

**PAINTING THE TOWN RED: THE “COMMUNIST” ADMINISTRATION AT
BLAIRMORE, ALBERTA, 1933-1936**

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For Mum, Dad and Meghan.

Abstract

On 14 February 1933, the citizens of Blairmore, Alberta, elected a Communist town council; this so-called Red administration remained in power until 1936. Best known for their seemingly outrageous actions, the council exists within current historiography as either the result of protracted depression or an example of the success experienced by the Communist Party of Canada during this period. This thesis will challenge both arguments, demonstrating that a series of social, economic, and political experiences resulted in the election of known Communists being socially permissible by 1933. It will be demonstrated that the agenda of council was not strictly “Communist,” rather it represented a balance between radical and populist programs, thus enabling council to challenge capitalist society while providing a practical response to the local effects of the Depression. The deterioration of this balance by 1936, coupled with a series of scandals, was resultant in the council’s electoral downfall.

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Introduction

Until 1933, Mrs. Rossi was not a well-known person outside of Blairmore, Alberta. An eighty-year-old Italian immigrant, Rossi typified the silent majority of this bituminous coal mining centre: impoverished, non-British and trying to survive the depression as best she could.¹ Yet it was not for her struggle against poverty or her hard work as a wife and mother that she has been remembered, but her simple actions on municipal election day, 13 February 1933. Unable to speak a word of English, Rossi entered the polling station with a lump of coal firmly in her grasp to signify her vote for the miners' slate of Red candidates.² The result of the election was contentious, but by 2 a.m. it was announced there was a slim majority for the Red miners' slate.³ Sweeping the previous pro-business town council from power, Communists were elected to all three vacant seats on council, as well as the Mayor's chair.⁴ "Never in the history of any town

¹ When referring to the extended economic depression at Blairmore the word "depression" is not capitalized, differentiating this reference from the Great Depression. The economic downturn at Blairmore, coined a "double depression" by William Sloan, will be discussed in detail in chapter one of this thesis.

² J.W., "Blairmore - Union Camp," *The Worker*, 3 June 1933. The group was officially known as "workers' candidates," but commonly referred to in the *Blairmore Enterprise* as the "Red Miners' Slate" or the "Miners' Slate of Red Candidates." The term "Red" also requires further explanation. The members of council were almost exclusively referred to as "Red" in the *Blairmore Enterprise*, a label that was intended to have a derogatory effect on the individuals in question. By calling them "Red," the paper insinuated all manner of radical connections, be it to the Communist Party of Canada, the Communist International, the Soviet Union or other Red-affiliated labour groups. Within the wider discourse engaged by this research, "Red" has similar widely varying and unfocused meanings. The involvement of the Red-affiliated Worker's Unity League in the 1932 strike discussed in Chapter 1, for example, would lead to statements which categorized all strikers as "Red strikers," although in actuality a minority of strikers may have supported a strictly Red agenda. In this thesis, the word "Red" will be defined as a person who actively challenged the social norms dictated by the Canadian nation state from a left of centre political perspective.

³ N.A., "William Knight Chief Magistrate," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 Feb 1933.

⁴ A total of six councillors and the mayor comprised a complete town council. Elections were staggered, with three council seats balloted on each February. The mayor also served a two year term. In 1933 the term of the mayor and three councillors had expired, and therefore the balance of power on council was in question. The Red element gained a large majority on council by electing its candidates to all vacant seats on council, the mayor's chair and by having the support of one of the holdover councillors from the previous year (R. Peressini). Thus, the composition of council changed dramatically, from 1932 where there had only been one Red member to 1933 where the Communists held a convincing 5 to 2 majority. See Appendix 1 for a breakdown of each councillor's terms in office.

in western Canada...,” the *Blairmore Enterprise* reported, has “such a degree of interest manifested itself in a municipal election as that shown here in Monday when the labour slate was almost entirely swept into power.”⁵ Mayor Bill Knight won re-election for a second time in 1935 with Red government continuing until 14 February 1936.

With voter turnout at over 90 percent Mrs. Rossi was certainly not the only “foreigner” who voted, but her actions caught the attention of the press.⁶ As the reality of a Communist town council in the heart of Canada’s largest coal mining region was reported to the nation, it was inextricable from the message that non-British individuals were responsible. Mrs. Rossi served as a personification of what a Communist was expected to be: she could not speak English, she was not British, she was seemingly uneducated, and ready to turn against the established cultural and social norms by voting for Red candidates.⁷ Though the newly-elected mayor of Blairmore was a British-born Great War veteran, a “Red scare” ensued in neighbouring towns and the new administration was quickly linked with the Communist Party of Canada and other radical labour groups.⁸

Before evaluating the historiography of Blairmore, it is necessary to first locate the town within its geographic experience. Since the incorporation of the Municipality of

⁵ N.A., “William Knight Chief Magistrate,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 Feb 1933.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For example see N.A., “The Town Act,” *High River Times* 26 February, 1933. See also Wesley Morgan, “The One Big Union in the Crowsnest Pass,” in *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia*, eds. Wayne Norton and Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 65.

⁸ Blairmore had been of interest to the Royal Northwest Mounted Police since the end of the Great War. A good example of the dominant view of “foreigners” in this time period is displayed in the “Memorandum on Revolutionary Tendencies in Western Canada, Prepared by the Assistant Comptroller, Royal Canadian Mounted Police” (National Archives of Canada, RG 24, Records of the Naval Service of Canada (intelligence), vol. 3985, 105-2-21 cited in Allen Seager and David Roth, “British Columbia and the Mining West,” in *The Worker’s Revolt in Canada: 1917-1925*, Ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 254. Also see Gregory Kealey and Reginald Whittaker, ed. *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part 1, 1933-1934* (St. John’s: Canadian Committee on Labour, 1989). According to Bill Knight’s gravestone in the Old Union Graveyard in Blairmore, he was in British regiment number 505173, and had attained the rank of Sergeant by the end of the Great War.

the Crowsnest Pass in 1978, road maps have represented the Pass as a district stretching from the Leitch Collieries to the Alberta-British Columbia border, with Highway 3 serving as a rough north-south dividing line.⁹ When driving through today one could be excused for having the impression that the Pass exists as one continuous area of settlement, with very small distances between the towns and villages and little in the way of main streets visible from the highway. The Crowsnest Pass has not always been this neatly defined.

The citizens of Blairmore currently share a strong regional identity with other residents of the Crowsnest Pass, however, the definition of what constitutes the Pass is not clear. Authors concerned with the area have very different perceptions of its constituent communities. In a 1984 article for *Canadian Geographic*, Elliot and Nicole Bernshaw informed readers that “sociologically” the Crowsnest Pass linked towns as far apart as Fort Macleod, Alberta in the east and Fernie, B.C. in the west through “common experiences.”¹⁰ Alternatively, geographer David Lake argued in 1972 that the Crowsnest Pass as a “functional area” starts at Elko, B.C. where the valley narrows, and terminates at Burmis, Alberta, where the valley widens into foothills.¹¹ A third perspective was offered by William Sloan in 1968, who argued that a “social corridor” existed between the Crowsnest Communities and Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, facilitated by the Great Northern Railway.¹² For Sloan the Crowsnest Pass represented the northernmost extension of the

⁹ Leitch Collieries is also known as “Passburg” or “Passburg Flats.”

¹⁰ Elliott and Nicole Bernshaw, “Crowsnest Pass: History and Controversy in a Stunning Setting,” *Canadian Geographic* 104 (1984), 28.

¹¹ David Lake, “A Study of Landscape Evolution in the Crowsnest Pass Region, 1898-1971” (Ph.D. Diss, University of Oklahoma, 1972), 2-3.

¹² William Alexander Sloan, “The Crowsnest Pass During the Depression: A Socioeconomic History of Southeastern British Columbia, 1918-1939” (M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1968), 7.

Inland Empire.¹³ The Pass is often further divided along the provincial boundary to reflect the experiences of those living either in Alberta or British Columbia.¹⁴

Given the varying perceptions of what constitutes the Crowsnest Pass, it is necessary to define the region in terms of this thesis. The examples offered above are based on sociological, geographical, social and political variables respectively, using different sets of empirical data. During the interviews conducted for this thesis, informants were asked to define the Pass as they perceived it during the depression. The dominant response was that it was a network of towns and villages stretching from Hillcrest, Alberta in the east through Bellevue, Frank, Blairmore, Coleman, Crowsnest, Michel, Natal and Hosmer, ending at Fernie, B.C. Informants remembered frequent travel between the communities for social visits. Beatrice Peressini, for example, recalls traveling from Blairmore to Michel and then on to Fernie with her family to visit other members of the Italian Society on weekends.¹⁵ It is clear that social, fraternal and ethnic ties connected the residents of these Crowsnest communities, who got together to celebrate events such as Labour Day and May Day.¹⁶ This thesis will therefore use a definition of the Pass stretching from Hillcrest, Alberta to Fernie, B.C.

While there was interaction and shared interests between the communities that made up the Crowsnest Pass of the 1930s, it would be incorrect to assume there was the same level of integration, communication or cooperation that exists today. Blairmore,

¹³ Ibid. The Inland Empire is centred on Spokane, Washington, and includes much of the Columbia River Basin, extending into northern Idaho, northeast Oregon, and north-western Montana. This region is sometimes also referred to as the Inland Northwest.

¹⁴ A good example is Tom Langford, *The Forgotten Side of the Border, British Columbia's Crowsnest Pass* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 1998).

¹⁵ For example, Beatrice Peressini interview, 7. Mrs. Peressini was interviewed in her Calgary home by the author 27 May 2006.

¹⁶ For more on May Day in the Crowsnest Pass, refer to Tom Langford, "Workers of the World Unite: Celebrating May Day" in *The Forgotten Side of the Border, British Columbia's Crowsnest Pass*, ed. Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 1998). 48-52.

Coleman and Fernie were the dominant urban and economic centres, and as such were competing for investment (and therefore prosperity and employment) throughout the period.¹⁷ Of the three, Blairmore and Coleman were particularly notorious rivals, and this rivalry was evident at sporting events and even in the local dating scene throughout the 1930s.¹⁸ As Helen Kropinak recalled, “hockey games were like war!”¹⁹ Comparisons between Blairmore, Coleman and Fernie were often found in the local press, either addressing the decisions of the local government, or for holding one town above the other in progress and vision.²⁰ The overall result was a common experience that was broadly shared among all of the constituent communities, yet defined locally by economic, corporate, ethnic and political considerations. All three settlements had unique political experiences during this period: Blairmore elected a Red town council, Coleman elected a right-wing Citizens’ Coalition council, and Fernie went bankrupt and was placed under the governance of a sole trustee for the Provincial Government.²¹

The towns even had quite different physical layouts. Unlike Coleman, which was a collection of neighbourhoods defined by ethnic identities, the neighbourhoods of Blairmore were delineated by the class of their inhabitants. Anne Spatuk, a retired school teacher and founding member of the Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, pointed out

¹⁷ Allen Seager, “Socialists and Workers: the Western Canadian Miners, 1900-1921,” *Labour/Le Travail* 21 (1985): 52.

¹⁸ Anne Spatuk interview; Beatrice Peressini interview. Mrs. Spatuk was interviewed in her Blairmore home by the author on 18 June 2006.

¹⁹ Helen Kropinak Interview, P5. Mrs. Kropinak was interviewed in her Blairmore home by the author on 18 June 2006.

²⁰ While such comparisons were usually qualitative, they took on a political and personal tone after the 1933 elections, with jokes such as: “What’s the difference between Mayor Knight and the future? The future sometimes looks bright!” appearing in the *Coleman Journal*. See N.A., “Local and General News,” *Blairmore Enterprise* 11 May, 1933.

²¹ For more on the experience at Fernie under trusteeship, see to Wayne Norton, “Trusteeship: The Provincial Administration at Fernie, 1935-1946,” in *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia*, Eds. Wayne Norton and Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 131-146.

that in Blairmore workers built their homes close to the industries where they worked – the mine, the brick factory or the brewery – while the owners of businesses and the managers of large corporations lived in the Westside residences, which were separated from the working-class Eastside by a Canadian Pacific Railway spur line to the West Canadian Collieries.²² During labour disputes, this division became more pointed.

Thelma Bradley (nee: Pinkney) recalled that during the strike of 1932 she had

stones thrown at me and [I was] called a scab because I happened to live in the west end of town where the mine officials resided. Our family was in no way connected with the strike but because I lived where I did and played with the children of the mine officials, I was guilty by association.²³

Blairmore demonstrates the most class-based settlement pattern within the urban areas of the Crowsnest Pass.²⁴

The residents of Blairmore were linked to the broader Crowsnest Pass region by shared experiences and defined locally by unique identities, but they were also influenced by the *raison d'être* of the town, coal. The specific nature of the local coal deposit and the extraction methods it required are key to understanding the experiences of Blairmore miners. Coal extracted from the Crowsnest region was soft and relatively perishable compared to its main competitor, Pennsylvania coal.²⁵ Crowsnest coal had to be shipped by rail in closed box cars or low gondolas, and had to be stored indoors to prolong its

²² Anne Spatuk interview, p 4-5.

²³ Crowsnest Pass Historical Society, *Crowsnest and Its People, Millennium Edition* (Lethbridge: Robbins Southern Printing, 2000), 519.

²⁴ The other settlement that owed its existence to the West Canadian Collieries, Lille, reflected a similar class-based town layout. See the maps in appendix 2.

²⁵ The West Canadian Collieries and other producers unsuccessfully lobbied the Federal Government to increase tariffs on American coal or subsidize freight rates for coal traveling east from Alberta. This lobbying effort had been well underway since the end of the Great War. For example, see N.A., “Alberta Coal is Facing Loss in Winnipeg Market: Steam Coal Already being Supplanted by American Produce – Domestic Faces Possibility of being Forced Out,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 6 May 1924.

usability.²⁶ The more coal from the Crowsnest Pass was handled – by miners, pickers, tipple workers, railway employees and consumers – the more it deteriorated, and the less it was worth.²⁷ Slack, as was termed the pieces that were too small to be useful, was simply discarded in large piles adjacent to the tipple.²⁸

The softer and more perishable nature of Crowsnest coal affected miners directly, as they were paid by the weight of saleable coal they extracted. Coal that was crushed or chipped into small pieces on the way from the coal face to the tipple was worthless to the West Canadian Collieries, and the miners were not paid for it. This was further complicated during the depression, because the mines at Blairmore and Bellevue had reached their maximum optimum operating depth during this time. While the company was searching for other money-saving alternatives, the simple reality for Blairmore miners was that they were paid by the ton of saleable coal produced, and that coal had to be extracted more deeply in an aging mine.²⁹

Soft, slacky coal was not the only factor Blairmore miners had to contend with; there were also “menacing peculiarities” that caused a series of problems unique to

²⁶ For an excellent explanation of the trouble facing Alberta coal, see to the 1919 Royal Commission on Coal in Alberta. A good abridged version has been edited by David J. Bercuson, and a description of the problems with Alberta coal during the period can be found on pages ix-x in the introduction. See David J. Bercuson (ed.), *Alberta's Coal Industry, 1919* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1978).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ When coal was brought to the surface it was cleaned of any other rocks and minerals, and then passed over a series of screens to separate the coal by size. Lump coal (more than 8 inches in diameter), nut coal (from 1-8 inches in diameter) and pea coal (smaller than two inches but still not powder or shards) could be sold to different markets or transformed into coke. The remaining coal was discarded as slack.

²⁹ Different strategies for combating slack and maximizing profits within the existing facilities were contemplated. The solution proposed was the placement of a jigging conveyor belt at the coal face, thus requiring a minimum of shoveling and handling, and consequently fewer men. In a letter dated November 1, 1933 to the administration of West Canadian Collieries, Raoul Green pointed out this could save 15 cents per ton “provided (and this is the main drawback) we can obtain such a contract from the union... obviously we are up against a slacky mine or a change in system.” Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.33 Kerr J&F.

Crowsnest coal fields.³⁰ Throughout the Pass coal seams lay at steeply pitched angles, which made the traditional room and pillar extraction method particularly challenging.³¹ Geologists reported that “the seams generally did not follow continuous paths, contained lethal pockets of methane gas and, because they were of soft bituminous coal, broke down neatly into dust during the mining process.”³² When mining operations were first undertaken at Frank, for example, “the coal seam pitched to the west at an angle of 70 degrees, changing to a vertical seam at an angle of 60 degrees, and going as low as 30 degrees to the east thereafter.”³³ This resulted in coal seams that were more labour-intensive and dangerous to mine in comparison to Pennsylvanian coal.³⁴

Blairmore was not representative of the so-called “typical” mining town. In his description of resource dependant towns in the Canadian west, Gerald Friesen suggests that centres like Blairmore were home to a narrow segment of the overall population – transient adult males – and therefore lacked the social diversity of young, old and female residents which brought social stability.³⁵ Friesen argues that because residence in such towns was temporary, local problems “did not require or deserve permanent economic or political remedies.”³⁶ He also observed that because of the transient nature of these

³⁰ The term “menacing peculiarities” was used by miner Arthur Wilson in his testimony before the Alberta Coal Commission in 1907. Cited in Sharon Babien, *The Coal Mining Industry in the Crowsnest Pass* (Edmonton: Government of Alberta, Department of Culture, 1985), 39.

³¹ Most underground coal was mined by the room and pillar method, whereby rooms are cut into the coal bed leaving a series of pillars, or columns of coal, to help support the mine roof and control the flow of air. Generally, rooms are 20-30 feet wide and the pillars up to 100 feet wide. As mining advances, a grid-like pattern of rooms and pillars is formed.

³² Babien, 39.

³³ Alberta, Mines Branch, Mine Files, File 48, Report to F.B. Smith, 1906. Public Archives of Alberta. Cited in Babien, 46. In the 1950s and thereafter it was the erratic nature of these seams that facilitated the economic argument for strip mining.

³⁴ For more on Pennsylvania coal and its effects on the Alberta Coal Industry, see David Bercuson, *Alberta's Coal Industry, 1919* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1978).

³⁵ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 297-298.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

settlements, miners rarely attended church, went to social functions, or interacted with non-miners.³⁷

Blairmore possessed few of these stereotypical traits. By 1933 the population of the town had reached a stable 1629, with a relatively close number of men and women (899 men versus 739 women); seventy percent of men at Blairmore were married.³⁸ Ethnic and fraternal organizations were established by this time, and miners and their families participated in the everyday social activities of the town, be it through these associations, their churches or social clubs. There were substantial religious congregations, with 862 Roman Catholics, 504 members of the United Church, and 154 Anglicans; only three individuals chose not to state their religion.³⁹ As this thesis will show, residents were also inclined to pursue permanent economic and political remedies to their suffering, as witnessed by the election of the Red council in 1933.

Having located the experiences at Blairmore within their larger geographical and geological context, it is now possible to undertake an investigation of the Red council and radicalism associated with the Crowsnest Pass from a number of perspectives. Local historians, like Annie Larbalestier and James Cousins, represent what has until recently been the dominant representation of the Red town council within community histories.⁴⁰ Larbalestier prefaces her discussion of the council by reminding readers that Reds “were just plainly hungry and bored with unemployment,” noting that “anything was better than

³⁷ Ibid, 297.

³⁸ See Appendix 4. For marriage statistic, see Allen Seager, *A History of the Mine Workers Union of Canada, 1925-1936* (MA Thesis, McGill University, 1977), 154.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Anne Larbalestier, “The Hungry Thirties,” in *The Story of Blairmore, Alberta, 1911-1961* (Lethbridge: Lethbridge Herald, 1961), 64-66; James Cousins, *A History of the Crowsnest Pass* (Lethbridge: Historical Trails Society of Alberta, 1981). Larbalestier is likely related to C.M. Larbalestier, Secretary Treasurer for the town of Blairmore under the Knight administration. The council tried to fire Larbalestier. They were stopped from doing so, however, by the provincial government.

what they had or their living conditions.”⁴¹ Cousins argues that although the citizens of Blairmore were not communist *per se*, the terminology used was Communist-inspired. Public occasions required “mass meetings” or “demonstrations of solidarity” while Soviet-style parades were held.⁴² These scholars invoke the more notorious actions of the Red administration, such as the re-naming of Victoria Avenue “Tim Buck Boulevard” for the imprisoned leader of the Communist Party of Canada, but there is no analysis of the actions or motivations of the council itself.⁴³ While it is noted that sympathy strikes were often held to show solidarity with other workers’ movements, “these strikes were more annoying than dangerous as so few shifts were worked in any case that each strike merely postponed the day’s work.”⁴⁴ The end of radicalism at Blairmore is ultimately attributed to “certain active workers” who organized baseball, basketball and hockey tournaments to facilitate the “general improvement of relations” between the citizens of Blairmore.⁴⁵ Larbalestier speculates that “perhaps it was the outbreak of war in 1939 that finally cleared [radicalism] all away...”⁴⁶ In these kinds of histories the experience of the so-called Red years in Blairmore was not to be remembered, but justified.

While Cousins’ book and Larbalestier’s article are focused on explaining away the existence of the Red administration, articles written by the Crowsnest Polish community deny any involvement with the local Red movement. Though acknowledging

⁴¹ Larbalestier, 64.

⁴² Cousins, 73.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Larbalestier credits the Catholic Bishop for helping to “calm the situation,” while interviews with Beatrice Peressini indicate that as both a Catholic and the daughter of a known Communist she felt churches were not neutral, but anti-communist. Clearly, unifying factors were not the same for Peressini and Larbalestier. See Beatrice Peressini interview, 5.

⁴⁶ Larbalestier, 65. That the photo accompanying Larbalestier’s article was of a 1941 Victory Loans campaign and not a picture of the council or miners during the “hungry thirties” is telling: Blairmore’s Communist town council was incongruent with the larger socio-cultural expectations of the Cold War era.

limited Polish activity within the Communist Party of Canada, Claire Chuchla holds that many ethnic Poles in the Pass “found Communism to be spiritually, economically and socially repulsive.”⁴⁷ This is reinforced by Krystina Lukasiewicz, who states that because ethnic Poles arrived in the Crowsnest Pass before the Great War they represented an element of stability rather than a catalyst for revolution.⁴⁸ Lukasiewicz solidifies her argument by pointing out that of the sixty-two individuals not re-hired after the strike of 1932, only two were Polish.⁴⁹ Clearly for the Polish community in the Crowsnest Pass the association of ethnic groups from Eastern Europe with Communism is still a sensitive issue.

Recently John Kinnear has challenged the idea that the Communist town council was simply the result of economic depression, linking the establishment of Knight’s administration with the experiences and conditions of the 1932 Mine Workers Union of Canada strike.⁵⁰ In 1932 miners across the Pass went on strike, with Blairmore staying out for eight months. For many reasons, discussed in Chapter 1, this strike was important in defining the political atmosphere in Blairmore for several years afterwards. For those fortunate enough to have jobs prior to the strike, the mines were only working at 50 percent capacity. Relief recipients could expect a “pathetic \$4.24 per month for a diet of flour, rice, porridge, beans, sugar, lard and prunes.” This was supplemented by hunting and fishing in the surrounding forest.⁵¹ Kinnear argues it was a combination of destitution

⁴⁷ Claire Chuchla, “We Came to Find Bread,” in Norton and Langford (eds.) *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 64.

⁴⁸ Krystina Lukasiewicz, “Polish Community in the Crowsnest Pass,” *Alberta History* 30, no. 4 (1988), 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

⁵⁰ The strike certainly represents a landmark event in the oral history testimony collected for this thesis. See Chapter One.

⁵¹ John Kinnear, “Trade Unionism and the Strike of 1932,” in *Crowsnest and its People: Millennium Edition*, 252-253.

and corporate discrimination (in the form of favouritism at the West Canadian Collieries) that resulted in the 1932 strike and the subsequent election of a Red council.

Kinnear also raises an interesting point about the way the administration is remembered. In 1990, an effort was made to revive Tim Buck Boulevard as a tourist initiative, but Kinnear states the proposal was “met with indignation from the old guard in the Pass who would rather forget than commemorate that important part of Pass history.”⁵² The desire to “forget” the Knight administration is not limited to textual documents. Photos of the first Red administration in 1933 have been altered and reprinted to hide the fact that the council was Communist. An original picture depicted the council seated behind a pro-Communist poster, while in a later copy the poster was replaced with a placard that simply read “Town Council 1933.”⁵³ In their article “Politicians of the Pass,” Tom Langford and Wayne Norton do not mention the Red administration at Blairmore; this absence could be representative of the lack of printed information about the council in 2006, or may represent an extension of the silence noted by Kinnear.⁵⁴ There is thus a tendency in local histories to justify the Red administration within a larger economic argument, to absolve certain ethnic groups of responsibility for radical action, or simply to “forget” the period altogether. This sensitivity about the Knight administration was important to keep in mind during the interview process, and will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

When considered from a from a regional labour perspective, specific experiences at Blairmore or within the Crowsnest Pass are used to support a larger argument about

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ See Appendix 3.

⁵⁴ Norton and Langford, “Politicians of the Pass,” in *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of the Crowsnest Pass*, eds. Wayne Norton and Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 89-98.

radical or left-wing movements in primary resource economies. Such comparisons exist within a larger super-regional and national narrative. In a western Canadian context, resource-based economies are represented as pockets of industrial and labour union strength, where a transient population of single men gained “working-class experience” while suffering dehumanizing physical living conditions.⁵⁵ These centres also represented the most visible areas of labour unrest in the West, with sometimes vicious and prolonged strikes capturing the headlines. Though these communities were among the loudest advocates of change, scholars argue that because of the transient nature of the communities and their inability to organize the unorganized – including growing numbers of working women – the “capitalist structure remained impervious to labour militancy alone.”⁵⁶ Prior to the Russian Revolution, the activities of left-wing groups like the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada were seen to be of little threat to mainstream society. The 1917 Russian Revolution changed the way a threat from the left – specifically Communism – was perceived, with the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike and subsequent sympathy strikes bringing the threat of an uprising sharply into focus in Canada.⁵⁷ The period immediately after the Great War, like the Great Depression, was socially and politically volatile, as masses of unemployed disillusioned workers and their families sought to sustain themselves in a depressed economy. The introduction of Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada during the Winnipeg General Strike, and its later use against radical individuals and groups, represents not only a post-war change in

⁵⁵Friesen, 300.

⁵⁶ Seager and Roth, 262.

⁵⁷ For more on the Winnipeg General Strike see Harry Gutkin, *Profiles in Descent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997).

the federal government's response to left, but also the profound effect the Winnipeg General Strike had on the Canadian political system.

The experiences of the Crowsnest Pass are frequently compared to the experiences of mining or working-class communities elsewhere. A. Ross McCormack, for example, argues that the Crowsnest Pass was part of a larger Canadian regional labour history, which included hard rock mining in the interior of British Columbia and coal mines on Vancouver Island.⁵⁸ Allen Seager and David Roth similarly place the Crowsnest Pass within a larger framework, holding that the experiences of miners in the Crowsnest Pass were similar to miners in British Columbia, and comparing “common experiences” at Vancouver, Nanaimo, the Kootenays, and the Pass.⁵⁹ This tendency to use Crowsnest experiences in support of a larger radical or political argument is problematic for two reasons. Such arguments fail to address the realities of geographic location, or the ethnic differences in the populations being compared. It is not sufficient to point out that labour unrest occurred at certain points within a region without clearly establishing that the agitation in question was derived from the same circumstances or motivations. Secondly, these comparisons take for granted that the working class in different places were affected in the same way by larger events, thus robbing them of individual agency and obscuring an opportunity to explore other reasons for local radicalism. By comparing labour movements in British Columbia with the Crowsnest

⁵⁸ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 43.

⁵⁹ Seager, “Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Coal Miners, 1900-1921,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (1985): 56. Also see Seager and Roth.

Pass, the existing literature succeeds in highlighting common labour anxieties, but does not address the root causes of such sentiments.⁶⁰

While the works of McCormack, Seager and Roth use the experiences of the Crowsnest Pass in support of a larger labour narrative, specific events have also been appropriated to support larger political arguments. John Manley, for example, cites the creation of Communist children's play groups at Blairmore during the strike of 1932 as evidence that the Third Period objectives of the Communist Party of Canada were becoming successful with party members.⁶¹ For Manley the spirit of the Third Period was summed up by Communist organizer Harvey Murphy at Blairmore's Cosmopolitan Hotel: "This business of dividing people because of their colour or their religion or what lodge they belong to is so much rot! Here there are only two colours, red and yellow!"⁶² The strike of 1932 and the Red council are also referenced by Bruce Ramsey in support of his argument that the United Mine Workers of America were an effective voice for the miners of western Canada.⁶³ Through the inclusion of the strike of 1932 and the Red administration, Ramsey's work implies that the UMWA and the Worker's Unity League

⁶⁰ A good example is the section entitled "Labour Unrest" in Seager and Roth, 245-247. While the politics of labour are discussed and the demands of unions are noted, there is no discussion of the personal motivations for these demands; the rationale remains completely political and economic.

⁶¹ John Manley, "Red or Yellow? Canadian Communists and the Long Third Period, 1927-1936," in *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2004), 220-246. Before 1928 the Comintern had instructed its member parties to make use of existing labour and leftist groups by infiltrating them and causing their members to gain class consciousness, therefore making them agreeable to a world revolution of the Soviet variety. The Third Period marked a departure from this policy, postulating that the "temporary stabilization" experienced in the capitalist world after the Great War was about to end, and consequently capitalism was in a Marxist sense moving back into crisis. In this ideological context, the only way to remedy such a crisis in capitalism was via communism, and therefore revolution. It thus was dictated that those who believed there was a "reformist" (i.e., "social democratic") solution to the problem could no longer be potential allies. In practical terms, this spelled the end of cooperation with other left-leaning groups, with Communists instructed via the Comintern to set up their own independent unions and organizations. For more on the international context, see Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, eds. *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan, 2003).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶³ Miners at the West Canadian Collieries Blairmore operations were members of the Mine Worker's Union of Canada, an affiliate of the Red Worker's Unity League. Ramsey, 155-156.

were working together, when in reality this was not the case.⁶⁴ The inclusion of the strike and the Red council in Ramsay's work is clearly intended to give the impression the UMWA was active in Blairmore continuously from the formation of the first home local to the time of the last mine closure.⁶⁵ These arguments are problematic for two reasons. In the case of Manley, it takes for granted that each and every person involved with the strike (or using the child care services provided) was a Communist. This thesis will show that the individuals involved with the left-wing movement at Blairmore (while potentially sympathetic to the Communist Party) were actually a coalition of different socialist and populist perspectives.⁶⁶ Ramsey's inclusion of the strike and the Red administration is more problematic. The UMWA was not the catalyst for - nor a supporter of - the Communist movement at Blairmore.⁶⁷

To explore this coalition of perspectives, it is first necessary to discuss populism and its application within this thesis. As David Laycock noted, "populism becomes a part of virtually all political organizations and social movements proposing a substantial

⁶⁴ Phrases such as "Unfortunately the Communist Party of Canada had been declared an illegal organization..." lead the reader to infer the UMWA supported the Red movement. In reality the UMWA had been fighting a dirty turf battle to represent the miners of the Crowsnest Pass with the Communist Party of Canada affiliated Mine Worker's Union of Canada. For a more detailed discussion of the UMWA's position in the Crowsnest Pass before the Depression see Morgan, 113-119.

⁶⁵ This is misleading as from 1926-1935 the miners at Blairmore were represented either by their home local, or the Mine Workers Union of Canada.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 328. While the actions at Blairmore have not been misrepresented, what is key to Manley's argument is that the only people participating in the events were in fact Communists; during the third period there was to be no cooperating between the Communist Party of Canada and any other organizations (with the exception of organizations that were fronted by the CPC).

⁶⁷ Although the Communist Party of Canada had decided to dissolve the Worker's Unity League in 1935 (and directed its members to re-join the UMWA), Ramsey makes no attempt to differentiate between the actions of communist hard liners like Harvey Murphy, UMWA officials, and ordinary miners. One is left with the impression that everyone involved was working under the auspices of the UMWA.

redistribution of class power,” as was the case in Blairmore in 1932.⁶⁸ According to sociologist Trevor Harrison, the basic tenets of populist movements or parties

involve a personal appeal by a leader to a mass audience... Central to the leader’s appeal is the notion of “the people,” a group defined by its historic, geographic and/or cultural roots. This appeal is made urgent by the perception of a crisis threatening “the people.” Finally, the source of this threat is another group – sometimes termed “power bloc” – viewed as physically or culturally external to “the people.”⁶⁹

Harrison notes that populism is a flexible ideology, with the meanings and representations of the definition above similarly being “elastic.”⁷⁰ It is necessary to explore the implication of this statement within the context of Blairmore. The future Red mayor encapsulated all that was necessary to make him a “leader” in a populist context. Having been employed by the West Canadian Collieries while concurrently owning a stake in the local pool hall, Bill Knight was able to understand and connect with the population on multiple levels and in very different circumstances; his appeal was not limited to either the patrons of the pool hall or to the miners at WCC.⁷¹ This also allowed him to have contact with a vast majority of the town’s voting population under normal, non-political circumstances. This access to the masses was enhanced by the fact that he too was a working-class individual, sharing social experiences, economic concerns and employment anxieties with the general population. When Knight spoke to the voters, he billed himself not as a politician, but just another “ordinary person” trying to make a bad situation better.⁷²

⁶⁸ David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 17.

⁶⁹ Trevor Harrison, “The Changing Face of Prairie Politics: Populism in Alberta,” *Prairie Forum* 25 no. 1 (Spring 2000): 108.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ See “Blairmore Tax Assessments,” Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 1932.92.13.98

⁷² Harrison, 111.

Knight's leadership qualities and working-class background are not enough to define the experience at Blairmore as populist. As Laycock has argued, reducing a populist movement to the appeal of its leader "ignores the mass organizational movement" necessary for populist success.⁷³ This mass movement was certainly evident in Blairmore, with the union organization working for the Red candidates during the elections of 1933, 1934 and 1935. At this time members of the Mine Workers' Union of Canada constituted 335 of the 899 male residents of the town. However, the number of unionized employees was larger, because bartenders and some hotel employees were also unionized.⁷⁴ This thesis will demonstrate that when the mass support of the union disintegrated, Knight's leadership alone could not perpetuate his populist appeal.

The Red candidates were also successful in framing the election not as a choice between legislative agendas, but as a struggle that pitted working-class existence at Blairmore against capitalist elements which were located "outside the local society."⁷⁵ By linking the economic hardships being experienced by residents with the capitalist governments in Edmonton and Ottawa (and by extension the economic systems they supported), Knight successfully established these outside elements as a power bloc that threatened "the people" and therefore was to be opposed.⁷⁶ It is not, however, the unity of "the people" which is critical in this context, but "the identification of a group 'not of the people,' possessing illegitimate political and economic power."⁷⁷ This thesis will demonstrate that while this view of the power bloc was maintained and a "direct

⁷³ Laycock, 15.

⁷⁴ Figures are from the Seventh Census of Canada and the West Canadian Collieries Employee Registry. See Appendix 4 and 5.

⁷⁵ Peter R. Sinclair, "Class Structure and Populist Protest: the Case of Western Canada" in Carol Caldarola (ed.) *Society and Politics in Alberta: Research Papers* (Toronto: Methuen, 1979), 75.

⁷⁶ Harrison, 108.

⁷⁷ Trevor Harrison, *Of Passionate Intensity: Right Wing Populism and the Reform Party of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 6.

relationship with the people” cultivated, the Red council was able to pursue both its pragmatic local agenda and their more radical undertakings as the citizens could identify with the outside threat as defined by the council.⁷⁸ When the power bloc was redefined as a struggle against war and fascism local support began to wane. Unlike the unpopular actions of the federal and provincial government’s relief apparatus, the new power bloc was more abstract and difficult to conceptualize as an immediate threat to the well-being of the citizens.

The flexibility of populism is a stark contrast to Communism as it was defined in this period. Ideologues in the Communist Parties of Canada and the Soviet Union had a crisp definition of the word “Communist,” however the residents of Blairmore used the terms “socialist,” “radical,” and “Communist” interchangeably in the local press. As Ian McKay has argued, a Bolshevik framework emerged from the Russian Revolution of 1917, with Canadians drawing on the Soviet experience to build a revolutionary political agenda in Canada based on the tenets of Leninism.⁷⁹ This ideology dictates that capitalism could only be overthrown by radical means – it could not, as argued by social democrats, be reformed – and such an uprising would be achieved via the efforts of the Communist Party of Canada and its revolutionary vanguard.⁸⁰ Though the exclusion of other leftist groups was relaxed during the power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, by 1933 the Third Period policies of the Communist International and the Communist Party

⁷⁸ Sinclair, 75.

⁷⁹ This forms part of McKay’s larger argument about the five distinct periods experienced by the Canadian Left. See Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005).

⁸⁰ See V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?* (London: Penguin Books, 1988).

of Canada firmly upheld the prohibition of cooperation between Communists and other leftist groups.⁸¹

Yet this thesis is not a history of Communism in Blairmore because as the populist model above indicates, broad support from many aspects of the community were needed for electoral success. Likewise, this will not be a “working-class” history. Rather, this thesis will embrace the framework enunciated by Canadian historian Ian McKay, who advocates an approach that

looks at all the people and parties who made up a given period in the history of the left. It assumes that each period, in complex ways, makes its own practice of leftism; that leftists in each period invent distinctive conceptual systems through which they grasp the world. They construct their own dialect of the general language of socialism.⁸²

And while admitting that “the history of socialism is related to and informed by working-class history,” they “are not, and have never been, one and the same.”⁸³ It is therefore dangerous to try to pigeonhole the miners and Reds in Blairmore at this time into a strict definition of “leftists” or “Communists.” This thesis will work within McKay’s perspective, asking not “was Blairmore Communist,” but rather investigating the kind of community, the kind of socialism and populism, that evolved there. To facilitate this outlook, this thesis will build upon and move away from the existing union-dominated historiography by placing the experiences of Red governance in Blairmore within a community-based social perspective.

This approach has already been undertaken successfully in American mining literature by Elizabeth Jameson and Laurie Mercier; both move beyond a recollection of a

⁸¹ For a more detailed analysis, see Anne Burger, “The Communist Party of Canada During the Great Depression: Organizing and Class Consciousness” (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 2004).

⁸² McKay, 34-35.

⁸³ Ibid., 39.

union or radical history and address the realities of living in the community in question. By locating the economic and political considerations of their research within a larger social context, these scholars address the shifting identities, experiences and motivations of mining communities in Colorado and Montana.⁸⁴ These studies not only provide inspiration for the framework and perspective taken by this thesis, but also serve as a reminder that race, class and gender are themselves not rigidly defined entities. Jameson notes that:

Too frequently, race, class and gender are seen only as significant to the people who experience discrimination on those bases. But men are affected by gender, capitalists by class, whites by race and native-born Americans by ethnicity. In Cripple Creek unstated assumptions about commonalities of race and gender, shared by white men of all classes, were as powerful in shaping local social arrangements as were more explicit declarations about class, gender and racial differences.⁸⁵

By using newspaper articles, oral histories, and home-ownership documents to investigate the changing nature of ethnic and radical interactions, these works move beyond an institutional or union-based framework. Jameson discusses many of the challenges involved in doing oral history in mining communities, noting that the dangerous nature of mining means few miners lived long enough to contribute to her oral history research directly.⁸⁶ Consequently, the majority of those interviewed were wives and children of miners; the same is true of this thesis.

Oral histories can be used to avoid romanticizing a false working-class unity or presenting working-class experiences in a utopian context, as they reveal the

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Laurie Mercier, *Labour, Community and Culture in Montana's Smelter City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

⁸⁵ Jameson., 15.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 253.

contradictions of identity, experience, and economic priorities within a community.⁸⁷ When trying to unravel the complex and intertwined social experiences of life in a resource-based economy, it is important to consider that regardless of the time period in question: “in an unpredictable economy in which workers do not control the means of production or have minimal job protection, they will forgo their own health to keep jobs that provide subsistence.”⁸⁸ The intersections of differing class and ethnic identities also must be considered in reference to the changing identities and priorities within such communities. As David Emmons suggests in his study of Butte, Montana, the development of class consciousness as an identity as influential as ethnicity or religion is critical for understanding competing class, ethnic and religious identities.⁸⁹ The construction of identities are further addressed by Canadian historian Jeremy Mouat in his work *Roaring Days: Rosslands’s Mines and the History of British Columbia*.⁹⁰ Mouat cites the example of a woman who cut her hair and dressed in men’s clothing in order to apply for a high paying male job; was she counted as a man or a woman in the Canadian census?

This thesis will use three key sets of primary sources to facilitate a community-based approach sensitive to changing class, religious and ethnic identities in Blairmore

⁸⁷ This theme is evident throughout the Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes. It is clear that the council itself perceived the working-class residents of Blairmore as being involved with a larger ideological struggle against capitalism, however, it is questionable whether the residents perceived themselves in the same way. While the Red administration frequently sent telegrams of sympathy or support to other striking or otherwise disadvantaged workers, there were never any letters to the editor or other expressions of solidarity found during the research for this work. The temptation to romanticize in labour history is also addressed by Mark Leier in the last chapter of his monograph *Rebel Life: The Life and Times of Robert Gosden, Revolutionary, Mystic, Labour Spy* (Vancouver: New Star Books Ltd., 1999), 139-169.

⁸⁸ Mercier, 202. This social contract which Mercier defines is also evident in interviews used in this thesis. For example see John and Raymonde Motil interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 2007.004.0001.

⁸⁹ David Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875-1925* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

⁹⁰ Jeremy Mouat, *Roaring Days: Rossland’s Mines and the History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), 111.

during this period. Drawing extensively on the local newspaper, the *Blairmore Enterprise*, this work will engage oral historian Louisa Passerini's argument that opinion articles, letters to the editor (and the editor's replies), and the local "gossip" section of the newspapers share commonalities with oral testimony: they are narratives laid out in a specific way, to relay a specific story.⁹¹ By comparing the "gaps" that exist in these narratives with the accounts of council by Larbalestier and Cousins, it becomes evident that in the 1930s Communism and the Communist town council were regular and acceptable public topics of conversation, becoming taboo after the close of the Second World War.

The meeting minutes from the Blairmore Town Council represent the second key primary source utilized in this thesis. These documents are particularly important as they are not simply transcripts of motions passed or lost while council was in session, but also give insight into the way that council operated. There are many examples where councillors, who were largely portrayed in the media as indiscernible from Mayor Knight, objected to motions of the mayor or other councillors, or even walked out of the meeting altogether only to come back to the next council session. Most importantly, the council documents clearly indicate that in the final year of the administration the mayor and council knew they were making decisions that were contrary to the Towns and Villages Act of Alberta, yet proceeded anyhow.⁹²

The third group of sources, oral histories, are essential to facilitating the community-based perspective sought by this thesis; they are also critical to framing and understanding the changing intersections between competing sources of identity. The

⁹¹ Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism," *History Workshop Journal* (1979): 82-108.

⁹² For example, see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 November 1935.

phrase “oral histories” includes interviews conducted specifically for this study and the oral testimony of individuals collected for TV documentaries, local histories on video, and a 2005 CD Rom paying tribute to “The Year of the Miner.”⁹³ In his article, “Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence,” Trevor Lumis argues that when using interviews from more than one study, it is necessary to establish a means of ensuring that the testimony being examined is representative of the group in question.⁹⁴ Generalizations such as “a few,” “the unskilled,” and “some” occur frequently with no specific data provided.⁹⁵ To remedy this problem, Lumis argues certain data, such as demographic information, is easily tabulated and that “if a sample is conformable to known trends, one can have some confidence that the internal distinctions will reflect real distinctions.”⁹⁶ Thus, by comparing ethnic, gender, and employment information, it is possible to ensure a balanced perspective is maintained.⁹⁷

Julie Cruikshank’s and Ronald Grele’s arguments pertaining to the structure of questioning within oral interviews were significant during the interview process.

⁹³ See “Rocky Mountain Reds,” on *The Journal*, prod. David Kirk, 13 minutes, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986; oral histories on VHS tape were filmed by members of the Crowsnest Pass Historical Society at various dates from 1976-1986. Though there are no accession numbers for them, they do form part of the permanent collection of the Crowsnest Pass Historical Society; “The Year of the Miner” compact disc was produced by the Bellcrest Historical Society. See Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 2007.004.0001.

⁹⁴ Trevor Lumis, “Structure and Validity in Oral Evidence” in *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 279.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 279-280.

⁹⁷ An interesting comparison is made possible by surviving West Canadian Collieries documents and the 1931 Canadian census. The documentation from the WCC indicates that “Canadians” constitute the second largest group of non-management employees ethnically, while the census does not consider this ethnic categorization; English represent the fourth largest proportionally. It will be noted in this thesis that the Red movement is often blamed on the “Eastern European miners” – at one point the editor of the *Blairmore Enterprise* says that the miner’s parades were less than 1 percent English speaking – yet statistically 47 percent of the miners are not Eastern European. This data suggests that there was in fact broadly based ethnic support for not only the miner’s affiliation with the Red Workers Unity League (approved at Blairmore by a margin of 234 to 20), but also for the council generally. This data challenges the assertion that Red or radical activity was being propagated by certain ethnicities. For figures on the Blairmore vote, see Frank Paul Karas, “Labour and Coal in the Crowsnest Pass,” (M.A. Thesis: University of Calgary, 1972), 39. For demographic information, see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

Cruikshank challenges historians and researchers to reconsider the framework and parameters of their research questions, noting that often specific inquiries are simply incongruent with the informants' internalized perspectives.⁹⁸ The questions asked for this thesis were intentionally open-ended, facilitating an informal structure that let the individual informants set the agenda. By asking broad, general questions (“what was life like in Blairmore during the 1930s?” as opposed to “what do you remember about Communism in Blairmore during the 1930s?”) informants told their own story within their own narrative structure.

One of the most frequent complaints heard during my time in the Pass as a researcher is that “outsiders” come to the Pass, collect the stories they want to hear, and then publish a book or article that does not accurately reflect the perspectives of the people who gave the testimony. A work pertaining to a strike, for example, might only include the actions of the key players in the union and the coal company and have no context about their effects on the everyday experience. This has been addressed by the Popular Memory Group who focus on the gap between “public” and “private” histories.⁹⁹

This has silenced some individuals, and caused others to approach historians and other researchers with a great deal of caution. To understand the meaning of an oral text, Louis Althusser argues one has to be aware not only of what is being said in the text, but

⁹⁸ Julie Cruikshank, *The Social Life of Stories: Narratives and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 46. Also see Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985).

⁹⁹ The Popular Memory Group seeks to expand the idea of historical production beyond the limits of academic history-writing by investigating the way that individuals produce their own histories. The group argues that these can be observed in oral statements in which the informant's public representations and private memories differ. The former will be compatible with a socially acceptable history of the subject, where as the latter will represent the diversions between the representation of an event and the informants perspectives or experiences regarding it. For more see Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics, Method,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

also the experiences and assumptions that inform it.¹⁰⁰ When analyzing the interview transcripts and other written works from Blairmore, common statements and questions are posed repeatedly by informants. Such statements either underline the importance of the point being made or bring awareness to a perspective that may have been obvious to the informant, but not to the interviewer.

There are also always gaps in the oral testimony, and the social effects of Cold War anti-communist activities and were evident in my interviews.¹⁰¹ For many respondents there is an overwhelming assumption that the Red administration is a topic better left alone. When talking about the involvement of her father as a Communist town councillor during the 1930s, Beatrice Peressini stated that “I’m not scared to say it, (pause) anymore. [My Granddaughter] gave me heck. She says I gotta’ say it.”¹⁰² Peressini elaborated that “I felt... and my husband felt, that maybe its better not to say things like that. You have your own family growing up. You have grandchildren, and great grandchildren, and I would not want anything to reflect on them.”¹⁰³ For the working classes the experience of the Cold War has made the Communist movement in Blairmore something to be embarrassed about while for the upper classes it represents a breakdown of acceptable class structure. The majority of informants were not embarrassed or ashamed about Communists or the effect of the Depression at Blairmore

¹⁰⁰ See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971); Louis Althusser, *Politics and History: Montesquieu, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

¹⁰¹ For example see Beatrice Peressini interview, 4.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

because they found the events traumatic, but because society at large had taught them that this was a taboo subject.¹⁰⁴

By combining these three key primary sources – newspaper articles, the Blairmore town council meeting minutes, and oral histories – this thesis will move beyond the older historiographical emphasis on institutional or “big man” histories, seeking instead a framework that accommodates a broad community-based study. To understand the social conditions leading to the election of the Red administration, Chapter One will evaluate the situation at Blairmore before the election of 1933, questioning what factors may have resulted in the election of a Communist council. By evaluating the nature and timing of the economic depression at Blairmore, this chapter will demonstrate that the citizens of Blairmore suffered from a collapsing local economy for a decade prior to the election of a radical council. Oral testimony will be used to highlight a change in social perspective in Blairmore, showing that class in addition to ethnicity became a key identifying factor for individuals. This chapter then challenges the perception that the election of Knight and his associates was a protest movement after the unsuccessful strike of 1932, using the *Blairmore Enterprise* to reveal the relatively positive coverage of Communism and Soviet Russia in the preceding year. In sum Chapter One exposes a local society that was informed, articulate and prepared to make daring choices. It will be demonstrated that the election of a Communist town council in 1933 was not simply the result of anger which accumulated during the strike of 1932 or a lack of political choices, but a vote that was informed by several important social and

¹⁰⁴ When informants were uncomfortable with the subject, the interviewer did not proceed with the line of questioning, rather the topic was discontinued until the informant brought it up again.

economic considerations spanning the preceding ten years. This vote, and the election of the Red council was not impulsive or reactionary, but rational under these circumstances.

Chapter Two describes the actions of the Red administration during its first year in power, demonstrating that after establishing its own legitimacy, council was able to undertake both ideological and pragmatic initiatives. This chapter demonstrates that the immediate and pointed actions taken by the new municipal administration to address local poverty and suffering were dramatically different from those recommended by the federal and provincial relief authorities, and thus will differentiate the experience at Blairmore from the dictated policy norm of senior governments. Chapter Two also details the actions of council which brought national attention, calling for the abandonment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for example, contrasting the ability of the Knight administration to be highly critical of the established order without getting involved with the legal quagmire experienced by other Communist groups. Ultimately, Chapter Two demonstrates the ability of the council to balance its ideological imperatives with pragmatic and important local initiatives, achieving an equilibrium that was acceptable to electors who may not have been Red, but were supportive of concrete changes made by council at the local level.

Chapter Three details both the pinnacle of the Red movement at Blairmore – encompassing what have become the most notorious actions of council – and its dramatic downfall. This chapter demonstrates that so long as the balance between pragmatic local action and radical pursuits was maintained, the electorate was prepared to renew council's mandate and tolerate its increasing intervention in their personal lives. It will be shown that when the council received the unqualified support of the electorate during the

municipal elections of 1935, all the Red candidates being acclaimed, the council misjudged its mandate, giving too much priority to their radical endeavours and ignoring the everyday problems that were important to the citizens of Blairmore. It was the failure to move back to an agenda that represented an equilibrium between these priorities, coupled with scandals, that ultimately cost the administration power in 1936. Ultimately, Chapter Three shows that the council was defeated in 1936 not because it was Communist, but because it stopped listening to, and acting on, the commonplace grievances of the ratepayers of Blairmore.

It is critical when considering the actions contained within this thesis that they not be reduced to the two dimensional equation Blairmore=Communist. Since the closure of the last coal mines on the Alberta side of the Pass, there has been an exodus of youth to other parts of the province and country. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the local economy slowly collapsed, despite numerous programs and initiatives put forward by the provincial government.¹⁰⁵ Many residents found this reality hard to understand because their economic downturn was not shared by the rest of the province or country, resulting in a zone of poverty and unemployment in what was otherwise a relatively stable economic area. The obverse is now true. After years of recession, the Crowsnest Pass now finds itself an attractive destination for those seeking a “quaint” or “rustic” weekend getaway. This influx of newcomers is significantly altering the way that long-time

¹⁰⁵ Several coal and non-coal related programs were championed by Fred Bradley, MLA, and the provincial government. In the final years of operation at Coleman Collieries, royalties were forgone by the Government of Alberta in order to keep the company operating; after it closed, several options were pursued that would have seen Coleman Collieries re-open. The government also moved to create the Sentinel Industrial Park, guarantee loans to some of the remaining businesses in the Crowsnest Pass which were also facing bankruptcy – Atlas Lumber, for example – and provided funds to set up the Crowsnest Centre, which provided retraining for those who lost their jobs. Government also made local service provisions in the Oldman River Dam contracts, which encouraged the hiring of local people, equipment, etc.

residents see and experience their community. The former site of the West Canadian Collieries tipple and slack piles at Blairmore will soon be home to “affordable” \$650,000 homes, and thus new meanings are being assigned to familiar landmarks.¹⁰⁶ This transition has been traumatic for many, and there is already a feeling that collective pasts are being reduced to “did you know” style billboards along the highway, glanced at and easily forgotten. It is therefore particularly important that to record these past events because – with age and the drastically changing demography of the municipality – these collective memories will soon be lost.

¹⁰⁶ N.A., “\$400M Resort Another Boost for the Pass,” *Calgary Herald*, 22 January 2007; Marshal Sahlins, *Islands of History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), ix.

Chapter 1

Though the election of Mayor Knight and his Red town council in 1933 was unexpected for many outside Blairmore, this chapter will show that there was an accumulation of economic, political and social factors that resulted in a situation where the election of a Red council was not only socially permissible, but representative of a larger populist sentiment. Arguing that by 1933 Blairmore was already at the low ebb of an economic downturn, the “double depression” experienced at Blairmore during the 1920s will be explored, demonstrating that the residents of Blairmore experienced economic hardship for a longer period than many other Canadian centres.¹⁰⁷ This chapter explores the economic and social effect the depression had on Blairmore, which was different from other towns in the Crowsnest Pass. Building upon existing scholarship, a brief investigation of the union experience at Blairmore from the collapse of United Mine Workers of America representation in 1925 to the strike of 1932 will demonstrate the active role citizens were willing and able to play in moving towards an economically stable and viable community. Using interviews, this chapter recasts the strike of 1932 from a social perspective and distinguishes the strike experience at Blairmore from elsewhere in the Crowsnest Pass. Finally, this chapter uses evidence from the *Blairmore Enterprise* to establish the social permissibility of Communism, demonstrating how contemporary political, economic, and social experiences created an atmosphere conducive to reader sympathy towards Communism. This chapter argues that given the

¹⁰⁷ William Alexander Sloan, “The Crowsnest Pass during the Depression: A Socioeconomic History of Southeastern British Columbia, 1918-1939,” (M.A Thesis: University of Victoria, 1968), 15.

political, economic, and social experiences at Blairmore before 1933, the election of a Red town council should not have unexpected to those familiar with the community.

The depression at Blairmore started in earnest with the end of the federal government's co-management scheme with Crowsnest mining companies in 1919.¹⁰⁸ Intended to ensure a steady supply of coal for Canada's war effort, from July 1917 this program gave the government control over mining operations without purchasing them, resulting in miners working full days to produce enough coal "to smelt the vast quantities of metal necessary for war production."¹⁰⁹ Under this program, the federal government guaranteed profits and wages in return for heightened and uninterrupted coal production. By 1918, miners in the Crowsnest Pass were making \$5.00 to \$6.00 more every week than their counterparts in logging and manufacturing, and were enjoying a quality of life they had never experienced before.¹¹⁰ As Sloan points out, "full employment became an accepted reality over the duration of the war."¹¹¹

The end of the co-management scheme at Blairmore coincided with a post-war contraction of coal markets, and the excess capacity that had been so valued during the war became an economic liability. Mine owners demanded savings from their work force by cutting production and seeking wage reductions at the same time as the rest of the country was beginning to recover from the post-war economic slump.¹¹² A series of strikes resulted, which ultimately served to weaken the international union movement at Blairmore. An eight-month strike was called in 1919, followed by work stoppages in

¹⁰⁸ Allen Seager and David Roth, "British Columbia and the Mining West," in *The Workers Revolt, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 246. By the end of the Great War the Crowsnest Pass was the largest coal producing region in the country.

¹⁰⁹ Harold A. Innis, "The Kootenay Region: After the Crowsnest Pass Railway," in *Settlement and the Forest and Mining Frontiers* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1936), 289.

¹¹⁰ Sloan, 163.

¹¹¹ Sloan, 11.

¹¹² Ibid.

1920 and 1922. Neither the One Big Union nor the UMWA was able to secure for Blairmore miners the wages they had earned during the wartime boom.¹¹³

The effects of strikes and contracting markets became so severe that by 1921 representatives of local miners appealed directly to the Blairmore town council for relief on behalf of more than seventy miners and their families.¹¹⁴ This economic downturn was aggravated by the collapse of the Home Bank in 1923.¹¹⁵ Many individuals and organizations – including the Blairmore School Board – lost heavily, and deep inroads were made into miners’ meagre savings, thus “adding to the distrust of existing institutions.”¹¹⁶ The residents of Blairmore were further disillusioned by two scandals involving the town council. In 1924, the council voted to give all elected members free electricity and water from the town-owned utility, contrary to the provincial Towns and Villages Act.¹¹⁷ In 1925, the town secretary requested a four-month leave of absence to visit his native Scotland; in appreciation of his “faithful” service the council awarded him an honorarium of \$240.¹¹⁸ This honorarium was paid in a strike year where council was

¹¹³ I in no way wish to indicate the rise and fall of the One Big Union (OBU) in the Crowsnest Pass was as simple as this; however other substantial works already exist on this topic. The main point of interest to this thesis is that the strike did not result in increased wages or benefits. The OBU never held power the same way as the UMWA or MWUC would, and the mine owners were not willing to negotiate with it, and eventually the OBU had to let its members rejoin more conventional unions in order to work. For more on the OBU in the Crowsnest Pass, see Wesley Morgan, “The One Big Union in the Crowsnest Pass,” in *A World Apart: The Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia*, eds. Wayne Norton and Tom Langford (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 113-119; also see David J. Bercuson, “Western Labour Radicalism and the One Big Union: Myths and Realities” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 9 (1974): 3-11. For an anti-OBU perspective, see Bruce Ramsey, *The Noble Cause: The Story of the United Mine Workers of America in Western Canada* (Calgary: District 18, United Mine Workers of America, 1990).

¹¹⁴ Crowsnest Pass Historical Society, *Crowsnest and its People*, 86.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ The growing misgivings towards local establishments were also prominent in the UMWA strike of 1924-1925. While it is impossible for this thesis to address in detail the fall of the UMWA in the Crowsnest Pass what is important is the recognition that miners in UMWA District 18 were feeling alienated from their international union. The unsuccessful UMWA strike of 1924 “broke the back of the [international] labour movement in the ‘Pass’ and saw miners return to work at drastically reduced wages.” See Sloan, 12.

¹¹⁷ Crowsnest Pass Historical Society, 86.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

providing little assistance to the miners or their families.¹¹⁹ No sooner had the secretary left than suspicions of irregularities in the town finances prompted council to order a special audit that revealed a shortage of \$5000 in both cash and tax roll inaccuracies. Though the town secretary was jailed for two years upon his return, this did little to mitigate the feelings of alienation many working-class people felt from their local government.¹²⁰

By 1927, the economic situation was such that Scott Nealing, a contributor to the workers' magazine *Labour Monthly*, observed "a sullen, helpless mass of workers being slowly worn down and crushed by the system... a system that cannot pay them a living because there is too much coal being produced by means of modern machine industry."¹²¹ In the United States, the Great Northern Railway had switched from Crowsnest coal to California oil as an energy source for their locomotives, while railways in Canada were reducing service (and therefore coal expenditures) in an effort to trim budgets and maximize profits.¹²² This was complicated by the loss of temporary summer employment away from Blairmore. Until 1926, many men had gone to the prairies during the slow summer months to work as transient farm labour, returning to work the mines during the busy fall and winter. Their ability to do so was dramatically reduced with the introduction of the labour-saving "combine" in 1926, and eliminated altogether by the stock market crash of 1929. Thus, in addition to shrinking coal markets and low commodity prices, "an

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Scott Nealing, "Crow's Nest Pass," *Labour Monthly* vol. 6 (February 1927), 123.

¹²² Sloan, 13. For more on railroad attempts to reduce expenditures in a Canadian context, see Bernard Hibbitts, "A Change of Mind: The Supreme Court and the Board of Railway Commissioners, 1903-1929," *The University of Toronto Law Journal* 41, no. 1: 60-113. A comparative view of the strategies of railway abandonment across the Canadian-American border is offered by David Jones, "The Strategy of Railway Abandonment: The Great Northern in Washington and British Columbia, 1917-1935," *Western Historical Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (1980): 141-158.

integral labour safety valve during the summer lay-offs of the twenties was closed to the Crowsnest miners and remained so for the balance of the Depression.”¹²³ The severity of the situation for miners can be seen in the Government of Alberta’s estimation that it cost \$1900 per annum to support a man, wife and three children in the Crowsnest Pass. The yearly wage for a miner during this period, however, was only \$900.¹²⁴

In addition, relief programs like labour camps that would later become so despised simply did not exist during the 1920s. Miners and their families had to make appeals to the town council for relief in the form of a reprieve from taxation, direct monetary benefits or food vouchers.¹²⁵ Many sought help from benevolent, fraternal or ethnic associations, such as the Polish Brotherly Aid Society or the Loyal Order of the Moose. It was not until after the stock market crash in the fall of 1929 that any coordinated relief programs became available to the working-class community at Blairmore. As local miner John Kostyniuk recalled: “There was no welfare. There was no widow’s pension. There was nothing... If you didn’t make it, too bad for you, Charlie!”¹²⁶

The decline in the local economy was facilitated by the collapse of international unionism at Blairmore in 1925. The miners’ desperation became increasingly evident during the strike of 1924-1925, and the severity of the economic situation was exacerbated by the meagre strike pay being offered by the UMWA “because of a similar deadlock in the United States.”¹²⁷ When the strike pay did come, it was “in the form of an

¹²³ Sloan, 18-19.

¹²⁴ Nealing, 122. Information about the relative employment of women is not known at this time.

¹²⁵ This often included requests for power and water from the town utilities at a reduced price.

¹²⁶ John Kostyniuk interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹²⁷ This strike was called in an effort to stabilize and if possible regain some of the war time prosperity experienced from 1915-1919. See Frank Karas, *Labour and Coal in the Crowsnest Pass: 1925-1935* (M.A. Thesis: University of Calgary, 1972), 39. As miner Joe Fortunaso recalled during an interview, ‘strike pay’

order on local stores, the miner receiving the same, stating the store he wished to deal with.”¹²⁸ The sum of \$5.00 for every married miner and \$3.00 for every unmarried miner was negligible, and since previous strikes and economic hardships had already depleted their savings, the “crisis deepened personal debts and made the miners more impatient with the UMWA and its inadequate strike assistance.”¹²⁹

As the dispute dragged on the UMWA lost sight of the financial resources of its members; having been out in a series of strikes the preceding years, the miners simply could not afford to be without work for an extended period of time. While the union continued to insist on its platform of no wage concessions to the local coal operators, while giving out strike pay that could not sustain families, the miners involved had to make a decision: was it better to continue the lengthy strike, or return to work for less money but the ability to provide for themselves and their families? Faced with an untenable economic situation, miners at Fernie were the first to sever their ties with the UMWA, “organiz[ing] a Canadian union and appoint[ing] a committee to negotiate with the management of the Crowsnest Pass Coal Co.”¹³⁰ The new union quickly reached an agreement with the company which reflected yet another wage decrease but allowed miners to return to work immediately.¹³¹ The miners at Blairmore sought and secured a similar agreement, with 72 percent agreeing to return to work on April 6, 1925.¹³² The inability of the UMWA to provide adequate strike pay coupled with economic hardship in Blairmore and throughout the Pass resulted in mining communities taking an active

did not have the same meaning as it does in 2006. In this context miners did not receive weekly strike pay in the form of wages, rather supplies supplemented by small and sporadic cash payments. For more, see Joe Fortunaso interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹²⁸ N.A., *The Lethbridge Herald*, 16 May 1924.

¹²⁹ Karas, 40.

¹³⁰ N.A., *The Edmonton Journal*, 8 December 1924.

¹³¹ N.A., *The Lethbridge Herald*, 19 Dec 1924

¹³² N.A., *The Lethbridge Herald*, 6 April 1925.

role in securing a change in representation.¹³³ This led to the formation of home locals and the almost total eradication of the UMWA from the valley by the end of 1925. The only UMWA local remaining was at Maple Leaf.¹³⁴

Shortly after concluding their separate local agreements, the miners of Blairmore called for a meeting of delegates from all of the new home locals to establish the Mine Workers Union of Canada (MWUC). The purpose of breaking away from the United Mine Workers of America was to form a new, Canadian union.¹³⁵ While this new organization quickly affiliated with all home locals (except Fernie), it remained largely an organization on paper for “we [MWUC] will not interfere in any way with existing contracts. We plan to go along quietly, increasing our strength gradually.”¹³⁶ When it came time to renew the agreements in 1928 the companies put forward offers representing an increase of 15 to 25 cents per day over the life of a two to three year contract, and the MWUC was unable to gain consensus for Pass-wide negotiations.¹³⁷ Only the Blairmore and Bellevue operations of the West Canadian Collieries pushed for a Conciliation Board ruling that recognized the MWUC as the official bargaining agent of the miners, but their efforts fell short of recognition and they eventually endorsed the agreement without the MWUC.

An unwritten social contract emerged between the miners and their employers: so long as the mines were working enough days at a rate of pay that would provide subsistence, the miners at Blairmore would not persist with militant union action. As

¹³³ Karas, 47.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ This meeting was held June 1, 1925. For more on the need for a Canadian union, see N.A., *Edmonton Journal*, 8 December 1924.

¹³⁶ Karas, 59.

¹³⁷ The Conciliation Board was the apparatus set up in the original contract with the home union to settle disputes between the company and the union. For more on this ruling and how it was interpreted by the radical left, see *The Worker*, 26 May 1928, 1.

local miner John Motil explained, “it was always the *threat* of real poverty that was the problem here. We always had something to eat – I never went hungry – but there was always the *threat* that it could happen.”¹³⁸ Though far from guaranteeing prosperity, this social contract mitigated the threat of complete poverty, which was still a vivid memory for many European immigrants.¹³⁹

When the home local’s contract expired in 1930, coal producers used the nationwide Depression as the reason for needing new concessions from home locals. The West Canadian Collieries demanded a reduction in both days worked and wages paid, violating the social contract outlined above. The demands of the coal companies in conjunction with falling market prices ultimately resulted in the consolidation of the MWUC with the communist-affiliated Workers Unity League (WUL), an association that was endorsed at Blairmore by a margin of 234 to 20.¹⁴⁰ As a moderate approach (UMWA) and a conservative approach (home locals) seemed unable or unlikely to continue to provide subsistence, the miners of Blairmore had now actively committed to a more radical tactic in securing economic stability. By 1931, the miners at Blairmore were once again prepared to take on a dynamic role in the looming strike between MWUC-WUL and the West Canadian Collieries.

¹³⁸ John and Raymonde Motil interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001. Emphasis placed by interviewee.

¹³⁹ It was mentioned in numerous interviews that such poverty was remembered well in the old countries, and as a result was always a real fear for many.

¹⁴⁰ The author in no way wishes to insinuate that the rise of the Workers Unity League or its amalgamation with the MWUC was simple or straight forward, however this process is well documented elsewhere. It is not the process of affiliation that this thesis is concerned with, rather the pattern that emerges at Blairmore: when unions could no longer give miners the ability to provide for their families and themselves, they sought out other alternatives. For more detail on union movements in the Pass at this point, please see Karas or Allen Seager, *A History of the Mine Worker’s Union of Canada* (M.A. Thesis: McGill University, 1977). Figures for Blairmore vote from Karas, 79.

It was from this context of economic depression coupled with social and political instability that the Pass-wide strike of 1932 emerged. In interviews conducted with individuals who experienced the strike, the events of 1932 mark a clear turning point in the way that people perceived themselves and their communities. As the interactions between the MWUC and the West Canadian Collieries have already been ably established by Allen Seager and others, this thesis will build upon this foundation by examining the experiences within the community during the labour hostilities of 1932, questioning how these experiences affected and changed the community.¹⁴¹ Their outcome is fundamental to understanding the 1933 election and subsequent years of Red administration at Blairmore.

Until the onset of the national Depression immigrants continued to make Blairmore their home, joining their families, friends or ethnic communities from their home country. Ethnic ties played an important role in socialization as immigrants settled in Blairmore. As long-time resident Bertha Yagos recalled, newcomers found “comfort and support” through associating with ethnic clubs, societies, and fraternal organizations.¹⁴² Yagos commented that “when those girls came from the old country, when they came across that ocean, they had nobody. Nobody to talk to, nobody to cry on.”¹⁴³ With a reduction in the number of individuals immigrating to the Pass during the Great Depression, ethnic societies began to play new roles. This can be seen, for example, in the establishment of separate benevolent societies that stood alongside cultural associations. The Blairmore Slovak Benefit Society was organized in January

¹⁴¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Allen Seager, *A History of the Mine Worker's Union of Canada*.

¹⁴² Bertha Yagos Interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001. Fraternal organizations such as the Masonic Lodge and Order of the Eastern Star can be considered ethnic as well, as they were dominated by Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

1932, and while there was a social aspect to the association, Mary Bobrosky and Anne Spatuk recall that “the whole purpose of the organization was to protect its membership through insurance and provide help to those who required it.”¹⁴⁴ Another example can be found in the Italian community. In mortgage documents dated 10 May 1934 there is a clear difference between the Italian Mutual Benefit Association and the Stella D’Italia Italian Lodge, the former being the association responsible for benevolent functions and the latter being the organization charged with promoting and preserving ethnic identity.¹⁴⁵ Cemeteries at Blairmore were maintained by two separate organizations; there is a union cemetery and a Catholic cemetery. Though these associations clearly maintained a strong ethnic identity, cultural programs increasingly had to address a new “benevolence” or “brotherly aid” imperative.

The perception of solidarity between ethnic communities and the “old country” during the depression also needs to be clarified. In many works there is a strong emphasis on the connection between the old country radicalism, and the ability of this relationship to function as a conduit for socialist ideology.¹⁴⁶ In one RCMP report addressing radical action and the Red movement in the Crowsnest Pass, it was stated “that a number of revolutionary speeches had been made, and that most of the agitators were Russians connected with the Russian Social Democratic Party...”¹⁴⁷ When recruiting officers to go undercover the RCMP sought “men who can speak several Slavic languages and do the work of a coal miner,” thereby allowing access to the ethnicities judged to be most at

¹⁴⁴ Mary Bobrosky and Anne Spatuk, *Slovak Play Group*, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association Archives, no accession number. Located in purple “Clubs/Archives” binder.

¹⁴⁵ Mortgage under the Land Titles Act in the name of the Italian Mutual Benefit Association, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association Archives, no accession number. Located in purple “Clubs/Archives” binder.

¹⁴⁶ Russians, Swedes, Finns and eastern Europeans were often assumed to be conduits for radical ideologies from Eastern Europe to Canada. For example, see Sloan 65.

¹⁴⁷ S.W. Horall, “The Royal North-West Mounted Police and Labour Unrest in Western Canada, 1919,” *Canadian Historical Review* LX1, no. 2 (1980): 197.

risk of revolutionary action.¹⁴⁸ Individuals with no connection to Eastern Europe or other areas where socialism was popular were considered to have a low risk of becoming radicalized because of difficulties in understanding the “rhetoric” of agitators.¹⁴⁹ For Seager, “Blairmore’s tendency towards the left can be partially attributed to the relative preponderance of Italians, Finns and Scandinavians in that town.”¹⁵⁰

This presumption on the part of the federal authorities that revolutionary ideas were passing from Eastern Europe to Canada via certain ethnic populations needs to be reconsidered in the Crowsnest context. The interaction between the old and new countries was often strained by a misunderstanding of the Canadian experience. This sense of alienation between individuals in the old and new countries is pronounced for John and Raymonde Motil. The Motils’ relatives in Slovakia perceived Canada as an exceedingly rich country, and had no concept of the depression that had engulfed the Pass. Raymonde remembered that:

There was a lot of resentment built, because the ones in Slovakia expected and demanded help. And the ones here did help, but, as much as they could. And after a while it got to be much, when we’d get a letter saying ‘well Janke wants to take violin lessons – I’m sure you could send a violin!’ Or ‘so-and-so is getting married, could you please send all the wedding clothes?’ Things like that, [it’s] expensive... you know, to get wedding clothes, violins, money... And [my mother] tried to explain to them... that it was not possible, and they would answer back saying ‘how can you be so (pause) how can you be like that? How can you be so tight?’ So it got to be very bad between them. And so a lot of relationships were broken that way.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 175.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 178.

¹⁵⁰ Seager, *A History of the Mine Workers Union of Canada*, 135.

¹⁵¹ John and Raymonde Motil interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

There is no doubt that the ethnic groups in Blairmore were proud of their heritage, but in this instance it did not necessarily lead to a strong ideological bond between Slovakia and Canada.

There is also a marked difference in the role that ethnicity plays in the narratives of informants before and during the labour unrest of 1932. Ethnicity still represents an identifying factor, but it begins to overlap with a larger “we” that was simply not dominant in previous memories. One example comes from the testimony of long-time resident Bertha Yagos, who recalled:

I remember a lady from the Dairy, Mrs. Rushko... anyway, they were a Ukrainian family. [Did] you know they brought men in with stockards [sic] on the trucks? That's how they brought [scab] workers in, the police you know. And she chased that truck, and she grabbed the back. And I can still see her, and she had the slats, you know, she grabbed the slats of the rack. And she's hanging onto that and the police was hitting her hands with a club. I can see that as plain as if it happened right now. I bet he broke every one of her fingers. And he's lucky he went home alive... we got mad. That was a terrible thing to do... [and] we went after him and he took off.¹⁵²

While Rushko's ethnicity is indicated, the existence of a larger group is also present in the statements “we got mad” and “we went after him.”¹⁵³ This “we” represents a larger community identity which transcended ethnic affiliations. Recalling the same event, Gordon McIntyre states that the RCMP “arrested one lady, and the crowd came together on top of the police and when the crowd separated the lady was gone. They couldn't hold on! So the next day they came with their fourteen horses... and made a wedge right through that crowd.”¹⁵⁴ In their testimony Mr. and Mrs. John Krkosky also noted the importance of this newly-realized social and class-based group: “one of the main things is

¹⁵² Bertha Yagos interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Gordon McIntyre interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, no accession number. Interview is in VHS format, and is located in the lower drawers of the TV stand on the main floor of the Crowsnest Museum.

that they pulled together, and you know, they couldn't possibly do all that they did do if they hadn't pulled together. For *everything*.”¹⁵⁵ When Irene Mole was asked to identify those who had been attending a community picnic in the early 1930s, she responded: “Everybody. The whole. All of them. There was not one nationality, either. There was everything you could think of. We were all the same.”¹⁵⁶ This experience with the baton-wielding RCMP officers was informed by the bloody battles between strikers and the RCMP at Estevan, Saskatchewan on 29 September 1931, where three strikers were killed by RCMP officers.¹⁵⁷

The strike brought to the Pass a new common enemy who transgressed established ethnic and religious boundaries: the scab. While scabs were no stranger to previous strikes, there was a fundamental difference in the definition of the word by the end of the strike in September 1932. Whereas coal companies previously had tried to organize different ethnic groups from within the Pass as strike-breakers, this strike occurred in the middle of the Depression, enabling the company to recruit scabs from outside the community.¹⁵⁸ For the first time in Blairmore, not all Slavs were welcome at the Slovak society, nor were all Italians welcome at the Italian Society. If you were a newcomer to the Pass and were employed as a strike-breaker, you were denied access to

¹⁵⁵ John Krkosky interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001. Emphasis is original.

¹⁵⁶ Irene Mole interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, no accession number. Interview is in VHS format, and is located in the lower drawers of the TV stand on the main floor of the Crowsnest Museum.

¹⁵⁷ For more, see Stephen Endicott, *Bienfait: The Saskatchewan Miners' Struggle of 1931* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). The situation at the Bienfait mines was similar to the strike at Blairmore in 1932. Mine owners sought to reduce their annual costs by reducing the amount of full time manpower on their payroll. The mine officials also wanted the union to recognize that the coal industry was seasonal, demanding that the mine have the right to close operations during the months it was unprofitable to operate.

¹⁵⁸ A good example is the so-called “Canadian Union” attempted earlier by McGillivray Creek Coal and Coke Company in Coleman. See Seager, “Socialists and Workers: The Western Canadian Miners, 1900-1921,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (85): 34.

your corresponding ethnic association or fraternity.¹⁵⁹ Scabs served to unite the communities in question not around ethnic identities as had previously been the case, but increasingly around a working-class and community-based identity. As John Krkosky pointed out, “scab is a bad word in the English language.”¹⁶⁰

Crossing the picket line was not an action that was easily forgiven. As Erma Favero remembers, “your picket line was always there when the man went to work, eh? [A scab] had to cross the picket line, and it wasn’t a pleasant thing. It left a stigma, almost, for those people, those people that did.”¹⁶¹ It is evident from the use of phrases such as “those people” that individuals who were crossing the line were not accepted members of the community, nor were they likely to be welcome in the community after the strike.

As these examples have shown, the strike affected everyone, not just the men who were striking. Women played a critical part in the strike, not only keeping the miners fed and providing emotional support, but by taking an active role in the strike itself. Women earned their reputation in the *Calgary Herald* for being the most “active and noisy” people involved in the strike.¹⁶² While many participated directly in the pickets, others policed the community’s social boundaries. Yagos stated, “I remember, well I don’t need to say his name, but there was this guy coming down the road going to work. He had no

¹⁵⁹ The only exception to this may have been the Masonic Lodge, which at this time was primarily made up of British, middle to upper class men. One well-known anti-Communist, MLA George Cruikshank, was the Worshipful Master of this lodge, which may serve as an indication of the social expectations within the lodge itself.

¹⁶⁰ John Krkosky interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁶¹ Erma Favero interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001. As Warren Caragata pointed out: “The action of the fire-bosses in agreeing to the company’s demand that they start strike breaking would be remembered a long 18 years later when they went out on strike, only to see the miners walk blithely through their picket lines,” See Warren Caragata, *Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1979), 116.

¹⁶² For a detailed account of the role played by women during this conflict, please refer to N.A., “Police Guard Coal Mines at Bellevue,” *Calgary Herald*, 4 May 1932 and N.A., “Police Use Batons to Disperse Mob of Miners and Women at Bellevue,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 May 1932.

business going to work... Anyway, [a women] goes out on the road, grabbed him, and she ripped the sleeves right off that parka. Wanna know what strength is? Some of those women were nuts.”¹⁶³

Though children were kept away by their parents from the violent conflicts that have come to characterize the unrest, they were allowed to watch and participate in parades and other social statements that did not involve violence.¹⁶⁴ Then twelve years of age, Lily Price remembers that as children “we used to sit upstairs in our bedroom window, and we’d watch the women and that all parade down the street. Some of them would be nothing from their top to their waist.”¹⁶⁵ Grace Aveledo recounts sitting on rocks watching the turmoil, but being forbidden from getting too close to it: “we used to sit on the rocks and watch all the people, the pickets, and the police... they were really getting rambunctious, the people hollering and shouting and fighting and, oh! I don’t know, it was scary! ...We weren’t allowed to go over the rocks at that time...so we wouldn’t get trampled over.”¹⁶⁶ When relief trains arrived it was often the children who were responsible for picking up supplies for their families. Anne Spatuk recalls that “they had to be picked up by someone. In our family it was the kids, and in most families it was the kids with [their] little red wagons that had to do this.”¹⁶⁷ It is clear that the whole working class was involved in the 1932 strike, creating a common experience and perspective which had not existed previously. It may also have served to reinforce

¹⁶³ Bertha Yagos Interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁶⁴ Caragata, 116.

¹⁶⁵ Lily Price interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001. Price seems to be suggesting that the women were topless.

¹⁶⁶ Grace Aveledo Interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁶⁷ Anne Spatuk interview, Pg 1.

distrust in government and its agencies, particularly the baton-wielding RCMP, whose tactics were widely reported in the press.¹⁶⁸

What emerges from the oral testimonies is a clear sense that the strike created a broader working-class identity in Blairmore, one which transcended (but did not erase) existing ethnic and religious identities. After the strike, residents of Blairmore faced a set of hardships common to all, regardless of ethnicity. Erma Favero remembers that miners “weren’t taken back right away... they were strikers, and the more active you were in the strike, the longer you stayed off [work], you know. All the companies had you down as a striker, eh? It was not a pleasant thing.”¹⁶⁹ Despite adopting a contract at the end of the strike that explicitly prohibited the blacklisting of miners for strike activity, the staggered re-hire dates in company records indicate that an unofficial blacklist was a reality Blairmore miners faced.¹⁷⁰ When miners were re-hired, known Red or radical individuals were taken back last.

Post-strike inflation was another challenge the community had to deal with. Joe Fortunaso recalled that:

going on strike I don’t think they earned a penny because they would go on strike, even if it’s for a month, and there’s no wages paid at that time... and as soon as the strike was over and you start getting whatever it was, a little more money, [and] everything went up in the stores. Everything cost a bit more money because the coal company, by having to pay more money, had to raise the price of coal.¹⁷¹

Many members of the community planted gardens to feed their families during the depression, but most residents also owed substantial debts to local merchants. When the

¹⁶⁸ N.A., “Police Use Batons to Disperse Mob of Miners and Women at Bellevue,” *Calgary Herald*, 5 May 1932. Also see Ramsey, 150-151 and Caragata, 116.

¹⁶⁹ Erma Favero interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁷⁰ Warren Caragata, 116. The employee register of the West Canadian Collieries indicates that miners were rehired in stages that stretched well over a month. See West Canadian Collieries Employment Records, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 91.29.1 unknown.

¹⁷¹ Joe Fortunaso interview, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

strike was over, they not only had to pay off these debts, but also had to address the reality that “as soon as there is a strike, the prices go up in the stores, and everything else goes up.”¹⁷² Thus families had to service new debt while dealing with higher prices in the stores. Inflation did not discriminate based on ethnicity, religion or gender. For Gaston Bazil the contradictions of the situation were obvious: “Miners didn’t have much money, but it seems to me that the business people lived in better houses, all the time, better places. Yet what come to my mind [is the question] what are they doing? Not mining coal! The town was here because of miners, not because of business people!”¹⁷³

1932 is clearly a landmark year for the informants, both because of the strike itself as well as the broader changes the strike created. The entire community was involved with the strike as picketers, supporters, or observers, with new class enemies in the form of scabs from “outside” the Pass being created. Together, the working class experienced the realities of living on credit throughout the strike, and the impact of post-strike inflation. What materializes is a cohesive community that experienced the social impact of the strike together and moved forward from the strike with a new group mentality and identity.

Though these oral testimonies are drawn from residents of Blairmore, Coleman and Bellevue and thus represent a shared common occurrence, it is critical that the experience at Blairmore be differentiated from the other communities of the Pass. Miners at Blairmore were on strike much longer than their counterparts in Coleman, and were seen as more radical and thus more threatening than their colleagues in Bellevue.

¹⁷² Bertha Yagos interview, CD. For more on the role of gardens during the depression, please refer to Interviews with Jack and Midge Willoughby and Ric Petrone, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 2007.004.0001.

¹⁷³ Gaston Bazil interview from *The Journal* “Rocky Mountain Reds” CBC News, Sept 26, 1986. Interviewer: Allen Able, producer David Kirk.

The Greenhill mine at Blairmore struck first on 23 February, followed the next day by the miners at Bellevue. Though pressed by their union, the miners at both the International Coal and Coke Co. and McGillivray Creek Coal and Coke Co. in Coleman did not go out in sympathy until 18 March. For miners at Coleman, the strike did not last long, with “conservatives” pushing for a vote to reconsider the strike action.¹⁷⁴ Held on 14 April, miners at Coleman voted 292 to 237 to return to work immediately.¹⁷⁵ The union called a meeting to justify the strike to miners at Coleman, however “one eyewitness who was sitting among the union supporters said the moderates began throwing chairs from the balcony onto the ‘Reds’ below, and he felt it was a wonder he had not been killed.”¹⁷⁶ The RCMP had to intervene to restore order.¹⁷⁷ Coleman miners returned to work at both the International and McGillivray mines on 26 May under police protection. Thus, while the strike at Blairmore lasted a full eight months, miners at Coleman were out just over two months.

The Blairmore strike was not only much longer, but also in many ways more desperate.¹⁷⁸ Miners did not have the solidarity of their colleagues in neighbouring Coleman; they continually had to justify their suffering economically and socially in comparison to the employed miners at Coleman, and most importantly they were aware that if the strike failed they could expect similar retribution from the mining company as the Reds received at Coleman.¹⁷⁹ As retired miner Pete Youschok recalls: “when they

¹⁷⁴ Janet Kennedy, *The McGillivray Creek Coal and Coke Co. and The International Coal and Coke Co., Coleman, Alberta: A Social History* (Edmonton: 1984), 42. Government of Alberta, unpublished government commissioned report. In author’s possession. The word “conservatives” is used by Kennedy, although it is doubtful if she is referring to members of the Conservative Party of Canada.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ The West Canadian Collieries owned both the striking mines in Blairmore and Bellevue.

¹⁷⁹ 125 were not rehired after the strike was over because they were “Red.” See Kennedy, 43.

broke that strike [at Coleman] and the men went back to work, there was men, working men, standing up there with the boss and he'd say, 'that's a Red, and that's a Red,' you know, guys coming looking for their jobs after the strike. The boss just shook his head – 'no job for you.'"¹⁸⁰ The miners at Blairmore experienced the social effects of the strike longer than their counterparts at Coleman, and they faced the greatest consequences should the strike be resolved against them.

Publicly, the West Canadian Collieries declared that it needed to reduce wages to preserve its economic viability after the 1929 stock market crash. However, private correspondence between the General Manager of the collieries, Mr. Vissac, and Mr. Raoul Green, a board member and the company's Chief Geologist, indicate that the company was not as financially destitute as it proclaimed. In a letter dated 8 June 1931, Vissac addresses the measures taken by the Bennett Government in Ottawa to relieve the industry, indicating that the provisions were "very satisfactory in every respect, and we are confident we accomplished all that could be expected for the benefit of our industry."¹⁸¹ Vissac goes on to inform Green that in regards to a federal government committee examining the coal industry "I am of the opinion that we must appoint a salaried representative on the new commission... who would be entitled to have his expenses paid up, and whose services would always be available."¹⁸² These points were to be further discussed at a meeting in Calgary's posh Palliser Hotel.¹⁸³

With massive work stoppages at its Blairmore and Bellevue operations during the 1932 strike, the economic impact of the labour unrest on a financially-insecure company

¹⁸⁰ Caragata, 116.

¹⁸¹ Vissac to Green, 8 June 1931, P1. Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.34 Kerr J+F.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1.

would have been staggering. Yet a very different perspective emerges in the surviving West Canadian Collieries documents in the Crowsnest Pass Historical Association archives. The documents do not portray a company fighting for its economic life or trying to end a costly labour struggle. Instead, they show a corporation that was waiting out the strike with little concern for the community involved. Just after the strike was called, Vissac again wrote to Green, indicating that “as you may have seen from the papers things were pretty hot last week, but things have quietened down again and we have to wait for a further ripening of the situation.”¹⁸⁴ Calling the strike a “situation,” is a telling choice of words. Even after months of labour battles, the “situation” did not seem to preoccupy the West Canadian Collieries General Manager, for in correspondence with Green at the height of the unrest he makes no mention of the strike whatsoever.¹⁸⁵ Unconcerned with the hardships currently being experienced by striking miners, Vissac assures Green that his current geological assessments were not urgently needed, and that if Green needed a place to relax he was welcome to use Mr. Charbonnier’s house and staff: “I want you to use it as your own home. Then, as you will have more time, you will be able to go over everything more leisurely.”¹⁸⁶ Finally, the correspondence indicates that enclosed with the letter was “a cheque for [Green’s] expense account which is more than justified.”¹⁸⁷ It is evident that for senior management, such as Vissac, Green and company lawyers, expense accounts, legal expenses and travel expenditures were still

¹⁸⁴ Vissac to Green, 10 May 1932 Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.34 Kerr J+F. Green’s permanent residence was in Calgary.

¹⁸⁵ Vissac to Green, 11 August, 1932. Crowsnest Pass Historical Society archives, accession number 88.18.34 J+F.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. Mr. Charbonnier was the President of West Canadian Collieries. Some of the “leisurely activities” available at the Charbonnier home included tennis on the private tennis court or use of the private pool; the residence was empty for most of the year as Charbonnier lived in France.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

being incurred while the company demanded wage reductions from its working-class employees.¹⁸⁸

Not until the end of the strike did an official at West Canadian Collieries publicly define the company's ideological position in relation to the event. Stating that the WCC had "positively declined to deal with the illegal organizations represented by the Mine Workers Union of Canada and its affiliations," the employee indicated that "practically at [Alberta Premier] Mr. Brownlee's dictation I was obliged to sign an agreement with this organization and its leaders who had continually flouted all law and order and preached open sedition and militant revolution."¹⁸⁹ For the West Canadian Collieries, the actions of 1932 clearly represented more than wage concessions; it was a larger struggle against radical anti-capitalist movements.

Though the strike was led by the communist-affiliated Workers Unity League, support for the union does not of course mean that the whole community supported Communism. A more accurate portrayal of what was socially permissible at Blairmore in the year before the election of the Red council can be gained when considering the preceding evidence in conjunction with articles from the *Blairmore Enterprise*. Given the prominence of the strike of 1932 in the memories of informants, it is critical to examine the way the strike was dealt with in the local paper. The paper was owned and edited by W.J. Bartlett, one of the first entrepreneurs in Blairmore and a staunch conservative. Given his political affiliations, it could be expected that there would be numerous articles in the *Enterprise* which condemned Communism and Red unionism in favour of a "home

¹⁸⁸ Vissac to Green, 10 May 1932, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.34 Kerr J+F.

¹⁸⁹ Caragata, 117.

local” approach.¹⁹⁰ Such articles certainly did appear, but before the election of the Red council they were always re-prints from other papers. The first substantive report dealing specifically with the Red element was from the *Coleman Journal* and printed on 7 April 1932. Entitled “Voice from the Strike Area,” and published on the front page, the article claimed that strikes allowed “quacks with half-baked philosophies a better opportunity to spread their nostrums,” and went on to challenge the tactics and moral compass of the Red-backed union.¹⁹¹

A piece reprinted from the *Kimberly Press* in B.C. declared that “in higher class unions, insubordination is not tolerated for a moment,” further editorializing the strike as “ridiculous” and lacking judgement.¹⁹² One article reprinted from the *Hanna Herald* went a step further calling for the deportation of all Reds to their native countries.¹⁹³ An article borrowed from the *Montreal Standard* observed that given the Communists’ “hatred towards Canada, we should judge [their countries of origin] more desirable places to live in. At the same time it is curious to note how few of these people care to go back to Russia.”¹⁹⁴ A re-print from the *Truro Weekly News* went so far as to observe that “Communism was given a trial in Bible times,” and that even “Saints failed to satisfy the population, and Communism failed.”¹⁹⁵ An article taken from the *Lethbridge Herald* criticized the miners’ demands, asking “if [relief as requested by the miners] is granted, why work for a living?”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ The author’s observations as to Bartlett’s political leanings are based on general reading of *The Blairmore Enterprise* from 1930-1937.

¹⁹¹ N.A., “Voice from the Strike Area,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 April 1932.

¹⁹² N.A., “The Strikers,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 April 1932. Emphasis placed by author.

¹⁹³ N.A., “Let Them go Home,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 26 May, 1932.

¹⁹⁴ N.A., “Kick Them Out Now,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 June 1932. It is also important to note the assumption of ethnicity regarding communists in this article.

¹⁹⁵ N.A., “Communism,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 October, 1932.

¹⁹⁶ N.A., “If this Request is Granted, Why Work for a Living?,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 24 November 1932.

The only local articles about the Communist or Red unionist movement were not written by Bartlett or his staff, but came in the form of letters to the editor. Mr. Ralph Wooton and Ms. Lily Rowe exchanged a series of letters debating ethnicity and responsibility to one's country.¹⁹⁷ Wooton decried the overt racism of the upper classes, stating that they were engaged in an effort to replace all eastern European miners with men of British extraction. He went on to criticize a superintendent at the West Canadian Collieries, who after being appointed to his position in 1932 "affirmed his intention of making Blairmore a 'white man's camp' and [doing] his utmost to carry it out. At every opportunity men of his own nationality have been engaged..."¹⁹⁸ Mr. Wooton further took issue with comments made by the editor regarding a union parade, demanding to know why the *Enterprise* reported that a parade of striking workers was described as only one percent English speaking.¹⁹⁹ Wooton sought to remove the stigma that only non-British individuals could be Red, stating that "if you had watched the parade closely, you would have seen many men and women who during your residence in Blairmore have grown from childhood to maturity."²⁰⁰

This brought a rebuke from Ms. Lily Rowe, who replied to Mr. Wooton that he and the other striking workers were not being held in Canada against their will.²⁰¹ "If you want the Red flag," Rowe stated, "why not go where it is waving?"²⁰² She chastised the strikers for wasting their time trying to pursue a Red agenda, and engage a larger Imperial narrative by warning Wooton that "we are Canadian and we are British. Our forefathers

¹⁹⁷ For example, see Ralph Wooton, "Letter to the Editor," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 30 June 1932; Lily Rowe, "Letter to the Editor," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 July 1932.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ralph Wooton, "Letter to the Editor," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 July 1932.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Lily Rowe, "Letter to the Editor," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 July, 1932.

²⁰² Ibid.

fought for this land, and we will not give in too easily... Nationality is no count. He is white who acts white.”²⁰³ It is clear that for Rowe, if you were not a supporter of the British Empire (or at least one who tacitly accepted the established order), you were relegated to the same status accorded to non-Anglo-Saxon-Celtic individuals.²⁰⁴

While there were no major editorials expressing the explicit perspective of Bartlett before 1934, he did express himself anonymously in the “Local and General Items” section of the *Enterprise*. Usually a forum for births, deaths and other items of strictly local importance, Bartlett included statements such as “Ghandi has come out against Communism. He dreads even the thought of dividing up his wardrobe,” and “Communists are being dumped into the rivers in China. General Pollution of Chinese waters will result,” making his opinion on Communism clear, while keeping it from being printed under his own name. The lack of substantive articles pertaining to the experiences of the strike indicates just how much economic power the working-class held in Blairmore at this time, and foreshadows the ability of the Knight administration to seek concessions from local industry and businesses in the interests of miners.

When articles appeared in the paper concerning Russia, they were similarly laced with the message that the Communist system of government was inherently flawed. Headlines like “Russian Wheat Shortage,” “Russian Food Problem is Serious,” and “Soviets Sow Less Wheat” conveyed the message that the Soviet Union was facing a crisis of epic proportions.²⁰⁵ While these articles were negative in their message, they

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ At this time non-white individuals, specifically people of Chinese ancestry, were excluded from working in the mines of the Crowsnest Pass by union contract.

²⁰⁵ N.A., “Russian Wheat Shortage,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 3 March 1933; N.A., “Russian Food Problem is Serious,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 24 November 1932; N.A., “Russia Sows Less Wheat,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 6 October 1932.

also allowed for comparisons to be made between the situation in Canada and the Soviet Union. The article “Export Market for Grain is Much Stronger” is a strong example.²⁰⁶ Noting that “there is little likelihood of much wheat being exported [from the Soviet Union] for some time,” the article goes on to state that the “prospects for an increased export movement of Canadian wheat appear to be very good indeed.”²⁰⁷ As described previously, miners and their families were in receipt of only token strike pay, accruing large debts with local retailers and wherever possible growing their own vegetables to augment their assistance from the government. As it was indicated the previous week in the *Enterprise* that the Soviet Union would be distributing 1.9 billion pounds of wheat to distressed areas, readers might have wondered why the Canadian government was not taking “surplus” wheat and distributing it to the poor rather than celebrating its export to the open market” From a working-class perspective, this article indicates that Soviet Russia was willing to reduce exports to feed its economically depressed areas, while bourgeois Canada was forsaking the working-classes to take advantage of an increasing market price. Though this was clearly not the intention of the conservative editor of the *Enterprise*, it demonstrates that a difference in class-based perspectives could reinforce the argument that the Soviet system governed for the people, while the Canadian government governed for the wealthy.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ N.A., “Export Market for Grain is Much Stronger,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 17 March 1932.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Though Soviet grain supplies may not have actually made it to the affected areas of the countryside, the perception given in this article is that they did. Consequently, it is this *perceived* reality that is of importance when questioning the impact such articles had on the readership at Blairmore. In actuality much of the promised aid never did arrive in Soviet Russia and many areas experienced severe famine. For more, see Michael Ellman, “The Role of Leadership Perceptions and of Intent in the Soviet Famine of 1931-1934,” *Europe Asia Studies* 57 (6): 823-841.

Bartlett also allocated space in the general interest section of the newspaper for syndicated articles which contained outrageous or unbelievable occurrences in the USSR. The *Blairmore Enterprise* reported, for example, that “Machine Makes Rain for Russian Farmers.”²⁰⁹ Created by the “Special Institute for Artificial Rain,” the article stated that the prototype machine “has proved satisfactory” in its task of using electricity to coax rain from the sky.²¹⁰ Soviet attempts to use airplanes to seed as many fields as possible were described, with the proviso that: “Of course Russian propagandists will insist on telling Canadian people that machinery is not permitted to take the place of manual labour – hence all people have an equal earning power. Yes! Yes!”²¹¹ It was even reported that the Red Air Force was permitting Muslim women to fly its fighter planes.²¹²

Readers of the *Blairmore Enterprise* were also kept informed of Soviet industrial production. These articles tended to be non-political in nature, identifying Soviet trade statistics in comparison with British, American and Canadian numbers for readers. For example, anyone reading the *Enterprise* would have been aware that “Russia Has the Largest Ball Bearing Factory [in the world],” in addition to the USSR being “ranked as second only to the US in volume of industrial output and national income.”²¹³ It was further reported that “Soviet industries increased their output 19.6 percent during the first 5 months of 1932 over the corresponding period last year according to figures published.”²¹⁴ Readers are left with a similarly strong impression of Soviet military power and expenditures, given the coverage of troop accumulation in response to the

²⁰⁹ N.A., “Machine Makes Rain for Russian Farmers,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 11 August 1932.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ W.J. Bartlett, “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 15 May 1932.

²¹² N.A., “Moslem Girl Becomes Pilot: Abandons Harem to Win Fame as Soviet Flyer,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 12 May 1932.

²¹³ W.J. Bartlett, “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 April 1932; W.J. Bartlett, “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 April 1932.

²¹⁴ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 28 July 1932.

Japanese invasion of Manchuria.²¹⁵ News relating to Soviet trade agreements with Italy and Turkey, steel purchases from Germany, and dirigible acquisitions were also relayed.²¹⁶ At a time when the Canadian national news contained largely negative articles in relation to the Depression and its impact on Canadian industries, these articles would have given the impression that aside from the drought being experienced in some areas of the Soviet Union, the industrial and overall economies were still buoyant. As a mining community, the residents of Blairmore shared broad common experiences with industrial workers in the USSR, such as working underground or working in dangerous conditions, and thus a larger question might emerge: if Soviet Russia is able to achieve industrial growth during an agricultural depression, why cannot capitalist Canada able to do the same?

Although it is not possible to know Bartlett's intentions when he selected articles for publication, nor is it possible to know the reactions of Blairmoreites to the paper beyond those expressed in their letters to the editor, there are several patterns which are evident. It can be seen that Bartlett did not publish articles that were critical of the local union movement under his own name, rather he reprinted articles from other newspapers. News pertaining to Soviet Russia was unenthusiastic, but interestingly allowed readers to compare the situation at Blairmore with that of the Soviet Union. The readership was also kept abreast of the economic and military standing of Russia. Though Bartlett was no champion of the Soviet system of government, the availability of this information

²¹⁵ N.A., "War Strength of Russia," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 25 February 1932.

²¹⁶ See N.A., "World Happenings Briefly Told," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 April, 1932; N.A., "Russia Arranges Credit with Turkey," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 19 May, 1932; N.A., "World Happenings Briefly Told," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 24 November 1932; N.A., "Dirigibles for Russia," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 25 February 1932.

provided Blairmoreites with the opportunity to learn more about the USSR and perhaps identify with the problems and their solution by the Communist regime.

It is consequently inappropriate to conclude that the election of a Red town council in February of 1933 was simply the result of residual anger from the strike of 1932; by the end of the year all the prerequisites for a full-blown populist movement had been established. As Trevor Harrison points out, populist movements result from a delegitimatization crisis and parallel the breakdown of previous political alliances or authority.²¹⁷ While the type of populist movement that emerges (right or left-wing) is a product of the social, political and ideological elements that surface from the breakdown of the preceding political power structure, it is the changing nature of these authorities that is important.

In this sense, one can see two distinct crises before 1933. The first appeared in 1925, where the strike served to delegitimize existing union representation, resulting in the creation of home locals and therefore the establishment of a new authority. In this case it was only one element of the governing apparatus that was challenged, the union, while the power of the government itself was unquestioned. The situation in 1932 represents a starkly different reality, with the authority of both the West Canadian Collieries and the government being challenged. With the violation of the social contract that had legitimized both the conservative home locals and the mining companies in the consciousness of the community, a change in authority can be seen. If, as Harrison suggests, authority can be described as “the ability of a dominant class to construct an overarching concept of reality,” one can see the concept of reality imposed by the West

²¹⁷ For his complete theory of populism, see Trevor Harrison, *Of Passionate Intensity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 11-15.

Canadian Collieries on the home local from 1925-1931 disintegrating and a new concept of class-based reality emerging.²¹⁸ This new authority had a distinct flavor, reflecting closely the concept of a populist movement as defined by Peter Sinclair, “stress[ing] the worth of the common people and advocate[ing] their political supremacy,” rejecting “intermediate associates between the mass and the leaders,” and “direct[ing] its protests against some group that lies outside the society.”²¹⁹

The new class-based community identity that emerged from the experiences of depression, union instability, the broken social contract and the strike of 1932 culminated in a new authority that had support from broad spectrums of Blairmore’s population. There were also new enemies in the form of outsiders: on a human level, represented by the scab laborers the mine companies had tried to employ during the strike; and on a more symbolic level, represented by the companies, capital and laws that imposed themselves on Blairmore from “outside.” This perception was reinforced by the political agenda of the West Canadian Collieries, the lack of solidarity between miners at Coleman and Blairmore and the inadvertent consequences of the articles published in the *Blairmore Enterprise*. In sum, there was an accumulation of economic, union, political and social experiences that preceded the election of Bill Knight and his Red administration at Blairmore in 1933 which make the election look considerably less surprising.

²¹⁸ Harrison, 11.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 5.

Chapter 2

During the final week of the 1933 municipal election campaign, the *Blairmore Enterprise* did its best to boost the Citizens' Coalition candidates and detract from the miners' slate of Red candidates.²²⁰ On 9 February 1933, four days before the vote, the *Enterprise* published an election issue which described the individuals running for office. It informed readers that Mr. Ferguson, Citizens' Coalition candidate for mayor, "has had wide experience both at Fernie and Blairmore, a man with the respect of respectable people, and deserving of support."²²¹ The miners' nominee, William Knight, was described only as "a carpenter."²²² Jokes about the would-be mayor and councillors were circulated in the paper – one suggesting that the working-class candidates were not worth half the yearly pay of the town's dog catcher – while posters decrying them as Communists were posted on power poles and public bulletin boards.²²³ The election was hotly contested, with ballots counted until 2am on 14 February, and in the end the working-class slate won the mayor's office and all three of the available council seats.²²⁴ The victory was far from decisive, with 54 spoiled ballots and 29 votes separating the most and least popular choices for council; a total of 788 ballots were cast.²²⁵

²²⁰ The Citizens Coalition offered a conservative election program and was dominated by businessmen and professionals.

²²¹ N.A., "Hot Election Forecasted," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 9 February 1933.

²²² Ibid. William Knight was a carpenter at the West Canadian Collieries, the owner of the local Greenhill mine.

²²³ See N.A. "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 26 January 1933 and N.A. "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 February 1933 respectively.

²²⁴ At this time councilors were elected for staggered two year terms, with elections held every year. Therefore, three seats were elected in 1932 (Peressini [Red], Morgan and Evans [anti-Communist]) and they continued their term to 1934. The Councilors elected in 1933 were to serve to 1935. For a detailed breakdown of the councilors and their terms in office, see Appendix 1. For a detailed explanation of the electoral process, refer to Footnote 4, in the introduction to this thesis.

²²⁵ The town council meeting minutes indicate that "most of the ballots were rejected for voting for fewer than the number of candidates to be elected." See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 13 February

The Red administration of Mayor Knight came into being without the authority accorded to past councils, both because of its radical political agenda and the close margin of victory. This chapter will argue that to fully implement its agenda, the newly-elected Red administration first had to establish its social and legal legitimacy. Best known for their radical and controversial initiatives, it will be demonstrated that there were in actuality two distinctly different agendas pursued by Knight and his associates. Elements of both radicalism and populism are evident in the relief and taxation policies initiated by council, and will be explored in depth in this chapter. The clear balance between populist and radical policies will show that the Red council was able to appeal not just to full-fledged Communists, but to a larger coalition of moderate and left-leaning Blairmoreites.

Knight and newly-elected councillors Joseph Krkosky, Joseph Aschacher and Albert Olson (as well as returning Red councillor Romano Peressini) took office at the peak of anti-Communist activity launched by the state. Communists across the nation were being arrested under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, handed stiff jail sentences, and in some cases deported. Repercussions under the code were not reserved only for high profile Communist activists, but could be levied against anyone actively agitating on for a significant change in the capitalist system.²²⁶ As John Thompson points out, Section 98 made it illegal to advocate “‘governmental, industrial, or economic change within Canada by use of force, violence or physical injury...’ even if the accused

1933, Municipality of the Crownsnest Pass Archives, no accession number. Documents are located in the municipality’s storage vault. Hereafter referred to as “Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes.”

²²⁶ The far-reaching effects of this provision of the Criminal Code of Canada is investigated in Kirk Neirgarth, “‘Fight for Life’: Dave Kashtan’s Memories of Depression-Era Communist Youth Work,” *Labour / Le Travail* 56 (2005). See, for example, footnote 34.

did nothing to bring about such changes.”²²⁷ It was under these auspices that “local bosses, clergy and reactionaries” called for the provincial government to declare Blairmore’s election invalid and appoint a provincial administrator for the town.²²⁸ While there were questions as to whether or not known Reds could legally govern a town council (as the tenets of Leninism were illegal under federal law), there were also local inquiries as to the validity of the election. With the vote so close for all of the councillors, the *Enterprise* was left to speculate that “from scrutineers and others in a position to know, we learn that from the very outside more than five qualified votes, resident in the town, were missed.”²²⁹ The Anglican Reverend Parkington was reported to have been “traveling around making scarifying speeches about ‘life and property’ being in danger” while Premier Brownlee was so displeased with the election results that his government was planning to oust the new council “by claiming the finances of the town are unsatisfactory” therefore warranting a provincial administrator.²³⁰ The province automatically had the right to appoint an administrator under the Towns and Villages Act

²²⁷ John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager (eds.), *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 227. Though Section 98 had existed within the Criminal Code since 1919, it was not used frequently until 1931. John Manley argues that the crackdown on Communists and the increasing use Section 98 can be attributed to the Communist Party of Canada’s success in organizing the unemployed over the spring and summer of 1931. See John Manley, “‘Audacity, Audacity, still more Audacity’: Tim Buck, the Party, and the People,” *Labour / Le Travail* 49 (2002): 9-41. In Quebec this was supplemented with the “Padlock law” that made it illegal to use a house or hall to propagate Communism. For more on the civil rights movements against the provisions of Section 98, see Dominique Clement, “‘It is Not the Beliefs but the Crime that Matters’: Post-War Civil Liberties Debates in Canada and Australia,” *Labour History* (86): 1-32.

²²⁸ N.A., “Red Town Council Cleans Out Mine Workers’ Enemies: Brownlee Threatens to Oust Workers’ Administration,” *the Worker*, 4 March 1933. An example of the backlash against the decision to let the council function can be found in Drumheller Mail, cited in “Blairmore Council Allowed to Function,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 30 March 1933.

²²⁹ N.A., “William Knight Chief Magistrate,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 February 1933.

²³⁰ N.A., “Red Town Council Cleans Our Mine Workers’ Enemies: Brownlee Threatens to Oust Workers’ Administration,” *The Worker*, 4 March 1933. Also see N.A., “Brownlee Threatens to Oust Blairmore Council: ‘Hands Off’ Blairmore Town Council: Action Taken Because Council is Workers’ Representative,” *The Worker*, 11 March 1933.

if the municipality was not financially stable.²³¹ It was against this backdrop of uncertainty regarding their right to govern that Knight and his council made their first dramatic decisions.

After their inaugural council meeting, the new Red administration issued what the local press dubbed the “Knight Manifesto.”²³² Occupying most of the front page of the 2 March 1933 *Blairmore Enterprise*, the Town of Blairmore took out a large advertisement to outline its new relief and taxation policies. With the bold headline “Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty,” the new mayor stated, “it is quite evident that the [federal and provincial] government cannot or will not make adequate provision for the unemployed, and until such time as their relief scheme functions at a better manner than at present, it is up to us.”²³³ Knight also indicated how the town would pay for the increased municipal support: a “voluntary” 5 percent contribution by every wage earner in the Town of Blairmore.²³⁴ It was announced that local miners under the auspices of the Mine Workers’ Union of Canada had already agreed to contribute 5 percent of their pay, as had the local teachers and employees of F.M. Thompson’s store.²³⁵ Should 5 percent “donations” not be forthcoming, it was warned that the council would take such actions as may be required to finance the necessary relief.²³⁶

This announcement marked the beginning of substantive change to the relief and taxation systems at Blairmore, and interestingly the council chose to relay the news under

²³¹ N.A., “That Blairmore Trouble,” *Medicine Hat News*, 28 February 1933.

²³² For the full text of the manifesto, see Appendix 6.

²³³ N.A., “Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 March 1933.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ This was a relatively risk-free move on the part of the council, as the majority of the citizens had already agreed to contribute 5% of their pay via their union or their employer for the purposes of increased relief; the only ones who really stood to oppose the move were local merchants and independent businessmen.

a banner similar to Horatio Nelson's famous statement that "England expects that every man will do his duty."²³⁷ The echoing of Horatio Nelson by a Red council is both ironic and representative of the administration's need to avoid imprisonment under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada by cocooning their radical proposals in language that itself was not revolutionary. Knight carefully and deliberately addressed the issue of the "Redness" of the new council: "after a great deal of deliberation, [it has been decided by council] that Redness is the state of the stomach. It is time that people's opinions regarding this colour business were changed, and that we get together as before."²³⁸

Despite the dismissal of political ideology as a factor behind the document, the Knight Manifesto (and the consequent action by council to establish a system of "real relief") established a power bloc that pitted the new council against the federal and provincial governments.²³⁹ The document sets the two administrations apart, defining the hated federal and provincial relief programs as the real threat to the well-being of Blairmore's working classes, and inversely promoting the newly elected Red administration as the solution. This classification allowed the council to insist on radical change on a provincial and national level, because such demands were being made against the power bloc that was seen to be threatening the best interests of the working-class. This would be complemented by highly visible local action on the part of the council to try to relieve the problems that had previously been imposed by external elements. By successfully defining the federal and provincial governments and their

²³⁷ "England expects that every man will do his duty" was the signal sent by Admiral Horatio Nelson at the commencement of the Battle of Trafalgar. This was the decisive naval engagement of the Napoleonic Wars, and gave the British navy control of the seas. For a more detailed study, see Adam Nicholson, *Seize the Fire: Duty and the Battle of Trafalgar* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005).

²³⁸ N.A., "Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 March 1933.

²³⁹ The phrase "real relief" refers to a system of relief that allows the recipients not only subsistence, but a dignified life.

capitalist base as the main threat against the citizens of Blairmore, the council then had the social authority to take action not only on the everyday issues facing Blairmoreites, but also to pursue their radical, anti-capitalist agenda.

Knight further addressed the other lingering stereotype that Reds were not good Christians by referring to “Christian” generosity in his appeal for the 5 percent contribution and stating, “‘God made men after his own image’ and evidently meant them to be fed pretty much alike. We are of the opinion that he was right...”²⁴⁰ The council did not want to be known just as “Red,” but as a new administration that was going to get things done for the workers and unemployed. While this may have been an effort to unite the town, it is more likely that this denial of being Red was intended to avoid any legal complications that might arise under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada.²⁴¹

The provincial government inadvertently helped the council differentiate themselves from the previous administration. On 7 March 1933 the Mayor read a letter to council from the Department of Municipal affairs, which had conducted an audit of the town’s finances and found that there were thousands of dollars in tax inaccuracies which were traced back to the town’s Secretary Treasurer, Mr. A.J. Kelly.²⁴² The Secretary Treasurer was immediately suspended, and the ensuing two-month investigation resulted in Kelly “admit[ing] that the facts as presented by the Auditor were correct, [and] that

²⁴⁰ N.A., “Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 March 1933.

²⁴¹ This conclusion has been drawn after considering the way that the administration represented itself in the newspaper and within its own declarations/proclamations. The workers’ administration frequently recognized the leadership of Tim Buck – the most notorious reference being Tim Buck Boulevard – and attended Communist-organized conferences and receptions. Given that council frequently endorsed a Communist agenda, the reality that none of the councillors or the mayor openly admitted to being Communist is evident of an evasion of the issue. It is clear from primary evidence that the council was comfortable with the agenda of the Communist Party of Canada, and therefore the refusal to identify as a Communist publicly is indicative of a larger evasion of the issue.

²⁴² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 March 1933.

there might be other shortages that he was not then prepared to discuss.”²⁴³ When charges had been laid, the Deputy Minister of Municipal Affairs wrote directly to Mayor Knight, instructing him to dismiss Mr. Kelly immediately. This letter marked an important milestone for the new administration; not only did it remove Kelly in a non-partisan manner, but more importantly affirmed the government’s willingness to work publicly with the Red council. When Mr. English, the Deputy Minister, traveled to Blairmore to meet with ratepayers and explain the findings of the audit, he described what was to become the provincial government’s policy towards the Town of Blairmore: “[Mr. English] stated that his department had no intention of appointing an administrator while the affairs of the town were being carried on in capable hands; but should such necessity arise, in the interest of ratepayers, action would surely be taken by his department...”²⁴⁴ The audit also provided an excellent chance to fill the position of Secretary Treasurer with someone who would be sympathetic to the new administration.

Where the opportunity to dismiss staff appointed by previous administrations was not provided by the provincial government, the Red council took the initiative themselves. After being sworn into office, council advised the Chief of Police, Fire Chief and the town Electrician that as of 31 March 1933, their services would no longer be required.²⁴⁵ While all three individuals were closely linked to previous councils and were not known for their support of the workers’ movement, the official reason given for the dismissals was the “inefficiency” of the individuals in question.²⁴⁶ While these dismissals were initially questioned, public opinion changed when an inventory of the

²⁴³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 13 March, 1933.

²⁴⁴ N.A., “Meeting of Electors,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 March, 1933.

²⁴⁵ See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 February 1933. Also see N.A., “Town Officials Face Firing Squad,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 February 1933.

²⁴⁶ N.A., “Town Officials Face Firing Squad,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 February 1933.

fire hall revealed that the former chief had taken the blankets, pillows, and even the stove from his office when vacating the premises.²⁴⁷

Having fired four of the most prominent men employed by the town, the Red members of council also sought to distinguish themselves from the only two non-Red councillors. Acting on rumours that Councillor Evan Morgan had used a man on the town's payroll to do yard work for him, the Mayor and Council demanded an investigation into the matter. A sworn declaration from the man, Mr. Ronald McDonald, stated "that while working for the Town of Blairmore I was employed to cut wood at the residence of E. Morgan... I received wages for this work from the Town of Blairmore, though the town received no benefit from that work. E. Morgan knew I was working for the Town at that time."²⁴⁸ Though Councillor Morgan demanded an apology for such "slanderous" testimony, the matter was referred to the town solicitor and Morgan eventually offered his own apology for the situation.²⁴⁹

Councillor W.L. Evans' credibility was also questioned when it was revealed in an open session of council that he had written a bad cheque to the town for his 1932 taxes.²⁵⁰ Evans stated that "he was not notified that his cheque had been returned to the Town Secretary" and tried to blame the now-disgraced A.J. Kelly and his inaccurate accounting. What the public perceived, however, was that Evans had not paid his taxes

²⁴⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 April 1933. The council demanded, but did not receive, the resignation of Mr. Corbett, the representative of the Federal Department of Finance in Blairmore. See *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1933.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.* It would appear from Morgan's statements in council over the year and his candidacy on the Red slate in 1934 that he may have started as a "labour," candidate, but reconciled himself with Knight and the other Red councilors before the next civic election. This is reinforced by statements in the *Enterprise* which confirm that all of the Red candidates were elected in 1934, indicating that by that time Morgan had become a "Red." The reasons for his rapprochement with Knight and his associates are not known at the time of printing.

²⁵⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 July 1933.

and Kelly had covered it up by not reporting it to council while still Town Secretary.²⁵¹ It is not known if Kelly told Evans that his cheque had bounced, and the councillor's reputation was seriously hurt by the accusations of impropriety.²⁵² Thus, just as the integrity of the town's former Chief of Police, Electrician, Fire Chief and Town Secretary had been challenged, so too was the honesty of the only two anti-Red councillors left on council.

The administration also moved to put an end to what it perceived as the spread of misinformation in the local and provincial press.²⁵³ In March, council discussed the "continuing inaccuracies in the press," and "it was agreed that the press be barred from meetings and provided with accurate meeting minutes."²⁵⁴ Initially this resulted in demands for the freedom of the press from the *Enterprise*, but the councillors and Mayor continued to make themselves available before and after meetings. The *Enterprise* was not pleased with the situation, however they adapted and continued to print stories about the council as before.

When the election results were first announced, Knight and his new council had faced questions from politicians and local citizens alike as to whether a Red administration could govern under Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada. *The Worker* reported that the "they are loudly complaining, and it is clear that if they had their way they would disenfranchise all militant workers and forbid them the vote."²⁵⁵ By distancing themselves from any language which could result in legal trouble – "Redness

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ N.A., *Coleman Journal*, 16 March 1933.

²⁵⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 March 1933.

²⁵⁵ N.A., "Red Town Council Cleans Out Mine Workers' Enemies: Brownlee Threatens to Oust Workers' Administration," *The Worker*, 4 March 1933.

is a state of the stomach” – council sought to legitimize the administration in the eyes of the public and senior levels of government.²⁵⁶ The scandals involving A.J. Kelly and Councillors Morgan and Evans were therefore not only important in discrediting the previous regime, but in demonstrating the council’s ability to function without hindrance from senior levels of government. Drastic measures such as the dismissal of the Fire Chief, Chief of Police and Town Electrician and their replacement with men loyal to the new administration not only brought a new perspective to town operations, but also ensured that the bureaucratic apparatus of the town was securely behind the new council.²⁵⁷ Despite opposition to policies put forward by Knight and his colleagues, questions about the council’s legal ability to govern were ultimately unsustainable.

The actions of council to legitimize their administration were coupled with a blatant attack on the upper classes in Blairmore. At the first regular council meeting after their election, Knight removed any questions regarding his stance on capital and landlords. His very first action as Mayor was to relinquish the chair to propose that “any work given to tenants for the purpose of paying current rent be regarded as granted for the purpose of paying arrears of taxes owing by the landlord [to the Town of Blairmore].”²⁵⁸ This was not simply an effort to collect unpaid taxes owing the town treasury, but a pointed attempt to extract taxes from a particular group of people. There was not, nor would be, an accompanying motion that forced miners or those on assistance

²⁵⁶ William Knight, “Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty.” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 Feb 1933.

²⁵⁷ There was one person who, though slated for dismissal, was spared. C.M. LARBALESTIER, the temporary Town Secretary appointed after the dismissal of A.J. Kelly was also dismissed, but when news of his dismissal reached Edmonton a letter was sent to the council indicating that because this position was appointed with provincial consent they could not arbitrarily remove LARBALESTIER. Consequently, this employee continued to serve the council in his position as secretary for some time. See N.A., “Ban is Placed on Actions – Blairmore Town Council,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 July 1933.

²⁵⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 February 1933.

to hand over their relief payments to pay arrears on property taxes. Knight had served notice that the tax burden was to be borne by the self-defined business and professional classes and those who made a living by providing services to the working-class community.²⁵⁹

This forced requisition from the local landlords was the first of many initiatives which sought to place the local tax burden on the upper and commercial classes. Just one month into their mandate council introduced Business Tax Bylaw #9, which fundamentally changed the premise for collecting municipal taxes in Blairmore. Whereas in the past tax revenue had been collected from the working class and used to improve the town through public works projects such as new sidewalks, new roads, and so on, this piece of legislation reversed the emphasis, collecting taxes from local business in support of programs for the working class. Business taxes were increased by 5 percent while homeowners saw their municipal taxes reduced.²⁶⁰

The proceeds of Bylaw #9 were used to move against the hunger and poverty of the unemployed and the underemployed. Addressing the council on behalf of the local Single Unemployed Association, Mr. D. Mills and Mr. A. Morris requested that the council investigate the rate of pay at which men were working for the town. A general discussion ensued, and it was decided that the hourly pay for town work (performed by the unemployed) should “be raised from 30 cents per hour to 50 cents per hour.”²⁶¹ Though not indicating how this increase was to be paid for in the long term, the town assumed the immediate costs and sent a telegram to the federal and provincial

²⁵⁹ See page 74 for a detailed description of the Blairmore Business and Professional Man’s Association.

²⁶⁰ Local land owners are not to be confused with local landlords. If you used your property for profit, then you were considered a business and would have to pay the tax.

²⁶¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 13 April 1933.

governments advising them that the council had increased their liabilities to the people of Blairmore.²⁶² A.A. McKenzie, provincial Minister of Charity and Relief, immediately responded with an angry letter, stating that “all efforts must be made to reduce expenses as far as the married unemployed were concerned.”²⁶³ This answer was unacceptable to council, replying that the Minister’s demands were “impossible” and enclosing with their letter a list of “all single and married unemployed so that they might receive financial help.”²⁶⁴ McKenzie had also insisted that all single relief was slated to cease 1 May 1933, but this did not happen, as the budget for the single unemployed was later approved by the department. Despite no further increases in relief reimbursement from the provincial or federal government, the Red council continued finance relief at the rate of 50 cents per hour through the business tax.

The assumption that the rich should pay for relief was reinforced some weeks later by the adoption of a bylaw that levied taxes on purebred dogs that lived in Blairmore; while superficially about animal control, this bylaw effectively implied that if you could afford a purebred dog during the depression, you could afford to pay more towards the costs of providing relief programs to the unemployed and underemployed of Blairmore.²⁶⁵ Ben Swanky, a Communist Party of Canada organizer sent to Blairmore, recalled years later that:

they couldn’t figure out how to get at the mine owners, so the question came up 'what kind of dogs are there in town?' They found out that it was the mine owners

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 24 April 1933.

²⁶⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 24 April 1933.

²⁶⁵ See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 March 1933. It appears from council minutes that it was a salaried employee that looked after animal control, and his rate of pay was not changed after the implementation of this bylaw.

that had the pedigree dogs, and the miners that had the mongrels, so they put a tax on the pedigree dogs.²⁶⁶

Capital projects and relief on the scale undertaken by Knight were not cheap, requiring large capital investment on the part of the Town of Blairmore. Despite major changes in taxation policy, the reality was that regardless of the administration's right to impose and collect taxes, no programs could be undertaken if they were not paid. It was therefore critical to ensure that the ratepayers actually paid their taxes. To this end, the council also re-evaluated the way that tax and utility bills were calculated and collected. The town council decided to lower the minimum rate for electricity to 50 cents per month; however, "those in arrears for over a month who do not pay by the 16th day of the next month will have their electricity cut off, and it will cost one dollar to have it reconnected."²⁶⁷ This marked the beginning of a different tactic altogether; rather than try to enforce a price that was out of reach for most and face massive defaults on utility debt, the price was lowered to a more reasonable sum. It was not the unwillingness to pay, rather the inability to do so at the current prices that resulted in overdue accounts. The council also moved to collect what had been previously assumed to be "uncollectable debt," light and water arrears for the preceding three years. The council provided for a 10 percent discount on all arrears, should the amount outstanding exceed one dollar.²⁶⁸ The rate of collection increased dramatically, and caused the *Blairmore Enterprise* to report that "collections for light and water are coming into the Town's treasury fairly well,

²⁶⁶ "Building a Nation, the Back Row: Labour's Cold War," prod. Donald Bouzek, 28 minutes, Athabasca University/Access Network, 2005.

²⁶⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 March 1933.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

despite the existing ‘hard times,’ largely due to the wise action of the council in offering [a] ten percent discount for prompt payment.”²⁶⁹

Tax incentives were also extended to the town’s business community. Bylaw 11 was introduced to provide an attractive reason for businesses to pay their taxes on time, thereby immediately making available funds for the town treasury. This bylaw confirmed the rate of taxation for business at 12.5 percent, and provided for a discount of 20 percent should local businesses pay their taxes in full on or before June the first of the year they were levied.²⁷⁰ This tax incentive proved to be too popular for the council to afford, and by December the Knight administration opted to lower the tax rate for business to 10 percent, replacing the 20 percent discount for timely payment of taxes with a 15 percent penalty for late payment of taxes.²⁷¹ The administration also reached out to small businesses that were competing with companies based elsewhere by imposing levies and additional business licenses on certain industries. Councillor Peressini raised the issue of laundries from Fernie and Lethbridge offering services in Blairmore at prices less than or similar to the local laundries. It was proposed that an extra business fee of \$15.00 be applied to all non-Blairmore operations offering services in the town, and the motion was carried.²⁷² Councillor Morgan later commented to the press that he “felt excellent service could be expected from local Chinese laundries, and that they should be protected.”²⁷³ This protection was later extended to other businesses, including a joint effort with the Town of Coleman to exclude transient barbers from cutting or shaving in either town

²⁶⁹ “N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 13 July 1933. This article seems to the author to be sarcastic, and when taken in context of the many articles run by the *Enterprise* demanding tax cuts, it is likely that the editor was trying to again instil in the minds of his readers that the town was collecting more money from ratepayers than was absolutely necessary.

²⁷⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 22 March 1933.

²⁷¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 5 December 1933.

²⁷² N.A., “Tax Rate Cut Two Mills,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 April 1933.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

without a license.²⁷⁴ In addition, the council moved to impose additional taxes on “outside contractors who accept contracts in the town.”²⁷⁵

Local industry, through their mouthpiece the *Blairmore Enterprise*, did not accept these changes to the tax bylaw silently. Despite some favourable changes for business taxes paid on time, the *Enterprise* and several other companies refused to pay. They hoped to appeal the validity of the bylaw #9 in court and declared “when the Blairmore town council undertakes to collect a tax from the business concerns of Blairmore, which must be considered a tax spread over the year for the benefit of the unemployed, they are practically guaranteeing that the unemployed will remain unemployed for at least the year.”²⁷⁶ The imposition of a new tax regime also facilitated the formation of the Blairmore Business and Professional Man’s Association (BBPMA) to promote the interests of the commercial and professional classes.²⁷⁷ The BBPMA used the *Enterprise* to challenge the Knight town hall, declaring they would take “steps to test the legality of the Blairmore Council’s actions.”²⁷⁸ Some members of the association appealed their tax assessments only to have their appeals dismissed by council sitting as a court of revision.²⁷⁹ When the businesses complained that the process was unfair, the Mayor advised the town secretary to record that the individual businesses in question were

²⁷⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 July 1935.

²⁷⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 August 1935.

²⁷⁶ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 13 April 1933. The other businesses who refused to pay their taxes in hopes of having the bylaw thrown out by the Alberta Courts were A.E. Ferguson, F.M. Thompson, S.G. Bannan and J.E. Gillis.

²⁷⁷ N.A., “Business Men Organize,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 27 April 1933.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ N.A., “Council Declines to Entertain Appeals Against Assessments,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 4 May 1933. The businessmen who appealed their taxes were W.J. Bartlett (owner and editor of the *Blairmore Enterprise*), A.E. Ferguson (profession unknown), F.M. Thompson (merchant), S.G. Bannan (lawyer) and J.E. Gillis (lawyer).

“asking for relief,” and if such corporate relief were to be granted another increase in business taxes would have to be investigated.²⁸⁰

The businesses that did not pay their taxes were issued writs of enforcement that were upheld in court, but during the appeals process an important contrast developed between the self-titled businessmen and professionals and the many members of the working class. The BBPMA had expected public support in their fight against the Red council; however, that support did not materialize. While the association had labelled the new tax laws in no uncertain terms as “unjustified and in reality illegal,” it took only a few weeks for a more conciliatory approach to appear.²⁸¹ Their new line was enunciated in the *Enterprise* on the 27 April:

Although Mayor Knight endeavours to have the unemployed of Blairmore believe that the business men of the town are determined to starve them, the unemployed know full well that this is not the case... Not a word has been said nor an idea entertained by any businessman to do any less for the unemployed than Mayor Knight and his council intend to do. They are not, in general, appealing against the *general* assessment, and are not opposed to paying a reasonable and necessary tax.”²⁸²

The BBPMA’s change of tone suggests that the association quickly realized that it did not have support for their cause within the general population, something they needed if they were to succeed having the legislation repealed. It also suggests the popularity of the council with residents, and the recognition by businessmen that while they may be opposed to Knight and his policies, they needed his supporters to patronize their stores and professional corporations.

This change in tactics by the *Enterprise* and the business concerns of Blairmore also represents the defeat of business’ effort to control (in a populist sense) the local

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ N.A., “Business Men Organize,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 27 April 1933.

²⁸² Ibid.

agenda. By criticizing the actions of council as reprehensible, illegal, and unfair, the conservative elements of the town had attempted to define the townspeople as good, law-abiding citizens who were being hijacked by a radical council. Conversely the administration defined themselves and their actions as solutions to an unjust society. The people of Blairmore had to decide which notion of citizenship matched their own perspectives, and when public opinion established itself firmly on the side of the Red administration the BBPMA was forced to redefine itself or face the possibility of being categorized as being outside of local society.²⁸³

There was one notable absence from the Blairmore Business and Professional Man's Association: the West Canadian Collieries. Critical of the Red movement in the past, it was not a reconciliation between the radicals and the company that caused their absence, rather economic considerations. In one report seeking potential cost saving measures, author Raoul Green concluded "common sense dictates that cutting down any quantity of men at Greenhill is not worth trying at present. Idle men go on relief and I for one would assume that the company would have to pay for them indirectly by taxation."²⁸⁴ The company may not have been pleased with the priorities of the new administration, but it had decided that antagonizing council was not worthwhile economically.²⁸⁵ The company turned elsewhere in an effort to reduce costs. Green had reported that parts of the timbering at the Blairmore mine required "immediate repairs" and suggested an innovative and cost-effective solution: "steel rails are every bit as

²⁸³ Trevor Harrison, "The Changing Face of Prairie Politics: Populism in Alberta," *Prairie Forum* 25 no. 1 (Spring 2000): 113.

²⁸⁴ Raoul Green, "Greenhill Mine Report," 14 March 1933, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society: Accession # 88.13.33 Kerr J + F.

²⁸⁵ Green's reference to indirect taxation refers to changes in the municipal taxation policy to be discussed later in this chapter.

suitable as I beams, since they cost nothing for purchase... there must still be quite a few rails at Lille.”²⁸⁶ Green was later sent to the abandoned town site to assess the availability of rails there, and found that “2000 ft. are well worth a try at re-claiming... they are angular #60 steel, and are well suited for mine timbers.”²⁸⁷ Instead of cutting staff, an expedition would be sent up the abandoned railway line to Lille to extract the remaining 2000 ft. of rail as a cost-saving measure.²⁸⁸

Despite legal challenges, the fundamental alteration of Blairmore’s taxation policy resulted in business interests paying more taxes for different reasons than they had previously. Even businesses fundamentally opposed to the Knight administration – such as the West Canadian Collieries – were forced to acknowledge the council’s prerogative to impose and collect tax. While this was unpopular with the business community, they could not simply lay off individuals to pay for the increase, because doing so would only result in another increase in tax to pay for the relief needed by the newly unemployed residents.

Having framed this change within the need to provide increased relief to the unemployed and underemployed, it is necessary for the relief policies of council to be

²⁸⁶ “Timbering” refers to the wood structure that prevents mineshafts from collapsing from the weight of the rock overhead. The steel rails would cost nothing because the West Canadian Collieries owned the abandoned town site of Lille where it had previously operated a colliery. Raoul Green to G.A. Vissac, 14 March 1933, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.33 Kerr J + F.

²⁸⁷ Green to J.A. Brusset, 6 September 1933, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.33 Kerr J + F.

²⁸⁸ The power of the union movement in Blairmore also had an effect on the way that the West Canadian Collieries operated its mine at Bellevue. Represented by the same union as the miners at Blairmore, the company feared a similar move in Bellevue to elect a Red town council. When discussing the issue of a low pitch coal in the #8 level at Bellevue, the introduction of a mechanical jiggling device was discussed that would facilitate the extraction of more coal while requiring fewer men. While it was reported that the “conditions were favourable, costs might not be more than 55 or 60 cents per ton, provided (and this is the main drawback) we can obtain such a contract from the union.” It was decided that the projected cost saving were not worth the potential backlash from the miners or their union, and the project was abandoned until both the union and Red movements had lost much of their power. See Raoul Green, “Low Pitch Coal – No. 8 Level – Bellevue,” 1 November 1933, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 88.18.33 Kerr J + F.

examined. Knight and his colleagues actively cultivated a civic culture where citizens could, and did, come to the council seeking help with their personal problems. The council extended its mandate beyond the traditional municipal niches of infrastructure and public utilities to embrace a populist agenda of advocacy and mediation for citizens on multiple levels while implementing a pragmatic system of relief.

The tone of the new administration's policy towards the unemployed or underemployed was clearly enunciated just over a month into the council's mandate in the "Knight Manifesto"²⁸⁹ The minutes from the previous council indicate it had taken a hands-off approach, relegating the administration of relief to a committee. When problems were encountered with the provincial and federal governments, many individuals were left to fend for themselves in terms of their appeals for more or different kinds of relief. By contrast, Knight and his council demanded during their first council meeting that the Alberta Relief Commissioner come to Blairmore to see for himself the suffering of the people and work with the local council to find an answer to the problem.²⁹⁰ Though the Relief Commissioner did not attend to the situation in Blairmore immediately, this marked the beginning of an aggressive campaign by the council to get favourable action from senior governments.

This new approach towards other levels of government was not reflected in the form of lofty petitions or demands for new and unrealistic programs; most of the correspondence between the administration and the relief authorities involved detailed

²⁸⁹ N.A., "Blairmore Expects this day Every Wage Earner to do His Duty," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 March 1933.

²⁹⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 Feb 1933.

cases and sought specific retribution.²⁹¹ Given the nature of the primary industry in the town, the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB) was often the target of such correspondence. Mr. Camile Canet was the first to appeal to the "council for help getting justice from the WCB," and was certainly not the last.²⁹² In what had previously been a process between the injured miner and the WCB, the town took an active role by writing to the board on Canet's behalf and seeking rectification of his file. When the adjudication of the file took longer than the council deemed necessary, they took the matter further, petitioning the Government, the Minister and the MLA for "justice."²⁹³ The municipal authority's resources extended beyond those seeking compensation from the WCB; they also included collecting money for those who were awarded settlement but were for one reason or another had not been paid.²⁹⁴ These actions were simple but important for many locals, especially if English was not their first language. The council had the staff, resources, time and understanding of the issue to successfully pursue cases for many who would have otherwise never received the "justice" they deserved from the WCB.

The administration also facilitated dialogue between the citizens themselves. Mr. O. Kurri came before council on 7 August 1933 seeking legal advice, not retribution or advocacy. Kurri had been renting a house from Mr. Kubic but was unable to pay his rent because he was unemployed. He had been threatened with eviction and did not know what to do. Council "advised him that the only way he could be evicted was on a judge's

²⁹¹ This contrasts with the image of council projected by the *Enterprise*. The paper tended to focus more on the abstract actions of council (such as petitions) rather than the concrete steps taken by the administration to address various local issues.

²⁹² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 June 1933. For further examples, see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 Nov, 1933.

²⁹³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 November 1933.

²⁹⁴ This was the case for Mr. V. Salva, who had been awarded a settlement but had not received payment. See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 November 1933.

order” and Kurri left the chamber.²⁹⁵ When Mr. Kubic came to council the next month, he said that he had decided to sell the house which Mr. Kurri was renting, and the new owners did not want a tenant.²⁹⁶ Kubic did not want to evict Mr. Kurri, but did not know that there was any other choice. The council agreed to find a new home for the tenant.²⁹⁷ This mediation would later extend to fences, porches and other squabbles between neighbours. Such things dealt with immediately and never referred to committee.

The council chambers further served as a *de facto* court of appeal for provincial and federal relief. For many who were challenging relief settlements awarded to them by the other levels of government, the appeals process took too long and they could not provide for themselves in the interim. The Knight council made a point of listening to their problems and providing what they could in short term relief, to try and keep the men out of relief camps, or “slave camps” as the labour press and Single Unemployed Association called them.²⁹⁸ Mr. Stella, for example, approached council on 19 June 1933, seeking assistance in dealing with the provincial government’s relief program.²⁹⁹ After hearing about his situation, the council agreed that he was indeed justified in seeking further aid from the provincial authorities and granted him the sack of flour he requested to sustain him and his family in the short term.³⁰⁰ Similar actions were taken on 3 July 1933, when immediate help was granted to Mrs. Mishalski and Mr. F.O. Peters who were

²⁹⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1933.

²⁹⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 18 September 1933.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 5 March 1934. The term “Slave Camp” was a popular way for both council and the radical labour press to refer to the relief camps set up by the Bennett Government. For an example of the “slave camps” representation in the workers’ press see “N.A., “Workers of Slave Camp Organize,” *the Worker*, 25 March 1933. For an account of camps located in the National Parks, see Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Altona, Manitoba: Friesen Printers, 1995). See Appendix 7.

²⁹⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 June 1933.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

not receiving sufficient relief from the province.³⁰¹ These are just three of many cases where emergency aid was granted, and in almost all cases the stipulation for the emergency relief was that the recipient would work off the cost of whatever it was they were granted at the rate of 50 cents per day at the town's Department of Public Works.³⁰²

While working for the town's Department of Public Works, both permanent employees and relief recipients were expected to record their hours on the newly-instituted "Workman's Time Sheet." This new form was identical for employees and relief recipients alike, with the payee filling out the date, a description of the work, and the number of hours worked; the only place where the type of labour was indicated – i.e., relief labour, public works department labour, etc – was at the bottom of the card, to be filled out by the town secretary along with the cheque number.³⁰³ Such a change in paperwork served to remove the stigma attached to relief work in the eyes of many, demonstrating that no one person's labour was more valuable than another; it is a clear statement that the town valued the labour of all equally.

The council's new approach to the delivery of relief was fundamentally different from other councils,' and certainly a departure from the norm expected by the Bennett government in Ottawa.³⁰⁴ While previous councils would investigate a claim before issuing any relief – leaving the potential recipient without any help until the review was complete – the new administration granted relief immediately in the interests of the humanity of the person in question. This sense of responsibility for the day-to-day welfare of citizens was also evident with issues such as WCB claims, with the town using

³⁰¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 July 1933.

³⁰² The rate of 50 cents per day was considered far too generous by the provincial and federal authorities. See page 84-85 of this thesis for more on this subject.

³⁰³ For example, see Appendix 8.

³⁰⁴ For more on the actions of the Bennett administration, see Thompson and Seager, 222-276.

its resources to try to force action where possible on cases that were simply taking too long or were creating human suffering. It is clear that the council was willing to take action where required, whether within their jurisdiction or not, to rectify issues that were negatively or inversely affecting the population of Blairmore. Meeting minutes demonstrate that the administration did not offer the same solution or relief to every applicant, rather their allocations represented an assessment of each individual's situation and needs. Early in their first term, the Knight town hall established a program of relief based not on the pragmatic allocation of resources, but the pursuit of their own kind of social justice.

For this council relief was not only about the allocation of money, but also about the opportunity to support oneself with dignity. Oral histories clearly indicate the need to hunt, fish, and garden to supplement their dietary intake. Beatrice Peressini remembers that as a child her father (Councillor Romano Peressini) not only worked in the mine, but that "we had half a block... and we grew vegetables, and that gave us any vegetable you wanted, and even some of the vegetables went on in the winter time."³⁰⁵ Being able to grow your own food was important in an economy where many were starving or barely making ends meet, and it was from this personal experience that Councillor Peressini proposed the town make available all unused public property "for the purpose of growing gardens."³⁰⁶ The rent per annum per lot was to be one dollar, with the provision that the rent could be cancelled by the town should the lot be sold.³⁰⁷ This motion was later amended to read that "lots be rented for free to the first applicant for the year 1933,

³⁰⁵ Beatrice Peressini Interview. P1.

³⁰⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 March 1933.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

understanding that they are to be properly cultivated.”³⁰⁸ It was through these provisions that many of the town’s empty lots were converted to vegetable gardens to feed the unemployed and underemployed.³⁰⁹ The program was later extended to include chicken runs.³¹⁰ Although council had made provisions to “cancel the lease in the event of a sale,” the town did not sell any of the properties being used as gardens despite receiving offers on at least one of them.³¹¹

The sale of property owned by the municipality was carefully considered when an offer was made before agreeing or declining the tender. Whereas previous councils sold based on the price offered for the lot in comparison to its market value, the Knight administration put the social value of the property first and foremost. An offer from C. Sartoris of \$100 for a house owned by the town and in relatively poor repair was received by council, and though the offer was considered to be fair market value, council did not let Sartoris buy the house.³¹² Instead the council chose to find out how much it would cost to repair the house so that the unemployed or underemployed might be able to live there; the renovations were done and the house was used for this purpose.³¹³ Two years later the council refused offers to purchase property from men who were on relief, indicating that if they could afford to buy land, they did not need relief.³¹⁴ The Red administration made it clear that the use or sale of town-owned property should be for the good of the residents, not based on an economic formula which only considered the value of the property based on market conditions.

³⁰⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 April 1933.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 July 1933.

³¹¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 April 1933.

³¹² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 June 1933.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Mr. L. Mark, a relief recipient, applied to purchase a town property but his offer was rejected because he was still in receipt of state aid. See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 July 1935.

Council had not lost sight of the local abundance of coal and agreed that it was foolish to overlook this natural resource. It proposed opening a seam of coal for the benefit of the local unemployed because the town usually experienced its first snowfall in October and the cold weather often lasted to April.³¹⁵ The *Enterprise* criticized the plans as being a direct attack on the West Canadian Collieries and another grab by the greedy unemployed.³¹⁶ In the end it was not a lack of determination by the council or a barrage of outrage from the *Enterprise* that stopped the project, but the reality that the sheer amount of red tape involved in opening and operating the mine would outweigh its economic benefit. It was simply cheaper to purchase the coal from the West Canadian Collieries and distribute it to those who were on relief.

When a meeting was finally arranged at Blairmore with Mr. F.J. Buck from the Alberta Department of Charity and Relief, it was apparent that the municipal and provincial governments had very different ideas about the way that relief programs should function. Council assembled half an hour before the meeting was to take place and unanimously endorsed a resolution which demanded “that the relief scale be advanced by 35%” along with the introduction of olive oil, butter, jam and eggs to the list of commodities provided by relief.³¹⁷ The resolution also called for an increase in the allowance for milk and shoe repairs, as well as an immediate issuing of clothing for the

³¹⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes (Special Meeting), October 23 1933.

³¹⁶ In part the *Blairmore Enterprise* stated: “The Blairmore town council now proposes to operate a mine for the benefit of the unemployed, who are demanding twelve dollars a month for adults, \$6.00 for dependants; \$12.00 a month for single young men and women; free light, water, fuel, and rent; free medical, optical and dental service; \$6.00 for adults and \$4.00 for dependants for winter clothing; exemption from taxation, free milk for babies, free food for milch cows owned by them, and state-wide non-contributory unemployment insurance. They would also operate a cooperative store.” See N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 5 October 1933.

³¹⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 23 October 1933.

poor.³¹⁸ Mr. Buck listened to the call for more help for those on relief, but he indicated that he “thought 35% was too much... he would put it before the Relief Commission, but did not think it would be granted.”³¹⁹ He also questioned the need for an increased clothing allowance, stating that in some places “parents admitted that certain articles of clothing asked for were not essential.”³²⁰

The issue of hourly wages provided for relief work was also addressed. The Mayor indicated that “20 cents a day, especially if asked to shovel snow” was inadequate, both for the work performed and to reasonably support a family.³²¹ When Mr. Buck stated that “some of them were quite willing to work” for this amount, the council insisted that the allowance was insufficient. The council and Buck could not agree on the amount of time to be worked either, with the council indicating to Buck that they felt the philosophy behind the relief system was degrading. Relief (and most emergency relief) was to be worked off at a rate of 50 cents per hour on town projects, with relief recipients made to work for the value of their assistance. While many important civic projects had been carried out under the auspices of this program, the council felt it was degrading for those who had to perform the work.³²² Mr. Buck replied only that “he did not know of any town where work could not be done to improve the place.”³²³ Nor could the council and Buck agree on the issue of support for single unemployed men. The council wanted financial support and Buck said that the only support for single individuals was in the

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid, 2.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² As noted above, the Town of Blairmore did what it could to alleviate the stigma attached to doing work for relief payments, for example, redesigning their time sheets to allow for the secretary to discreetly indicate the reason for the payment.

³²³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, Oct 23 1933.

relief camps.³²⁴ Knight even went so far as to demand a change to the wording of the relief forms, informing Buck that the citizens of Blairmore took exception to the form itself.³²⁵ Despite a standardized form being used across the province, the council advised Buck that many were unwilling to sign the forms because they contained a clause indicating that the recipient must re-pay or work off the benefits received from the province; it was feared that this could lead to the unemployed being obliged to repay their debt or enter the government's relief camps at the province's discretion.³²⁶ The meeting between council and Mr. Buck fulfilled the longstanding demand by council that an official of the department visit Blairmore to see the needs of the community first hand, but yielded little in terms of progress.

Advocacy on behalf of residents was not always high-profile or political in nature. The council often addressed issues that were of everyday importance. For example, the quality of local dairy products dominated complaints in the spring and summer of 1933, and as a result the town asked for, and received, a review of the local dairy from the Minister of Agriculture.³²⁷ Likewise, when complaints about the quality of local radio signals surfaced, the council had Gaston Bazille, the town electrician, investigate the situation. Bazille "advised that there was a lot of radio interference in the town" and the council instructed the secretary to get in touch with the government radio inspector so

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid. It was reported to council one week later that "the unemployed were willing to sign the new application form and would work out relief in the town." It is unclear if the "new application" refers to an amended document (and was therefore the result of the preceding week's meeting with Buck) or if this is a reference to the same form that the Red council had discussed with Buck on 23 October 1933. Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 30 October 1933.

³²⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 July 1933. The dairy was outside the town limits so there was no way for the town to regulate it. Asking the Minister of Agriculture was the only option the town had to attempt to improve the quality of the products.

that the situation might be rectified.³²⁸ When three local men, Mr. Harich, Mr. Grena and Mr. Antusak were sentenced to be deported in Fort MacLeod federal court the council demanded that the town secretary take the matter up with the Minister of Immigration, hoping the situation could be rectified.³²⁹ Though the council was not able to get the deportation overturned, the level of advocacy – writing letters, circulating petitions, issuing press releases – represents a stark difference when compared to the actions of the previous council.³³⁰

Intervention and demands for action extended beyond municipal boundaries. While Mayor Knight avoided saying anything that could be construed as anti-Canadian, anti-British or “revolutionary,” the council endorsed several petitions and resolutions brought forward by the Mine Workers Union of Canada and other radical bodies demanding change to the way that the nation was governed. Perhaps the most important and controversial change demanded by council was a call for the dissolution of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.³³¹ While both the left and the right in Blairmore cited the same reasons for either keeping or disbanding the force – their role in the 1932 strike – what was key for the council was that it had found a way to express its desire for national change in a way that could not be considered treasonous.³³² The administration also demanded the repeal of Section 98 of the Criminal Code of Canada, gave moral support to radical striking miners at Stratford, Ontario, called for the return of tobacco to

³²⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 July 1933.

³²⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1933.

³³⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 16 September 1933.

³³¹ Across the nation the RCMP were monitoring the actions of radical and leftist groups, as well as breaking up strikes and collecting information used in Section 98 arrests and prosecutions. For more on the actions of the RCMP at this time, see Michael Lonardo, “Under a Watchful Eye: A Case Study of Police Surveillance During the 1930s,” *Labour/Le Travail* 35 (1995): 11-41.

³³² See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes for 30 October 1933 and 15 May 1933 respectively.

provincial jails, and protested the arrest of picketing labourers in Calgary.³³³ These petitions had little chance of success, but were vehicles for council to express its political beliefs to a larger audience.³³⁴ The petitions could be carefully worded to avoid problems with the federal authorities and had no cost attached to them, making them a relatively safe way of expressing the council's opinions. In addition, they were usually controversial enough to gain free press both in the home market and sometimes in provincial and national papers as well. The administration was not afraid, however, to put public funds towards projects that were overtly politically motivated. When Harvey Murphy, who was neither a resident of the town nor a councillor but a political activist for the Communist Party of Canada, suggested that the council should send a delegate to the National Unemployed Congress in Ottawa, Councillor Albert Olson was selected and sent to the conference with a budget of \$200.³³⁵

³³³ See N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 30 October 1933 and N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 15 May 1933 respectively. The petitions regarding tobacco and imprisoned workers were as follows: "we see no reason for the ban on tobacco, when in federal penitentiaries it is allowed. It is bad enough to imprison a man without adding torture;" and "Whereas 14 Calgary workers are arrested on a charge of unlawful assembly arising out of the Calgary unemployed picketing a job, and whereas this section of the Criminal Code #87 is a direct blow at the rights of picketing and allowing for the "frame-ups as in this case, we the Town Council of the Town of Blairmore urge the Provincial Government to drop charges and petition the Federal Government to abolish this anti-labour section of the Criminal Code. Both from Town Council Meeting Min, 15 May 1933.

³³⁴ Council's decision to distribute meeting minutes to the *Lethbridge Herald*, the *Calgary Herald* and the *Calgary Albertan* as well as the local newspapers demonstrates the council's desire to address not only a local audience, but also the working-class population outside the Pass. See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 March 1933.

³³⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1933. Harvey Murphy was a paid organizer for the Communist Party of Canada, who was responsible for traveling to targeted regions to build support for the CCP. In 1933 Murphy would have been 28 years of age, and made his permanent home in Toronto. While it is clear from the primary sources provided that Murphy traveled between Toronto and Blairmore, nothing is known about the other Communist Party of Canada organizer cited in this thesis, Mr. Ben Swanky. Neither Murphy or Swanky appear on the tax roles of the town of Blairmore. For more information on Harvey Murphy, see Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band: The Clashes between the Communists and the Canadian Establishment 1928-1932* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, n.d.), 42-43. See Crownsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, accession number 92.13.38 Municipality; 1934: 92.13.38 Municipality; 1935: 92.13.38 Municipality. From a reading of the Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes and the *Blairmore Enterprise* it does not appear that there was a larger influx of "fellow travelers" or Red supporters because of the Red slate's victory.

The conference addressed one of the central issues for Blairmoreites at the time – unemployment – but as it had been dismissed by senior levels of government it became questionable as to whether it was appropriate to send a publicly funded delegate to Ottawa. The *Enterprise* trumpeted that “the Town Act clearly stipulates for what purposes taxes may be assessed, and the purpose to which this \$200 has been applied is not covered by the act,” further arguing that the council had “overstep[ed] its rights, and it is surprising to the bulk of reasonable thinking ratepayers that the Department [of Municipal Affairs] has not before now taken steps to stop this mal-administration.”³³⁶ The provincial government did not take any steps to address the spending, however, and Olson was permitted to attend the conference.

While the budget was tight, the council always found money to repay deficits accrued by labour organizations that were holding local events. The Mine Workers’ Union of Canada, for example, ran over budget for both their May Day and Labour Day events; although the Union had other sources of funding, they sought and received money from the Red council to cover their cost overruns.³³⁷ This served to enrage further the BBPMA who perceived their increase in taxes going towards the subsidization of Red events. The *Enterprise* reported “a picnic and sports day, staged by the Red element of the Crowsnest Pass in Blairmore on Labour Day reports quite a deficit, which they expect the ratepayers of Blairmore to make good. It is time the provincial authorities stepped in

³³⁶ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 17 August 1933. This spending was particularly stinging for the Blairmore Enterprise and other businessmen who were opposed to the regime given the recent redistribution of tax roles. It should, however, be noted that Mr. Olson did not spend the entire sum, and refunded the town \$40.55 that was unspent from the allowance upon his return from Ottawa. See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 18 September 1933.

³³⁷ See references to the May Day picnic in Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 1 July 1933 and reference to the Labour Day picnic in Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 October 1933.

to put a stop to this mal-administration of local affairs.”³³⁸ Despite repeated demands in the *Enterprise* provincial intervention was not forthcoming.

The charges of “mal-administration” extended beyond the expenditures of council, with the paper taking particular exception to the form and location of some town council meetings.³³⁹ When Councillor Evans returned from relief meetings in Edmonton, he chaired a meeting of ratepayers in the Union Hall rather than the town hall.³⁴⁰ Charging that this meeting was to take place at Red “headquarters,” the editor demanded “what next from our clever Mayor?”³⁴¹ Questions were raised regarding who was attending council meetings. Records show that the council was receiving large delegations of unemployed in their small chambers, filling the room to capacity and resulting in some ratepayers having to stand. Pragmatically, these crowds were best facilitated by entering through the attached fire hall rather than the smaller main entrance. This caused the *Enterprise* to denounce council because not only were ratepayers not able to enter the council chambers through the front door, but “the limited space therein [was] occupied by non-ratepayers, or others who have little or no interest there.”³⁴² The argument made by the *Enterprise* was that if a person did not pay municipal taxes – meaning you did not own property – they should not be permitted to take space in a meeting if it meant that an actual ratepayer would not have a seat. The paper was careful to avoid criticizing the system of relief itself, but rather the way the program was

³³⁸ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 September 1933.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 12 October 1933. The change in venue was made to facilitate the large number of expected attendees.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 30 November 1933. Non-ratepayers refers to those who did not pay municipal taxes or business taxes, but had the right to vote in municipal elections. The *Enterprise* believed that because they did not pay taxes, they had no vested interest in the town, and therefore no business in the council chambers.

administered locally: “Blairmore is the only town in the province that is saddled with unnecessary relief, and the authorities in Edmonton and Ottawa are becoming aware of this fact at a slightly late date.”³⁴³ This criticism of municipal spending directly affected the *Enterprise* when the council stopped purchasing services from the paper on the basis that they “cost too much.”³⁴⁴ It appears that after this action by council, Bartlett was annoyed enough to start writing editorials under his own name.

Having decried the taxation and relief policies of the Red administration, the *Enterprise* also conducted a campaign of fear aimed at making ratepayers question what the council would do, given the chance. Religion was the battlefield of choice. In response to an open letter in the *Calgary Herald* from the Anglican Rev. Parkington, Robert Horne tried to distance the Red movement from “the increase in atheism in the Crowsnest Pass” and challenged the Reverend to an open debate on the causes of atheism.³⁴⁵ This challenge spilled over into the local press, and the *Enterprise* happily fanned the flames of religious antagonism. This included sarcastic statements such as “the public are pleased to note from Mayor Knight’s manifesto that on one point at least he agrees God was right,” as well as much more serious articles such as demanding that all those who believe in God stay far away from any known Reds.³⁴⁶ In response to the question “is it all right for a Catholic to be Red?” the *Enterprise* published a reply from the clergy which stated: “Is it all right? No, its [sic] all wrong. The Reds are the apostles of Russia in this country. They are the apostles of destruction. They would destroy order

³⁴³ Ibid. Despite being repeatedly told by the senior levels of government that they were spending too much on relief, the council kept spending on relief programs, financing them through tax initiatives and other sources of revenue.

³⁴⁴ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 9 November 1933.

³⁴⁵ Robert Horne, “The Situation in the Crowsnest Pass,” *Calgary Herald*, 9 March 1933.

³⁴⁶ N.A., “Local and General Items” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 9 March 1933.

and peace amongst us; they would set up here Russia's form of government, the cruellest and most enslaving government yet devised by man. The Reds would destroy every last vestige of religion and banish God from the heart and mind of man."³⁴⁷

When water and electricity were cut off to the United Church at the request of the Minister and an executive member from the Church's Board of Directors because they were doing repairs to the building, the *Enterprise* reported that the council had done so because of their hatred for religion.³⁴⁸ Despite having to print a retraction, the editor lost no opportunity to associate the council with the desire to remove the churches from the social fabric of the community.³⁴⁹ Even after the retraction the editor continued his warnings from the previous week, stating that "this is not getting away from the fact that if the council is to accede to the demands of [Harvey] Murphy and the Workers' Unity League, they would be opposed to churches and avail of any opportunity to condemn or cripple them. Churches and societies are instruments for much good in our community, while the Unity League is a direct opposition."³⁵⁰ The editor made it clear that despite any good works done by the council, it was ultimately something to be feared.

February, 1934 brought with it a new set of municipal elections, and the citizens of Blairmore were presented with distinct alternatives. Reporting that "one of the hottest elections in the history of the town and school district is promised to take place on Monday next," the *Enterprise* informed its readers that there would be a choice between "complete slates nominated by the MWU of C [and] opposed by complete slates of

³⁴⁷ N.A., "What About Being Red?" *Blairmore Enterprise*, 30 March 1933.

³⁴⁸ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, November 9 1933.

³⁴⁹ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 16 November 1933.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. Also see Robert Horne, "The Situation in the Crow's Nest Pass," *Calgary Herald*, 3 March 1933.

Citizens' Coalition candidates."³⁵¹ The Citizens' Coalition challenged the incumbents with a pro-business, Conservative platform similar to that offered by their colleagues in Coleman.³⁵² No matter the outcome, it was announced that "the big 'Election Dance' [would] be held in the Columbus Hall Monday next."³⁵³

The election was not simply a choice between Communist and Conservative candidates, as Knight's administration did not enact a strictly Red agenda. Instead, the election became a referendum on the actions taken by the Red council. Ratepayers were presented with a choice between an interventionist, hands-on approach and a slate that promised a return to a more hands-off municipal government. When the result of the vote was announced, it revealed voter turnout at higher levels than the preceding year, and "by far the heaviest ever polled in the town and district."³⁵⁴ Representatives of the workers were elected to all three available seats on the town council and all but one position on the Blairmore School Board.³⁵⁵

Having first established their legal legitimacy, council pursued two agendas that differentiated it from previous administrations. The electoral approval of this balance represents not only success for the strategy itself, but the basis from which the ratepayers of Blairmore expected their council to move forward. Chapter Three will show that so long as this balance was maintained, the voters were willing to elect and re-elect Red candidates despite their increasingly radical announcements. It will also demonstrate that when one agenda took precedence over the other, as was the case in 1935, support for the

³⁵¹ N.A., "Elections Monday Next," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 8 February 1934.

³⁵² Coleman had been governed by a Conservative Citizens' Coalition council in 1933. They won re-election in 1934.

³⁵³ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 8 February 1934.

³⁵⁴ N.A., "Results of Monday's Election No Surprise," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 15 February 1934.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Also see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 February 1934.

administration deteriorated and the entire program of the Red council was called into question.

Chapter 3

The electoral victory achieved by the Red element in the municipal and school board elections in 1934 confirmed that the voters of Blairmore supported their controversial administration; with 1242 ballots cast for the Red candidates, all were handily elected.³⁵⁶ This gave the administration a mandate to pursue a number of initiatives. In the days immediately following the election, even the *Blairmore Enterprise* cautiously accepted the results, explaining that “wherever we have criticized the administration of the past year, it has been, as we figured, in the interest of the ratepayers at large and not any small faction of them. No doubt this council recognizes this fact.”³⁵⁷ Though this goodwill from the *Enterprise* and business interests of the town was not to last, it was from this high point that the town council proceeded to implement a bold agenda based around several large infrastructure projects. The council initially continued to balance its priorities as described in the previous chapter, making sure that local concerns were taken seriously while pursuing a larger political agenda. This chapter will demonstrate that as 1934 progressed council moved beyond its previous role as advocates and mediators for the working class, to actively pursue a local programme that was more invasive than previous initiatives. This was endorsed by the electorate in 1935, with Mayor Knight returned unopposed and all three council vacancies filled by the acclamation of workers’ candidates. The council and school board then jointly issued a new manifesto which laid out the administration’s priorities for the year. This document demanded a much more radical local agenda, and while previously the participation in

³⁵⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 12 February 1934.

³⁵⁷ N.A., “Results of Monday’s Election No Surprise,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 15 February 1934.

“Red” events had been “optional,” this manifesto called for the mass organization of all sympathetic elements of society in the struggle against capitalism. This chapter will show that the priorities outlined in their second manifesto (1935) were not congruent with the expectations of the electorate. Misjudging their acclamation in 1935, the balance between priorities so carefully formulated over the preceding two terms in office disintegrated, with the council increasingly concentrating on their struggle against war and fascism. It will be argued that this shift in the council’s legislative program, coupled with growing factionalism, changes to the relief program, and unforeseeable scandals, would ultimately lead to the Knight administration’s demise in 1936.

Having drastically changed the way taxes were distributed in 1933 and successfully implemented a program of relief that was more responsive to the needs of the unemployed and underemployed, the council began to broaden its agenda to include three local infrastructure priorities. It explored the possibility of taking ownership of the arena, creating a system of local garbage collection, and identified Victoria Avenue as a priority for infrastructure upgrades. While some aspects of these projects were controversial, others were well received by both the working classes and businessmen alike. The arena was built by selling shares to members of the community, and maintained by the profits from its rental. As the depression dragged on, members of the community were neither able to pay for sporting events nor rent the arena at a price which would allow the arena corporation to operate at a profit or break-even situation, causing the arena board to develop a large amount of operating debt. It was reported that “the suggestion has been made – and it’s a good one – that the town should take over the arena and have the same placed in proper repair for the winter season. The arena could

become one of the town's most valuable assets, as well as a very necessary utility."³⁵⁸ This suggestion was considered in concert with another sporting facility that the mayor felt necessary, a swimming pool.³⁵⁹ It was reported that "the costs need not be very great" if the pool were combined with the arena, however the idea was ultimately shelved.³⁶⁰ Despite public support for the project the mayor felt it was simply too expensive to carry out, opting instead to bankroll tickets for the unemployed to hockey games.³⁶¹

Though residents did not have the money to attend local sporting events, the council did believe they could afford "twenty-five cents per month for the collection of garbage," initiating the garbage collection system that serves the town to this day.³⁶² Previously residents had taken care of their own refuse, burning or otherwise disposing of it. This controversial bylaw marked the first time since the council took power in 1933 that additional taxes had been levied against the working classes to pay for a municipal service. Many ratepayers felt that given the economic depression it was simply not feasible to pay an additional \$3.00 per year for a service they could take care of by themselves. The most controversial elements of the program, however, pertained to its administration. The council called for tenders from would-be garbage collectors, and ultimately chose Mr. F. Link and Mr. F. Goddard, paying them \$80.75 per month.³⁶³

Controversy erupted not only over the amount of money paid to the garbage collectors,

³⁵⁸ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 6 September 1934. This support for the arena is representative of the *Enterprise's* previous argument for investment in assets that would prove a "selling point" in their town boosterism. From their conservative point of view, a series of social programs feeding and providing for the unemployed and underemployed were nothing to brag about, but assets that could attract new business or interest in the town were considerably different.

³⁵⁹ The mayor stated that the town was in need of a swimming pool and council agreed to get estimates for the same. See Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 24 August 1934.

³⁶⁰ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 6 September 1934.

³⁶¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 January 1935.

³⁶² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 21 June 1934.

³⁶³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 10 July 1934. For rate of pay, see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1934. This was the total sum paid by the town. Each of the two garbage collectors and their expenses needed to be paid from this amount.

but also because the pair hired a single man to help with the work, despite the application of several married men for the same position.³⁶⁴ Complaints were received by council from Mr. Wislet of the Unemployed Association that the work should have gone to a man with a family who was unemployed, but the administration declined to get involved.³⁶⁵

The issue of garbage collection continued to be a thorn in the side of the council even after initial problems had been worked out. Having collected the garbage at a rate of \$80.75 for the summer months, Link and Goddard returned to council in October declaring that it was not possible to collect the garbage for the amount of money the town was paying them. With the threat of a suspension of collection services, the town agreed to increase the amount of total expenditure to \$130.00 per month, effectively subsidizing the operation by 197 households.³⁶⁶ The already-unpopular service was also criticized for the impracticality of the recommended garbage cans. It was reported that “a number of people viewing the receptacle [on display in the window of A. Morrency’s tin shop] are of the opinion that it is far too large, and that less than a dozen of its size would be sufficient for the whole of the town for a week.”³⁶⁷ Pointing out that the recommended garbage can was council-approved for household use, the *Enterprise* went on to state that “if any householder has a weekly accumulation sufficient to fill the can proposed by council, there is surely something wrong somewhere.”³⁶⁸ Though trash collection continued at Blairmore from this point forward, the program was criticized as unnecessary, expensive, and impractical at the time of its implementation.

³⁶⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 10 July 1934.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 1 October 1934. It was stated that the sum of \$80.75 was equal to the money collected by the town for garbage services, therefore the garbage collection was breaking even. When the pay was increased to \$130.00, the difference is \$49.25, when divided by the 25 cents paid per household represents an increase of 197 households.

³⁶⁷ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 31 May 1934.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

Council also undertook massive improvements to the town's main thoroughfare Victoria Avenue. Part of Highway #3, Victoria Avenue was in rough shape by spring of 1935, with the council writing to the Hon. O.L. McPherson, Minister responsible for infrastructure, to demand that improvements be forthcoming.³⁶⁹ Despite receiving a letter indicating that "a provincial engineer would be in shortly to look at it," no repairs were done and council took matters into their own hands, making improvements to the existing sidewalks and then to the road itself.³⁷⁰ Breaking with its criticism of municipal spending, the *Enterprise* called the work "entirely necessary," reporting "a determined effort to improve the streets of the town can be seen in various directions... sidewalks of shale and plank are also being installed, and the work is considerably relieving the unemployment situation."³⁷¹ While this support for improvements represents a departure from the larger anti-Knight position of the paper, it is in line with Editor Bartlett's demands that the council stop spending money on direct relief and use it instead in town improvements that might attract further monetary investment. For the conservative Bartlett, the upgrades represented progress, unlike the money spent on direct relief.

This unqualified support abruptly ended when the council announced it wanted to do more than simply upgrade roadways or improve the sidewalks: it wanted unofficially to rename Victoria Avenue in honour of Tim Buck, the imprisoned leader of the Communist Party of Canada. The street could not be officially renamed as it was a provincial highway, and as such was not technically within council's jurisdiction, but that

³⁶⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 31 May 1934.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 May 1934; *Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes*, 14 June 1934; *Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes*, 23 May 1934.

did not stop them.³⁷² During the public rededication ceremony A.E. Smith of Toronto, Secretary of the Workers' Unity League, cut the tape, broke a bottle of ginger ale and pronounced Tim Buck Boulevard open to traffic.³⁷³ The town tried to make it a boulevard by widening it, adding streetlights and installing a new sprinkler system at the cost of \$80 per block.³⁷⁴ Flowers were planted along the route, and the council finished the job by ordering two large, electrical "Tim Buck Boulevard" signs to be installed at the beginning and the end of the Boulevard.³⁷⁵ *Maclean's* reported that:

Whereas Victoria Avenue boasted only five ordinary streetlights, the boulevard is a blaze of glory at night, being illuminated by a row of about eighty arc-lights of high candle power. A new project is underway at present to erect at either end of the boulevard a large neon sign bearing the name "Tim Buck," and announcing to all and sundry that here is no mean city but one which proudly boasts the communist leader as patron saint.³⁷⁶

Having established this monument to Tim Buck, the mayor instructed the secretary to draw up a bylaw that "impos[ed] parallel parking and [another] bylaw concerning driving to danger the public, fine for first offence under the parking bylaw \$1.00, and for driving to danger the public \$10.00."³⁷⁷ Driving on the sidewalks with either a bicycle or automobile was also banned.³⁷⁸ The council showed it was serious

³⁷² N.A., "Actions of Blairmore School Board Arouse Anger," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 29 November 1934.

³⁷³ Florence Elder Miles, "Is This A Soviet?" *MacLean's Magazine*, 15 April 1935. The exact date of the ceremony is not known, as the local paper refused to cover the event, and it was not explicitly dealt with in council chambers (there could be no motion, as they could not officially change the name). So while it is possible to track expenditures made by council in creating Tim Buck Boulevard, an absolutely accurate date cannot be established. The rededication is described as "early autumn" by Miles, and is referenced with increasing frequency in other papers after the 13 September 1934.

³⁷⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 August 1934. Also see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 July 1934.

³⁷⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 July 1935.

³⁷⁶ Miles, "Is This a Soviet?"

³⁷⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 August 1934.

³⁷⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 21 June 1934.

about the enforcement of these bylaws by reading them a first, second and third time and passing them only four days later.³⁷⁹

The Boulevard was not meant for everyone to enjoy, however. When the sprinkler system and streetlight improvements to Tim Buck Boulevard were announced, the West Canadian Collieries asked that the amenities be extended the length of the road to include the Westside residences occupied by the mine managers and other mine officials. In the discussion that followed, town council decided that “improvements be made only to the east side of the CPR spurline... West Canadian Collieries’ request to improvements to the Westside not granted.”³⁸⁰ If the editorial staff at the *Enterprise* were to be believed, this was no great loss for the WCC. The *Enterprise* refused to print an article about the new boulevard, but did comment in the Local and General Items section that “the Town of Coleman is not throwing away money on monuments to the likes of Tim Buck.”³⁸¹ The newspaper even went to the trouble of creating a fake news story from thirteen years in the future critical of the new parking bylaw and the street itself, reporting that “‘John Oakes,’ a married man, was fined \$25 and costs for parking his car one hour and ten minutes beneath the pansy trees in Tim Buck’s Boulevard.”³⁸²

Tim Buck Boulevard and garbage collection captured the headlines, but the relief programs continued to occupy a large part of council’s regular business. Residents continued to come to the council seeking specific items to help them through everyday life. Mr. D. Mills had no stove and had not been able to locate a used one for his home, so he came to council seeking help. Council agreed to find him a used stove at reasonable

³⁷⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 24 August 1934.

³⁸⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 August 1934.

³⁸¹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 13 September 1934.

³⁸² *Ibid.*

cost, and when they could not locate one either they granted Mills the sum of \$20.00 to purchase a new one.³⁸³ A similar grant was made to Mr. A. Pondelicek Sr. who had appeared before council to request repairs for his artificial limb.³⁸⁴ The council likewise approved the application of Mr. Canet who asked to have the outstanding taxes on his property cancelled, “to facilitate the sale and enable him to go to Calgary for treatment of his sight.”³⁸⁵ Free memberships to the Blairmore Public Library were provided to anyone on relief.³⁸⁶

Provisions were also made for those who with tax arrears predating 1932. Previously these debts had to be paid in cash or special permission from council received to work them off (at the town rate of fifty cents per hour). However, it was now announced that anyone who wished to work debt off would be allowed to do so without special approval.³⁸⁷ Knight and his administration also continued to monitor matters of public health, receiving another report from the provincial Inspector of Dairies subsequent to the complaint lodged with him in 1933.³⁸⁸ Similarly, when a complaint was made that the sausage factory had no functioning cesspool, the Chief of Police was dispatched to assess of the situation and recommend further action as necessary.³⁸⁹

Demands from the commercial concerns of the town were also given consideration. In an effort to reduce costs, Mayor Knight “interviewed T. Eaton and Co. in Calgary with regard to supplying clothing, and had been guaranteed 10% off the

³⁸³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 April 1934.

³⁸⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 November 1934.

³⁸⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1934.

³⁸⁶ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 May 1934.

³⁸⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 September 1934.

³⁸⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1934.

³⁸⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 31 March 1934.

catalogue price.”³⁹⁰ At this time clothing for the unemployed was purchased with funds from the federal and provincial governments and distributed by council to the unemployed. Despite the potential savings offered by the Toronto-based company, a contract was not pursued because “local merchants had registered complaints against supplies being bought from others than taxpayers.”³⁹¹

These sorts of requests and resolutions are similar to the solutions provided in the first year of the Knight administration, but 1934 saw the introduction of different expectations. Council had previously acted on a moral obligation to help all who were in need. This changed in 1934: the individuals in question were required to demonstrate not only need, but also that they were seeking to address their problem outside the council chambers. Mr. Mills, for example, tried to find a stove before going to council and Mr. Pondelicek could not have anticipated needing repairs to his prosthesis. When cases arose where the applicants did not appear to have tried to help themselves before coming before council or demonstrated that they felt entitled to relief, Knight and his colleagues adopted a firmer approach. When Mr. Wislet of the Unemployed Association enquired why Mr. F. Amatto had not been issued his regular relief payment, “it was stated F. Amatto had refused to work when called upon to do so. Mayor Knight stated that in that case Mr. Amatto would be off relief until he was willing to work.”³⁹² When Mr. J. Howe came to council to complain that his relief payments were not enough to allow him to purchase a pair of shoes for his daughter, the council, rather than make up the difference as it might have previously, “informed [Howe] that this was the Red Cross price and must be abided

³⁹⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 26 January 1936.

³⁹¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 26 January 1936. This decision angered Mr. Buck of the provincial relief department, who demanded that the municipality undertake the least expensive option.

³⁹² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 15 October 1934.

by.”³⁹³ When Howe protested, “Knight informed him that he could work [with the relief scale] or go off relief.”³⁹⁴ Mrs. J. Stella’s request to have her shoes re-soled was refused altogether.³⁹⁵

In cases where the validity of relief applications were in question, the council again changed strategies. Previously temporary relief was issued immediately while council investigated the application, but by 2 July 1935 council was demanding that applicants “produce statements of his earnings before he is issued relief.”³⁹⁶ In 1933, council had provided aid immediately in the interests of the humanity of the individual in question, but in 1934 the council now began to judge the worthiness of the applicants.

1934 represented the introduction of a moral standard for the delivery of relief, and also the beginning of a more active legislative agenda. Previously, the council had simply responded to concerns brought forward by members of the public, and when the council did initiate change it was in regard to taxes or other initiatives aimed directly at the upper classes. This new agenda affected everyone. Building on previous action taken to ensure the town’s supply of commercial dairy products was indeed safe, the council decided to inspect all cows within its jurisdiction.³⁹⁷ Having found eight families living with more than one cow within the town limits, Mayor Knight “suggested that all cows be Tuberculosis tested and registered.”³⁹⁸ Council insisted that vaccination and

³⁹³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 23 April 1934.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 June 1935.

³⁹⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 July 1935.

³⁹⁷ While action was requested in relation to a specific dairy in 1933, there is no record of complaints being made against animals in town.

³⁹⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 20 August 1934.

registration of all cattle be completed within a one month period, including “outside dairies selling milk in town.”³⁹⁹

Residents’ health was also invoked when council sought to regulate the town’s sex trade. Hill Sixty, as it was called, was located between the townsites of Blairmore and Frank, and was well-known to contain two brothels. Though Knight did not seek to end prostitution, his council demanded “that the Chief of Police notify the two landladies that they and all the girls on the premises must have a photo of themselves, to which is attached a certificate certifying they have been medically examined at least once every week.”⁴⁰⁰ Though professing the action was in the interest of public health, the *Enterprise* asked “why such interest on the part of the town council in Hill Sixty? The town grading apparatus is trying to make the approaches easier.”⁴⁰¹

The actions of council were slightly less understandable when it came to beer. Despite no public complaints being registered with the municipality, the town council moved to stop the intoxication of those on relief. Circulating a complete list of men on government assistance to every drinking establishment and hotel in the Crowsnest Pass, the administration sought to stop those receiving public funds from drinking them away.⁴⁰² It is apparent town hall’s request that bartenders refuse service to those on assistance was not implemented, for two weeks later the town secretary was “instructed to write to the Alberta Liquor Commission regarding people on relief being supplied with beer in the Greenhill Hotel Bar.”⁴⁰³ This issue is explored by Craig Heron, who argues

³⁹⁹ Ibid. The council’s demands of outside dairies could not be enforced in any way, as not only were the owners of such dairies outside the jurisdiction of the town council, but so was the ability to make laws concerning public health. The provincial government did not enforce Blairmore’s demands.

⁴⁰⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 31 May 1934.

⁴⁰¹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 August 1934.

⁴⁰² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 July 1935.

⁴⁰³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 July 1935.

that an attempt to stop relief recipients from drinking was an affront to “the customs and rituals [that] developed around the consumption of booze.”⁴⁰⁴ In the working classes, these traditions were rooted in the prohibition of the preceding decade, where drinking “symbolized a collective defiance of bourgeois efforts to control them.”⁴⁰⁵ Previously this insubordination had been directed at the social and moral regulations of capitalist governments, but it is evident that they were transferable to any authority who sought to regulate the intake of alcohol.

In keeping with this more interventionist agenda, 1934 also marked the first time that council laid charges against private individuals. When council learned that Mr. A. Pondelicek Jr. had received \$81.56 from an insurance payout, for example, there was commotion in council chambers.⁴⁰⁶ Mr. Pondelicek was on relief, and it was reported that “he had made no report to the Relief Committee about receiving this money, [and] also when signing the application he stated that he did not have insurance.”⁴⁰⁷ On the motion of Councillor Pagnucco it was decided that the individual “be prosecuted for obtaining relief under false pretences.”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁴ Craig Heron, “The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890-1946,” *Canadian Historical Review* (86), 427.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid. Prohibition and the temperance movement never took hold in the Crowsnest Pass, with Blairmore at the centre of a large and profitable rum-running operation. The message of abstinence (coupled with evangelical Christianity) championed by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union was perceived as a threat to the autonomy of working class men, and never seriously developed in Blairmore. The strength of this social attachment can be seen later in the 1930s when the town’s unionized bartenders went on strike for higher wages; despite being asked to stay away from non-union beer parlours, the strike was unsuccessful because miners and other workers were simply unwilling to abstain from the social aspects of drinking. See appendix 9. For a larger discussion of the temperance movement, see the collection of essays on the subject in Cheryl Krasnick (ed.), *Drink in Canada: Historical Essays* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993).

⁴⁰⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 July 1934.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

The council also acted against the only non-Red member of the Blairmore School Board, local solicitor and noted Mason S.G. Bannan.⁴⁰⁹ Charging that Bannan had stolen electricity from the town by connecting his line before the meter, charges of theft were laid against him. While these charges were originally upheld by the magistrate at Blairmore, Bannan won on appeal to the District Court in Fort MacLeod. Furious, the mayor and council alleged that they were denied justice by the courts because the administration was Red, and issued the following notice to the citizens of Blairmore:

You are hereby warned that from midnight Friday April 13th, 1934, the Town of Blairmore will discontinue to supply electricity. The action has been brought about by the inability of the town to obtain justice in cases where customers are taking juice from ahead of the meter. Any complaints should be registered with the Attorney-General. Signed, Mayor and Council of Blairmore.⁴¹⁰

Though the Knight town hall did not follow through on the threat to discontinue electricity to the residents of Blairmore, they were swiftly condemned for having made them at all. The *Enterprise* asked “why worry about the drastic action threatened by the mayor and council? It’s just their natural way of expressing love for the people,” and even Communist organizer Harvey Murphy called the threat “crazy.”⁴¹¹

Refusing to acknowledge their loss, the town appealed the decision to the Supreme Court at Lethbridge. In his ruling, Mr. Justice Simmons found against the Town of Blairmore, awarding the defendant \$100 and expenses.⁴¹² The judge also took the time to chastise the municipal government for threatening to cut off power to the residents of

⁴⁰⁹ Bannan was a highly placed member of the Masonic Lodge in Blairmore. He is pictured wearing the apron of the Grand Master of the Grand [Masonic] Lodge of Alberta in Blairmore Lions Club, *The Story of Blairmore, Alberta: 1911-1961* (Lethbridge: Lethbridge Herald, 1961), 45. This apron is worn by individuals who have achieved the office of Grand Master of Alberta, which is essentially the ‘President’ of the Alberta chapter of the fraternity. This is the same Bannan who refused to pay his increase in business taxes in 1933. See Page 74, footnote 60.

⁴¹⁰ N.A., “Here’s the Latest Rave!,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 12 April 1934.

⁴¹¹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 12 April 1934. For more on Murphy, refer to page 88, footnote 115.

⁴¹² N.A., “Bannan Wins Against Town of Blairmore,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 25 October 1934.

Blairmore when the decision at MacLeod had not gone in their favour, stating that “actions which might endanger the life and property of citizens would not be tolerated, whatever one might obtain in Moscow.”⁴¹³ Despite this setback and public rebuke, Knight made himself available to the media. In an interview with the *Lethbridge Herald* he pointed out “the splendid financial position of the town of Blairmore. Practically all debt and all debentures have been paid. Blairmore is almost a model town, he declared. Ninety percent of citizens are behind the municipal government...”⁴¹⁴ Despite the legal setback, the council did not stop prosecuting individuals for stealing power. Only a few months later, the council brought similar charges against Mr. M. Giacomuzzi.⁴¹⁵

In spite of this more conservative approach to residents’ demands, Knight and his colleagues also continued to pursue an active Red agenda. When J. Krkosky Jr. applied on behalf of the Red-affiliated Mine Workers’ Union of Canada for “assistance in sending Messrs. Norville, Salva and Canet to Edmonton with a view to making changes to the personnel of the Workman’s Compensation Board,” Knight and his colleagues readily agreed, providing \$50 towards the costs of the trip.⁴¹⁶ The men also left Blairmore not only with the requested funding, but with a resolution proposed by Communist Party of Canada worker Harvey Murphy and endorsed by council stating:

That the Council of the Town of Blairmore, after hearing the request of the delegation from the Mine Workers’ Union of Canada Local No. 1, endorses the demand of the miners, that the present Compensation Board be dismissed because of their heartless attitude towards the workman injured, and resolves to call upon the Government of set up another Board where the workers shall be represented by elected workers.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹³ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 1 November 1934.

⁴¹⁴ N.A., “Blairmore Mayor Proud of his Town,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 25 October 1934.

⁴¹⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 June 1934. It is not known what the outcome of the charges were. It was not brought up in the *Enterprise* or subsequent council meeting minutes.

⁴¹⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 5 March 1934. The MWUC was affiliated with the Workers Unity League, which was backed by the Communist Party of Canada.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

The council also endorsed a resolution from the delegation of the single unemployed that “we will not enter the governments Slave Camps.”⁴¹⁸ Thus while the resolutions were radical in their tone, they also still resounded with the working class in Blairmore, being directly applicable to comprehensible local problems and issues.

Council continued to pass resolutions protesting conditions encountered by other radical groups across the country. Overnight lettergrams were sent to the miners at Flin Flon and Noranda, supporting them in their struggle against mine owners and condemning the actions of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.⁴¹⁹ Council again took up the case of known Communists who were facing persecution, calling for the release of Tim Buck and expressing outrage over the tarring and feathering experienced by George Palmer of Innisfree, Alberta for his political beliefs.⁴²⁰

Knight also concerned himself with the struggle against war and fascism, and with Mr. C. Shaw wrote an appeal that is worth quoting at length:

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.

⁴¹⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 23 April 1934 and Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1934. Flin Flon, Manitoba and Noranda, Quebec were both mining towns where miners were striking because of wage reductions. In the case of Flin Flon, the company reduced wages by 18% for single miners and 15% for married miners, and the radical tactics of the ensuing strike were associated with the Communist Party of Canada. The workforce in Noranda was largely dominated by “immigrants” (ie, non French-Canadians), who also went out over wages. This situation differed, however, because the local French population did not support the strike, demanding that strikers not be allowed to return to work and that a new French-Canadian staff be hired instead. At Noranda, the “immigrants” on strike were also associated with the Communist movement For more on Flin Flon see Robson, “Strike in the Single Enterprise Community: Flin Flon, 1934,” *Labour/Le Travail* 12 (1983): 63-68. Regarding Noranda see Guy Gaudreau, “Les Causes D’une Participation a la Greve: Grevistes et Non-Grevistes de la Noranda Mines Ltd., Juin 1934,” *Labour/Le Travail* 44 (1999): 47-70 or Daniel Gnelday, “Dependency, Class Relations and Politics in Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec,” (Ph.D. Diss., Carleton University, 1999), 570.

⁴²⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 August 1934. Regarding Mr. Palmer, please see N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 22 November 1934, N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 29 November 1934 and Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 19 November 1934. A reading of both the *Enterprise* and the Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes indicate that Mr. George Palmer was tarred and feathered by a group on unknown individuals for openly being a Communist.

On Oct. 6th a national congress against war and Fascism will be held in Toronto. Delegates from all parts of Canada will assemble to lay plans for the building of a nation-wide movement to prevent war and Fascism. The rapid preparations for another Imperialistic war are instanced by the increased production of armaments in all countries, feverish preparations for war to go forward, one disarmament conference after another has broken down and failed to curb the production of weapons... There are many manifestations of preparations for war and Fascism in Canada and the USA. Steel and munitions plants are working full time. The industrial codes, which take from workers the right to strike and makes Labour Unions appendages of the state, are being put into full force... In Britain, France and the USA, and some parts of Canada, the movement against war and Fascism is being rapidly built. Liberal-minded members of the working and middle class are working together and appointing persons to write and speak publicly against the horrors of war and Fascism... the Crow's Nest Pass should take part in this movement. We therefore appeal to you to attend the conference against war and Fascism, which will be held in the Blairmore school house at 8pm on September 20th, 1934. Delegates to the national congress, which will be held on Oct. 6th in Toronto, should be elected at this conference. [signed] W. Knight and C. Shaw on behalf of the Initiative Committee.⁴²¹

When the Blairmore Committee Against War and Fascism came to council seeking \$50 towards the conference, it was granted despite the council telling a group of unemployed men at the same meeting there was no extra money available for increased relief.⁴²²

The Blairmore school board also unapologetically pursued its own Red agenda when it decided to make the anniversary of the Russian Revolution a public holiday for all school children and board staff. The move caused a backlash from not only the *Enterprise*, but also in other newspapers and even in *Maclean's* magazine. The *Regina Leader Post* declared the decision to be “unprecedented in the educational life of this whole continent [that] a duly constituted Canadian school board has granted the children a holiday on the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. ‘Hail Lenin’ the board says in effect...” while the *Fernie Free Press* questioned, “if it isn’t time for [Blairmore] to be

⁴²¹ N.A., “Local Appeal for Fight Against War and Fascism,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 September 1934.

⁴²² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 15 October 1934.

transported lock, stock and barrel to Russia where most of its citizens seem to belong.”⁴²³ The situation was further enflamed by the board’s refusal to grant a holiday on Armistice Day or for the royal wedding of the Duke of Kent to Princess Marina.⁴²⁴ “To put it mildly,” *Maclean’s* editorialized, these “civic acts were rather startling, but it is not speaking too strongly to say that the action of the school board was an affront to the sensibilities of all thinking Canadians.”⁴²⁵

The holiday brought not only protest from the press, but petitions to the Premier and Minister of Education. The Women’s Conservative Association of Calgary passed a resolution to be forwarded to the provincial government. The resolution demanded:

Whereas we have heard with amazement that school children at Blairmore were given a holiday in commemoration of the 17th anniversary of the Red revolution in Russia

And whereas official observances of the national holidays of any foreign powers is unprecedented and inadvisable

And whereas the Russian Government has encouraged blasphemous atheism, looseness of marital and family ties, and ruthless disregard for human life

And whereas the schools in Blairmore are maintained in part by Government grants to which all taxpayers in the province contribute,

This Association strongly protests against the granting of this holiday as calculated to poison the minds of children against Canadian institutions, and respectfully but firmly insists that such holidays not be permitted in the future.⁴²⁶

The petition was acknowledged by the Hon. Perrin Baker, Minister of Education for the province of Alberta, who stated that while the action taken at Blairmore was offensive to many in the province, it was not in fact illegal. Baker advised the Women’s Conservative

⁴²³ N.A., “A ‘Red’ School Board,” *Regina Leader Post* cited in *Blairmore Enterprise*, 22 November 1934; *Fernie Free Press* cited in the *Blairmore Enterprise*, 6 December 1934.

⁴²⁴ Florence Elder Miles, 22.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

Association of Calgary that his office had written to the Blairmore school board informing them of the inappropriate and offensive nature of the holiday, but he also admitted “a school board has the authority to declare any day a holiday, subject to the limitations prescribed in the School Act, [and] it was never contemplated that this prerogative would be used by a public body to commemorate officially a foreign revolution...”⁴²⁷ The Minister indicated that his government “expected the action would not again be repeated,” and local MLA George Cruikshank introduced amendments to the School Act which were designed to keep control of education firmly in the hands of British subjects; the amendment read in part that “the expression elector shall not include any person who is not a British subject.”⁴²⁸ Perhaps the most reasonable commentary came from the editorial earlier cited in the *Regina Leader Post*, whose author commented that “it is possible that there will be indignant stamping of feet across Canada. There may be ‘demands’ about it... [but] if Blairmore, Alberta has a ‘Red’ school board, we are not sure that anything can be done about it to make it another colour. Certain types of effort might change it, but it is doubtful if anything suggestive of force would.”⁴²⁹

If there was any real opposition to the Council’s actions building, it was not evident in February 1935 when the Red slate proposed for both the school board and town council were returned by acclamation. The Red council’s policies may have appeared controversial, especially to observers outside Blairmore, but there was no denying that the town was in excellent shape financially after two years of “Red”

⁴²⁷ Ibid. Section 145 (3) of the School Act of 1931, Chapter 32 of the Statutes of Alberta states that “it shall be at the direction of the Board to permit other holidays, but not to exceed one such day in any month, and one exceeding one day at a time,” cited in Miles, 22.

⁴²⁸ N.A., “Bill Designed to Keep Control of School Affairs,” in *Alberta Scrapbook Hansard* (Edmonton: King’s Printers, 1935), 152. On March 21, 1935 George Cruikshank, MLA, introduced changes to the Towns and Villages Act that would also make it illegal to declare civic holidays in honour of Communists. See Government of Alberta, *Alberta Scrapbook Hansard* (Edmonton: King’s Printer, 1935).

⁴²⁹ N.A., “A Red School Board,” *Regina Leader Post*, 22 November 1934.

administration. In January of 1935 the Town of Blairmore announced that it had an audited bank balance of over \$18,000 at fiscal year end.⁴³⁰ This was critical, as it prevented the provincial government from having a legal excuse to appoint an administrator for the town.⁴³¹ This compared to a surplus of \$2109.41 at Coleman, a “surprise” surplus of \$6000.00 at Vulcan, and an administration in receivership at Fernie.⁴³² The *Coleman Journal* offered its opinion, stating that “people get the type of government they deserve, therefore it is presumed Blairmore is content.”⁴³³ In comparison to the acclamations at Blairmore, fourteen candidates were vying for six vacancies in Coleman.⁴³⁴

The first week of the administration’s third term certainly was considerably more eventful. Jointly issuing a second manifesto, the council and school board reflected on the accomplishments and shortfalls of 1934 and laid out their agenda for the coming year.⁴³⁵

Among the achievements noted were the attendance of A.E. Cross, Secretary of the

⁴³⁰ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 February 1935. For a detailed breakdown, please refer to the Town of Blairmore tax assessments, Crowsnest Pass Historical Association Archives, accession Number: 92.14.40 Municipality.

⁴³¹ N.A., “That Blairmore Trouble,” *Medicine Hat News*, 28 February 1933.

⁴³² N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 31 January 1934. The posting of a surplus at this time was not normal for most municipalities. As Eric Strikwerda argues, the federal authorities believed the Depression would be short-lived, and therefore massive relief programs or funding targeted at unemployment relief were initially not forthcoming; the burden of these expenses rested with the individual town and city councils. Even when the breadth of the problem was acknowledged, federal and provincial funding was not sufficient to meet local demands for help. Though the municipalities only supplied one third of the money allotted to relief programs, they were responsible for operating them and many accumulated large debts doing so. For towns like Fernie, it was a choice between having the unemployed starve in the hobo city or accumulate more debt, to the point that debt maintenance was unsustainable. Situations were hardest for large municipalities, as individuals from the outlying areas moved into cities seeking work; in Saskatchewan this led to an official “back-to-the-land” movement. See Todd McCallum, “‘Still Raining, Market Still Rotten’: Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression in Vancouver,” (PhD. Dissertation., Queens University, 2004), 578; Wayne Norton, “Trusteeship: The Provincial Administration of Fernie, 1935-1946,” in *A World Apart: the Crowsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 131-146; Erik J. Strikwerda, “From Short-Term Emergency to Long-Term Crisis: Public Works Projects in Saskatoon, 1929-1932,” *Prairie Forum* 26, no. 2 (2001): 169-168; Dawn Bowen, “‘Forward to the Farm’: The Back-to-the-Land Movement as a Relief Initiative in Saskatchewan During the Great Depression,” *Prairie Forum* 20 No. 2 (1995): 207-229.

⁴³³ Cited in N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 February 1935.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ For the full text of the Red Manifesto, see appendix 10.

MWUC at the rededication of Tim Buck Boulevard; protesting the conditions in the relief camps, and providing cash for delegates to the National Conference Against War and Fascism.⁴³⁶ There was no mention of council's relief efforts at the local level. When analyzing their shortcomings, the document noted that in some cases the Reds "did not take full advantage of their elected positions to organize and mobilize the workers," pledging to address this problem by pursuing a higher degree of integration between the MWUC, the workers, the school board, and the town council.⁴³⁷

This manifesto symbolizes a significant departure from the balance previously pursued by council, amounting to a redefinition of the power bloc by the ruling administration. Perhaps feeling emboldened by their support at the polls in the preceding two years, the council misjudged their electoral acclamation as an endorsement of their radical actions, for which they were notorious outside Blairmore. By issuing this second manifesto, Knight and his associates effectively announced that they perceived the greatest threat to the citizens of Blairmore no longer to be capitalism and its incarnations within federal and provincial governmental policy, but the emergence of war and fascism as a threat to the world. By listing in detail what they were going to do to prevent this new threat, the council inversely ignored all that had been achieved in the preceding two terms in office, thereby minimizing the positive role they had played in the past. While

⁴³⁶ N.A., "Blairmore Issues an Absolutely Red Manifesto," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 February 1935.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. Criticism and Self-Criticism were important parts of Communist political liturgy during the Third Period; this affected both the rank and file Party members as well as the Party leaders. Tim Buck, for example, was reprimanded on his first trip to Moscow for not being sufficiently self-critical, while members of the Communist Party of Canada were expected to be "sufficiently self-critical" if they were to remain card carrying members. For more on this experience in an international context, see Berthold Unfried, "Foreign Communists and the Mechanisms of Soviet Cadre Formation on the USSR," in *Stalin's Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union*, ed. Kevin McDermott and Barry McLoughlin (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillian, 2003), 176-179. Regarding the Canadian experience, see Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 309-311.

the effects of governmental policy over the preceding ten years of depression were obvious to all in Blairmore, the threat posed by war and fascism was more abstract and difficult to conceptualize in a local context. Because of the parameters of the newly defined power bloc – an international and ideological context – it would become increasingly difficult to link the local unemployment, underemployment, and suffering to the external elements with which the council would do battle.

The administration wasted no time in the implementation of its new agenda by declaring a civic holiday to honour Tim Buck.⁴³⁸ Recently released from prison, Buck traveled to the town on 21 March, and spoke to a large audience. Council had given all town employees and school children the day off.⁴³⁹ Beatrice Peressini, daughter of former Red councillor R. Peressini, recalls that she was called upon from the crowd, “and I gave Tim Buck a beautiful bouquet of flowers.”⁴⁴⁰ It was later noted that “many expressed themselves as surprised to find that Buck was not as radical in his speech as they expected he would be... his talk throughout was very interesting and won him a host of new friends.”⁴⁴¹

Though there was some measure of support for Buck when he arrived in Blairmore, the council’s shift away from a local agenda was not as popular. Fifty men from the Single Unemployed Association came before the town council complaining that the relief offered by the municipal Relief Committee was “not acceptable,” and requested the mayor and councillors to state their position on the matter.⁴⁴² Despite identifying the

⁴³⁸ N.A., “Civic Holiday for Buck,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 21 March 1935. Also see Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 18 March 1935.

⁴³⁹ N.A., “Civic Holiday for Buck,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 21 March 1935.

⁴⁴⁰ Beatrice Peressini interview, 5-6.

⁴⁴¹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 28 March 1935.

⁴⁴² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes (Special Meeting), 14 February 1935.

plight of the unemployed as a priority, Knight startled the group by defending his administration, arguing relief was “not the [sole] responsibility of the town, [but] the responsibility of the town and the two senior governments.”⁴⁴³ Though Councillor Morgan questioned if “the government can conscript men, why not the wealth to look after them,” the council unanimously agreed that the current relief schedule was appropriate for both the recipients and the town in terms of benefits and cost.⁴⁴⁴ The council then took the unprecedented measure of declaring they were “unanimous in taking the step that these boys are the responsibility of the Dominion Government,” and that they should be “handed over to the RCMP at the nearest contact point with the Dominion Government.”⁴⁴⁵ While it is not known if the individuals were actually handed over to the federal government, the council’s abrupt about-face is indicative of changing priorities.

Ironically, only one month later the council went to the public seeking the increased financial support for which the unemployed had been chastised. On 4 March 1935, the council passed a motion to enact a bylaw providing payments of \$2.00 for the mayor and each councillor for every meeting they attended, with an additional provision for “\$3.00 to the Mayor while supervising the laying out of town works: Secretary instructed to hold a plebiscite on March 25th.”⁴⁴⁶ This brought immediate criticism from the *Enterprise*, and other newspapers in the province. The *Calgary Albertan* editorialized, “Blairmore is the town from whence we hear more than from anywhere else about the oppression of the workers; it is also the town whose councillors have devised an

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 March 1935.

ingenious means of adding to the oppression for their own profit.”⁴⁴⁷ The *Enterprise* questioned the financial ability of the town to pay the proposed per diem, stating that

there isn't a town on the map that has been howling more for assistance from other governments than the town of Blairmore... how can anyone figure out that the mayor and council, none of them in dire need, should undertake to pay themselves from the funds that the ratepayers in general cannot dig up themselves?⁴⁴⁸

While the *Calgary Albertan* mused about “what an enthusiastic inspector of public works the present or any future mayor will become at three dollars an inspection,” they also enunciated the question on the minds of many watching the proposed bylaw: “what will the propriety and ratepayers have to say about it?”⁴⁴⁹

Under section 382 of the Towns and Villages Act of Alberta, a two-thirds vote was required to endorse the proposal. When the matter was put to a vote only one-third of those casting ballots supported it.⁴⁵⁰ Although this defeat did not legally affect the status of the council, it was the first time since taking power that the administration could not claim to have the support of the public in their actions.

Council had intended to hold another referendum shortly after the plebiscite on their wages to determine the ratepayers' feelings regarding hospital services in the town. As early as March of 1934, Knight had sent an invitation to his counterpart in Coleman, proposing that they work together to purchase and run a regional hospital on a non-profit basis for the benefit of the workers.⁴⁵¹ When it was reported that Coleman was “quite satisfied with the hospital accommodations furnished them... and not very seriously

⁴⁴⁷ N.A., “What Will the Voters Say?” *Calgary Albertan*, 21 March 1935.

⁴⁴⁸ W.J. Bartlett, “Editorial,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 March 1935.

⁴⁴⁹ N.A., “What Will the Voters Say?” *Calgary Albertan*, 21 March 1935.

⁴⁵⁰ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 21 February 1935 and N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 21 March 1935.

⁴⁵¹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 8 March 1934.

interested in Mayor Knight's proposal," the mayor sought support from the Blairmore School District.⁴⁵² After the board decided to back the proposal in the amount of \$2500, howls of protest arose from the *Enterprise* that not only had a municipal hospital "never been endorsed by ratepayers," but also that the school board had committed funds "collected or collectable for school purposes only."⁴⁵³

Despite this financial commitment by the school board, the council could not come up with the money for the project (estimated at approximately \$7000), without liquidating assets or going into debt.⁴⁵⁴ Determined that the project go forward, Knight negotiated with the only party that was willing to give the town a loan in the middle of the Depression, the West Canadian Collieries.⁴⁵⁵ Noting that the town "would have to guarantee any loan received from the West Canadian Collieries" against its saleable assets, it was decided by council to pursue this option.⁴⁵⁶ The only question left was the legality of the move to secure new debt to finance the hospital, with Councillor Olson

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 23 May 1934 and N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 8 March 1934.

⁴⁵⁴ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 22 November 1934.

⁴⁵⁵ Conventional banks were unwilling to give new loans to individuals or municipal governments at this time, as many were forfeiting their payments; Fernie, for example, went bankrupt and was forced into trusteeship. The problem was not limited to a specific province or region, but was a national issue. This unwillingness to loan money except to the most qualified borrowers and the ruthlessly deflationary tactics employed by the charter banks led Prime Minister Bennett to call the MacMillan Commission (Royal Commission on Banking and Currency) which recommended the establishment of the Bank of Canada to stabilize the economy. For more on the situation at Fernie, see Wayne Norton, "Trusteeship: A Public Administration at Fernie, 1935-1946" in *A World Apart: The Crownsnest Communities of Alberta and British Columbia* (Kamloops: Plateau Press, 2002), 131-146. For a recent investigation of the banking industry during the Depression, see Richard S. Grossman, "The Shoe That Didn't Drop: Explaining Banking Stability During the Great Depression," *Journal of Economic History* 54 no. 3: 654-683. For more on the emergence of the Bank of Canada as a reaction to the Great Depression, see George S. Watts, *The Bank of Canada: Origins and Early Histories* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), or Michael Bordo and Angela Redish, "Why did the Bank of Canada Emerge in 1935?" *Journal of Economic History* 47 No. 2: 405-417.

⁴⁵⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 22 November 1934.

suggesting that the town retain the services of Mr. Gillis (a local solicitor) “regarding the necessity of first holding an election to ascertain the wishes of the ratepayers.”⁴⁵⁷

Having established that under section 382 of the Towns and Villages Act a vote was indeed required, the council arranged to secure “a loan of \$7000 for [the] hospital purchase from the West C[anadian] C[olleries],” confirming “that the hospital scheme be pushed forward.”⁴⁵⁸ Though insisting that the vote would go ahead despite the electoral setback experienced on 25 February, the council continued to postpone the referendum. The *Enterprise* aptly observed that “in the face of things that happened last week to make the mayor just a little less popular, it will be interesting to look forward to the result of his [hospital] bylaw” when it is submitted to the ratepayers.⁴⁵⁹ Motions that the hospital bylaw be “placed before the proprietary electors, authorizing the council to issue debentures to the amount of \$7000 to purchase and renovate the building used as a hospital at present” were approved by council on 1 April, 17 June and 20 August, yet the citizens of Blairmore were never given the opportunity to vote on the issue.⁴⁶⁰

As the year progressed, less time was taken during council meetings to address the appeals of citizens for various kinds of help. For example, when Mrs. Diamond appeared before the council on 15 April to request a new pair of glasses, she was informed that her appeal could not be dealt with by council and the matter was left to the relief committee. Mr. Rossi’s request for a stove was handled the same way, unlike the way council had dealt with Mr. Mill’s request in 1934.⁴⁶¹ When Mr. Zuberky sought

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Town Council Meeting Minutes, 7 January 1935.

⁴⁵⁹ N.A., “Local and General Items,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 11 April 1935.

⁴⁶⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 1 April 1935; Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 June 1935; Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 15 August 1935.

⁴⁶¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 April 1934.

mediation between himself and his neighbour, Mrs. A. Dobek, regarding a fence between their property, the administration again declined, stating that “a fence was not a matter that could be settled by the council.”⁴⁶² Perhaps the only individual who succeeded in 1935 in having council reconsider its decision to leave the matter of relief to the relief committee was Mrs. R.J. Connor. Mrs. Connor had submitted a written request for lights at her dwelling and one ton of coal, and appeared in person on 16 September to answer questions pertaining to her letter.⁴⁶³ When council sent the issue to committee, Connor demanded immediate action and the council reconsidered its decision, granting lights and one ton of coal.⁴⁶⁴ Speaking to council immediately after Mrs. Connor, Mr. Wislet appeared on behalf of the Unemployed Association, stating that the unemployed were not able to pick coal from the slack piles, and therefore requested that they be given loads of coal as well. This application was not as well received, with the mayor informing Mr. Wislet that “if the unemployed would not take the trouble to supply themselves with wood [during the summer], the town would not supply coal.”⁴⁶⁵ The council also went so far as to act on a report that the children of Mr. A. Sullivan were not attending school because they had to stay home and look after their mother. Council contacted Mr. Sullivan and advised him of the situation, demanding that he “return and look after his family, or same will be cut off relief and thus force some action on his part.”⁴⁶⁶

The time that had been used previously to address the day-to-day concerns of the citizens was now taken up by council’s ambitions in a national and international context. Concerned that there might be an attempt from within to stall the council’s agenda,

⁴⁶² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 July 1935.

⁴⁶³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 16 September 1935.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 December 1935.

“Councillor Packer recommended [on 4 March] a change in auditor, and stated his reason for wishing same [was] that in his opinion E.D. Bantrum, Auditor, was collaborating with the government.”⁴⁶⁷ Having disposed of the suspected government spy, the council occupied itself with requests from the union local and other workers’ groups, granting subsidies to the Young Workers Gymnasium and the Workers’ Sports Association.⁴⁶⁸ These grants were made by council despite the town secretary’s advising that such grants were being “made illegally” by council.⁴⁶⁹ Financial support was also extended to help pay for a second visit from Tim Buck, with the Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada being led in a dramatic torchlight procession from the train station to the location where he was to speak.⁴⁷⁰

The council continued to pass resolutions pertaining to the plight of workers elsewhere in the country, but unlike previous statements, the council moved to accompany such resolutions with public education on the matter in question. It was in this vein that the administration endorsed a resolution “protesting the government’s actions in connection with the Regina Riot.”⁴⁷¹ In order that a broader understanding and sympathy for the issue be present at Blairmore, Knight scheduled a “public meeting of the town council” to discuss matters pertaining to the Regina Riot and the On-to-Ottawa trekkers.⁴⁷²

⁴⁶⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 March 1935.

⁴⁶⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 March 1945; Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 June 1935.

⁴⁶⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 3 June 1935.

⁴⁷⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 22 August 1935 and Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 29 August 1935.

⁴⁷¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 26 August 1935.

⁴⁷² Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 October 1935. As Bill Waiser has pointed out, the On-to-Ottawa trek had one goal, to force the federal government to act against the appalling conditions faced by single men in the relief camps. Having demanded action from the federal government for months, camp residents started from Vancouver east to Ottawa to make their demands in person. As they traveled east,

The council continued to concern itself with the international spread of fascism. When it was learned in November that Mussolini had invaded Ethiopia, Knight and his associates lost no time endorsing the following cable to be sent to Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie:

Mayor and Council convey best wishes for success over Mussolini, the oppressor of the Italian people and war-monger. We pray for your victory which will help to free the Italian people and the world. Blairmore salutes you. Mayor William Knight.⁴⁷³

Despite again being advised by the town secretary that “he considered this an illegal expense, and that he had recently been advised by Mr. Collins, Auditor, that money spent for political purposes [was] out of order,” the council passed the motion and directed that copies be sent to the *New York Times*, the *Lethbridge Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, the *Toronto Star* and *Pravda* (Moscow).⁴⁷⁴ The *Enterprise* noted that the cable was brought

their movement gained popularity, and was feared to become so powerful by the time it reached Ottawa that it might have serious revolutionary implications. The Communist Party of Canada was involved with the organization of the movement, and active in recruiting men as the trek progressed. The federal authorities ordered the RCMP to stop the “trekkers” in Regina and disperse the men; the Regina riot resulted. Waiser argues that the behaviour of the men during the riot coupled with the trial of some rioters sullied the perception of the unemployed and their ultimate intentions. By calling a town meeting to discuss the purpose of the trek and the experiences of the Regina Riot, Knight was following the example of the Citizen’s Defence Committee and the Communist Party of Canada in trying to regain public support for the men’s cause (and by extension their own fundamental disagreement with the local relief camp which the federal and provincial authorities insisted be used for the relief of single men). For more see Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003) or Victor Howard, “*We Were the Salt of the Earth*”: *The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot* (Regina: University of Saskatchewan, 1985).

⁴⁷³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 November 1935. Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, justified by the Italian government as necessary to defend the territorial integrity of its colony Italian Somaliland, was decried by the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of Canada as nothing more but the spread of fascism to Africa. The same sentiment is expressed by Knight and council in their telegram. The Bennett government initially would not condemn the Italians (at the League of Nations) for the invasion. This policy only changed at the last minute, when during the final days of the federal election campaign that would cost Bennett government, the prime minister changed course and authorized Canada’s representative at the League of Nations to vote in favour of aggressive sanctions; this about face was made after it was revealed that both the United Kingdom and France would be supportive of sanctions. For a Canadian perspective see John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager (eds.), *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 308-310; for an evaluation of Mussolini’s larger role in the origins of the Second World War, including the Ethiopian invasion, see Robert Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

forward by councillor Pagnucco, himself a native of Italy, but was soon rescinded because of the backlash over the cost of sending the cable not only to Ethiopia, but also to the newspapers listed in the motion. The official reason given for rescinding the telegram was that councillors Olson and Aschacher were unable to be present at the meeting.⁴⁷⁵ “It is thought,” the *Enterprise* editorialized, “that Haile Selassie will manage to pull through without Blairmore’s assistance or interference.”⁴⁷⁶

Perhaps still conscious of the backlash experienced over the telegram to Ethiopia, the council was cautious two weeks later when the matter of the Canadian Congress Against War and Fascism was brought before them. Whereas in previous years the council had financed a delegate, the secretary was instructed to “embody in a letter the council’s support of the movement, and [that we] sincerely regret that finances prohibited sending a delegate to attend the conference.”⁴⁷⁷ Though the council often cited monetary restrictions when declining funding, this represents the first time that council would not financially assist in sending delegates to a Red-affiliated conference. This decision would not stand, however, as the Mine Workers’ Union of Canada organized a public meeting to “request the council reconsider the appointing of a representative of the town of Blairmore to the Second Congress Against War and Fascism.”⁴⁷⁸ Despite vocal opposition from residents and businessmen like C.J. Thompkins who stated that if “the League of Nations and sanctions imposed by fifty-two nations could not stop a war, the Congress would have little bearing,” the council chose to hold another public meeting to

⁴⁷⁵ N.A., “Blairmore Again in the Limelight,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 November 1935.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 18 November 1935.

⁴⁷⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 27 November 1935.

reconsider the matter.⁴⁷⁹ When it was reported to council that “it had been the wish of the citizens that Mayor Knight be appointed a delegate to attend [the] Congress Against War and Fascism.” Knight was advanced \$225 to pay for his expenses and left for Toronto.⁴⁸⁰

The legitimacy of this public meeting was questioned in the *Enterprise*, with Bartlett stating that “Bill was sent forward by a vote representative of anything but the ratepayers of Blairmore,” charging that “the little fingers of tots too young for school” were raised in support of the trip at the instruction of their parents.⁴⁸¹ Bartlett further complained that “the trip is being paid for, like many other items (illegally) out of the town’s treasury,” adding that “only recently an appeal from a crying woman, who had children less than half clothed or fed was turned down, temporarily at least, on the grounds that the town’s treasury could not afford to support her.”⁴⁸²

Bartlett identifies a critical issue in his last observation. Since the council’s reelection in February of 1935 the programs designed to provide relief at a local level and maintain the town’s infrastructure were simply not as high a priority as they had once been. One year earlier the town had spent a considerable sum on the improvement of Victoria Avenue and its rededication as Tim Buck Boulevard in 1934 – complete with neon signs, eighty light standards and flowers – but when it came time for routine work to be completed the council put off doing so because funds were not forthcoming from the province.⁴⁸³ As the administration continued to give money to miners’ picnics, sporting events and cablegrams to various parts of the Dominion regarding the plight of workers, Tim Buck Boulevard was becoming increasingly impassable for lack of grading

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid; Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 2 December 1935.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ W.J. Bartlett, “Editorial,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 5 December 1935.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 March 1935.

and other necessary maintenance. In part, the quick decline in the condition of the road was blamed in part on the Boulevard's sprinkler system, which was not spraying as it should and causing the road to become increasingly rutted.⁴⁸⁴ The conditions became so bad that the *Enterprise* sarcastically observed: "for some time the town council of Blairmore have been discussing the proposition of a hospital. Watching cars picking their steps between the numerous ruts in our main street makes one feel that very soon a hospital for cars or nervous wrecks is badly needed."⁴⁸⁵

There were also a number of scandals and disagreements involving members of council or employees appointed by council that further served to erode local confidence in the Knight administration. When the change of auditors was brought up by councillor Packer in March of 1935, Knight relinquished the chair to "oppose the change and read the 1934 Town Act covering the duties of an official auditor."⁴⁸⁶ Despite the mayor's opposition, the motion was passed and Mr. Banttrum was replaced. The mayor found himself in the minority again when he raised concerns regarding Gaston Bazille, the town electrician and a fellow Red who had been appointed in the first weeks of 1933. Calling a special meeting to "discuss his actions," Knight insisted that Bazille be immediately dismissed from the town staff "due to his general conduct for the last two years."⁴⁸⁷ The motion was lost, and though council agreed to censure the fellow radical, he remained in his post until the demise of the administration in 1936.

Bazille was not the only appointed employee to cause divisions within the administration. Without prior warning to council, charges of extortion and theft were laid

⁴⁸⁴ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 25 July 1935.

⁴⁸⁵ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 15 August 1935.

⁴⁸⁶ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 4 March 1935.

⁴⁸⁷ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 9 May 1935. It is not known what caused a rift between Knight and Bazille, who were both Red.

against Red appointee Joseph Fitzpatrick, Chief of Police, at the district court in Fort MacLeod.⁴⁸⁸ A local prostitute, Leona Cudmore, alias Leona LeDrake, was also charged with one count of extortion.⁴⁸⁹ Though council immediately moved to suspend Fitzpatrick indefinitely “for the reason that he had been arrested and released on bail,” the chief of police had been a close political ally of the Red administration and the trial reflected poorly on the mayor and council.⁴⁹⁰ It was revealed in court that Fitzpatrick and Cudmore had teamed up in an effort to blackmail one of her long-time “acquaintances,” who was in the habit of loaning money to Cudmore in exchange for sexual services. When the individual in question, Mr. Sam Kubilski, visited Cudmore in her home on 25 May 1935, the Chief of Police also arrived “telling him what a terrible offence this was.”⁴⁹¹ In an effort to keep the matter quiet, Kubilski gave the pair two cheques amounting to \$1150. Upon cross examination it was stated that the Miss Cudmore’s brothel was “run with the knowledge of Blairmore’s town council, and that the chief of police inspected it occasionally.”⁴⁹² It was also reported that Mayor Knight was seen close to the house on the day of the crime.⁴⁹³ Court learned that charges were brought forward when Kubilski went to the RCMP, and that Fitzpatrick and Cudmore had tried to cash the cheques as far away as Cranbrook, British Columbia. After being placed under arrest and asked about the whereabouts of the cheques “Mae Cudmore pulled them out of her stocking and gave them to the officer.”⁴⁹⁴ Mr. Justice Ives sentenced Fitzpatrick to two years less a day of hard labour at the jail in Lethbridge for his role in the affair.

⁴⁸⁸ N.A., “Blairmore Council Suspends Chief,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 20 June 1935.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 17 June 1935.

⁴⁹¹ N.A., “Two Years Less a Day for Fitzpatrick,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 5 December 1935.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

Knight also found himself at the centre of scandal. When the mayor expressed interest in purchasing a piece of property owned by the municipality, council gave him an option on the parcel for a period of six months.⁴⁹⁵ Unlike private citizens, Knight was not required to put down a cash deposit, and the option was not subject to a better offer. The mayor even asked a town employee to erect a fence around the property for him.⁴⁹⁶ The fence was never erected, but the hypocrisy of asking a town employee to do work on an elected member's land after the public humiliation of non-Red councillor Evan Morgan in 1933 was not lost on some residents.⁴⁹⁷ A formal complaint was laid before council "questioning the legality of the town giving the mayor an option" on the property, and though the matter was discussed, it was ultimately left to the town solicitor for legal advice.⁴⁹⁸ What made the issue particularly insulting for many was that earlier in the year the mayor had successfully challenged his 1935 municipal tax assessment, the complaint "being that the taxes were too high."⁴⁹⁹ Although the final reassessment was made by the Alberta Assessment Commission, the reduction in the value of Knight's property and the consequent reduction in his municipal taxes was not popular with the residents of Blairmore.⁵⁰⁰

The town's finances represented a problem that Knight and his associates could not avoid: by law, the municipality had to publish its financial statement ahead of the annual municipal elections. After taking over the position of Auditor, Mr. Larkham Collins reported to council "that the financial statement issued for 1934 did not agree

⁴⁹⁵ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 November 1935.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ See Chapter Two, page 66.

⁴⁹⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 9 January 1936.

⁴⁹⁹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 28 June 1935.

⁵⁰⁰ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 16 September 1935.

with the town records... [and] in fact they did so since 1926.”⁵⁰¹ Though the mayor suggested “all differences could be written off as the Kelly falsifications, a definitive figure for the Kelly shortages never having been arrived at,” the council disagreed and authorized Mr. Collins to “check the cash receipts and rolls for 1933-1934 and make a report to council.”⁵⁰² When Collins again appeared before council to recommend a fuller investigation, Knight took exception to the idea, stating “that this would appear to be throwing good money after bad, as arrears found to have been dropped from the roll... would in all probability be uncollectable.”⁵⁰³ Again the council differed in opinion from the mayor, and authorized the audit at the cost of up to \$600.⁵⁰⁴

When the Auditor released the town’s financial statement two weeks ahead of the civic elections as required by law, uproar ensued. In 1934, the town had realized a surplus of \$18,000, but the auditor’s statement revealed that in 1935 “after absorbing a profit on your light and water utilities of \$10,168.38, your total net loss on [all town] operations was \$9,376.11.”⁵⁰⁵ This loss marked the first time that the provincial government could plausibly intervene and appoint an administrator because of financial instability, though it did not.⁵⁰⁶ Collins went even further, confirming the accusations of the *Enterprise* and the concerns of the town secretary by publicly stating that

certain expenditures made in the year 1935 in my opinion are contrary to the Town and Village Act and, in accordance with Section 93 (2), I report them hereunder:

⁵⁰¹ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 18 October 1935.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 24 October 1935.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ N.A., “Auditor Draws Attention of Ratepayers to the Unlawful Practice,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 24 January 1935.

⁵⁰⁶ N.A., “That Blairmore Trouble,” *Medicine Hat News*, 28 February 1933. It is likely that if the government had initiated the process to take control of Blairmore’s affairs, it would have taken longer than the two weeks left in the council’s mandate. Therefore by the time the takeover would have been complete, it would have been fruitless, as the Red aspects of council were not re-elected.

1. J. Fitzpatrick advance on wages \$300, of which \$125.00 has been repaid.
2. Rent for hall for Tim Buck and Reverend East, \$60.00.
3. Mayor W. Knight, traveling expenses to attend Congress Against War and Fascism in Toronto, \$225.00.⁵⁰⁷

This was made worse with the disclosure that Knight had actually spent \$335.00 in Toronto, and had asked the council to make up the \$110.00 difference from the town treasury.⁵⁰⁸

When it came time for the annual meeting of ratepayers one week after the release of the town's financial statement, there was such an interest in the event that the meeting had to be transferred from the Community Hall to the school gymnasium as the original accommodations "were not large enough to fit all the interested ratepayers."⁵⁰⁹ When the meeting finally got underway Mayor Knight attempted to defend his record, declaring his determination to "smash" certain councillors who had turned against his leadership in the preceding week and move forward with a new agenda.⁵¹⁰ Facing a hostile crowd, it was reported that "Mayor Knight was pulled from the platform, but climbed back to finish his speech."⁵¹¹ The mayor received a series of questions about the replacement of the town auditor, his involvement with the Communist Party of Canada, and his trip to Toronto. It was also revealed that "the mayor was determined that J. Fitzpatrick not be discharged for drunkenness and neglect of duty... [and] it was only when the criminal charge of

⁵⁰⁷ N.A., "Auditor Draws Attention of Ratepayers to the Unlawful Practice," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 24 January 1935.

⁵⁰⁸ Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes, 6 January 1935. The council turned down Knight's request.

⁵⁰⁹ N.A., "Local and General Items," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 Feb 1935.

⁵¹⁰ Taxpayer, "Correspondence," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 February 1936. It should be noted that neither in the paper nor in the council meeting minutes are these councillors named, or the issue in question addressed.

⁵¹¹ N.A., "Hot Ratepayers Meeting," *MacLeod Gazette*, 7 February 1936.

extortion had been laid that the Police Committee succeeded in dismissing the ex-chief.”⁵¹²

Though Knight’s former colleagues had publicly turned against him at the town meeting, doing so would not save their jobs.⁵¹³ The Red candidates for the 1936 election had been previously agreed upon, but the entire group withdrew from consideration after the town’s financial statement was made public, and councillors who had hoped to run on the Red ticket were left without a mass campaign organization or endorsement.⁵¹⁴ With the Red faction embroiled in internal fighting and the union refusing to endorse any candidate, ordinary citizens came together to nominate a compromise slate of candidates.⁵¹⁵ The proposed candidates, H. Zak, W.L. Evans, and E. Wormersley represented both the business and mining interests of the town, and being unopposed by the Reds were “quite unexpectedly” acclaimed to their offices.⁵¹⁶ The same was true of the School Board, with S.G. Bannan, solicitor and J. Krkosky Jr., miner, being acclaimed. Thus the outcry against the mismanagement of municipal finances and delusion with the newly-redefined (1935) goals of the council caused the ratepayers of Blairmore to turn against their Red council and school board, nominating compromise candidates.

Mayor Knight and the three holdover councillors from 1935 could have forced a continuation of their Red agenda against the wishes expressed by ratepayers at the town meeting; however, the councillors decided to act constructively with the three newly-elected moderate members of council. Despite being rebuked publicly, Knight did not

⁵¹² Taxpayer, “Correspondence,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 February 1936.

⁵¹³ Ibid. While reports of the meeting indicate that there was a division amongst the councillors that was a week old, there is no other indication as to the specifics of the problem. The reports from the town meeting suggest that it was over the town’s finances. There are no specifics as to which councillors came out against Knight.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ N.A., “Acclamations at Blairmore,” *Blairmore Enterprise*, 7 February 1936.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

give up easily the idea of Red government. Acting as though there had been no rejection of his leadership, he used the first council meeting with the new councillors to again call for the dismissal of Gaston Bazille and his replacement with another Red sympathizer. The new council, however, had other ideas about who should resign, defeating Knight's motion and replacing it with their own: "that Mayor Knight resign immediately."⁵¹⁷ Though Knight refused the council's request, one thing was perfectly clear: the era of the Red administration at Blairmore was over.

1934-1935 represented two extremes for Blairmore's radical town council. Initially, they continued their successful practice of balancing the local interests and everyday concerns of the electorate with their own Red agenda, and this equilibrium met with success. This balance allowed the council to rename the main street Tim Buck Boulevard and the school board to declare a public holiday in honour of the Russian Revolution. When Knight and his associates were returned to power unopposed in 1935, the administration interpreted this electoral victory as an endorsement of their increasingly radical agenda. The balance achieved in 1933 and 1934 was fundamentally changed by the manifesto of 1935, which focused almost predominantly on class-based struggle and the movement against war and fascism. This focus on a larger ideological agenda to the detriment of their local goals represents an important dichotomy. As the council became more radical on the national and international stage, it became more conservative and more business-like in the way that it administered local relief. A change is evident in the way councillors defined their brand of social justice: in 1933 council considered the immediate needs of any person regardless of their qualifications, while in 1934 and 1935 they increasingly evaluated the "worthiness" of the applicant. While it

⁵¹⁷ N.A., "Attempt to Can the Mayor," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 21 February 1936.

could be said that they became more “responsible” with the public’s money in this regard, such unpopular actions served to weaken council’s electoral support. The numerous scandals that rocked council in 1935 represents the third important factor in the council’s demise. Thus, it was the deterioration of this balance, the changing definition of social justice, a series of scandals, and the indignant performance of Mayor Knight in January of 1936 that led to the defeat of the Canada’s most radical town council.

Conclusion:

The Red administration at Blairmore, Alberta can neither be pronounced a triumph for the Communist Party of Canada, nor dismissed as the simple result of residual anger over a disastrous strike (1932) and depression economy. Mayor Bill Knight and his councillors headed a municipal government that was both outspoken on the issues that mattered to the working classes and pragmatic when it came to the implementation of their local agenda. By actively seeking sensible and realistic solutions to the poverty and social instability encountered by the unemployed and underemployed, Knight rose to fame – perhaps infamy – with his manifesto of 1933. For many, this is how Knight’s administration will be remembered. Former Blairmore Mayor Billy Grace recalled that “there was a lot who might have been militant and associated with Tim Buck, but I don’t give a damn what anyone says, they were good people, good *Christian* people.”⁵¹⁸ Similar sentiments were expressed by Cyrus Favero, who when asked about the Red years at Blairmore declared Knight to be “a pretty good mayor. If he thought a thing was right, he’d do it. He didn’t care about who objected to it... Maybe he wasn’t always right, but he didn’t pussyfoot around!”⁵¹⁹ For former town electrician Gaston Bazille, a self-declared Communist until the day he died, the administration was simply a matter of local democracy. “If anybody believes in democracy I do,” Bazille stated to the

⁵¹⁸ Billy Grace, Interviewed by Allen Able, “Rocky Mountain Reds,” on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986. Emphasis of interviewee.

⁵¹⁹ Cyrus Favero, Interviewed by Joan Vare, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society Archives, no accession number. Interview is in VHS format, and is located in the lower drawers of the TV stand on the main floor of the Crowsnest Museum.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, “though it might be a different kind of democracy than some people would think about.”⁵²⁰

While former associates of Knight and citizens of Blairmore seem to have reconciled themselves with their controversial past, others in the Pass and elsewhere do not remember Knight in the same way. Anne Spatuk, former President of the Crowsnest Pass Historical Association and retired teacher, recalls that “you didn’t tell people you were from Blairmore. There was a kind of inbuilt reaction to Blairmore, a connotation with ‘Redism’ and Communism and all the aspects of it...”⁵²¹ The experiences under Knight were entirely left out of the first edition of *Crowsnest and Its People*. Tony Pitera fumed “its not in *that* history book... ‘fraid they didn’t want the young people to know about that history [of] Communism.”⁵²² We are therefore left to question the gap between these perspectives. How is it that for some the Communist experiment at Blairmore is an important part of their history, while for others it is largely ignored, or brings with it the negative connotations enunciated by Spatuk? What led to the formation of a gap between these private and public memories? To understand this stratification of perspectives it is necessary to return to the populist foundation referenced in the introduction of this thesis. It has been established that, in a general context, populism as an ideology can be described as a mass movement based on an imagined or false relationship between followers and the leader, informed by symbols and traditions that support and identity

⁵²⁰ Gaston Bazille, Interviewed by Allen Able, “Rocky Mountain Reds,” on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986.

⁵²¹ Anne Spatuk, Interviewed by Allen Able, “Rocky Mountain Reds,” on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986.

⁵²² Tony Pitera, Interviewed by Allen Able, “Rocky Mountain Reds,” on *The Journal*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, September 26, 1986.

myth, and are threatened by a powerful element external to the group in question..⁵²³ Previously these five elements were explored within a local context, demonstrating that when all five came together favourably they created a situation where the Red council could achieve and maintain power with their populist agenda. The unity of these elements was what underpinned the first Knight Manifesto of 1933, and became the hallmark of council's actions in 1933 and 1934. It was when the administration published its second manifesto, however, that this balance changed. Whereas the residents of Blairmore could identify with the provisions laid out by council in 1933 – the identification of the provincial and federal governments and their poor relief programs as the source of local suffering – the provisions of the second document were much more abstract and difficult to conceptualize. Because of the parameters of the newly defined power bloc – an international and ideological context – it became increasingly impossible to link local unemployment, underemployment, and suffering to the external elements with which the council was doing battle. As the administration increasingly left the relief apparatus on autopilot, the delivery of aid became less and less associated with the ideological aspects of the administration, and the immediacy of the threat from outside decreased accordingly.

The gap between public and private memories can also be understood within this particular populist paradigm. For those outside of local society, the entire Red era at Blairmore can be reduced to the simple equation Blairmore=Communist. The perception for many is that, “Blairmore had a Communist town council for three years,” so therefore “Blairmore was Communist for three years.” This study has shown that such a blanket

⁵²³ Trevor Harrison, “The Changing Face of Prairie Politics: Populism in Alberta,” *Prairie Forum* 25 no. 1 (Spring 2000): 108.

statement is not only unfair, but untrue. While there can be no doubt as to the political convictions or rhetoric of Mayor Knight and his fellow Red councillors at the time, a coalition of ideological perspectives was responsible (and necessary) for the election and re-election of the radical council. As Ian McKay points out, each leftist movement, or perceived left movement, is “defined by time, place, demography, [and] types of institutions,” from which they create their own experiment in “living otherwise.”⁵²⁴ For Blairmoreites, this experience was not defined by a strict socialist or Communist dogma, but as McKay terms it, their desire to “live otherwise.”⁵²⁵

For those who lived during the Red era, it is not the radical politics that most recall, but the ability of the council to get things done for the citizens of Blairmore. The reference in interviews to council’s ability to get things done is critical, as it outlines the reason the council was elected and re-elected, and foreshadowing the reason it was ultimately defeated. The historiography has largely been informed by perceptions created outside the community – Blairmore was Red from 1933-1936 – while the personal memories of those involved reveal a more complex interrelationship between the actions of council and the experiences of Blairmoreites. This gap is represented not only in a social context, but is also firmly entrenched in the literature which pertains to this period of the town’s history.

Though this study represents an understanding of the role played by the Communist administration at Blairmore from 1933-1936, there are inherent restrictions within a MA thesis, and consequently there are important issues stemming from this research that need to be addressed in the future. Having delineated the actions of council,

⁵²⁴ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 35.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

it is now necessary to explore the community of Blairmore itself during this period. This thesis has taken the first step by exploring the Red administration from a community-based perspective rather than a labour or union point of view, yet the question still remains to be answered: what kind of community was Blairmore ethnically and socially? What constituted the local experience, and how did these change over time? What role did gender play? How did the town fit into a larger social, economic and political experience, and more importantly, how did Blairmoreites perceive themselves in relation to other communities within the Pass, the province, the nation, and the world? Many existing histories of Blairmore and the Crowsnest Pass address its violent, disastrous or otherwise controversial past, reporting on the “outrageous,” or “unbelievable” events while de-coupling them from their appropriate social milieu. Ultimately, what is yet to be accomplished is a study that explores what it meant to live in Blairmore and the Crowsnest Pass during this period, exploring the social fabric of the community and thus allowing a better understanding of the events explored in this thesis in a wider, more complex and comprehensive context.

In sum, this thesis has shown that the Red administration of Mayor Bill Knight and his colleagues on town council and school board can neither be described as a knee-jerk reaction to the notorious strike of 1932, nor the realization of Communist enlightenment among the masses. Rather, the election of Communists became socially permissible given the cumulative social, economic and political experiences at Blairmore over the preceding decade. Once in power, Knight established the legitimacy of his administration by acting immediately and decisively to address the poverty and anger being experienced by the working-class at Blairmore. It was the ability to cast capitalism

(and its manifestation in the policies pursued by the provincial and federal governments) as the external cause of local suffering that allowed council to pursue its other agenda, the call for radical action on a provincial, federal, and international level. Thus, it was the balance between concern for improving the everyday experience of the working classes in Blairmore, the council's sense of social justice, their perception as "different" from past corrupt councils, and the pursuit of the radical agenda on a larger scale that ultimately sustained the administration in power. When the mayor and councillors misjudged the community's support for Red candidates during the election of 1935 as an endorsement of their radical policy, the resultant departure of council from active involvement in the day-to-day running of the municipality in favour of concentrating on the struggle against war and fascism disrupted the equilibrium between local and ideological concerns. This change was coupled with an evolving definition of social justice that by 1935 saw the council acting more and more like previous administrations: relief was granted through an increasingly bureaucratic process which judged applicants worthiness to receive help. Finally, the council found itself implicated in several scandals which tarnished its image, and likened it to the corrupt administration they had replaced in 1933. By the end of 1935 an irreparable rift between the objectives of council and the demands of ratepayers emerged. The Red administration at Blairmore was not defeated because it renamed the main street Tim Buck Boulevard or declared a civic holiday on the Anniversary of the Russian Revolution, but because it lost sight of its local, populist agenda.

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Appendix 1

Blairmore Town Council 1933:

Joseph Aschacher (1933-1935) *
W.L. Evans (1932-1934)
William Knight (Mayor), (1933-1935) *
Joseph KrKosky (1933-1935) *
Evan Morgan (1932-1934)
Albert Olson (1933-1935) *
Romano Peressini (1932-1934) *

Blairmore Town Council 1934:

Joseph Aschacher (1933-1935) *
William Knight (1933-1935) *
Joseph KrKosky (1933-1935) *
Evan Morgan (1934-1936) *
Albert Olson (1933-1935) *
Jonathan Packer (1934-1936) *
Angelo Pagnucco (1934-1936) *

Blairmore Town Council 1935 (all new councillors elected by acclamation):

Joseph Aschacher (1935-1937) *
William Knight (1935-1937) *
Joseph KrKosky (1935-1937) *
Evan Morgan (1934-1936) *
Albert Olson (1935-1937) *
Jonathan Packer (1934-1936) *
Angelo Pagnucco (1934-1936) *

Blairmore Town Council 1936 (all new councillors elected by acclamation):

Joseph Aschacher (1935-1937) *
W.L. Evans (1936-1938)
William Knight (1935-1937) *
Joseph KrKosky (1935-1937) *
Albert Olson (1935-1937) *
E. Womersley (1936-1938)
Henry Zak (1936-1938)

Source for all election statistics: Blairmore Town Council Meeting Minutes.

* denotes Red councillor.

Appendix 2

Note: Both Lille and Blairmore were dominated by the West Canadian Collieries, whereas Coleman was split between the International Coal and Coke Company and the McGillivray Coal and Coke Company.

Lille:

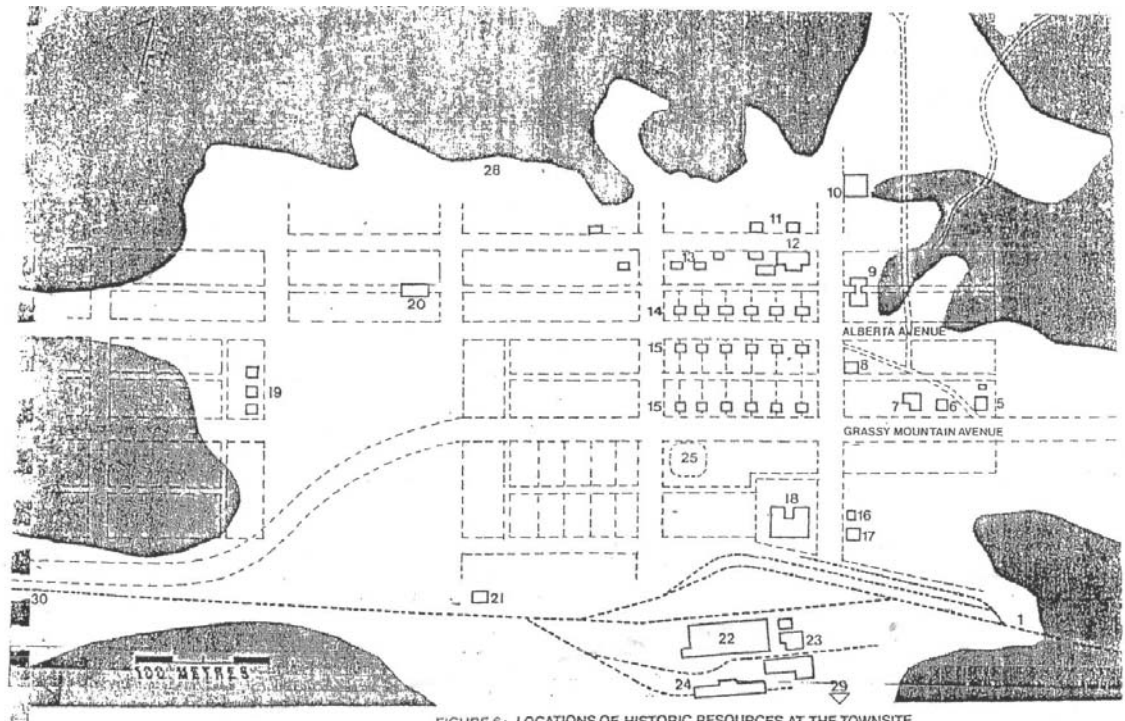


FIGURE 6: LOCATIONS OF HISTORIC RESOURCES AT THE TOWNSITE

LEGEND

NOTE: HISTORICAL RESOURCES ARE NUMERICALLY REFERENCED TO MORE DETAILED STATUS REPORT IN "LILLE'S HISTORIC FEATURES" SECTION

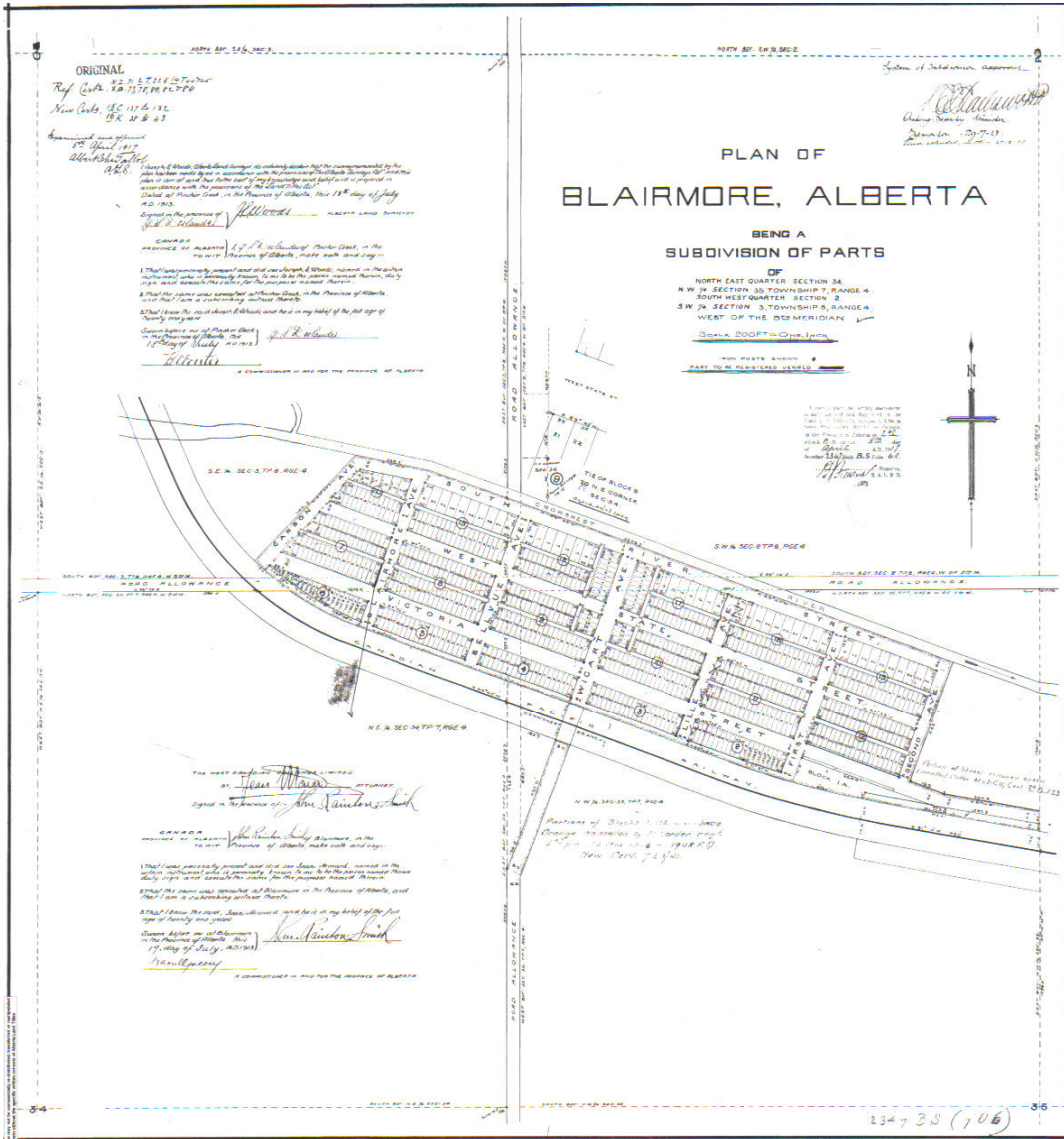
1 GRASSY MTN. RAIL.	8 BUTCHERS SHOP	12 BUNKHOUSE	16 ICE HOUSE	20 SCHOOL	24 REPAIR SHED	28 LOG CABINS
5 BAKERY	9 HOSPITAL (?)	13 LIVING SHACKS	17 LIVERY STABLE	21 MASTER MECHANIC(?)	25 TOWN DUMP	29 COAL TIPPLE
6 LIQUOR STORE	10 STABLE (?)	14 DUPLEXES	18 HOTEL	22 COKING OVENS	26 NUMBER TWO MINE	30 RAIL LINK TO
7 GENERAL STORE	11 BARBER SHOP (?)	15 MINERS' COTTAGES	19 WEALTHY RES.	23 WASHERY	27 NUMBER THREE MINE	ORIGINAL TOWN

Source: Travel Alberta.

Appendix Two, continued.

Blairmore:

Block numbers 5,6,7,8,19 and 20 (the six westernmost blocks on this map) would be considered the Westside, whereas the residences to the east were the workers' houses. This would be reinforced when the West Canadian Collieries and the Canadian Pacific Railway constructed a spur line to the tippie that literally split the town along class lines; the rail line would be constructed where the current north-south "Road Allowance" is indicated on this map.



Source: Information regarding the division of Blairmore along class lines found in the Helen Kropinak and Anne Spatuk interviews. Map courtesy of the Crowsnest Museum, permanent map collection, no accession number.

Appendix Two, continued.

Coleman:

In Coleman the neighbourhoods were divided according to ethnicity. Carbondale was primarily British; West Coleman, known as “Slavtown,” was made up of Slavic Ethnicities; the area indicated as “Coleman” on this map was in actuality two neighbourhoods, Scotchman’s Hill (Scottish) and the British Block (British); Graftontown or Graftonville was primarily British; East Coleman, known as “Bush Town,” was primarily Polish and Ukrainian. Also important but not specifically indicated on this map is “Dago Town,” which was primarily Italian and located in the seven blocks immediately to the south west of “Coleman Plan no. 820L” and north of the land allowance for the International Coal and Coal Company. “Poverty Lane” is also omitted from this map – at the time of printing it may not have been considered part of the town – and it was primarily German and located immediately to the south of Carbondale (on the south side of the Crowsnest River).



Source: Information regarding the division of Coleman along class lines found in the Helen Kropinak and Anne Spatuk interviews. Map courtesy of the Crowsnest Museum, permanent map collection, no accession number.

Appendix Three



Left to Right:
Back Row: R. Horne, H. Murphy, J. Krkosky Jr., A. Olson, A. Bosetti
Front Row: J. Aschacher, R. Peressini Sr., W. Knight, J. Fitzpatrick, J. Krkosky Sr.



Source: Beatrice Peressini. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix 4

Population:

899 Men

739 Women

1629 Total Population

SOURCE: Government of Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume 11* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1933), 237.

Ethnicity:

330 English

67 Irish

204 Scottish

61 "Other British"

161 French

17 Austrian

56 Belgian

222 Czech or Slovak

3 Dutch

1121 Total

SOURCE: Government of Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume 11* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1933), 466.

Literacy (figures are only available for Census Division 2 as a whole):

Can Read and Write:

92% Men

90% Women

Can Read Only:

.002% Men

.002% Women

Illiterate:

8% Men

10% Women

SOURCE: Government of Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume 11* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1933), 827.

Appendix 4, continued.

Religion:

Anglicans:	154
Baptists:	3
Confucians and Buddhists:	18
Lutherans:	39
Mormon:	1
Presbyterians:	39
Roman Catholics:	862
United Church:	504
Other Sects:	6
Not Stated:	3

SOURCE: Government of Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931: Volume 11* (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, 1933), 672-673.

Appendix 5

Ethnicity of Miners Employed at the West Canadian Collieries, 1933 (excluding management):

63	Czech or Slovak
60	Canadian
57	Italian
37	English
24	Bohemian
23	French
20	Polish
15	Belgian
10	Finnish
9	Scotch
9	Welsh
3	German
2	Serbian
1	Irish
1	Yugoslav
1	Hungarian

Source: West Canadian Collieries Employee Records, Crowsnest Pass Historical Society, accession number: 91.29.1 unknown.

Appendix 6

Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner To Do His Duty

Blairmore, Alberta, February 20th, 1933.

At the first regular meeting of the Blairmore Town Council, notice of motion to introduce two by-laws as provided for by Sections 292, 293 of The Towns' Act—Business Tax and Personal Property Tax—was made. It is the Law. The receipts from the said by-laws are for relief purposes only, and for assistance of our unemployed, who are many.

This is of vital importance to all employers of labor, secretaries of organizations and any individual wage earner.

As taxation is costly, tedious and slow, we would like to avoid imposition of the same. There is at present one other method being employed, viz: A voluntary 5% contribution by the M.W.U. of C., who are in the great majority. Others in the Town who are in favor of this, are: (1) Local School Staff, (2) F. M. Thompson Co., (3) some of the officials of the West Canadian Collieries. The M.W.U. of C. have up to the present time donated \$2,000.00 to this worthy cause, proving that the Christian feeling is not yet dead in some places.

Furthermore, we as Loyal Canadians deem it our duty to help the Government in these times of stress and relieve them of some of their responsibilities, consoling ourselves with the thought that it is more blessed to give than receive.

This movement, to be perfect, must be 100%, and on the result of this appeal the future actions of the council must be governed. It is quite evident that the Government cannot or will not make adequate provision for the unemployed, and until such time as their relief scheme functions in a better manner than at present, it is up to us. We all know that 20 cents per day is not enough for a man in the prime of his life and we deem it our duty to augment his meagre sustenance without hurting any one else to a great extent. The donors are still retaining 95% for their personal use, and should be thankful they are not on the receiving end.

We have come to the conclusion, after a great deal of deliberation, that readiness is the state of the stomach. It is time that people's opinions regarding this color business were changed, and that we get together as we were previous.

"God made man after his own image" and evidently meant them to be fed pretty much alike. We are of the opinion that he was right, therefore the above by-laws.

There is no form of taxation which is justifiable in the present case, as it is impossible to reach all parties; so, this 5% contribution is the only suitable method and should go over big.

In so far as this is a "One" industry Town and we are all dependent on that industry, there is no doubt that we are responsible for this unemployment, as the said industry formerly absorbed all these unemployed. Until such a time as these unemployed procure work, or are provided for, we are responsible for their care. So Be It.

WILLIAM KNIGHT, Mayor of the Town of Blairmore

Source: William Knight, "Blairmore Expects This Day Every Wage Earner to do Their Duty," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 2 March 1933.

Appendix 7



Source: *The Worker*, 11 November 1932, cited in Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*, (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003).

Appendix 8

By forcing all individuals working for the town, both employees and relief applicants, to use the same timesheet when accounting for hours, the mayor and councillors made an effort to try to remove the stigmatism from relief labour. Note that only the town secretary indicates when completing the cheque information what budget the moneys are to be taken from, public works, waterworks or relief work.

<u>TOWN OF BLAIRMORE</u>			
WORKMAN'S TIME SHEET			
NAME			
Period from		to	
DATE	DESCRIPTION OF WORK	HOURS	
Public Works	Waterworks	Relief Work	Paid by Cheque
hours	hours	hours	No.

Enterprise-2M-dup-7-38

Source: Crowsnest Pass Historical Society, accession number 1982-024-00040.

Appendix 9

FELLOW WORKERS of the CROWS NEST PASS who VISIT the BEER PARLORS

- Do you know there is a Dispute on between the Hotel Proprietors and their Bartenders in Bellevue, Blairmore and Coleman?
- All the Bartenders are asking for is: "That the Hotel Proprietors sign an Agreement that carries a Minimum Wage Clause of \$4.75 Per Day; And that any Bartender now receiving more will not be reduced."
- The Proprietors are not willing to pay more than \$4.00 Per Day. Would you like to work for that low Wage?
- This is not Germany, Italy nor Japan; THIS IS CANADA.
- These Boys are not Nazis, Fascists nor Japs; They are our own Boys, Fighting for Democracy on the Home Front.
- Every Glass of Beer you Drink in any of these Hotels helps to Defeat their Cause.

Committee of Bartenders' Union.

Source: Crowsnest Pass Historical Association, accession number 1984.008.0020

Appendix 10

Due to there being no opposition, which resulted in election by acclamation of the Worker's candidates, this manifesto is being published to acquaint the workers of Blairmore with the program which the candidates have pledged themselves to follow.

In analyzing the work carried out by the council and school board during the past year, we find that the worker's representatives carried out some good quality work, not only in Blairmore, but in taking a leading part in helping to bring about unity of the miners in the Crownsnest Pass (e.g. organizing joint first of May demonstrations with miners in Michelle). They have used their positions on council to mobilize the workers of Blairmore in support of the struggles of the Canadian Working Class, such as: Demanding the release of Tim Buck and his comrades from Kingston Penitentiary; welcoming A.E. Smith and Malcolm Bruce to Blairmore; sending protests to the Provincial Government against conditions in the 'relief camps;' gave cash contributions towards sending delegates to the National Congress Against War and Fascism, etc. The Worker's School Board can also show some progress along working class lines, such as: Declaring School Holidays on May 1st and November 7th; carrying on work amongst the teachers in bringing them closer to our working class organizations; securing free dental treatment to those children who needed same; free spectacles to students and tuition to children of the unemployed in the higher grades, etc.

As we note these achievements, we also note some short-comings which must be corrected during the coming year, chief among them which is the absence of close personal contact between the Worker's representatives and their organizations. They did not take full advantage of their elected positions to organize and mobilize the workers (especially the unemployed) around their immediate needs. They did not organize wide discussions on the work of council and the school board with the workers. There is also a tendency to 'play politics' among the members of the council and to collaborate and negotiate with the provincial government and the 'powers that be' in matters of working class interest (especially the unemployed) rather than organizing and leading the struggle of the worker's.

Program of Workers Candidates:

1. All workers candidates to the council and school board pledge themselves to use their elected positions to organize a broad united front against War and Fascism.
2. To support the miners in all their struggles against the coal company.
3. In case of strike to use every means at their disposal to support the strikers.

Appendix Ten, continued

4. To do everything in their power to establish the greatest possible unity between the worker's organizations and their representatives on the council and school board, by giving periodical reports on the work of council and the
5. school board to the MWUC, and by calling meetings of all people in Blairmore at least once every two months, where reports will be given.
6. To call special meeting[s] of workers and discuss with them important matters coming up before taking action on the same.
7. To take a leading part in organizing the unemployed around their immediate demands, to carry on the fight for relief with the Provincial Government, to issue immediate relief to all contentious cases (as to the jurisdiction of the Provincial Government and the Town) until such time as responsibility is established. To see that all unemployed are adequately clothed, and where the Provincial Government refuses to issue clothing out of the town treasury.
8. To seek to place the burden of taxation where it belongs, on the shoulders of those most able to pay, and to make the basic needs of the workers their first consideration.
9. To hold periodic conferences with the school staff to which representatives of the working class organizations are invited.
10. To concentrate more on working class education in school.
11. To organize the school children into children's clubs (Miner's children clubs, Pioneers, etc).

That May first and November seventh be declared Town and School holidays.

Source: N.A., "Blairmore Issues Absolutely Red Manifesto," *Blairmore Enterprise*, 14 February 1935.