and] he realised for the first time what we've done for ourselves. He saw our libraries, financed by the miners, for studying labour problems and learning the how and why of things. He began to look more closely at the signs on the store fronts along Main Street, and what he saw there showed him a new kind of life. He was learning that there's almost no limit to what you can do when you work together. He was getting his bearings, finding democracy right on his doorstep. . . . The next day Bruce Adams reported for duty with the night shift. He's still with us. He knows how we live and work and how we feel about the future. He's learned that, in our own way, we're fighters too. And he's working with all the men of Coaltown to build the world we want.⁶²

Despite the government's tax concessions and publicity campaign, the desired results of PC 4092 were not realized. Between 1 June and 31 August, a total of 1,105 ex-coal miners in the Maritimes registered under the provisions of PC 4092. Of these, 351 were referred to coal employment; 444 were allowed, for medical or other reasons, to remain in their existing jobs; and, as of 1 September, 310 miners awaited disposition.⁶³ According to Michael Dwyer, the entire registration process had "completely bogged down", with men simply producing medical examination certificates claiming an inability to perform coal work that were "not worth the paper they are printed on".⁶⁴ Men deemed fit for coal employment were simply appealing their medical examinations to NSS appeal boards. In the Minto area in New Brunswick, 16 of 19 appeals were granted by NSS officials. In the New Glasgow area, NSS officials set up an Army Medical Board with only one doctor instead of the normal two. Out of 40 ex-coal miners examined, 37 were judged to be medically fit to return to coal employment, but all 37 men appealed the decisions on the grounds that two doctors were not present. NSS sent two new doctors to examine the men, and this new Medical Board judged 30 of the 37 appellants to be medically unfit for coal employment.⁶⁵

Additional NSS measures taken during the summer of 1943 did not result in any production gains. In July, MacNamara issued a directive that gave coal mining priority over all industries in the use of available unskilled labour. Mine operators, however, pointed out that they were swamped with unskilled help and that only an

62 G. McInnes to V.C. Phelan, 19 October 1943, Volume 666, file 6-5-23-1 pt. 2: Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

63 Report on Registration of Ex-Coal Miners Under PC 4092, Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 4 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

64 Mitchell to MacNamara, 30 June 1943, *ibid.*

65 Report on Coal Mining Labour Supply in Eastern Canada, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining Reports, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

increase in the number of producers working at the coal face would increase the output.⁶⁶ The effort to release coal miners from the Army, one of the pillars of the NSS plan to augment production, might have helped but it continued to yield frustrating results. Of the 2,200 miners who had been authorized for release by September 1943, 700 men had withdrawn their applications to return to the pits or been sent overseas, 100 men had returned to the Army, and only 970 had gone to mines across the country, with the remainder awaiting allocation.⁶⁷ There were several attempts to smooth the process of release, but Department of National Defence officials resisted any suggestion that military personnel should be compelled to return to coal employment.⁶⁸ At the same time, union demands continued to grow. With all residual issues arising out of the levelling-up of wages settled by the summer of 1943, District 26 officials lobbied hard to do the same at three other companies in Nova Scotia.⁶⁹ Finally, in the autumn of 1943, exasperated Department of Labour officials authorized all District 26 claims for levelling-up wages in the Nova Scotia coal industry in the hope that this concession would result in a corresponding increase in coal production.

The last major NSS initiative in 1943 centred on the extension of training classes to facilitate the transfer of datal men to the coal face. Coal mining methods had changed radically since provincial mining laws were first enacted. The old “room and pillar” method allowed two men to work together in one “room”, with these men responsible for all facets of the face operation including boring holes, blasting, cutting the coal, loading the coal, laying track, looking after ventilation and putting up safety timbers. Because of the large area required for this method, it was difficult for foremen to provide close supervision, and producers had to be skilled in all phases of coal work. The “longwall” mining method in place in most Nova Scotia mines during the war, however, allowed many men to work together at the coal face under the supervision of a single foreman and with no auxiliary duties. NSS officials realized that this mining method allowed for the use of non-certified miners beside skilled coal miners with first-class mining certificates.

To encourage datal men in this direction, NSS representatives attempted to inaugurate a series of training classes in the larger coal mines in Nova Scotia. But while the companies indicated a willingness to participate in the training scheme, UMWA officials refused to endorse it. Preliminary discussions between the companies and District 26 leaders in September 1943 resulted in the establishment of one small training class in Glace Bay at the coal company’s expense.⁷⁰ In the final

66 A. Cross to E.J. Brunning, 30 August 1943, Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 4 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC. Mobilization officials across the country recognized this as the primary problem. In February 1943, Justice A.M. Manson, Chairman of the NSS Mobilization Board in Vancouver, noted that with producing miners in short supply the British Columbia mines needed men with “more than strong backs and weak heads”. See Manson to MacNamara, 18 February 1943. Volume 666, file 6-5-23-2-1 pt. 1: Coal Mining, Army Men, RG 27, NAC.

67 Needham to A.E. Nash, 30 September 1943, *ibid.*

68 A.L. Macdonald to Mitchell, 21 October 1943, *ibid.*

69 Scott to Mitchell, 4 November 1943, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC. The three companies targeted were the Indian Cove, Joggins and Minto coal firms.

70 Thompson to MacNamara, 13 September 1943, M. Dwyer to MacNamara, 22 September 1943, Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 4 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

months of 1943, however, any hope of continued union cooperation evaporated in the face of the union's continuing demands for wage increases. The District 26 contract with the coal companies had expired on 1 February 1943, and a union brief submitted to the NWLB had not been addressed. At the union convention in October 1943, UMWA officials resolved not to support any training schemes. Wage increases of \$15 to \$17 million annually, the union claimed, would settle all production shortfalls in the province.⁷¹ In the same month as the convention, union officials advised MacNamara that all "fly-by-night" NSS training schemes should be abandoned in favour of immediate wage increases. In these circumstances, the training option was abandoned until the spring of 1944.⁷²

There were no new initiatives to increase the production of coal in Nova Scotia in the first five months of 1944. Miners were granted a one dollar per day increase in wages through a NWLB decision issued in December 1943,⁷³ and additional income tax concessions were granted to all coal miners in July 1944.⁷⁴ The provisions of PC 4092 barring the enlistment of coal miners were likewise extended to 1 August 1944. In June 1944, a second attempt was made to start training classes in cooperation with the union. Two classes were eventually begun with a limited number of participants in Dominion's No. 1-B and No. 24 mines.⁷⁵ Although company officials continued to support the training option, General Manager T.L. McCall claimed that the pay increase had only resulted in higher rates of absenteeism and had further decreased the incentive for datal workers to move to producing positions at the coalface.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, an order-in-council issued in March 1944 by the Nova Scotia government allowed males as young as 17 to work at the face if they were supervised by an experienced miner. In all, more than 800 ex-coal miners were eventually returned to the Maritime coal fields under the registration provisions of PC 4092,⁷⁷ and more than 2,000 soldier-miners were working in coal mines across Canada as early as June 1943.⁷⁸ None of these measures, however, had resulted in an increase in the production of coal in Nova Scotia.

Aware that more than a year of NSS activity had not improved the dismal

71 Dwyer to MacNamara, 2 October 1943, Dwyer to MacNamara, 4 October 1943, Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 5 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC. In the light of continued union intransigence, Dwyer called for "a test of authority" and suggested that datal men be compelled to work at the face.

72 W. Sneed to MacNamara, 28 October 1943, *ibid.* The UMWA finally agreed to start another training class in one Dominion mine in December 1943, although it took more than three months for the class to commence.

73 *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal*, p. 550.

74 The compulsory savings portion of the income tax that was to be refunded after the war was eliminated in the budget speech of 23 June 1942. See McCall to H.J. Kelley, 10 August 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC. The compulsory savings tax had been levied in 1942 and the refund paid after the war included two per cent interest.

75 Needham to MacNamara, 14 June 1944, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

76 McCall to Brunning, 7 June 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

77 "Registration of Ex-Coal Miners Under PC 4092", Volume 155: file 611-1-19-8 pt. 7 — Coal Mine Labour Committee, RG 27, NAC.

78 Mitchell to MacNamara, 30 June 1944, Volume 6-5-23-2 — Coal Mining, UIC Reports, RG 27, NAC.

production figures in Nova Scotia mines, coal company officials launched a concerted campaign in June 1944 to highlight existing labour problems to government officials in Ottawa. For his part, McCall detailed for Coal Controller Brunning the severe problem of absenteeism caused, in his view, by the increased wages paid to District 26 employees.⁷⁹ McCall claimed that “the pick of our producers physically and as to loyalty” had enlisted in disgust after the slowdown strikes of 1941, and that their replacements, secured through NSS, had been of poor quality. The absentee rate in The Dominion Coal mines had increased from a daily average of 18.2 per cent in May 1942 to 29.7 per cent in May 1943. In the week in May 1944 that Dominion had paid the retroactive one dollar per day wage increase, the absentee rate among producers had reached a staggering 41.2 per cent. In McCall’s view, price controls gave well-paid producers an incentive to stop working once they reached an acceptable level of earnings. Datal workers also remained a problem; 625 of them in the employ of the DCC either possessed first- or second-class mining certificates or possessed skills that would qualify them to gain the necessary certificate to work in producing positions at the coal face. Nonetheless, they were not being transferred to where they were needed.

Brunning quickly brought this particular account of the failure of NSS efforts to the attention of MacNamara and other ranking officials in the Department of Labour. In view of production shortfalls in the United States and the possibility of increased demands on American coal after the Normandy invasion, the “serious deterioration” in the Maritime coal fields necessitated immediate action.⁸⁰ In 1939, Brunning noted, producers had composed 36.4 per cent (2,274 workers) of Dominion Coal’s total work-force of 7,209. By April 1944, however, only 24.7 per cent (1,554 workers) of the workforce was directly engaged in production. Comparing the first five months of 1939 with the first five months of 1944, production had declined by 16 per cent and the number of producers by 31 per cent. As a result of various NSS initiatives, the mines were “flooded with non-producers”; the high rates paid to datal workers provided no incentive for them to switch to production positions. Brunning called for an immediate NSS investigation into the production crisis; it was essential to induce datal men to move to the coal face and to change wage rates so as to tangibly achieve this.

More than two years after the idea of production committees had been rejected by NSS leaders as a union publicity ploy, a desperate MacNamara in July 1944 endorsed the proposal. The first actual steps to get the committees going were taken at a meeting of Department of Labour officials, company executives and union leaders at the Isle Royale Hotel in Sydney on 12-13 July.⁸¹ Company officials complained that despite the wage concessions absenteeism and deliberate union slowdowns were hampering production. Union representatives countered by noting the squalour of the coal environment, the lack of pension and recreational opportunities for miners and

79 McCall to Brunning, 7 June 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

80 Brunning to MacNamara, 5 June 1944, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

81 Minutes of Joint Production Committee Meeting, 12 July 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

the closing of liquor stores in coal areas on Saturdays, a decision made by the Nova Scotia government on the recommendation of Humphrey Mitchell. After two days of rancorous debate, four understandings were reached: Joint Production Committees would be established and would meet twice per month; pressure would be exerted on the Nova Scotia government to open liquor stores on Saturdays; companies would improve recreational and community facilities in company towns; and the formation of a coal commission would be sought to oversee the implementation of improvements in the industry.

Although some NSS officials clearly viewed the establishment of Joint Production Committees as an alternative to more coercive measures, pressure continued to build in July and August 1944 for more decisive action. Beginning on 30 July, workers at the Acadia Coal Company in Stellarton walked off the job for five days, an event that led company officials to document 40 cases of illegal work stoppages between August 1943 and August 1944. Production at the Acadia mines had declined by more than 10,000 tons in the first six months of 1944 compared with the same period in 1943, and absenteeism had only increased in response to the income tax concessions made in July 1944.⁸² To John McLeod the situation at Stellarton typified the “trivial causes” of the “chronic” strikes and tie-ups in the Nova Scotia coal fields. The majority of miners, McLeod maintained, observed the rules of collective agreements, but they were “bedeviled by the noisy minority” involved in “factional union rackets”.⁸³

The flood of criticism directed towards the government’s handling of the coal labour force, the continued labour problems with UMWA men and the declining coal production figures all led several NSS officials to challenge MacNamara to solve the crisis in the Nova Scotia coal fields through coercion. In August 1944, C.F. Needham called for “drastic disciplinary action” to be taken against miners and suggested, for the first time, that Compulsory Transfer Orders be used within mines to force datal men to work at the face.⁸⁴ Needham noted that the Dominion Coal Company producing class of 1,900 workers was 900 short of the required number while there was a surplus of datal men working in the mines, including more than 600 certified miners. Dominion Coal officials likewise lobbied MacNamara, taking the view that all previous NSS initiatives, including the wage increases and income tax reforms, had only exacerbated the problem.⁸⁵ Several of MacNamara’s key advisors, however, lobbied against calls for coercion of the coal work force. One of these was M.M. Maclean, the NSS Director of Industrial Relations and a former National Secretary of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees and Executive Member of the Canadian Congress of Labour. Maclean asserted that Needham was “not intimately informed” of the issues involved in the coal situation.⁸⁶ Needham was simply parroting McLeod’s viewpoint, a perspective that was “entirely out of touch” with

82 Production Report of Acadia Coal Company, Intercolonial Coal Company, and Greenwood Coal Company, *ibid.*

83 McLeod to Needham, 3 August 1944, *ibid.*

84 Needham to MacNamara, 5 August 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, *ibid.*

85 Brunning to MacNamara, 11 August 1944, *ibid.*

86 M.M. Maclean to MacNamara, 12 August 1944, *ibid.*

both union and company sentiment. According to Maclean, the Joint Production Committees would solve the problem. MacNamara agreed, and while admitting to Needham that he was “stymied” on the whole issue, would go no further than suggesting that the NWLB investigate the possibility of a further increase in the wage differential between datal and production workers.⁸⁷

Several senior NSS officials in the Maritimes, however, supported the views of Needham and McLeod. On 24 August, Dwyer told MacNamara that the records of the previous 40 years showed that every wage increase had been followed by an increase in absenteeism and a decrease in production. In Dwyer’s view the time had come for the establishment of a permanent labour board with “final and supreme authority” over the coal industry.⁸⁸ The development of a new labour policy “with some teeth in it” would initially be resisted, but the majority of the workers would agree to the new rules and not allow the “radicals to win if a strong hand [was] brought to bear in the first place”. Once again Maclean dissuaded MacNamara from acting on Dwyer’s recommendations. Dwyer, Maclean argued, had a “very biased” viewpoint and had swallowed the company line. The Joint Production Committees would solve the problem of absenteeism.⁸⁹

In effect, the second stage of the NSS response to the coal labour crisis ended in August 1944. While the most compulsory labour mobilization measures of the war had been instituted through PC 4092 in May 1943, coal production continued to decline steadily in the 16 months thereafter. Massive publicity efforts could not begin to address the real problem of a shortage of skilled miners. The release of coal miners from the armed forces, although the most significant source of men to augment producer staffs, proceeded with difficulty and could not fill the void created by the initial loss of skilled producers to the armed forces. Training classes were only marginally successful and were not supported by union officials. Wage and income tax concessions did not lead to production gains. In desperation, the Department of Labour turned to Joint Production Committees as a way out, but in practice these also failed to solve the problem. The result was that MacNamara and other NSS officials were reduced in the last months of the war to leading a tepid campaign of consultation and conciliation.

By contrast, officials of the Department of Munitions and Supply attempted to spur the government to take a more interventionist approach. In September 1944, Coal Controller Brunning lobbied Howe to wield his influence because massive government subsidies to the coal industry were not resulting in production increases. The Emergency Coal Production Board, Brunning observed, had paid Dominion Coal

87 MacNamara to Needham, 16 August 1944, *ibid.* Evidence was readily available that a significant wage differentials already existed. NWLB Chairman Justice M.B. Archibald wrote to MacNamara on 2 September 1944 with the wage information for DCC workers. In June 1944, 5,097 datal workers earned an average of \$6.21 per day, while 1,600 producers earned an average of \$9.44 per day. Even Archibald felt that wage increases had only increased absentee rates, with younger datal men taking advantage of high absentee rates among older workers to remain in datal work and receive extended overtime work schedules. See Archibald to MacNamara, 2 September 1945, *ibid.*

88 Dwyer to MacNamara, 24 August 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 1 — Coal Mine Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

89 Maclean to A.H. Brown, 29 August 1944, *ibid.*

and its subsidiaries nearly \$8 million in subsidies to 1 June 1944, a figure that did not include any of the increased wage costs shouldered by the government. The “chief reason” for the operating losses coal companies in Nova Scotia were experiencing was the poor balance of producers within the labour force.⁹⁰ This being the case, Brunning called for a comprehensive labour survey to be carried out in all coal mines. Medically fit datal men qualified to work at the face should be forced to do so or else face compulsory military service.

NSS immediately rejected this proposal. Maclean condemned it as a “great mistake”,⁹¹ while other NSS officials noted that any survey designed to comb men out of coal employment would “create nothing but confusion and misunderstanding” since many men had been directed to the mines and frozen in that employment.⁹² For these men, the Joint Production Committees remained the only workable solution to the production problem. Brunning, however, refused to back down and insisted that a “correct proportion” of datal men to production workers be established. Dismissing the Joint Production Committees as irrelevant, he insisted that only the threat of conscription could force datal men to work at the coal face.⁹³

After Howe urged Mitchell to adopt Brunning’s plan, senior DMS and Department of Labour officials met in Ottawa on 25 September 1944. MacNamara admitted that the removal of the freezing provisions governing datal workers was an attractive option, but working against it was the possibility of widespread discontent among union members. Maclean now finally admitted that the Joint Production Committees “would be too slow in adjusting the production problem”, and that the training schemes established in March 1944 would not solve it either.⁹⁴ On their side, the DMS representatives proposed that a survey of datal men in Nova Scotia coal mines be carried out to gain a comprehensive picture of the composition and qualification of the datal workforce. Agreement was reached on this, and a Coal Labour Survey (CLS) form was drafted within a week. Each datal worker was required to report his qualifications for a production position and his reasons for remaining in datal employment. By the same token, employers were required to fill out a second form assessing the essentiality of each datal worker. Letters announcing the CLS were sent to company and union officials on 2 October 1944. The first survey was undertaken at Dominion Coal, and eventually 11 Nova Scotia coal companies and 8,677 workers were canvassed.

In the face of increased official scrutiny of coal mining operations and the datal work force, UMWA officials sought government support for a new conciliatory labour strategy. The Royal Commission on Coal had been appointed in October 1944 to investigate the problems plaguing the coal industry across Canada.⁹⁵ District 26 President Jenkins informed Brunning on 5 October 1944 that the UMWA had adopted

90 Brunning to Howe, 11 September 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

91 Maclean to Brown, 15 September 1944, *ibid.*

92 H.C. Goldenberg to Brunning, 15 September 1944, *ibid.*

93 Brunning to Goldenberg, 16 September 1944, *ibid.*

94 Minutes of Meeting to Deal With Coal Mining Situation in Nova Scotia, 25 September 1944, *ibid.*

95 Angus Morrison from the Alberta UMWA and Justice C.C. McLaurin from Calgary rounded out the royal commission’s membership.

a “Summary of Proposals” calling for: the union promotion of improvements in social conditions, housing and recreation; the creation of central production committees; the union encouragement of “energetic” education programs; the development of company initiatives to improve management techniques; the development of special machinery for union-management cooperation; the formulation, with government assistance, of mechanization plans; the support of government labour experts in union education plans; and the granting of the union shop. Jenkins asked that the “Summary of Proposals” be accepted by DMS and the Department of Labour and that they in turn exert pressure on the coal companies to make it a joint labour-management brief to the Royal Commission.⁹⁶ Not surprisingly, some NSS officials jumped at the chance to facilitate union-company cooperation. Maclean told MacNamara that the UMWA document contained a “sound diagnosis” of the problems of the coal mining industry.⁹⁷ In late October, Maclean urged that a special conference of all interested parties should be convened to explore ways to adopt the UMWA plan.

MacNamara, however, rejected this call for cooperation with UMWA officials. In a rare display of emotion, MacNamara informed his subordinate that he was disgusted with UMWA actions during the war and that the results of the Coal Labour Survey should be tabulated before any further action was contemplated.⁹⁸ In an even rarer move, MacNamara expressed his feelings about the union to C.B. Wade, the District 26 research director. Reiterating his belief that UMWA men were responsible for production declines, MacNamara rejected the union proposals and insisted that the Coal Labour Survey would form the basis of a solution to the industry’s problems.⁹⁹ Wade replied quickly; the union proposals, he wrote, should be considered an “integral part” of a larger plan — including the CLS — to increase production and stabilize the coal labour force.¹⁰⁰ The Survey would not solve anything since the questions it contained were “mostly superfluous” and were viewed by the miners as being related to military service (a claim confirmed by several senior NSS officials).¹⁰¹

Frustrated by the dismal production situation in Nova Scotia, some NSS officials sought to place the blame on other departments. Chief among them was L.E. Westman, the NSS Associate Director — War Industries, a position created in the summer of 1944. In two remarkable memoranda, one to Brunning (October 1944) and the other to MacNamara (November 1944),¹⁰² Westman admitted that virtually every NSS initiative had been a failure. The return of soldier miners to datal work rather

96 Jenkins to Brunning, 5 October 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 2 — Coal Mining Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

97 Maclean to MacNamara, 23 October 1944, *ibid.*

98 MacNamara to Maclean, 1 November 1944, *ibid.*

99 MacNamara to C.B. Wade, 4 November 1944, *ibid.*

100 Wade to MacNamara, 7 November 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

101 H.R. Pettigrove admitted that NSS officials had no authority to compel workers to move from datal to producing positions, but that the Coal Labour Survey might “by inference” indicate to datal men that medically fit men would be called for military service unless they volunteered to work at the face. See Pettigrove to Maclean, 14 October 1944, *ibid.*

102 L.E. Westman to Brunning, 26 October 1944; Westman to MacNamara, 13 November 1944, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

than to production positions had been of limited value. Moreover, pay increases had bloated datal staffs, while the training schools had not been a factor of “any great consequence”. Westman blamed the Department of Munitions and Supply for the production declines. The real problem in Nova Scotia was not wages and labour supply but working conditions. Until these were addressed, the “chronic problems” of the industry could not be solved.

As might be expected, DMS officials rejected Westman’s analysis of the situation. Brunning’s special assistant on coal matters, C.L. O’Brian, refuted Westman point by point. Although he admitted that the number of Army men working in the Nova Scotia mines was limited, O’Brian emphasized that those released from the military were the “steadiest workers in the pits”.¹⁰³ Again, while it was true that the number of men taking training classes had been “very low”, there was a “greater interest” than ever in this option. As for conditions underground, the mines were in “the best of physical condition”, and DCC officials were doing a “wonderful job of maintaining the facilities”. In O’Brian’s view, only the use of mechanical loaders in the larger mines could solve the labour problem, but these machines could only be introduced after a period of “long and careful experiment”. In his view, a “mental condition” existed among Cape Breton miners that affected their outlook, and only the “utmost cooperation” between labour and management could overcome this.

NSS and DMS officials hoped that the Coal Labour Survey would be the preliminary step to an eventual shift of datal men to production positions, but in practice the CLS suffered from many defects. The success depended on two key considerations — a good response rate from the datal men and the subsequent interviewing of all men deemed qualified to work at the face. It was hoped that the majority of surveys would be returned by mail during October 1944, but the response rate during that month was far from satisfactory. By 7 November only 35 per cent of the surveys had been completed; this forced NSS officials to issue 3,000 follow-up letters to miners urging them to fill out the forms.¹⁰⁴ By 7 December, 75 per cent of the surveys had been completed, but, with the final report scheduled for delivery on 15 December, the NSS representative supervising the survey asked that the plan to interview datal men be abandoned.¹⁰⁵ DMS officials immediately opposed this request; as O’Brian noted, the entire rationale behind the CLS was to use the biographical information on the forms to identify and interview the most promising datal workers. O’Brian agreed with union officials that the CLS form contained many questions which were “not germane to the main point” of the survey.¹⁰⁶

Although the decision was made to interview approximately 550 Dominion Coal Company employees, the interviews never occurred. In a February 1945 weekly report to MacNamara, Willard Scott, an NSS Associate Director, insisted that personal interviews were unnecessary because the final tabulations concerning the

103 C.L. O’Brian to Westman, 31 October 1944, *ibid.*

104 A. George to W. Scott, 7 November 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 1 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

105 P. MacAulay to Scott, 7 December 1944, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 2 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

106 Undirected O’Brian memo, 22 December 1944, *ibid.*

demographics of the coal work force in Nova Scotia made it “sufficiently clear” why datal men were not going to the face.¹⁰⁷ More than 3,400 datal men possessed first- or second-class mining certificates, but close to 65 per cent of the individuals in this group were more than 40 years of age. Moreover, 63 per cent of the 6,373 men who had completed the forms were either physically unfit for face work or had been declared essential in datal positions by their employers. Noting that close to 800 men who were actually eligible for transfer had indicated that they would refuse to work in production positions, Scott maintained that a tighter control of the datal work force would iron out many of the existing problems.¹⁰⁸ Specifically, he called for the institution of a five day week, the close monitoring of extra shifts for datal workers to cut down on absenteeism and overtime, the amendment of PC 4092 to allow NSS officials to compel men to positions within coal mines, the return to the armed forces of soldier miners who refused to work at the face and the implementation of provincial measures to reduce the time needed to obtain a first-class mining certificate. In a more subtle manner, Scott was advocating Needham’s suggestion that NSS control be extended to the supervision of individual workers in coal employment, with qualified workers being forced to move to the face.

Scott’s views had considerable support among NSS officials, but MacNamara’s actions ensured that nothing concrete would result. McLeod agreed with Scott that NSS should have the power to compel certain men to work at the face, but he also maintained that the 799 soldier miners working in Nova Scotia, 392 of whom were performing datal work, should be left alone.¹⁰⁹ Both company and NSS representatives supported the proposals for a five-day work week and a clampdown on overtime shifts. MacNamara, however, failed to act and sent the completed CLS tabulations to the Royal Commission on Coal for information purposes only.¹¹⁰ The coal companies were not even given the opportunity to move men who had indicated on the survey forms a willingness to switch to production jobs. This was because individual responses to the CLS could not be released to management without the permission of the UMWA.¹¹¹ As a result, many experienced men remained in datal posts in companies where no shortage of producers existed. In the mines of the Cumberland Railway and Coal Company, for example, 145 qualified datal men were willing to work at the coal face, but no production vacancies were available in that company’s operations.¹¹² At the same time, other companies in need of production workers did not have access to the information needed to identify them.

In truth, MacNamara had the support of many senior NSS officials in his de facto abandonment of regulatory control of the coal labour force. On 14 March 1945, Westman told him that “various expedients” might be tried to reduce the demand for 1,100 producers in the coal mines across Canada, but that it was “questionable

107 Reports of Associate Directors for Week Ending 3 February 1945, *ibid.*

108 A full report on the Coal Labour Survey is found in Volume 975: file NSS Submission to Royal Commission on Coal, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

109 T.L. Connolly to Scott, 28 February 1945; McLeod to MacNamara, 6 March 1945, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-10 pt. 2 — Coal Mining, Coal Labour Survey, RG 27, NAC.

110 MacNamara to Brunning, 21 March 1945, *ibid.*

111 D. Burchell to R. Howland, 5 October 1945, *ibid.*

112 Brunning to MacNamara, 22 March 1945, *ibid.*

whether the net result would justify the means”. Noting that a plan had been adopted to ensure that the soldier miners would not be interrupted in their employment, Westman summarized the position that NSS would now take for the duration of the war: “From the point of view of the present emergency, it can be said that no radical changes are likely to take place in respect to new developments of coal resources, improvements in working conditions and mechanization, labour relations, and absenteeism”.¹¹³

During the spring and summer of 1945, labour relations deteriorated in the Nova Scotia coalfields. On 20 February 1945, after the NWLB had rejected a union proposal for increased wages, a strike vote had been called by District 26 President Jenkins.¹¹⁴ Despite Mitchell’s public warning that the vote would not further the miners’ cause and that a strike was forbidden under the provisions of the Wartime Wages Control Order, the vote carried, and a series of tie-ups and work stoppages ensued. The most remarkable stoppage in production occurred in June, when UMWA miners in Glace Bay went on strike in support of a group of waitresses at the Glory Cafe who had been fired and were being denied their pay until they returned their uniforms. Local unions determined that cafe owner Yee Yen was “in league with other cafe owners in a move to smash the waitresses’ union”; this made full UMWA support of the waitresses mandatory.¹¹⁵ Two days were lost in the mines as a result of this job action.

In many respects, however, NSS adopted a hands-off approach to the problems of the industry for the remainder of the war. During this period, absenteeism continued to increase while production continued to go down. By June 1945, absenteeism had reached a daily average of 30 per cent in the Nova Scotia coal industry — a rate characterized by NSS officials as a “deliberate and calculated” attempt to produce more overtime work.¹¹⁶ Production declined by six per cent per month from January to June 1945, a situation made worse for the country by a simultaneous import cut of ten per cent in American coal.¹¹⁷ In June, Mitchell offered an increase of 25 cents per ton in the existing subsidy for coal, with the sum realized thereby to be divided among union members if the UMWA would agree to a contract for 12 months.¹¹⁸ Key NSS officials, however, maintained that decreasing production rates would be a “foregone conclusion” if datal wage rates were increased.¹¹⁹ NSS representatives welcomed the end of the war in the Pacific as an opportunity to extricate the Dominion government from the morass of the previous three years in the coal industry. With the return of

113 Westman to MacNamara, 14 March 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining Reports, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

114 Humphrey Mitchell Radio Address, 19 February 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

115 McLeod to Robinson, 30 June 1945, Volume 667: file 6-5-23-11 pt. 2 — Coal Mining Production Problems, Nova Scotia, RG 27, NAC.

116 Westman to MacNamara, 9 May 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining Reports, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

117 Westman to MacNamara, 18 June 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

118 Mitchell to Jenkins, 19 June 1945, *ibid.*

119 Westman to MacNamara, 9 May 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 1 — Coal Mining Reports, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

thousands of men to Cape Breton and the nation-wide early release of more than 600 coal miners from the armed forces under the Industrial Selection and Release Plan,¹²⁰ freezing regulations and compulsory direction of ex-coal miners were dropped in September 1945. Then, in November, despite the fact that the industry was still in a “precarious condition”, PC 4092 and the emergency regulations governing the coal labour force were repealed.¹²¹

The effort to regulate the labour force in the Nova Scotia coal fields vividly illustrates the remarkable difficulty NSS officials could experience in providing manpower for vital industry. NSS bureaucrats were given extensive regulatory authority over the coal industry, but they were unable to stop the decline in coal output after 1939. To be fair, the enlistment of more than 3,000 experienced coal miners, more than half of them from the Maritimes, put the coal industry in a precarious situation from which it could not easily recover. Working against NSS initiatives also was the militancy of UMWA District 26. Faced with an acute labour shortage of skilled employees with specialized training and a festering labour relations environment, NSS officials were thrown on the defensive. With the adoption of PC 4092 in May 1943 as well as the training scheme and publicity campaign, NSS became little more than a monitoring agency in respect to the coal industry. At no time during the war did any comprehensive proposal designed to offset decades of mistreatment of the coal miners receive serious consideration by the federal government.

This account of NSS policy adds in several ways to the historiography of Canada’s war effort, the provincial coal industry and regional economic development in the Maritimes. If weak, ineffective and often ill-conceived government policies can be considered the predominant features of Canada’s mobilization effort in the coal industry,¹²² the prevailing viewpoint extolling the virtues of Mackenzie King’s handling of the manpower question during the war must be reconsidered. Indeed, the roots of Canada’s manpower malaise throughout the war leading to the 1944 conscription crisis might have less to do with external shocks such as casualty rates and replacement shortfalls and more to do with domestic human resource mobilization policies adopted by the King government. This study, therefore, complements a growing body of scholarship that identifies a decidedly mediocre record of military and civilian endeavours during the Second World War.¹²³

120 “Statistical Report No. 2, Industrial Selection and Release Committee”, Volume 984: file 10 — NSS ISRP, RG 27, NAC. The Industrial Selection and Release Plan allowed key workers in many industries to be discharged from the armed forces out of turn. See Michael D. Stevenson, “The Industrial Selection and Release Plan and the Premature Release of Personnel from the Armed Forces, 1945-1946”, in Greg Donaghy, ed., *Uncertain Horizons: Canadians and Their World in 1945* (Ottawa, 1996), pp. 115-32.

121 Brunning to MacNamara, 13 November 1945, Volume 666: file 6-5-23-1 pt. 3 — Coal Mining, General Correspondence, RG 27, NAC.

122 See Michael D. Stevenson, “National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources in Canada During the Second World War”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1996.

123 See J.L. Granatstein, *The Generals: The Canadian Army’s Senior Commanders in the Second World War* (Toronto, 1993), Terry Copp and Bill McAndrew, *Battle Exhaustion: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Canadian Army, 1939-1945* (Kingston, 1990) and David Zimmerman, *The Great Naval Battle of Ottawa: How Admirals, Scientists, and Politicians Impeded the Development of High Technology in Canada’s Wartime Navy* (Toronto, 1989).

Additionally, this account of NSS involvement with the coal industry offers telling insights into the nature of leadership in the Canadian government during the war years and the immediate postwar era. In contrast to existing accounts trumpeting the prominence of centralizers and planners in such agencies as the Departments of Finance and Reconstruction, Arthur MacNamara is perhaps a more appropriate person to represent the government planner shaping wartime and postwar policy in Canada.¹²⁴ While there can be no doubt that the war allowed a group of skilled intellectuals to achieve prominence in the administration of government affairs, the commitment of most “Ottawa men” to a planned and centralized national government was not unequivocal. Cautious, deliberate, flexible and often ineffective initiatives, such as those endorsed and adopted by NSS officials, were the rule and not the exception in government circles during the Second World War and the years following 1945.

Yet some examples do exist of more interventionist and enlightened wartime manpower strategies in other industries. The most successful NSS initiative occurred along the Halifax docks.¹²⁵ Faced with an acute shortage of longshoremen and a marked increase in port traffic, NSS secured legislation that forced all men with longshore experience back to the docks. Moreover, NSS went much further by completely decasualizing dock labour and by offering a guaranteed minimum wage to all longshoremen. Additionally, special provisions were made to establish a reserve pool of labour in Halifax housed at government expense and to have army labour battallions available to meet emergency labour requirements. This combination of the carrot and the stick allowed the federal government to overcome decades of labour hostility between shipping companies and the Halifax Longshoremen’s Association and saw the emergence of Halifax as the primary Canadian port during the war. Furthermore, all parties concerned with the handling of port cargo agreed to maintain the wartime apparatus of longshore regulation into the post-war era. While the coal mining industry was perhaps beset by a unique series of problems, the successful and dramatic measures adopted along the Halifax docks at least hint at the possibility that a unitary wartime state could have flexed its muscle to improve upon the record of the coal industry during the war.

The reaction of the coal miners in District 26 to NSS mobilization initiatives fills an important gap in the existing historiography of coal miners in Nova Scotia. In many respects, the four years of the war following the end of the slowdown strikes in 1941 were a cooling-off period for an exhausted and troubled sector of the Canadian work force. Union militancy remained strong, and many government officials, including MacNamara himself, blamed this union activism for the production declines that occurred between 1941 and 1945. But rank and file members of the union and

124 See J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto, 1982); Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1986); Barry Ferguson, *Remaking Liberalism: The Intellectual Legacy of Adam Shortt, O.D. Skelton, W.C. Clark, and W.A. Mackintosh, 1890-1925* (Kingston, 1994); and Robert Campbell, *Grand Illusions: The Politics of the Keynesian Experience in Canada, 1945-1975* (Peterborough, 1987).

125 See Stevenson, “National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources”, Chapter 7; and Jay White, “Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War”, Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1994, Chapter 5.

their leaders did not pursue a strident strategy of direct confrontation with coal company and government officials similar to that of the 1920s. District 26 leaders grudgingly complied with the wartime wage regulations and wrung monetary concessions from the coal operators,¹²⁶ concessions that were funded entirely by the Dominion government. Nevertheless, the fundamental nature of labour relations between workers and companies remained unchanged during the period of federal control of the coal industry. When war ended in 1945, the fractious pattern of industrial conflict continued unabated as it had in the decades prior to 1939. The massive three-month strike and other smaller stoppages in the Maritime coal fields during 1947 proved that the war had changed nothing as far as the coal industry was concerned.

The history of the Dominion government's wartime efforts in relation to the Nova Scotia coal industry also confirms the "primarily parasitical" role of the federal government in the economic underdevelopment of the Maritimes.¹²⁷ Ernest Forbes has argued persuasively that Ottawa virtually abandoned Maritime economic interests during the Second World War apart from token gestures of financial aid, with Maritime firms receiving only 3.7 per cent of industrial investment and 6.2 percent of the shipbuilding contract funds from Howe's Department of Munitions and Supply between 1939 and 1945.¹²⁸ It is more difficult to judge the impact of the Department of Labour and NSS on the economic development of the Maritimes during the war. Humphrey Mitchell and Arthur MacNamara seemed to share none of Howe's personal animosity towards Maritime industry, but neither Mitchell nor MacNamara spearheaded significant initiatives to assist the primary industrial sectors of the Maritime Provinces. To 31 March 1946, the Dominion government paid slightly more than \$18 million in wartime production subsidies to Nova Scotia coal operators to offset wage increases paid to UMWA employees. But this emergency expenditure was simply a temporary measure, and it was not accompanied by any decisive and progressive steps that would benefit both company and worker in the long run. The wartime state, possessing virtually unlimited power to at least attempt to address critical defects in the coal industry, failed to act on the behalf of thousands of coal miners in Nova Scotia. This failure only accentuated historical trends that witnessed the gradual decline of the coal industry as one of the primary sectors of the Maritime economy during the 20th century.

126 Among seven major industrial groups, the increase in the wages of coal miners between 1939 stood second only to the increase achieved in the same period by loggers. In the case of coal miners, however, these wartime wage increases allowed UMWA members to return to wage rates that prevailed more than 25 years earlier. See *Report of the Royal Commission on Coal*, p. 304.

127 See Gary Burrill and Ian McKay, eds., *People, Resources, and Power: Critical Perspectives on Underdevelopment and Primary Industries in the Atlantic Region* (Fredericton, 1987), p. 5.

128 See Ernest R. Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada During the Second World War", *Acadiensis*, XV, 2 (Spring 1986), pp. 3-27.