

The Next Time We Strike: Labor in Utah's Coal Fields, 1900-1933, by Allan Kent Powell. Logan: Utah State University Press, 1985. xix, 272 pp. Illustrations, maps, appendix, notes, index. \$17.95 cloth.

Fire in the Hole: Miners and Managers in the American Coal Industry, by Curtis Seltzer. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985. xii, 276 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$28.00 cloth.

The troubled relations between labor and capital within the American coal industry is the subject common to both Allan Kent Powell's *The Next Time We Strike* and Curtis Seltzer's *Fire in the Hole*. Although neither of these volumes deals specifically with Iowa, both books deal at length with the United Mine Workers of America, which once was a powerful economic and political force in Iowa, and which drew two of its international presidents from Iowa: John P. White of Oskaloosa (1911-1917) and the legendary John L. Lewis of Lucas (1920-1960).

Professor Powell's *The Next Time We Strike* is an in-depth history of the efforts to unionize mine workers in the coal fields of Utah during the years from roughly 1900 through 1933. Unionization came late to Utah's coal fields. The state's intransigent coal operators used ethnic tensions, nativistic sentiments, private detective agencies, state officials, and the Mormon church to divide workers and thwart their efforts to organize and sustain viable unions. Not until late in 1933 were Utah's coal operators ready to negotiate an agreement with the state's mine workers that recognized the mine workers' right to organize unions of their own choosing and to bargain collectively with their employers.

The struggle to organize a miners' union in Utah was fifty years old when the mine workers chose the United Mine Workers (UMWA) to represent them in 1933. In those years the Knights of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the National Miners Union had also tried to organize Utah's mine workers. The reaction to the deaths of two hundred men and boys in a mine explosion at the Winter Quarters mine in 1900, Powell claims, promoted demands for better mine safety and initiated a movement to organize Utah's mines. Powell examines in detail that disaster and a second one at Castle Gate that claimed the lives of 171 mine workers in 1924. He devotes separate chapters to three long, bitter strikes—the strikes of 1901, 1903-1904, and 1922—each of which ended disastrously for the UMWA and the miners involved in them, but which left a legacy of resistance to the abuses of the coal operators and instilled a burning passion in many mine workers to see Utah's coal fields unionized.

The Next Time We Strike is more than a mere chronicling of mine explosions and unsuccessful strikes, however. Powell uses a wide variety of sources, including oral history interviews, to examine such topics as the role of foreign-born workers in the struggle for unionism, the significance of Utah in the UMWA's nationwide organizing strategy, the attitude of Mormon church leaders toward the labor movement, and the effect of the federal government's labor policies on efforts to unionize Utah's mine workers. Professor Powell's history is thoroughly researched, soundly reasoned, and well written. Persons interested in coal mining, labor history, ethnic studies, Mormon history, or the twentieth-century West would do well to examine this study.

Curtis Seltzer's *Fire in the Hole* is an attempt at a historical analysis of labor relations in the American coal industry in general. Seltzer examines the economics and politics of coal to explain the historical relationship between mine workers and mine managers. The author, a professional energy consultant, points to chronic overproduction as the critical problem. As energy demands in the twentieth century shifted from coal to other fuels, market forces made victims of both workers and managers. The industry as a whole suffered from attempting to operate too many mines and employ too many miners. Overcapacity, oversupply, and ruinous competition forced coal producers to slash prices and lay off workers. This in turn led to social anguish in mining communities and created turmoil in the coal fields. These problems were evident when John L. Lewis assumed the UMWA presidency in 1920, and they continue to plague the industry to the present time.

The Lewis in Seltzer's account appears not as the heroic voice of the downtrodden miner nor as the militant leader spearheading the CIO's organizing drives. His Lewis is a conservative Republican and a free-market capitalist who was willing to sacrifice his political philosophy to acquire and exercise power. Seltzer finds Lewis ready to sacrifice union miners' jobs by allowing certain major coal operators to mechanize their mines and reduce the work force. Seltzer's Lewis is also responsible for transforming a democratic, decentralized, and politically pluralistic union into an autocracy that tolerated no dissidents. The absence of democracy within the UMWA led to a multitude of abuses.

The greater portion of Seltzer's study is devoted to examining the UMWA in the years following Lewis's retirement from the union's presidency in 1960. These years witnessed a growing militancy in the union's rank and file. One of the early manifestations of that militancy was the formation of the Black Lung Association in the late 1960s. This developed into a demand for a more democratic union, which in 1970 took the name, Miners for Democracy. By 1972 reformers within the

UMWA were able to capture the union's presidency from Tony Boyle, Lewis's hand-picked successor. The growth of militancy and democracy within the UMWA has forced a reworking of the union's relationship with management, a process marked by conflict in the coal fields.

Seltzer's *Fire in the Hole* is well written and exhaustively documented. Its treatment of the tortuous history of the UMWA since World War II is the best yet published. For students of coal mining, labor relations, or labor history this book should prove valuable.

IOWA CITY

MERLE DAVIS

Worker and Community: Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York, 1850-1884, by Brian Greenberg. SUNY Series in American Social History. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. ix, 227 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$34.50 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900, by Richard Jules Oestreicher. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986. xix, 263 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Many of the studies of the "new" labor history in the recent past have focused on the urban working class in nineteenth-century America. These works have immeasurably expanded our knowledge of working-class lifestyles, the degree of involvement in radical movements, the influence of free-labor ideology, and the variety of independent working-class institutions from cooperatives to trade unions. Studies such as Sean Wilentz's *Chants Democratic*, a work on early nineteenth-century New York artisans or Leon Fink's study of the Knights of Labor, *Workingmen's Democracy*, have laid to rest many of the myths of America's "classless" development during the age of rapid industrialization, explosive urban growth, and untrammelled immigration. Both Brian Greenberg's *Worker and Community* and Richard Oestreicher's *Solidarity and Fragmentation* follow the conceptual and methodological framework laid down by the new generation of labor historians. The unstated question of these and other studies of the type is why, despite recurrent radical political movements and the exceptional class turmoil which reigned periodically in American cities, did a class-conscious labor movement and working-class politics never develop in the United States to the extent that they did in Europe's advanced capitalist states.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.