

The Legacy of Gordon Sidney Harrington
1909 -1925

by

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Abstract

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Gordon Sidney Harrington served as Premier of Nova Scotia from 1930 to 1933. However, this investigation ends with his election to the Nova Scotia Legislature in 1925 and covers important but little known aspects of his career. From being mayor of Glace Bay, he raised, trained and led “B” Company of the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders overseas in the First World War. He served at the Front, then became Deputy Minister Canadian Forces Overseas. He was instrumental in Canada’s gaining control of its forces, he negotiated the financial settlement with the British War Office and oversaw the repatriation of Canadians after the war. Back in Cape Breton he defended known communists. Taking on the British Empire Steel Corporation, which consistently abused its employees, led him into politics. Within his first year as Minister of Public Works and Mines he quelled years of tumult in the coal fields of Nova Scotia.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Allan MacDonald, a stalwart of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) District 26 in the early 20th century, engaged in what seems to have been an incongruous activity. Asked why he had been a Conservative Party organizer, Allan's oldest daughter clarified that he was not a "Conservative" organizer. He was a "Harrington" organizer.

Who was Harrington?

Her brief answer was that Gordon Sidney Harrington was the union lawyer who became Premier of Nova Scotia in 1930. Allan's daughter was not alone in believing that Harrington was a friend of the miners. Certainly he was that, but the story of Harrington's life, and of Harrington himself, is much more complicated and deserves attention both because of his dedication to the miners and the service he provided to Canada during his years overseas in the First World War.

This study will explore what drove a man who could have lived a comfortable life and who derived peace and solace from the outdoors, to find himself continually in the midst of institutions redolent of intrigue, internal dissention and condemnation by outside forces, and how through all of it, he earned – the evidence suggests – increasing respect and trust. Although the respect and trust continued well into his service in the Nova Scotia Legislature, this investigation will end with his first year as an Member of the Legislative Assembly and provincial minister, and will cover the years he spent as mayor of Glace Bay, Deputy Minister of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada (OMFC) in London, and senior counsel of the UMW. He defended communists in court and was the

Minister who broke the hold of the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco) on the mining communities in UMW District 26.

There are mysteries surrounding Harrington's life that will not be resolved. Neither Harrington nor his wife left personal papers. Those few who have mentioned him in accounts of the labour upheavals in the mining communities in the early part of the twentieth century have done so largely in passing, offering little comment on his performance as legal counsel to the UMW both before and after the First World War. C. W. Wade, UMW author of the unpublished *History of District 26*, seemed to have gone the farthest when he wrote, referring to an incident at the Sydney Steel Plant in 1923, that, "Once again Harrington was called and once again he cobbled together some kind of settlement."¹

Harrington was born in Halifax on 7 August, 1883, the third child and oldest son of Charles Sidney Harrington and Mary Sophia Ratchford DeWolf. C. Sidney, as he was known, was a prominent Halifax lawyer, a partner of future Prime Minister Robert Borden, and an unsuccessful Conservative candidate for the provincial legislature. The family had considerable wealth, although after C. Sidney Harrington's death in 1903 its circumstances appear to have been reduced, and Gordon Harrington had to borrow to make his way through law school. For reasons that are difficult to gauge, Harrington chose soon after graduation to abandon legal practice in Halifax in favour of Glace Bay. He then commenced his long legal relationship with the UMW.

¹ Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), HD 8039, M615, M 872.2, C.B Wade, *History of District 26 United Mine Workers of America, 1951*.

In the meantime, he and Katherine MacDonald were married in the Rectory of the Anglican Church in Sydney on 31 October 1910. Soon thereafter he became mayor of Glace Bay, but after the outbreak of the First World War he went on overseas service with the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders, moving on as the war continued to become Deputy Minister of Overseas Military Forces of Canada (OMFC) and so to have demanding administrative responsibilities. Following the Armistice, he continued in this position for a time, but eventually returned to Cape Breton professing a desire for a peaceful and low-key life as he recovered from serious war-related health issues. Instead, his quickly-resumed role with the UMW put him in the midst of the tempestuous capital-labour disputes that characterized industrial Cape Breton during the first half of the 1920s. By 1925, no doubt motivated by the desperate conditions created by the bitter strike and lockout of that year, Harrington was ready to run for provincial elected office. His election in Cape Breton Centre led to his appointment as Minister of Labour under Premier E.N. Rhodes, and subsequently to his succeeding Rhodes as Premier.

Immediately after the 1925 election, with Rhodes, Harrington negotiated a temporary settlement that got the miners back to work, and he initiated the Royal Commission of Sir Andrew Rae Duncan that enquired into the working and living conditions of the miners. While a further study would be required in order to do justice to Harrington's later career, it is the contention of this thesis that the key to understanding his entry into provincial political life lies in examining his earlier experiences. Even though working with the limited source base that results from the loss or destruction of Harrington's personal and political papers, the thesis will trace and analyze the process

that, during Harrington's younger years leading up to his early 40s, made him an important entrant into Nova Scotia's public life.

Although both the Harringtons and DeWolfs were prominent Halifax families in the late nineteenth century in Halifax, few records remain in existence. Information on Harrington's early life was gleaned from records at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management (NSA), at the Prothonotary's office of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court, from McAlpine's Business Directory and from later interviews. His activities as legal counsel to the UMW before the First World War were recorded in his obituaries and in a few newspaper articles found by chance. Several publications dealing with the early years of mining in Cape Breton provided context for the period.²

Few records survive of Harrington's time as mayor of Glace Bay but his time spent in raising and training "B" Company of the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders was found in newspaper reports and in Rev. Clarence MacKinnon's papers at the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada. M. Stuart Hunt's *Nova Scotia's Part in the*

² Royal Commission on Relations of Labour and Capital, Glace Bay Hearings, 1888, http://www.minersmuseum.com/educational_resources/Cape%20Breton%20Miners%20Speak%2096.pdf; C. M. O'Dell, "Men and Methods of the Early Days of Mining in Cape Breton," *Transactions of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, (25 1922), <http://www.mininghistory.ns.ca/cim/c1922001.htm> (accessed 12 February 2013); David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1917-1926." (PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1979); David Frank, "Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation," in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation*, ed. E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); David Frank, *J.B. McLachlan: A Biography* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1999); Carole MacDonald, *Historic Glace Bay* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2009); Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914," *Acadiensis*, 13:1 (Autumn, 1983), 3-46; Ian McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873-1927," *Acadiensis*, 16:1 (Autumn, 1986), 3-57; James Morrison, "Labor Management Relations in the Coal Mining Industry of Nova Scotia." (M.A. thesis, Acadia University, 1950); Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), HD 8039 M615 M 872.2, C.B. Wade, *History of District 26 United Mine Workers of America, 1951*; John Mellor, *The Company Store: James Bryson McLachlan and the Cape Breton Miners 1900-1925* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert & Company, 1976); Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens Hakkert & Company, 1976).

Great War was an introduction to Harrington's war years.³ It led to Desmond Morton's *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War*.⁴ This book was instrumental in instigating an investigation at Library and Archives Canada into the papers of Harrington's colleagues and superiors during and after the war which included important communications with and about Harrington that provided more context for that period, as did Tim Cook's *The Madman and the Butcher*.⁵

Nineteen hundred and twenty to 1925 was a time of continuing crises in the coal industry in Nova Scotia and particularly in Cape Breton. Many of the publications mentioned above also covered this period. Frank, for instance also wrote about the British Empire Steel Corporation and J.B. McLachlan's trial for seditious libel.⁶ The transcripts for that trial from LAC, as well as files at NSA, are incomplete but useful nevertheless. Prime Minister Mackenzie King's papers added to Don MacGillivray's publications about military intervention in the coalfields.⁷ Newspapers reports were a significant source of information about Harrington's support for the miners in 1922, the year the Royal

³ M. Stuart Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax: The Nova Scotia Veteran Publishing Co. Ltd., 1920), 403.

⁴ Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

⁵ Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher: The Sensational Wars of Sam Hughes and General Arthur Currie* (Toronto: Allen Lane Canada, 2010); LAC, Kemp Papers, Kemp to Borden, 29 June 1920; LAC, MG 30, Currie to Harrington, 29 January.

⁶ David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* 7:1 (Autumn 1977); David Frank, "The Trial of J.B. McLachlan," *Historical Papers/Communications Historiques* 18:1 (1988), 208-225.

⁷ Don MacGillivray, "Cape Breton in the 1920s: A Community Besieged," in *Essays in Cape Breton History*, ed. B.D. Tennyson (Windsor, NS: Lancelot Press, 1973); Don MacGillivray, "Industrial Unrest in Cape Breton, 1919-1925" (M.A. thesis, Mount Allison University, 1974); Don MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s," in *Cape Breton Historical Essays*, ed. Don MacGillivray and Brian Tennyson (Sydney, NS: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980); Don MacGillivray, *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures 1948-1968: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton*, ed. H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilke (Halifax and Sydney, NS: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and The University College of Cape Breton Press, 1983), 171-190.

Commission Respecting the Coal Mining Industry in Nova Scotia (The Duncan Commission of 1925) claimed was the lowest ebb in labour-management relations.⁸ Brian Tennyson advised me about a letter he found in London and which he deposited at the Beaton Institute in which Harrington requested advice concerning the establishment of a Royal Commission from the British Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Institute also retains some copies of the company's newspaper, the *Besco Bulletin* and NSA's Rhodes Papers shed light on Harrington's focus on the mining part of his portfolio of Public Works and Mines.

After he had won elections in 1925 and 1928, Premier Harrington told a reporter in 1931 that there were still those who believed he was a died-in-the-wool Conservative who used the miners for political purposes.⁹ Given the distrust that had evolved in that community, the astute miners would have seen through such a charade and would not have re-elected him, which they would do again in 1933. There can be no doubt that in Harrington's own mind, he was doing what he felt to be his duty and fulfilling his need to be useful.¹⁰ Harrington's willingness to risk his health in order to be useful is one the mysteries that remains unanswered at the close of this investigation. What is known is that before Harrington became Minister of Public Works and Mines, the miners had a history of bitter experience with governments' support for mine operators. Harrington was able to bring much-needed peace to the coalfields of Nova Scotia.

⁸ NSA, MG 9554, N93 R88, Report of the Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mines of the Province of Nova Scotia, (the Duncan Commission of 1925).

⁹ Beverley Owen, "Premier of Nova Scotia: An Intimate Sketch of the One-Time Labor Advocate Who Now Heads a Conservative Administration in the Province by the Sea," *Maclean's*, September 1931, 17.

¹⁰ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG 26 H, Sir Borden Papers, Borden to Harrington, 29 June 1925.

Chapter 2

Inspiring Trust and Confidence

Gordon Sidney Harrington (1883-1943), lawyer, Deputy Minister of Canadian Forces Overseas in the First World War, and Premier of Nova Scotia from 1930 to 1933, was born into a comfortable life in upper-class Halifax. His paternal grandfather, Edward Henry Harrington, a lawyer who had been Sheriff of Antigonish and Guysboro counties, settled in Halifax where he and his wife, Louisa Pinnell raised nine children on an estate named “Hawthorn” near the corner of Gottingen and North Streets.¹¹ Gordon’s father, Charles Sidney Harrington, known as C. Sidney, was the youngest living Harrington child and a lawyer. He married Mary Sophia Ratchford DeWolf in 1875. It appears they were living on the Harrington property with their two daughters, Helen (Maud), and Agnes (Mollie) when their first son, Gordon was born on 7 August 1883.

Mary Sophia DeWolf was known to the family as Mae.¹² She was the daughter of Dr. James DeWolf, a graduate of Edinburgh University where he studied medicine and shared classes with a future Prime Minister, Charles Tupper. Dr. DeWolf’s father, known as T.A.S. DeWolf, was a wealthy merchant who, with his son Charles, operated businesses in Halifax and in Horton in the Annapolis Valley. Dr. James DeWolf was president of the Nova Scotia Philanthropic Society and one of the founders of the Medical Society of Nova Scotia in 1854. He specialized in nervous disorders and in 1857 became superintendent of the Nova Scotia Hospital, then popularly known as Mount Hope. DeWolf brought enlightened treatment to the mentally ill but conflicts with the

¹¹NSA, Hopkins land map of Halifax, Plate F, Estate of E. Harrington 1878.

¹²NSA, MG1, vol.1046, Harry Piers Diaries, 1908-1912.

Board and subordinates led to his dismissal in 1878, after which he moved to Halifax where he lived on his investments.¹³

Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden claimed that he and C. Sidney Harrington together established the Canadian Bar Association, and C. Sidney was that organization's first vice president.¹⁴ As a Liberal-Conservative, C. Sidney Harrington unsuccessfully contested the provincial constituency of Annapolis against the Attorney-General J.W. Longley in 1886. Although Harrington lost the election, Borden claimed C. Sidney was an excellent after-dinner speaker and equally effective on the hustings.¹⁵

C. Sidney and his colleagues, many of them relatives, formed the *Game and Inland Fishery Protection Society* that advised the provincial government on policies to protect wildlife.¹⁶ In 1875, C. Sidney Harrington was the first Chief Commissioner of the Game and Inland Fisheries Protection Act. It was the responsibility of the Game Society to administer and enforce wildlife statutes. The society sold hunting and fishing licenses and monitored wildlife populations from its own observations and those of others. The province provided the society with a grant to offset its costs in game protection during much of the period from its inception in 1852.¹⁷ C. Sidney's obituary included the information that along with being "one of the foremost members of the Bar of Nova Scotia and president of the Nova Scotia Bar Association" much, if not all game protection legislation was drafted by Harrington and "enacted as a result of his

¹³ Colin D. Howell, "DeWolf, James Ratchford," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 13, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, (accessed 6 March, 2014), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/dewolf_james_ratchford_13E.html.

¹⁴ Robert Borden, *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 23.

¹⁵ Borden, *Memoirs*, 23.

¹⁶ Donald Dodds, *Challenge and Response: A History of Wildlife and Wildlife Management in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, 1993), 47.

¹⁷ Dodds, *Challenge and Response*, 36.

exertions.”¹⁸ C. Sidney’s oldest son, Gordon, shared his family’s love of the outdoors, hunting and fishing, a hobby that served him well throughout his life.

Gordon’s maternal grandmother died in 1899. She left Gordon’s sisters \$500.00 each and \$250 to each of the three grandsons: Gordon, James, and Hugh. Dr. DeWolf died two years later and left identical bequests to the grandchildren. To his daughter, Mary, he left an interest in his house on Morris Street and all its furnishing.¹⁹ Not listed in his will, but found in Mary’s when she died in 1924, was a twice-yearly income of \$260 from her father’s estate.²⁰ C. Sidney suffered from Bright’s Disease and paralysis. He died of a heart attack on 5 September 1903, leaving no will.²¹ Gordon, then 20, petitioned the court to release his father’s assets to his mother.²² It appears the Harringtons collected rent from the various properties they acquired during their marriage but that there were few other assets. The houses were located in Dartmouth, on Gottingen Street in Halifax, and in Bedford. The family apparently owned the unit in which they lived in a row of townhouses on Halifax’s South Park Street. Along with the property she inherited from her parents and her husband, Mary owned a house in her own name on the North West Arm.²³

Thus, Gordon Harrington came from a family background of apparent affluence and strong political connections, but outside of the modest bequest from his grandparents,

¹⁸ *Halifax Herald*, 7 September 1903.

¹⁹ Nova Scotia Supreme Court (NSSC), Office of the Prothonotary, Dr. James DeWolf Estate Papers.

²⁰ NSSC, Office of the Prothonotary, Estate Papers of Mary Ratchford Harrington.

²¹ *Halifax Herald*, 5 September 1903.

²² NSSC, Office of the Prothonotary, C. Sidney Harrington Estate Papers.

²³ NSSC, Office of the Prothonotary.

in reality he enjoyed very little inherited wealth. Indeed he had to go into debt to pay his way through law school when his father died.²⁴

Harrington attended Dalhousie Law School at a time when its founder, Richard Chapman Weldon, insisted on a focus on international and constitutional law. Of the curriculum, Weldon wrote, “We may fairly hope that some of our students will, in their riper years be called upon to discharge public duties. We aim to help these to act with fidelity and wisdom.”²⁵ No doubt this focus informed future events in Gordon Harrington’s life and likely underpinned his concept of duty. Many classes were taught by “downtowners,” men who combined practicing law and teaching at the Law School. Both P.B. Waite and John Willis wrote that many of them were not dependable but Willis claimed that among the “indispensable stalwarts of the downtowners was [Gordon’s father] Sidney Harrington.”²⁶

Following graduation from Dalhousie Law School in 1904, Harrington was employed for a short time in the law firm of Borden, Ritchie and Chisholm and given family contacts he might have lived a comfortable life in Halifax society. He told Beverley Owen that during his undergraduate years, he developed “an insatiable taste for economic and sociological literature.” He moved to Glace Bay where he “could apply his academic knowledge to industrial and labour conditions as then prevailed in Cape

²⁴ LAC, MG26-H, Robert Borden Papers, Harrington to Borden, 15 August 1930.

²⁵ P.B. Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University, Volume I*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 140.

²⁶ John Willis, *A History of Dalhousie Law School*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 58.

Breton.”²⁷ In Glace Bay, Harrington set up a practice with his classmate, John MacKinley Cameron.

Because of labour troubles that, on occasion, attracted national attention, a perception has developed of early Glace Bay as a town of unremitting poverty and desolation, with all miners’ families in deplorable housing and forever tied to the company stores. Certainly these conditions did exist in particular areas of the town, yet prior to the amalgamation of local mines under the Dominion Coal Company in 1893, it appears the town had a thriving port with a customs house.²⁸ Dozens of businesses stood on two main roads that converged at the harbor.²⁹

At the turn of the 20th century, the Nova Scotia government gave the Dominion Coal Company a 99-year lease on all the coalfields south of Sydney Harbour. In return the company paid a 12.5 cent royalty on each ton of coal raised. The coal company absorbed the existing mines, closing some and opening others. It opened a steel plant in Sydney that would utilize much of the coal production.³⁰

In 1901 the coal company built several hundred small, tightly-packed, double company houses in the New Aberdeen and Caledonia areas of Glace Bay, and more in neighbouring No. 6, New Waterford and Birch Grove to absorb the thousands of families responding to advertisements for miners placed in Canada, the United States and Europe.

²⁷ Owen, “Premier of Nova Scotia,” 17.

²⁸ Maureen Burton McNeil, *Early Sullivans of Cape Breton 1800-1850* (Glace Bay: Maureen McNeil, 2006), 2. Susanna Lott Sullivan ran the customs house after her husband died, and she also operated a tavern.

²⁹ NSA map collection, A.F. Church, Cape Breton County, map of Glace Bay, 1877.

³⁰ Frank, David. “The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation.” *Acadiensis*, 7:1 (Autumn 1977): 11.

This housing would supplement houses built some fifty or more years earlier by independent mining companies.³¹

Gordon Harrington's home and his office are listed in McAlpine's Directory for 1907.³² Reflecting the population explosion in the town, the Directory, while incomplete, lists businesses selling goods and services to the townspeople as well as to those who came by train and tram car from surrounding communities to shop and for entertainment. Stores sold everything from ice cream to wagons, fresh fruit to furs. McArel's three-storey department store on Commercial Street carried everything from groceries to harnesses. The town also boasted several banks, insurance companies, hotels, movie houses and live theatre venues. There was one indoor skating rink and several outdoor ones, ball fields and swimming clubs. Women as well as men had hockey, basketball and swim teams. There was a modern hospital, schools, and several churches. The Directory listed both businesses and individuals. Not all miners who owned their own homes were listed, but it appears the Directory does not include those renting company houses.

Religion played a major role in Glace Bay, as in other nearby mining communities. Three churches in Glace Bay served the largely Roman Catholic population. A massive Presbyterian church in the centre of town loomed over neighbouring places of worship catering to the Anglicans, Baptists, Greek Orthodox and Methodists. The first synagogue in Eastern Canada was built in Glace Bay. Smaller Catholic and Protestant churches were built in New Aberdeen and Caledonia, near the newer company houses.

³¹ MacDonald, *Historic Glace Bay*, 38, 39.

³² *McAlpine's Nova Scotia Directory*, Glace Bay 1907-08, 1357.

There were Irish and Acadian Catholics, along with Scottish Presbyterians and smaller ethnic groups, but Scottish Catholic traditions dominated the mining communities. Gaelic was heard on the street and in the mines' washhouses. Churches held Gaelic services.³³ There was a Scottish pipe band, Scottish piping competitions and Gaelic concerts.³⁴

In setting up a practice in Glace Bay, Gordon Harrington, an Anglican from Halifax, stepped into what must have been for him an entirely new culture, complete with new languages. His law partner, Cameron, was from Pictou and of Scottish origin. He may have explained to Harrington how to navigate the Scottish culture.³⁵ David Frank wrote that in 1907, almost 80 per cent of the men working for the Dominion Coal Company were under 30 years of age and descended from parents who had come from the countryside a generation earlier. They were mostly Gaelic-speaking Highland Scots and mostly Catholic.³⁶

Political and economic disruptions in Scotland in the latter half of the eighteenth century led to tens of thousands of Scots leaving the country, either voluntarily or through the infamous Highland Clearances. It has been estimated that between 1790 and 1830 some 50,000 arrived on the shores of Cape Breton Island. The largest influx

³³ David Frank, "Traditions and Culture in Cape Breton Mining Communities in the Early Twentieth Century," in *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785-1985*, ed. Kenneth Donovan (Sydney: University of Cape Breton Press, 1985), 205.

³⁴ MacDonald, *Historic Glace Bay*, 12, 124.

³⁵ Cameron moved to Calgary, Alberta, where he made a name for himself as a criminal lawyer. See J. McKinley Cameron fonds: http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesMainResults.aspx?XC=/search/archivesMainResults.aspx&TN=MAINCAT&AC=QBE_QUERY&RF=WebResults&DL=0&RL=0&NP=255&MF=WPEngMsg.ini&MR=5&QB0=AND&QF0=Main%20entry%2B%7C%2BTitle&QI0=J.%20Mckinley%20Cameron%20fonds. (accessed 28 March 2013).

³⁶ Frank, "Traditions and Culture," 204.

occurred between 1800 and 1815. Those who arrived later found themselves on backlands that were almost impossible to farm. Between 1845 and 1851 potato rot caused near-starvation on the Island. Concurrently, wheat fly destroyed the meagre wheat crop.³⁷ In Cape Breton, the bulk of the Scottish migration to rural Cape Breton was made up of “unpropertied immigrant crofters from the Highlands, [who] became the main source of the urban proletariat that emerged in the coal towns from mid-century onward.”³⁸

Harrington married Katherine Agnes MacDonald in the rectory of the Anglican Church in Sydney in 1910. She was 19, he 27. Katherine was one of seven children of coal miner Michael MacDonald and his wife Jessie, who lived in Reserve Mines, near Glace Bay. Katherine’s father was the son of a Scottish immigrant, and had been one of three brothers who left Boisdale in rural Cape Breton for the mining communities in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁹ Katherine’s father worked in a mine at Reserve Mines. His brother, Rory, went first to mine coal in Port Morien and then Glace Bay. The third brother, James, was a seafarer who lived in Dominion and had a large family. James’s son, Michael, was a CCF member of the legislature from 1945 to 1953 and leader of the CCF/NDP party from 1953 to 1963.⁴⁰ Another son, Alex, became president of District 26, United Mine Workers of America UMW and a third, Donald, president of District 18, UMW in Alberta.⁴¹

³⁷ Robert Morgan, *Early Cape Breton: From Founding to Famine: Essays, Talks, and Conversations* (Wreck Cove: Breton Books, 2000), 136.

³⁸ Del Muise, “The Making of an Industrial Community: Cape Breton Coal Towns 1867-1900,” in *Cape Breton Historical Essays*, ed. Don MacGillivray and Brian Tennyson (Sydney: College of Cape Breton Press, 1980), 78.

³⁹ LAC, Census of Canada 189, NS/CB/Glace Bay page 38. Lists Katherine’s grandfather, Donald MacDonald, 90 years, born in Scotland and living with his son Rory and family.

⁴⁰ *Halifax Herald*, 4 July 1997.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Katherine's parents owned their own home on Main Street in Reserve Mines, which Katherine's niece remembered as a large comfortable house with several musical instruments.⁴² The family was Catholic, and politically Liberal. In marrying outside the Catholic Church, Katherine risked the ire of family and community.⁴³ Regardless of the opinion of the community, there is no indication that deserting her religion or political leanings affected her relationship with her own immediate family.⁴⁴ Neither was there a problem with the Harringtons. In Halifax, Harry Piers, Harrington's first cousin, recorded that his mother gave Gordon's wife a silver spoon for a wedding present, and on 30 December 1910, Gordon and Katherine were in Halifax visiting Gordon's mother at Christmas, during which time Gordon petitioned for a family land partition. Katherine typed the document.⁴⁵

Harrington chose well in finding a location from which to study sociology and labour. The 1888 Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital held hearings in Glace Bay where members interviewed two miners, one of whom was a coal cutter who rarely took home any money after charges were deducted.⁴⁶ Charges included house rental, charges for miners' materials, purchases at the company store, and charges for the doctor and the school. At that time, the churches had not started collecting from

⁴² One of several conversations with the late Carmel MacKenzie of Hamilton, Ontario. Katherine is Harrington's niece.

⁴³ Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, passenger declaration, on the ship *Royal George*, June 19, 1920. Mrs. G.S. Harrington listed her religion as Church of England.

⁴⁴ Carmel MacKenzie, daughter of Katherine's brother, Tom, said she overheard her parents discussing politics and her mother saying that Tom, Katherine Harrington's brother, was a Liberal until his brother-in-law (Harrington) became involved in the Conservative Party.

⁴⁵ NSA, MG 1, vol. 1046, Harry Piers Diaries, 1908-1912. Although no information exists concerning how Harrington and MacDonald met, that she typed a legal document might mean that she had been his secretary.

⁴⁶ The 1937 provincial Trade Union Act referred to the automatic deduction of union dues as a "check-off." In the coal fields of Cape Breton, the term had, from the 19th century, referred to all deductions made at source.

the check-off and it would be another ten to twelve years before payments for the hospital would be deducted. The second miner, who owned his own home, also owned a woodlot. He said he could not sell wood to the Caledonia mine because he did not owe enough at the company store, then owned by the mine manager, David MacKeen.⁴⁷

Once caught in the trap of company housing and company stores, it is easy to see how it was important to have young boys go into the mines to help the usually-large families. They were paid less than adults but had the same deductions taken from their pay. By the turn of the century, half the miners in Nova Scotia were under twenty years of age and three quarters of them were under thirty.⁴⁸ When boys had been working since they were eight or ten, it was natural that by eighteen they felt adult enough to marry and begin their own families, starting the process over again. Often these early marriages combined with too little pay, too much debt and irregular work, led to systemic poverty.

In a book of mining photos honouring legendary Glace Bay photographer, Leslie Shedden, Don MacGillivray wrote about the difficulty Highland Scots had in bending to authority, the reverence of many miners for “Saint Monday,” as well as the need for other “personal” days which, MacGillivray wrote, is a tradition in working class communities.⁴⁹

The hardships in mining communities in 1888, though severe, had been relatively improved from earlier years due to the efforts of the Provincial Workmen’s Association (PWA). The PWA was founded in Springhill in 1879 by the usually independent miners

⁴⁷ Royal Commission on Relations of Labour and Capital.

⁴⁸ Frank, *McLachlan*, 50.

⁴⁹ MacGillivray, “Glace Bay: Images and Impressions,” 178; for a full explanation of the subject as it existed in Industrial England see Douglas A. Reid, “The Decline of Saint Monday 1766-1876,” *The Past and Present Society*, Oxford University Press, 76 -101, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650355> (accessed 15 July 2014).

who banded together to have wage cuts restored. Their success led them to expand the organization. The PWA moved into Cape Breton in 1881 and made impressive progress in the miners' working conditions.⁵⁰ According to an anonymous essay at the Glace Bay Miners' Museum web site:

The essential points of the PWA were unity, equity and progress. It wanted to make the mining population a respected segment of the community. The PWA used three notable tactics to accomplish its aims: strikes, lobbying and politics. Strikes were used as a last resort when all else failed.⁵¹

The PWA was a fairly loose confederation of skilled colliers' lodges under the leadership of General Secretary Robert Drummond, described by labour historian Craig Heron as follows:

An earnest, preachy teetotaler obsessed with working class respectability, Drummond was always ready to trumpet the rights of independent workers in the face of unreasonably autocratic mine managers and an undemocratic state. With or without his blessing, local PWA lodges waged surprisingly successful battles to retain their direct control over coal-hewing operations.

While absenteeism was accepted by the mine operators, writers such as MacGillivray, James Morrison, McKay and Heron suggest that there were reasons to believe that the miners saw themselves as partners in coal production and worked overtime when they considered it necessary to "get the coal out."⁵²

At the turn of the twentieth century things changed rapidly with the amalgamation of the coal mines, and the influx of a new labour force, mostly from Britain, composed of

⁵⁰ Frank, *McLachlan*, 50.

⁵¹ Glace Bay Miners' Museum, http://www.minersmuseum.com/hof_unions_pwa.html (accessed 13 February 2013).

⁵² McGillivray, "Glace Bay: Images and Impressions," 178; Morrison, "Labour Management in the Coal Mining Industry of Nova Scotia," 90; Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., 1996), 9, 10 and 39; McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty," 7.

workers who brought with them an antagonism towards capitalism. None was more strident in that antagonism than J.B. McLachlan. Heron wrote:

[Coal miners'] proud independence and solidarity in the workplace made the miners particularly resistant to the new managerial style of monopoly capitalism and were strengthened by the immigration of militant young workers such as Cape Breton's J.B. McLachlan.⁵³

McLachlan had been blacklisted for his union activities in his native Lanarkshire in Scotland and soon after he, his wife, and their four children arrived in North Sydney where he was also blacklisted by the Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company. The McLachlan family then moved to Glace Bay.⁵⁴ There, McLachlan gathered many followers who complained that the PWA was a company-controlled union. In 1904, the PWA lost a strike at the Sydney Steel Plant, giving more incentive to critics. Many thereupon applied for membership of the rival United Mine Workers of America (UMW), and McLachlan assumed the job of secretary-treasurer, a salaried position to which he would continually be re-elected. He and his family, which would grow to nine children, lived on a small farm at Steele's Hill on the outskirts of town.⁵⁵

No record has been found to indicate exactly when District 26 of the UMW retained Gordon Harrington as its legal counsel but that event would lead to a decades-long interaction between McLachlan and Harrington. District 26 applied to the Dominion Coal Company to replace the PWA as representatives of the coal miners. The PWA, confident of its support, agreed to a referendum. It was held on 24 June 1909, but with fewer than half the miners voting and the UMW winning by some 400 votes, the PWA

⁵³ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 39-40.

⁵⁴ Frank, *McLachlan*, 92.

⁵⁵ Frank, *McLachlan*, 94 and 122.

refused to concede and retained the support of the company. Membership in the UMW increased steadily, even though members suffered by getting assigned the worst equipment and the worst shifts.⁵⁶ Jack Williams wrote that the PWA had negotiated a closed-shop agreement with the coal company, which included the check-off for union dues. Men who left the PWA were subject to dismissal.⁵⁷ Tensions rose between 1908 and 1909. On April 24, 1909, the PWA Grand Secretary John Moffatt told the *Sydney Post* that the PWA would not be worried if the UMW members were to go on strike. He said there were thirteen PWA lodges in and around Glace Bay with an average of 400 members each who could keep the mines working. At the same time, in the same paper, a representative of the UMW made the unlikely claim that the union had no intention of going on strike and the \$20,000 sent to District 26 from UMW international headquarters was only for education.⁵⁸

In preparation for a strike, the UMW was required under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act to apply for conciliation board. It did so and the conciliation board favoured the company and the PWA. On 5 July 1909, the Dominion Coal Company posted a notice that it would not recognize the UMW and that in the event of a strike it would continue to operate with the aid of loyal men. On 6 July 1909, 2500 members of the UMW went on strike.⁵⁹

In many ways, the 1909 strike demonstrated how Glace Bay had changed from the beginning of the century. Coal royalties were now one of the largest sources of

⁵⁶ Frank, *McLachlan*, 96.

⁴⁶ Jack Williams, *The Story of Unions in Canada* (Canada: J.M. Dent Company Ltd., 1975), 89.

⁵⁸ *Sydney Post*, 24 April 1909.

⁵⁹ Williams, *The Story of Unions*, 89.

income for the provincial government,⁶⁰ and it therefore had a stake in seeing that the mines continued operating.

Events surrounding the 1909 strike created a mythology within the mining communities, particularly areas of Glace Bay which developed a rigid anti-capitalist attitude that lasted for generations. The company asked the mayor and council of Glace Bay to request troops to protect its property, in accordance with the Militia Act, under which mayors or magistrates could apply to the Minister of Militia for troops to preserve public order and protect property.

The mayor, John C. Douglas, a prominent Conservative and one of the lawyers for the UMW, refused. The company then went to a county judge, who signed the order. The arrival of troops in 1909 represented, to the UMW membership, unqualified government support for the coal company. The troops set up defences around the pit heads, the strongest of which were installed at the militant No.2 colliery at New Aberdeen. Stories abound about UMW members and their families taunting PWA members who had to be escorted to work amid stone-throwing and yells of “scabs.” PWA members were harassed on the street and at their homes. They laid charges against the agitators, many of whom were arrested. The UMW provided bail for the accused and its lawyers, including Harrington, laid harassment charges against the people who complained of harassment.⁶¹ The general manager, G.H. Duggan, was charged with attacking a protester. A reporter of the *Sydney Post* claimed that Harrington’s cross-

⁶⁰ Frank, *McLachlan*, 107.

⁶¹ *Sydney Post*, 14 July 1909.

examination of Duggan was too tame for the judge to take seriously, wanting instead proof of “sticks, fisticuffs or bad language.”⁶²

Not only did the 1909 strike cause permanent labour-management distrust, but it also caused divisions within the community, and within families.

Three weeks into the strike, the company began evicting striking miners from company houses. Father James Fraser of Saint John’s Catholic Church in New Aberdeen opened the church basement to miners’ families. One story claims that Father Fraser was immediately taken from the parish for his efforts.⁶³ In fact, while the priest tried unsuccessfully to use his personal acquaintance with Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier to get help for the miners, he continued at Saint John’s parish until 1916.⁶⁴

The communities of Bridgeport and Dominion lie approximately two miles west of New Aberdeen. They were older, settled, mostly Catholic and mostly PWA supporters. On 30 June 1909, UMW members gathered in Glace Bay and formed a parade, led by UMW president, Dan McDougall, to march to Dominion. In Glace Bay, Mayor Douglas refused to halt the march despite the fact that on the town council were two members of the PWA and two other mine contractors who were likely PWA supporters given the coal company’s closed shop.⁶⁵ The Town of Dominion passed an emergency bylaw on Friday 29 July forbidding every kind of parade, meeting or street loitering within the town without a permit. It may be an overstatement to suggest that the UMW marchers parading into Dominion was akin to Orangemen in Belfast marching into Falls Road, but

⁶² *Sydney Post*, 21 July 1909.

⁶³ *Cape Breton’s Magazine*, Issue 59, 1992, 43.

⁶⁴ Antigonish Diocese Archives, <http://www.antigonishdiocese.com> (accessed 28 March 2013).

⁶⁵ *Toronto Star*, 16 July 1909.

McDougall was what David Frank described as a prominent Orangeman, and he was riding a white horse.⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, the marchers were aware of the bylaw passed a day earlier. As they crossed the bridge at Cadegan's Brook, the border between Bridgeport and Dominion, they saw a machine gun nest set up on the steps of Immaculate Conception Church with the gun aimed at the marchers. They turned around and marched back to Glace Bay.⁶⁷

The strike eventually failed. Many on the international executive of the UMW argued that if the strike was not over when the shipping season closed, it should be shut down. However, at McLachlan's urging, it dragged on into the winter, costing the head office of the UMW some \$800,000 for food, health care and lodging of striking miners and their families.⁶⁸ Jack Williams places the amount at \$1,000,000.⁶⁹ Whichever the real cost, it was enough to encourage the international union to balk at funding future strikes.

Troops continued to patrol the district. Men began drifting back to work and were compelled to join the PWA and take part in the check-off. In April of 1910 the strike was officially over in Cape Breton, although it dragged out for another year in Springhill. In 1913, the UMW District 26, having too few members, lost its charter.⁷⁰

Although the strike caused ongoing dissention between supporters of the UMW and supporters of the PWA, Gordon Harrington, who had been legal counsel for UMW, the union that lost the battle, was elected mayor in March of 1913. The election followed the death of Mayor Henry MacDonald. MacDonald, who died on 3 December 1912 of

⁶⁶ Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners," 83.

⁶⁷ Frank, *McLachlan*, 100.

⁶⁸ Frank, *McLachlan*, 103.

⁶⁹ Williams, *Story of Unions*, 80.

⁷⁰ Frank, *McLachlan*, 108, 109 and 160. Through a series of amalgamations the charter of District 26, lost in 1913, was reinstated in 1919.

Bright's Disease, had been a very popular figure. A coal miner before becoming a businessman and stipendiary magistrate, MacDonald, a Roman Catholic, commanded support across political and religious lines.⁷¹ Harrington's election led the *Sydney Post*, a Conservative newspaper, to report that the new mayor had won the largest majority in the history of the town, proving that although born in Halifax, he had evidently established himself firmly in the confidence of the citizens.⁷² The Liberal *Sydney Record* wrote that there was a small turn-out of 1000 of the 3700 eligible voters. With questionable mathematics, it went on to report that Harrington won 1339 votes to 537 for his opponent. Without congratulating the winner, the *Record* noted that the defeat of Acting Mayor P.E. Ogilvie, who had been on council since the town's incorporation, would be a great loss to his many friends.⁷³

The minutes of Glace Bay council meetings for those years appear to have been lost, most likely to a fire in the town hall, although some reports have survived.⁷⁴ The problems that faced the town in 1913 would continue to exist for years to come, particularly financial difficulties and health problems resulting from poor sanitation and poor nutrition, which in turn resulted in poor educational prospects for many of the town's children. The reports from various commissions, including the 1925 Royal Commission enquiring into the coal mining industry in Nova Scotia, indicate a situation in Glace Bay whereby the tracts of company housing were not properly maintained. Some areas had open sewers, and no water supply. Although these problems existed

⁷¹ *Sydney Record*, 5 December 1912.

⁷² *Sydney Post*, 5 March 1913.

⁷³ *Sydney Record*, 5 March 1913.

⁷⁴ Beaton Institute (BI), MG 16, selected annual reports for the Town of Glace Bay, 1902-1928.

mostly in the areas of company housing, the effects of poor sanitation permeated the town through illness, truancy, and poor prospects for the children from those areas.⁷⁵

In 1914, causes of death were listed for the first time in Glace Bay's annual health reports. Dr. MacLean, the town's Medical Officer of Health, wrote that money the town spent on sewers, water supply and the hospital went a long way in preventing typhoid fever but further improvement could be made by more improvements to sanitation and more monitoring of the sources of the town's milk supply. The major cause of children's deaths was *cholera infantum*, a persistent problem in the town because of unsanitary surroundings mostly in the areas of company houses.⁷⁶

Many years later, at the time of Harrington's death, Glace Bay mayor D. W. Morrison noted that the UMW had hired Harrington as its legal counsel during the 1909 strike and that following this experience he became interested in civic politics. Morrison said he had been fortunate to be on council when Harrington was mayor and that the town made much progress during that time.⁷⁷

In 1915, Harrington resigned as mayor to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force to fight with Britain in the First World War. Harrington had been a militia officer with the Princess Patricia Fusiliers since 1899 and held the rank of captain.⁷⁸ In December 1914, four months after the outbreak of the war, Sir Samuel Hughes, Minister of Militia, spoke in Sydney as part of his effort to travel the country encouraging leaders in

⁷⁵ The Quirk Commission in 1920, the Scott Commission in 1922, the Report Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mines in the Province of Nova Scotia, 1925, appendix I, 41-46.

⁷⁶ Selected Annual Reports for the town of Glace Bay 1902-1928.

⁷⁷ *Glace Bay News*, 5 July 1943. Morrison served twice as mayor, from 1922-1933 and 1934-1950.

⁷⁸ Cambridge Library, records of Princess Louise Fusiliers, 66th battalion, 1902-03.

communities to raise battalions which he promised would fight together overseas.⁷⁹ Soon afterward, according to a local newspaper, “Major” Harrington – a rank he had not yet formally attained – was reported to have departed ceremoniously from Sydney for Halifax at the head of a party that was “over one hundred strong.”⁸⁰

The group first set up on the Halifax Commons then moved to Aldershot as part of the fledgling 185th Battalion, under the command Frank Parker Day. Day, born in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, and educated in England and Germany, had moved to the United States where he taught at university, but returned to Canada at the outbreak of World War I to enlist in the Canadian Forces. He served first with the 85th Canadian Infantry Battalion and later helped recruit and then commanded the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders.⁸¹ Harrington was second-in-command. The *Heather*, a newspaper for and about the 185th Highlanders, reported:

The concert given Major Harrington at King’s Theatre [unreadable] 28th emphasized the truth of the saying, “Full many a flower’s born to blush, etc.”.....However, some real live ones appeared, some fine piano playing mouth –organ playing and dancing were handed out to the unsuspecting audience who all went away saying the Glace Bay Company of the 185th is some company.”⁸²

“Best recruiting center in the Empire,” read the headline in the *Sydney Post*:

Cape Breton, the tight little island gave over twelve hundred men to the 185th battalion in three weeks and was the best recruiting centre in the British Empire said Col. Frank Day the giant commanding officer of the 185th.⁸³

⁷⁹ *Sydney Post*, 21 December 1914.

⁸⁰ “Century in Review,” *Cape Breton Post*, 31 December 1999, 19.

⁸¹ Dalhousie University Archives, ms-2-288. Frank Parker Day Fonds. <http://www.library.dal.ca/archives/MS2/MS-2-288fa.htm>. (accessed 12 May 2014).

⁸² *The Heather*, no dates given.

⁸³ “Century in Review,” 31 December 1999, 19.

Day congratulated the women of Cape Breton and the people who opened their houses to recruiters as they travelled throughout the Island. On one Sunday battalion officers occupied four pulpits in Sydney. On the Monday and Tuesday North Sydney gave up more than 100 recruits.⁸⁴

Harrington's 1200 men from Glace Bay, New Waterford and surrounding area formed the 185th "B" Company that began initial training at Broughton, an abandoned coal town 30 miles from Sydney.

D.H. MacDougall, Vice President of Dosco and a native of Glace Bay, was made Honorary Colonel of the regiment. He made several gifts to the 185th including large sums of money and outfitted a pipe band with pipes and drums.⁸⁵ Similar gifts were presented to each company, including one by Col. Thomas Cantley, President of Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company, operators of the mines and steel works in Sydney Mines.⁸⁶

When the men arrived at Broughton the snow was too deep for training, clothing was inadequate and many of the men became ill. The Broughton Arms Hotel, considered the most up-to-date east of Montreal, was turned into a hospital. The Royal Engineers, who came to repair the plumbing, accidentally set the building on fire and it was totally destroyed. No one died, but two days' rations were lost.⁸⁷

The 185th Cape Breton Highlanders, after nearly two months spent at Broughton for its mobilization center, left yesterday for the brigade camp at Kentville.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ 185th Battalion History, <http://bdbarry.tripod.com/id121.htm> (accessed 3 May, 2013).

⁸⁶ *The Heather*.

⁸⁷ Bill Crowell, *The Artist and the Colonel: The Story of Mabel Killam Day and Frank Parker Day*, (Tantallon, NS: Glen Margaret Publishing, 2008), 77-78.

Leaving Broughton about 4 p.m. the train, which was divided into two sections with a half hour interval between them arrived at Sydney at 5:30 p.m.

The station platform and approaches were packed with dense throngs of people as the train steamed to and as the men began to detrain there was a roaring [cheers] from the crowds. The battalion formed up immediately by companies and headed by the splendid regimental band, each company being headed by pipers proceeded to Victoria Park. The ease and steadiness with which the men marched was particularly noticeable and they presented generally a hardy and efficient appearance.⁸⁸

Rev. Clarence MacKinnon, Principal of the Presbyterian College in Halifax and chaplain to the 219th, wrote that each battalion was distinguished by the colours of the feathers in their balmorals.⁸⁹

Harrington could not have anticipated any of these events when he first left the tree-lined streets of south end Halifax for Glace Bay. No doubt in 1905, the town would have offered a challenge, both physically and culturally, and certainly was a good location to practice law and study sociology and labour. That he fitted easily into the town and that his leadership skills soon emerged was demonstrated by his becoming mayor less than a decade later. It is worth repeating that he was legal counsel to the union that lost a long and bitter strike, yet was elected mayor of the town at the age of 30 and was headed for re-election, according to D.W. Morrison. There seems to be no question of his ability to gain the trust of the men he trained in the 185th "B" company, and that trust would reappear in the labour struggles after the war.

⁸⁸ "The 185th Heads to Aldershot," *Cape Breton in Review* 1916, 19.

⁸⁹ Maritime Conference United Church Archives, Sackville, New Brunswick, Reverend Clarence MacKinnon, *Journal of the 219th Battalion*.

Chapter 3

The War Years

1915 to 1920

Col. Gordon S. Harrington's Certificate of Service in the Canadian Expeditionary Force states that he was appointed to a commissioned rank with the 85th Battalion on 1 October 1915 then transferred to the 185th on 23 February 1916.⁹⁰

The SS *Olympic*, carrying all four Nova Scotia Highland Brigades, set sail from Halifax on 13 October 1916 for a five-day journey through the submarine-infested North Atlantic, arriving in Liverpool on 19 October. Both Katherine Harrington and Mabel Killam Day, wife of Frank Parker Day, would follow in November. The *Olympic* was the sister ship of the RMS *Titanic* and while some of the first class section had been designated for hospital space, the state rooms set aside for officers must have made them question "whether they were still in the land of the living or whether their merits might not have secured for them 'quick translation to Elysian joys.'"⁹¹ The enlisted men slept under the decks in hammocks slung from the ceiling. Everyone had to wear a life belt throughout the voyage except at night.

Gordon Sidney Harrington served with the 185th Battalion, the 193rd Battalion, the 17th Reserve Battalion, the Nova Scotia Regimental Depot, and the General List before being assigned to the Office of the High Commissioner for Canada in April, 1917. He was struck off strength on 5 January 1921 by reason of general demobilization.

⁹⁰ LAC, Soldiers of the First World War, RG 1RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4078, 3750.

⁹¹ MacKinnon, *Journal of the 219th Battalion*.

From 1914 to 1918, the head office of Canada's overseas mission was "chaotic and politics ridden."⁹² Canadian Minister of the Militia General Samuel Hughes's representative in England, Major General John Carson – appointed, like his associated appointee Max Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, by Hughes without Prime Minister Borden's knowledge⁹³ – assumed greater and greater power. The British War Office was confused as to who had what authority. Most officers in the Department knew that their careers were at the mercy of Hughes and tolerated his policies. Hughes created an Overseas Militia Council which was subordinate to the Militia Council in Ottawa but he kept it ineffective ensure his power was paramount in all matters.⁹⁴

Prime Minister Borden continually received letters from the field complaining of incompetence in the London office, insufficient equipment and supplies in the field, with serious implications for morale. There were allegations of serious corruption in the pay office and rumours of 214 surplus officers paid a total of \$1064 per day to do nothing.⁹⁵ The Prime Minister was well aware of Hughes's activities and reputation but for political reasons tried to work around this temperamental but still-popular minister. As scandals proliferated, Borden made unsuccessful attempts to rein in his minister. Increasingly, the incompetence of the Canadian military administration under Hughes was becoming

⁹² Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 69.

⁹³ Robert Craig Brown, "Hughes, Sir Samuel," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 15, University of Toronto Press 2003, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hughes_samuel_15E.html (accessed 23 April 2013).

⁵ Canadian Army Headquarters, Historical Section, Ottawa: *The Command of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada in the United Kingdom, 1914-1918*, Report 98, 1988, paragraph 77.

⁹⁵ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 72-73.

obvious, as the unnecessary loss of almost 1400 men at St. Eloi in April 1916 painfully indicated.⁹⁶ According to Robert Craig Brown:

By 1916, Hughes was a growing political liability for the government. He was detested in Quebec for his anti-French, anti-Catholic views, and distrusted by Cabinet colleagues for his financial and administrative shortcomings. His attempts to establish and control a Canadian military command structure overseas had resulted in chaos, leading in the fall to the creation by the prime minister of an overseas ministry answering directly to Cabinet.⁹⁷

The Canadian High Commissioner to Great Britain, Sir George Perley, proposed to Borden the establishment of a much smaller, more efficient council. Perley recommended that “such a council must be firmly based on an order-in-council with authority to manage our military affairs across the seas in a businesslike way.”⁹⁸ By 18 October 1916, Borden had a new plan that would permit a cabinet minister to live in London and have responsibility for personnel, property, and expenditures of the Canadian forces in Britain and on the continent. On all matters affecting the overseas forces, the minister would be responsible for negotiations with the British government. He could hire staff and recruit an advisory council. The minister would report to the cabinet through the Prime Minister and would receive no pay.⁹⁹ Hughes raised objection after objection but, on 27 October 1916, an order-in-council established the new, civilian-run Overseas Military Forces of Canada (OMFC). The same day, another order-in-council made Sir George Perley minister of that organization.¹⁰⁰ Not quite a month later, Hughes

⁹⁶ Canadian War Museum, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/st-eloi-e.aspx>, (accessed 21 October 2013).

⁹⁷ Brown, “Hughes, Sir Samuel,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

⁹⁸ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 84.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁰⁰ *The Command of the Overseas Military*, Report 98, paragraph 82.

was replaced as Minister of Militia by a Toronto manufacturer-turned-politician, Albert Edward Kemp.¹⁰¹

In the meantime, on 19 October 1916 the Nova Scotia brigade, including the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders, disembarked at Liverpool. Their immediate experience of adverse weather and health issues including influenza was aggravated by the woeful inadequacy of their clothing and equipment. Moreover, the battalions were soon broken up to supply the huge losses in the British forces. On 30 November orders for the first draft of 800 men for France arrived,¹⁰² confirming the rumors and the fears that promises made to keep the battalions together would be ignored.

Following further officer training in Bedford, England at the Imperial First Senior Infantry School where, according to a later report, Harrington passed the qualifying examination with the highest marks ever attained “at that institution during those times,” he assumed command of the 17th Reserve battalion at Bramshott. The battalion had a full complement of 800. As a reserve battalion in the 5th Reserve Brigade, it was to reinforce the 25th and the 85th and to be distinctly Nova Scotian. It subsumed the 219th and the 193rd.¹⁰³ From Bramshott, Harrington was transferred to London on 18 April 1917.¹⁰⁴

When requested by Borden to take on the OMFC, Perley suggested he do so initially for a few months to see how it would work. Borden, in turn, recommended to Perley that he hire a confidential secretary. Perley originally ignored the suggestion but then wrote asking the Minister of the Militia, Sir Edward Kemp, to find a “trustworthy,

¹⁰¹ Brown, “Hughes, Sir Samuel,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

¹⁰² MacKinnon, *Journal of the 219th Battalion*.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Sydney Post Record*, 11 May 1957.

tactful and reticent officer who does not talk too much and would assist me with those having troubles and grievances and generally smooth over difficulties. Hard to define his duties but they will be important.”¹⁰⁵ The person, he continued, should be a man of experience but not too young, a Conservative but not too partisan. Kemp’s original recommendation was ignored by Perley who let the subject drop. But it appears Kemp sought the same qualities in a secretary when he took over the office. Harrington, having been mayor of Glace Bay, would have been seen as having the experience needed for this position.

Eventually Kemp took over the OMFC while Perley remained High Commissioner. Kemp proceeded to assess the organization’s structure, and persuaded the Prime Minister to agree to the constitution of a Military Council. Harrington became its secretary, an important position given the weight attached by Kemp to systematic recording and carrying-out of decisions.

Although Harrington’s late father had been a law partner with the Prime Minister and Harrington had spent a brief time in Borden’s law firm, Borden wrote later that he did not get to know Harrington until 1918:

My chief experience with Gordon Harrington was during the war (where) he found his *métier* in the organization of the Canadian Overseas Ministry. Both Sir George Perley and Sir Edward Kemp formed a high opinion of Harrington’s character, ability and devotion to duty. He rendered to our country service that could hardly be overestimated.¹⁰⁶

Kemp and Harrington set out to prove that the new council would be a healthy contrast to Hughes’s version. Procedures resembled those of the Militia Council in

¹⁰⁵ *The Command of the Overseas Military*, Report 98, 128.

¹⁰⁶ Sir Robert Laird Borden, *Letters to Limbo*, ed. Henry Borden, SM, CMG, QC (Toronto: University Press, 1971), 39.

Ottawa, with memoranda submitted in advance, a formal agenda, and a formal report on decisions reached.¹⁰⁷ However, an issue that quickly arose was whether or to what extent the authority of the new structure would extend to Canadian forces serving at the Front.

Plans for the reorganization were laid out at a meeting on 2 April 1917 at the War Office, attended by among others Kemp, and Harrington as Acting Deputy Minister.

After some sparring between the Canadians and British, at the meeting and in memoranda afterwards, the OMFC was conceded considerable administrative control of Canadian troops, qualified by compromise wording “on important matters” drafted by Harrington.¹⁰⁸ “On all important matters, e.g. discipline, allotment of reinforcements, establishments, appointments of senior officers, etc.,” was replaced with: “On important matters such as allotment of reinforcements, in emergencies, establishments, appointment, of General Officers and those which from their relation to military operations should properly receive consideration from G.H.Q. France, the Canadian authorities will welcome the assistance offered by recommendations sent through G.H.Q. France.”¹⁰⁹ Thus Canada established that while it would hear advice and recommendation from the British, final decisions would henceforth be made by Canada.

The War Office forwarded the changes to Field Marshal Douglas Haig, Commander of Allied Forces, who apparently accepted them without comment. Harrington realized that considerable discretion would remain with the head of the Canadian Section, particularly when matters of administration and organization might have a bearing on operations.

¹⁸ *The Command of the Overseas Military*, Report 98, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 164.

¹⁰⁹ *The Command of the Overseas Military*, Report 98, 153.

With the German offensives creating a crisis in France, Kemp refrained from establishing the Canadian Section immediately. However, on 6 May 1917 he visited Montreuil and had a brief conference with Haig, delivering a copy of Harrington's memorandum and promising to return later with a more detailed statement of the proposed functions and composition of the Section. This task was immediately set afoot.¹¹⁰ At the end of May 1917, Harrington went to France to consult with the officers at the Corps. On 1 June he saw Lieutenant General Arthur Currie, Commander of the Canadian Corps, and presented him with his memo. Currie accepted the idea of a Canadian Section with enthusiasm, seeing in it a further step in the establishment of an autonomous Canadian force.¹¹¹ “Much relieved,” noted the historian Desmond Morton, “Harrington could now present the British commander-in-chief with both a united front and the most explicit statement to date of how autonomous the Canadian overseas forces had become.”¹¹²

Harrington forwarded the memo to the War Office. It was returned with several amendments putting Canadian forces squarely under the control of the British. “The Overseas Ministry [through Harrington] responded,” Morton continued, “acknowledged the letter from the War Office, expressed polite thanks to the G.H.Q. for allowing recommendations of general officers to pass through its channels, and ignored the rest.”¹¹³ Nothing more was heard on the matter and the Canadian Section was formally established by order-in-council on 22 September 1918. It continued to grow and function

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹² Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 165.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 166.

until the end of the war when it assumed even greater responsibilities in the demobilization of the Corps in France.

Overall the changes in the organization of the Canadian Forces that created the Canadian Section left some 400 surplus officers. Many were returned to Canada where, disgruntled, they found political allies in Hughes and others in denouncing the OMFC for overstaffing, wasteful administrative practices, and lack of military training or experience among the staff. Asked to respond by the Prime Minister, Kemp offered a detailed summary of the operations of the OMFC, in which Harrington was taking a key role. It was drafted by General Richard Turner:

The Headquarters of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada have under their control for training and administration some One Hundred and One Thousand troops in England, and for administration of some One Hundred and Fifty Two Thousand troops in France. In these are included all branches of military service, and also a matter of over Twelve Thousand overseas Casualties in hospital...the Pay Office and the Record Office respectively, must deal not only with the accounts and records of every Canadian soldier now in the service, but also, every man who has enlisted and despatched to England, whatever his ultimate destiny may have been.¹¹⁴

Turner went on to enumerate the reductions in staff that had taken place “during the past 18 months” (the time since Hughes’s departure), and noted there was no single training facility or hospital large enough to accommodate Canadians but that they were concentrated as much as possible close to central administration. “At one time, it was true that a large majority of officers employed on administration and training duties in England had not seen Overseas Service,” Turner noted, but this had been completely remedied. To most of the complaints, Turner responded that the statements referred to

¹¹⁴ LAC, MG 30-E46, Richard E. W. Turner Papers, Turner to Kemp, 5 April 1919.

operations under Hughes (although he avoided saying so directly) and that steps had been taken to correct those situations.¹¹⁵

Harrington acted as deputy minister on several occasions including seven months in 1917 and 1918 while Deputy Minister Walter Gow was on extended sick leave in Canada. When Gow returned, Harrington – now promoted to Colonel – became deputy minister in his own right, following a dispute involving Kemp, Gow and Turner, which resulted in Gow’s resignation. Morton wrote that Kemp replaced Gow with “the congenial and experienced Colonel Harrington who was on good terms with Kemp and the sometimes-prickly Currie.”¹¹⁶ Harrington’s correspondence with Currie was direct but cordial. On 29 January 1919, Currie wrote Harrington complaining that one of his officers who deserved an increase in pay had not received it while another, less deserving, did. He wrote: “I am writing to you Harrington because I feel safer in using strong language to you knowing you will not take offence, whereas the Minister might think otherwise.”¹¹⁷ Harrington’s reply was equally direct, pointing out when and where he had asked Currie about that situation, but “...instead of sending me this information, you write me a letter couched in what you quite modestly term ‘strong language’ and the most unfortunate part is that I am afraid I must agree with practically everything you say.”¹¹⁸ Currie apologized. In another letter, Currie also apologized for not seeing Harrington on his trip to London. Reminding Harrington of how he hated London and his

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *The Command of the Overseas Military*, Report 98, 159.

¹¹⁷ LAC, MG 30, General Correspondence 1915-1919, Currie to Harrington, 29 January 1919.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., Harrington to Currie, 3 February 1919.

eagerness to leave, he wrote that he hoped to see Harrington in France again in the near future.¹¹⁹

Harrington, in turn, held a high opinion of Currie's dedication to his men. When Col. H.M. Urquhart was writing a biography of Sir Arthur Currie he asked Harrington for his impressions of the man. Harrington wrote:

I do remember how concerned, in fact nervous he was before the Corps went into action. When the Corps moved in front of Arras in 1918 to commence the last stretch I returned to Corps headquarters one morning about three o'clock. He was still sitting up reading Henderson's life of Stonewall Jackson and he told me it was impossible for him to sleep. He was anxious to have me stay and talk with him for he said he found the hardest hours of all just before the engagement commenced.

Harrington went on to say there was not a detail Currie did not go over personally, that he felt keenly for those for whom he felt responsible, "and if anything of that kind went wrong, his language was lurid."¹²⁰

When the war officially ended, military repatriation, bringing the Canadian military home from Europe, was the largest movement of people in Canadian history up to that time.¹²¹ To sustain morale while the men awaited transport home, the military promoted physical training programs, organized sports, and a wide range of recreational activities. It also expanded the Khaki University, first established in 1917, to offer courses from elementary to university level to idle troops. Some 50,000 Canadians took part in this pioneering education program that prepared veterans for post-war life, and

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Currie papers, Currie to Harrington, 20 June 1919. The file includes recommendations for promotions as well as a (then) current and proposed plan to try to find missing Canadian soldiers.

¹²⁰ McGill University Archives, MG 4027, Box 1, File 12, Urquhart Papers. In an attached letter from Currie to Col. Harold Daley, Currie wrote that when peace came he hoped it would last. Poignantly, in view of later events, he said that he hoped "we do not have to do the same thing all over again in fifteen or twenty years."

¹²¹ Canadian War Museum, "Canada and the First World War," <http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/repatriation-e.aspx> (accessed 3 May 2013).

occupied leisure hours while they waited for shipping berths to take them home.¹²²

Harrington's friend, Rev. Clarence MacKinnon, principal of the Presbyterian College in Halifax (later Pine Hill Divinity College), and prominent in labour relations in Cape Breton in the 1920s, was one of the original promoters of the Khaki University.¹²³

Although plans for demobilization began long before the war was over, different ideas of how it should be done overlooked how it could be done. Ottawa wanted soldiers brought back in the order of those for whom jobs existed. The British had tried and abandoned that proposal. There was a proposal to give the men a vacation in Europe before they returned to Canada. The Prime Minister favoured this plan. Harrington, faced with the prospect of trying to gather up tens of thousands of men from across Europe, saw the plan as totally unworkable and convinced Kemp to argue for soldiers returning to Canada under military discipline.¹²⁴ Currie wanted to bring each corps back as a unit so that they would return to their communities as heroes. This plan was unworkable as well because it meant that men who "arrived late" would return before longer-serving veterans.¹²⁵ Delays were caused by a shortage of ships, longshoremen's strikes in Britain and more important, the inability of Canadian ports to berth the troopships. Saint John and Halifax were the only large, ice-free Canadian ports, and the latter was still rebuilding from the massive explosion the previous year that had destroyed most dockside facilities. As well, Canadian railroads could initially promise only 25,000

³³ Canadian War Museum, "Canada and the First World War."

¹²³ Beverley Owen, "Premier of Nova Scotia," *Maclean's*, September, 1931, 17.

¹²⁴ Hector Charlesworth, *I'm Telling You: Being the Further Candid Chronicles of Hector Charlesworth*, (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1937), 271-273. Charlesworth was editor of *Saturday Night* magazine.

¹²⁵ Canadian War Museum, "Canada and the First World War."

spaces per month, exactly half the number required for soldiers and dependents expected to arrive.¹²⁶

Added to that, the conditions under which the first group sailed for home were considered so bad it created a scandal in Canada. Regardless how anxious the men (and women) were to get home, for some time, the order from Canada was that Canadians returning home required accommodations that were of better quality than those provided to servicemen from other countries.¹²⁷ A cattle boat offered for troop shipment was condemned out of hand. The ship was supposed to transport men from the crowded Kinmel camp that was filled with frustrated, tired, poorly fed and, in most cases, penniless men. On the night of 4 March a riot erupted.

According to the *Canadian Great War Project*, most of the 17,000 men at Kinmel belonged to the railway and forestry corps. They had never seen combat and had never left Britain.¹²⁸ Nevertheless they waited in crowded conditions, in the cold with no money. During the two-day riot, the men attacked all the areas and organizations they felt had taken advantage of them but bypassed the Salvation Army operation, which they thought had treated them fairly.¹²⁹ Harrington called for an investigation. It was headed by General James MacBrien but was incomplete because the arrival of ships transported witnesses. The *Olympic*, earlier considered too big for Halifax Harbour, suddenly became an appropriate troop carrier.¹³⁰ One of the ships pressed into service was the *Mauritania* and one of its passengers was Sir Edward Kemp, ill and suffering the loss of two sons-in-

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 183.

¹²⁸ Canadian Great War Project, <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/writing/kinmelpark.asp> (accessed 4 May 2013).

¹²⁹ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 188-190.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 190.

law within months of each other. From Canada, Kemp complained about confusion, chaos and ineptitude at the dock. Harrington told him that the cause of the upset was the last-minute attempt to fill vacancies with drafts from Kinmel.¹³¹ A report detailing the causes of the Kinmel riot was outlined in a document signed and distributed by Harrington to the Adjutant General and the Quartermaster General on 22 March for further investigation: “You might kindly take immediate steps to have the necessary information on these points and any others appearing from the Proceedings, collected.”¹³² Further uprisings would occur at Whitley and Epsom, among others. Sadly, the British media blew all these events out of proportion. Newspapers that covered the Kinmel affair added their own sensationalism. *The Times* (of London) initially reported, and later recanted, that the rioters had killed a Victoria Cross winner. It also reported that given the discipline and record of Canadian Troops since the beginning of the war, The Kinmel Incident was to be regretted and it also regretted that “reports of the incident have been exaggerated.”¹³³

Turner promised severe repercussions if soldiers did not improve their behavior but it is likely that increased efforts to get the men home slowed and eventually ended the uprisings. By August, 1919 most Canadian soldiers and their dependents had left Britain for Canada.

With the end of hostilities and the removal of Canadian soldiers from Europe, the OMFC and its deputy minister were still concerned with issues related to missing Canadians, graves and grave stones, soldiers in hospital, disposal of goods and

¹³¹ Ibid., 194.

¹³² LAC, MG30-E46, Turner Papers, Harrington to the Adjutant General, 22 March 1919.

¹³³ Canadian Great War Project (accessed 9 July 2014).

settlements with the British War Office. Hospitals such as Cliveden and Saint Dunstan's still contained injured Canadian soldiers. Mrs. Waldorf Astor, feeling she had done her part for the war effort, wrote the Prime Minister in December 1918, asking to have her house, Cliveden, back. Borden forwarded the request to Kemp who told Borden that he would like to comply with her request but there were no convalescent hospitals in Canada and he "couldn't foresee moving the patients for some time to come."¹³⁴ One such hospital was Saint Dunstan's where Katherine Harrington volunteered with blind soldiers to fit them for jobs in Canada.¹³⁵

General James MacBrien was one of the staff of OMFC who stayed in London after the war to help close down the Canadian operation. He faced many challenges dealing with the disposal of goods and equipment including the slowness of the British military in assessing the value of Canadian equipment. Harrington wrote that he understood that the British were quite right in not wanting to commit themselves to taking on Dominion stores at a loss. In a letter to the Secretary of the War Office, Harrington suggested, and the War Office agreed, as a practical solution for the stores and equipment, that:

...the total equipment of the Canadian Units in France, including those articles mentioned in our letter of the 11th November, excepting the personal equipment of the men, and rifles, be turned in to the Imperial Ordnance Department in France, and that Canada should receive serviceable equipment in [sic] of such quantities and at such time as Canada requests the same to be issued.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ LAC, MG 26-H, Borden Papers, Kemp to Borden, 13 December 1918.

¹³⁵ Stuart M. Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax: The Nova Scotia Veteran Publishing Co. Ltd., 1920), 368. Katherine also volunteered at the Beaver Hut, a YMCA organization that helped enlisted men on leave providing travel advice, storage for the men's kits, a pay office and other amenities.

¹³⁶ LAC, MG 27, Vol. 102, 10-16-6, copies from Great Britain's War Office, G. S Harrington to Secretary, War Office, 27 December 1918.

While Harrington himself was en route to Canada, MacBrien wrote Kemp that the reorganization [report] Harrington was bringing contained a list of items for sale that “will pretty well clear us out.”¹³⁷ He added that problems had arisen at points of embarkation where officers and their families were being overcharged for first class accommodation.

In late 1919, John C. Douglas, a Cape Breton Member of Parliament, and another former mayor organized a dinner for Harrington in Sydney and asked Kemp for a telegram that could be read during the dinner. Kemp responded with:

[Harrington’s] services to Canada as Deputy Minister of Overseas Military Forces have been invaluable. He possessed those very high qualities which particularly fitted him for the arduous task which he had to perform particularly after Armistice when nearly all officers who had spent long periods overseas desired to return to their homes in Canada. The Officers with whom he had intimate relations as well as myself have the highest personal regard for him and I am sure the citizens of Nova Scotia and other provinces have.¹³⁸

From Ottawa a few weeks later, Harrington wrote MacBrien telling him how a short hunting trip saw his health “much improved” but word of “congestion” in Ottawa cut short his holiday. He commiserated with MacBrien for the delays in closing up affairs in England and ended that while he would like to see him, “still I trust I will not be here when you come out, and will be quite willing to substitute meeting you in Halifax or almost anywhere other than Ottawa.”¹³⁹

Problems in Britain, including strikes, continued to be a hindrance to MacBrien’s efforts to leave England. Harrington, anxious to get MacBrien to Ottawa so that he could

¹³⁷ LAC, MG30-E63, James MacBrien Papers, MacBrien to Kemp, 28 October 1919.

¹³⁸ LAC, Kemp papers, Kemp to Douglas, 18 November 1919.

¹³⁹ LAC, MG30-E63, MacBrien Papers, Harrington to MacBrien, 10 December 1919.

leave, offered suggestions on the many files still active and hinted at a personal motivation.

No one appears to appreciate the fact that until you come over and bring that place with you, Sir Edward Kemp has practically set his mind on keeping me around here and no one at all appears to realize that the last thing in the world that I want to do, and from my own point of view should do, is to stay here any longer...Everybody seem to be in fairly good health and spirits, though this is the coldest place on earth.¹⁴⁰

Harrington's main complaint about being in Ottawa, although he disliked the city, was that he believed that the duties he was performing should be done by military staff. But while he was anxious to return to civilian life, he wanted to make sure that all care was taken in closing up operations finally and properly, leaving nothing unresolved or unreported.

In March, 1920, Harrington was still in Ottawa. Kemp was in his seventh week of illness and work slowed in Britain when MacBrien was admitted to hospital for an operation, the nature of which was not mentioned in the correspondence. Harrington was trying to impress upon the Militia Department the importance of MacBrien and his team being in Ottawa before the official shutting down of the OMFC at the end of the Parliamentary session, likely sometime that April.¹⁴¹ MacBrien was still in Britain in early April, 1920, when Harrington was again on his way there, to negotiate a financial settlement with the British War Office

According to Morton, "No problem bulked larger or was more important to the reputation of the Overseas Ministry than the final settlement of the financial

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 21 January 1920.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Harrington to MacBrien, 1 March 1920.

arrangements with the British. Few problems could be more complex.”¹⁴² Kemp was scheduled to lead the negotiations but at the last moment, his doctor refused to let him sail. He cabled Harrington that he was “under the impression you can clean up the financial matters with the War Office and Canteen Funds. If you find it necessary, cable frequently. ...advise what credit you require and as far as is practicable have someone preserve details in case they should be demanded.”¹⁴³

Harrington was not new to financial negotiations. They had actually begun under Perley when the War Office realized it had agreed too quickly to pay five shillings per man per day for men in France and an extra shilling for ammunition and payment for all accommodation for Canadian troops in England. Perley agreed on 2 March 1917 to re-open negotiations but only from that day on, not retroactively. The War Office continually emphasized its estimation that Canada owed £4 million. By the time Kemp arrived to take over the OMFC, things had become much more complicated. As the war dragged on, Canada became increasingly reluctant to assume all the costs of the CEF.¹⁴⁴ Harrington had become involved in the negotiations at least by 1919 when he forwarded a letter to H.C. Gordon at the Finance Department of the War Office in February of 1919.¹⁴⁵ Back in London in 1920, Harrington was able quickly to settle some of the more minor issues with the War Office. Others, he observed to Gordon, took longer:

Liability for claim operations Forestry Corps raised between War Office, Board of Trade, Air Ministry, settlement now reached. Credit will be about one and one quarter million sterling. Better than expected. Chief

¹⁴² Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 199.

¹⁴³ LAC, RG 9III, vol. 75, file 10-8-22. The cable is undated but an attachment explaining that Col. and Mrs. Harrington will occupy the stateroom booked for Kemp is dated 8 April 1920.

¹⁴⁴ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 199.

¹⁴⁵ LAC, Kemp Papers, Harrington to Gordon, 21 February 1919.

questions left are, against us horses, command claims, Against War Office undrawn equipment, artillery, vehicles. Will cable general balance indicated ascertained. Also attempting agree principle for settlement with Navy & Army Canteen Board. Very difficult.¹⁴⁶

Although Harrington was anxious to end his military life and get back home, he reported that by the end of the second week of negotiations, things were moving very slowly because of the British insistence on examining the accounts minutely:

for without doing so they are not in a position to state how we stand generally. This has taken some little time but it has impressed me very fully with the necessity of obtaining a complete settlement while I am here. I am firmly convinced that unless I effect such an arrangement, I will leave some unfortunate matters outstanding that will breed trouble especially among officers who are not familiar with them in Canada and do not know the personnel in the War Office over here with whom we have been dealing.¹⁴⁷

Agreement was finally reached on 27 May 1920 on Harrington's recommendation for half a million pounds sterling paid by Canada to Britain which Harrington argued may not have been completely exact but did substantial justice to the taxpayers of Britain and Canada alike.¹⁴⁸ On 29 June 1920, Kemp wrote the Prime Minister complimenting Harrington on bringing the negotiations to a conclusion at an amount substantially lower than had been anticipated. Kemp also pointed out that Harrington, so far, had been paid nothing for expenses. He recommended a reimbursement of \$4500 and then turned to the matter of Harrington's health:

In addition to the above, you are aware that Colonel Harrington as Deputy Minister has performed splendid service for Canada and is now anxious to be demobilized and work up a law practice in Nova Scotia. In the meantime, however, it is necessary for him to take an extended rest as his health has been more or less impaired through strenuous work. I feel,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Harrington to Kemp, 12 May 1920.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 200.

therefore that the least that can be done for him by the Government is to grant him six months leave of absence with pay and allowances which this report also covers, and which I hope will be approved.¹⁴⁹

Borden replied that he had congratulated Harrington on his results and confirmed that “he has certainly been a very capable and devoted officer throughout” adding that he was sending for him that day in order to start him on his holiday as soon as possible.¹⁵⁰

On 5 July, the Committee of the Privy Council voted that Harrington be reimbursed \$4500, and that upon his demobilization he immediately be granted six months’ leave of absence with pay and allowances.¹⁵¹ Like many others who served overseas in staff capacities, Harrington had been overworked to the point of exhaustion and now faced adjusting to civilian life with complications from health issues.¹⁵² In addition, in October 1918 he had spent 10 days in hospital with Spanish Influenza. Later studies showed that Spanish “flu” had lasting repercussions,¹⁵³ and it is entirely possible that Harrington’s recovery was less than complete. Following his return to Canada, outdoor pursuits helped. After leaving Ottawa he spent a month hunting and fishing in New Brunswick (where, although on holiday, he was contacted to deal with a military matter).

¹⁴⁹ LAC, Kemp Papers, Kemp to Borden, 29 June 1920.

¹⁵⁰ LAC, Kemp Papers, Borden to Kemp, 30 June 1920.

¹⁵¹ LAC, Kemp papers, P.C. # 1493.

¹⁵² Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 205.

¹⁵³ Dorothy E Pettit, and Janice Bailie, *A Cruel Wind: Pandemic Flu in America, 1918-1920* (Tennessee: Timberlane Books, 2008), 30. Although Influenza is usually a short term illness, in 1918, many victims were ill for months. Some people never regained their health. Often accompanying the pandemic disease were complications (such as pneumonia) or long-term loss of taste and smell. In other instances it was reported that victim’s hair turned white or even fell out due to the high fever associated with the disease. During the 1918 pandemic many victims had vascular diseases, and still others had impaired central nervous systems. Some of the damage was minor. People complained of excessive fatigue or loss of appetite. But other victims had neuralgia, polyneuritis, and even psychosis. Still others had tachycardia, meningitis, retinitis and paralysis. The authors wrote that the number of sudden deaths during and after the pandemic was remarkable.

On 23 August 1920 Harrington wrote Kemp that his health had improved considerably and he planned to spend time in the country in Cape Breton, adding that he had finally found a house in Sydney and some office space on Charlotte Street. Despite the promised six months' vacation, Kemp asked him to return to Ottawa to put together a final report for the government.¹⁵⁴ Harrington resisted, pointing out that before he left Ottawa he had organized all the material related to the settlement with War Office and put it into the safe marked for Kemp personally.¹⁵⁵

Harrington told Kemp that "it surprised me not a little no single department of the Government has yet called upon my services here [in Sydney]," and added he suspected many of his pre-war clients had found other lawyers during his five year absence.¹⁵⁶ He admitted in a letter to Kemp, however, that because of having little work, he was able to have more opportunities to get out into the country. In November, Harrington wrote, "Though it is a little chilly yet, the country here is very beautiful and I believe it is the greatest thing to patch my nervous system."¹⁵⁷

In January, 1921, Kemp again asked Harrington when he could come to Ottawa to put the finishing touches on a report on the OMFC. Harrington replied that he was unable to come because he had been "flat on his back" for the first two weeks of the year and had since been recuperating. He said he would ask his doctor when he would be able to travel but suspected it would be at least a fortnight. "The effects of the last three years over-work," he said, "take time and careful treatment to overcome." The letter went on to

¹⁵⁴ LAC, Kemp Papers, Harrington to Kemp, 30 August 1920.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 10 September 1920.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 22 November 1920.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

explain how the report might be handled.¹⁵⁸ By mid-February his health had improved and he believed himself able to travel to Ottawa if needed. However, a letter he wrote to Kemp on 22 February suggested that ultimately there was no need:

I acknowledge your letter of 18 February enclosing a copy of P.C. Order 408. From a very cursory glance at it there appears to me ample material placed before the Government to ratify my actions last summer [the financial negotiations with Britain] and practically the whole story is there for any one to elaborate who knows the facts, It is quite unlikely such an elaboration will be necessary for among other reasons we closed at about one million within our estimates, Practically all this amount is accounted for by that settlement, I am forced to assume that the Government is grateful, not merely for the money saving but as well for the relief from future entanglements on our account. I should have liked Dowie, Capt. Ross and Capt. Martin to have been rewarded in some manner for their assistance but probably that is not now possible.¹⁵⁹

In May 1922, Harrington had been again working as senior counsel to the United Mine Workers of America in Cape Breton for four months when he and MacBrien were called to Ottawa to appear at the Liberal government's public accounts committee to answer questions concerning overseas financial practices at the end of the First World War. The partisan inquiry seems to have been searching for inadequacies in his and MacBrien's responses to questions concerning the operations of the OMFC. Probably in reference to the early days of the war when there were officers at OMFC who had not served at the Front, Harrington was asked what service he had performed at the Front, to which he answered simply, "Intelligence."¹⁶⁰ The committee stated it was satisfied that Harrington had given a clear account of events although the Chair admitted he found it astonishing that Harrington had actually convinced the British War Office to pay for

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., Harrington to Kemp, 21 January 1920.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Library of Parliament (LAP), Public Accounts Committee on Overseas Accounts, May, 1922.

materials for which Canada could produce no records.¹⁶¹ Years later, Harrington wrote Conservative Senator, Sir Arthur Meighen stating that although the committee claimed to be anxious that he be paid as an expert witness in addition to his expenses, he had only been paid a small portion of his account.¹⁶²

Harrington, overseas, soon earned the trust and respect of his superiors and colleagues. No records have been found to indicate why he was transferred to the OMFC, but, once there, it was his capacity for leadership and his administrative ability that led him to be appointed Deputy Minister of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada at the age of thirty-five and after several months as acting deputy minister. Normally, it would seem that a former Mayor of Glace Bay who negotiated how Canadian troops were to be used by the “Mother Country,” negotiated policy, procedures and financial matters with the British War Office would have aspired to a prestigious national or international position after the war. But none of this appears to have led him to any greater aspirations than to return to Cape Breton, open a law office, and enjoy the peace he found in the outdoors. But if that peace was to exist at all, it would not last long.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² LAC, MG 26-1, vol. 118, Sir Arthur Meighen Papers, Harrington to Meighen, 4 April 1932.

Chapter 4

District 26, Besco and the Communists

1920 to 1925

The respect that Gordon S. Harrington earned, and the contacts and friendships he made at the OMFC, could have led him to prestigious administrative or political positions in either Canada or the United Kingdom.¹ Instead, he and Katherine bought a house in Sydney, Cape Breton, and he opened an office on Charlotte Street sometime in the summer of 1920. Sydney was less than twenty miles from Glace Bay but had a far different culture from the town where he had launched his legal career, been legal counsel for the UMW, and served as mayor. He told Sir Edward Kemp that he needed peace, and exposure to the outdoors, to maintain his health, which had been badly damaged during the war. To judge from a letter to Kemp in which he commented that expected government contracts had not materialized and that former clients might have found other legal counsel during his five-year absence, it appears that he did plan to live a quiet life.² Harrington's six months' pay from the federal government ended with his demobilization on 5 January 1921, but he had not totally recovered his health. Later in January, he informed Kemp that he had been "flat on his back" for the first two weeks of the year.³

¹ Besides being well respected by Canadians such as Borden, Currie and Kemp, Harrington had a personal friendship with at least one British cabinet minister, Colonel L.M.S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies. See Beaton Institute MG 9.35: Harrington to Colonel L.M.S. Amery, 6 August 1925.

² LAC, MG 27 Kemp papers, Harrington to Kemp, 22 November 1920.

³ Ibid., Harrington to Kemp, 25 January 1921.

This letter of 25 January was written on the letterhead of the law firm Harrington, Forbes & Campbell.⁴ The firm's major client was District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW). Harrington, now thirty-seven years old, war-weary and with recurring health problems became its senior counsel, coming full circle to his pre-war days. Serving as senior counsel for District 26 of the UMW in Cape Breton in the tumultuous early 1920s may have seemed an unlikely role for a man who claimed that peace and quiet was necessary for his health. District 26 had lost its charter following the disastrous strike of 1909-1910, but through a series of amalgamations, it regained its status in 1919. However, struggles between the coal company and the union, as well as friction within the union, would persist for years to come.

Although the years 1920 to 1925 were the most turbulent times in the history of the UMW District 26, particularly in Cape Breton, neither Harrington's role nor his personality appears to have attracted attention. However, articles written after he became a member of the Nova Scotia Legislature were quite consistent in describing his physical appearance, his abilities and his personality. In office, he was described as a man of about five foot-seven in height with a slight build, who gave the appearance that he would be happier reading a book or fishing on the Mira River in Cape Breton than being in politics.⁵ Andrew Merkel of the Canadian Press admired Harrington's sincerity, charm, intelligence and ability to discuss a wide variety of subjects, and yet he noted that in debate there was no one quicker or more biting and caustic.⁶ Historian Murray Beck

⁴ Evan MacKenzie Forbes (known as E. Mack. Forbes) was mayor of Glace Bay in 1921 and appears to have been a Conservative. Harrington, in office, would appoint Andrew Campbell a juvenile court judge.

⁵ Owen, "Premier of Nova Scotia," 17; *Halifax Herald*, 5 July 1943.

⁶ Andrew Merkel, "Outstanding Political Leaders Remembered," *Halifax Mail*, 8 March 1947.

claimed that Harrington was not as good a debater as his predecessor in the Premier's office, E.N. Rhodes, but possessed more of the common touch and warmth that was lacking in Rhodes.⁷ E.R. Forbes quoted former Liberal organizer Leo Dolan, who characterized Harrington as “a soldier-turned-administrator, decisive in action,” and “ruthless against opponents whether inside or without his own party.”⁸ Hector Charlesworth, editor of *Saturday Night* magazine, found Harrington pleasant company and a good story-teller but “no back slapper.”⁹

Although born into a Conservative family, Harrington, well known to be much more socially progressive than the Conservative Party of the day, trod his own path. Owen wrote, “He developed, and never feared to openly express ideas and theories about industrial conditions that disconcerted orthodox Conservatives and at times drew barrages from both political camps.”¹⁰ Despite his well-honed negotiating skills, there were those, including Finlay MacDonald, Conservative MP from Sydney, who said that Harrington had no natural flair for politics. This was said after Harrington had won his seat in three consecutive elections.¹¹ Beck wrote that unlike Rhodes, who was an orthodox Conservative, Harrington would have become known as a “Red Tory,” one who regretted that financial conditions prevented him from “moving towards the social ends he favoured.”¹² Sir Robert Borden congratulated Harrington on his election to the legislature

⁷ J. Murray Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia, Volume Two 1896-1988*, (Tantallon: Four East Publications, 1988), 140.

⁸ E.R. Forbes, “The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party in the Provincial Politics of Nova Scotia 1922-1933,” (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1969), 135.

⁹ Hector Charlesworth, “Nova Scotia Candidate,” *Saturday Night*, 20 March 1937, 5.

¹⁰ Owen, “Premier of Nova Scotia,” 26.

¹¹ LAC, MG 26 K, Bennett Papers, MacDonald to Bennett, 24 October 1934.

¹² Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, 140.

in 1925, offering good wishes for “this new sphere of usefulness.”¹³ In response, Harrington thanked Borden for his inspiration and added, “It is only the firm conviction that I may be of some service...that has induced me to enter a sphere of life that for years has been distasteful to me, and at the same time to abandon that quiet and secluded form of existence that attracts me most.”¹⁴

In 1921, however, the decision to re-enter active political life lay well in the future. For now, Harrington would have been well aware of the effects of the post-war depression on businesses nationally and internationally and that the effects of the downturn would be felt more profoundly in Cape Breton. Steelmaking was on the decline and coal markets in Ontario and Quebec were impeded by both imports from the United States and a significant increase in freight rates.¹⁵ As well, contracts at the Sydney Steel plant were short term, lessening the demand for coal.¹⁶ But in the early 1920s coal from District 26 still accounted for nearly half the coal sold in Quebec and Ontario, and was a substantial source of income for the Nova Scotia government.¹⁷ Both federal and provincial governments were anxious to keep the coal coming to market.

In April 1921, three months after Harrington joined Forbes & Campbell, a new business venture would exacerbate the tensions already existing within the coal and steel industries.¹⁸ Roy Wolvin was a relatively young entrepreneur, originally from the United States, whose success in developing ports on the Great Lakes led to an invitation for him to manage the construction of the Halifax Shipyards after the 1917 Halifax Explosion.

¹³ LAC, MG H, Sir Robert Borden Papers, Borden to Harrington, 29 June 1926.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Harrington to Borden, 3 July 1925.

¹⁵ Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry,” 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

Wolvin saw a larger opportunity. He began buying shares in Dominion and Nova Scotia Steel. He established a working relationship with a similar-minded group based in London whose plan was to use Canadian resources to revitalize British industry in the face of American competition. The proposed merger of nine companies set up a storm of controversy in the House of Commons and to avoid an investigation, the British Empire Steel Company was incorporated in Nova Scotia with wide powers for a fee of \$75,000.¹⁹ According to Frank, having gained investors internationally at a time when markets were diminishing, Wolvin and his directors pursued two central goals: to reduce the cost of labour power in the coal industry and to recruit state support for the coal and steel industries in the national market.²⁰

Recruiting state support, at least from the Nova Scotia Government, was easily attainable; reducing labour costs would prove much more difficult. Prior to the arrival of Besco, incomes were not keeping pace with inflation, and although the miners saw wage increases in January and July of 1918, “In the face of rising prices the wage rates were not sufficient to bring about permanent improvements in real wages.”²¹ Conditions in the coalfields of Cape Breton may have appealed to Harrington’s sense of responsibility. He had been mayor of Glace Bay and no doubt would have been re-elected if he had not recruited hundreds of men in the area to join him in going off to war. Those and other veterans who came back from the war, likely damaged, found themselves and their families trapped in substandard housing and broken work time. Sir Arthur Currie wrote that:

¹⁹ Frank, “The Rise and Fall of Besco,” 15 -19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 24

²¹ Frank, *McLachlan*, 154.

The health of almost everyone who served throughout the war was, to some extent, adversely affected. Men may not have been wounded, not have suffered from any illness, but I do not believe that any man could go through the campaigns of the Great War without his power to resist disease being minimized.²²

After five years overseas Harrington's fellow-veterans came back to company housing that continued to deteriorate, growing poverty and chronic health and education problems. There had been little improvement in the lives of the coal miners and now after the war, too many miners who expected a better life faced too few jobs and too few markets for coal.

Perhaps Harrington believed the task of being legal counsel for the union would see him being useful as well as being in a position similar to that of the deputy minister of OMFC where he worked largely behind the scenes.²³ But by early in 1922 he had clearly made his mark in negotiating a settlement between the UMW and Besco, and in 1923 when a strike was threatened at the Sydney Steel Plant, C.B., Wade wrote, "Once more Harrington was called and once again he cobbled together some kind of a settlement."²⁴

Between 1920 and 1922, at least four federal commissions of inquiry examined the relationship between the miners and the operators of the coal industry with varying degrees of success.²⁵ The first, which led to what became known as the MacKinnon Award, was chaired by Rev. Clarence MacKinnon, Principal of the Presbyterian College in Halifax, and a returned veteran. In 1920 MacKinnon reviewed many job categories and

²² Sir Arthur Currie, *Toronto Star*, 1 April 1927. Currie, at that time, would not have mentioned mental or spiritual damage that many soldiers would have suffered.

²³ LAC, Kemp Papers, Harrington to Kemp, 25 January 1921.

²⁴ Wade, *History of District 26*. It appears Harrington's position as counsel to the UMW was not exclusive given that the steel plant was not part of the UMW.

²⁵ The commissions were The MacKinnon Award, Quirk Commission, Gillan Commission and Scott Commission.

leveled wage rates across the industry.²⁶ Nevertheless, the miners were not satisfied. James Morrison, research director of the UMW circa 1945, wrote that prior to the Award, men with large families or with disabilities had been paid higher wages.²⁷ Other seemingly rare examples of cooperation between the company and the men included a meeting between the company's Assistant General Manager, H.J. McCann and representatives of the miners in March, 1921. McCann had just returned from a meeting with executives of the mining company in Montreal. He reported that due to the continuing depression in the market it would likely be necessary to close some mines. The union suggested and the company agreed that it made more sense to put all the mines on part time so that all miners would have some income. The company, at that time, had markets for only 100,000 tons and already had 160,000 tons banked at New Aberdeen.²⁸

Wade, Frank, and others write of a time of constant strife between an intransigent company bound to starve its employees into submission on one side and a communist-influenced union aimed at the destruction of the capitalist system on the other. With the arrival of Besco, the situation turned to a continuing crisis with the ultra-capitalist Wolvin pitted against the communist, J.B. McLachlan, who as secretary-treasurer of the UMW became its public voice. Yet, there were those on both sides who aimed for a middle ground and it would seem that Gordon Harrington, at least in the beginning, would

²⁶ Maritime Conference United Church Archives, Box F, I 102/7 MacKinnon files, copies of documents related to the Board of Conciliation re Industrial Dispute between Dominion Coal Company and United Miner Workers of America District 26, 5 December 1919 to 13 January 1920. The report claimed to have covered 81 categories of employment with two outstanding.

²⁷ Morrison, "Labor Management Relations," 90. Morrison followed Wade as research director for District 26.

²⁸ *Glace Bay Gazette*, 24 March 1921.

choose to travel that middle ground while at the same time providing counsel to those on the radical wing when required.

Although the federal commissions failed for various reasons, all commented on the appalling living conditions in company housing and how those conditions affected not only the productivity of current miners, but also the health, education and expectations of the children. Harrington would ask that company housing be considered in the deliberations of the Duncan Royal Commission of 1925.²⁹

When the fourth inquiry, the Gillan Commission, began its investigation in January of 1922, Besco, without waiting for the outcome, cut wages. Harrington appeared before Justice Benjamin Russell on behalf of District No. 26 of the UMW to argue that the company, by cutting wages, had defied the rules of the Industrial Disputes Act. Justice Russell granted an injunction against Besco on 30 December 1921, basing his decision on the inadequate notice and the fact that the conciliation board had not reported.³⁰ The company appealed. A two-to-one decision by the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia overturned the injunction on 10 January, 1922, stating that both parties planned to renegotiate the agreement, and therefore there was no onus on the company to comply with the Act.³¹ The decision was written by Supreme Court Justice Humphrey Mellish, former solicitor for the Dominion Coal Company.³²

²⁹ BI, MG 9.35, Political Figures, Harrington to Amery, 6 August 1925.

³⁰ NSA, RG 39, C, 281741 ½, The Supreme Court of Nova Scotia UMW vs. DOSCO.

³¹ Ibid.

³² On 25 July 1917, an explosion in No. 12 mine in New Waterford killed 65 miners. Three coal company officials were charged with negligence. Humphrey Mellish, senior counsel for the coal company, prepared the company's defence. By the time the case came to trial, Mellish had been appointed to the Bench and decreed that there was insufficient evidence for the case to proceed to trial.

Negotiations continued unsuccessfully. In April, 1922 the federal government offered the union the opportunity to reopen the Gillan Commission, which had recommended a cut in wages in February. The miners had rejected the results of the Commission and saw no point in having the same commission review information on which it had already commented. To that end, the miners sent a telegram to Prime Minister Mackenzie King requesting that Col. Gordon Harrington represent the miners on a new commission.³³

Rather than agree to this request, the federal government convened yet another inquiry. This Scott Commission also failed. Then in August, the annual election of District 26 saw the moderates, Robert Baxter, William Delaney and Silby Barrett, lose to the radical wing of the union.³⁴ The new executive ordered a 100 per cent strike to begin on 15 August if the company did not provide “a distinctly increased wage rate.”³⁵ Such a strike would see the maintenance men removed from the mines. This prospect seemed to send Besco president Wolvin and Nova Scotia Public Works Minister Armstrong into a panic. Wolvin began a barrage of letters and cables to the Prime Minister claiming the mines were about to be destroyed and begging for military intervention. To each of Wolvin’s telegrams and letters Prime Minister Mackenzie King made the same response: military aid to a civil power was outside the jurisdiction of the federal government and could only be enacted by local authorities.³⁶ The mayor of Glace Bay, D.W. Morrison, a moderate member of the UMW and a friend of Harrington’s, refused to sign the

³³ *Glace Bay Gazette*, 9 April 1922.

³⁴ Frank, *McLachlan*, 264.

³⁵ LAC, MG 26-J, William Lyon Mackenzie King papers, Ackland to King, 9 August 1922.

³⁶ LAC, MG 26-J, King papers, Wolvin to King, King to Wolvin 9 August 1922 to 26 August, 1922; Armstrong to King, 16 August 1922.

requisition for troops requested by the company and made it clear that the town would not pay for any troops sent into the area. Their presence, he said, would aggravate the situation.³⁷ In his reply to Morrison, King said he was sending him the same information he had given Wolvin, that the federal government had no authority in the situation.³⁸ When Morrison refused to order the troops, Besco approached Judge Duncan Finlayson who signed the requisition and troops headed to the coalfields.³⁹ A letter from Eugene Fiset, Deputy Minister of Militia and Defence, to Hugh Ross, a barrister in Sydney, outlining the means by which the militia can be called out ended by observing that, “one of the first questions which arises is as to whether they were legally called out, or whether the Military Officers did not act too hastily in obeying a panicky summons.”⁴⁰

Six months earlier, on 22 December, 1921, General H. C. Thacker, commander of Militia District 6 headquartered in Halifax and including all of Nova Scotia, was already preparing for an uprising in the coalfields. He wrote the Secretary of the Militia Council in Ottawa to say that along with press reports, he was advised by an active militia member who was also an official at one of the coal companies that “vague and random threats of violence have reached him indirectly as possible in case an agreement is not reached between operators and employees before the wage cut comes into operation.”⁴¹ Thacker, a veteran of the Boer War and of the First World War, seemed to be taking fears of revolution to a new level by ordering more and more troops, and requesting both a

³⁷ BI, MG 9.13, Morrison to King 17 August 1922.

³⁸ Ibid., King to Morrison, 17 August 1922.

³⁹ LAC, MG 30-E133, vol. 109, Nova Scotia-Aid to the Civil Power, Finlayson to Thacker, 15 August 1922.

⁴⁰ BI, MG 9.13, Fiset to Ross, 9 August 1922.

⁴¹ LAC, RG 24, vol. 2656, file Hqs-3568, pt. I, correspondence 1921-1924.

nearby British warship and intervention by the fledgling Canadian air force.⁴² The Prime Minister did ensure that Thacker's plans were controlled. Mackenzie King's file on labour unrest in Cape Breton includes letters from the mayor of Glace Bay, the Great War Veterans' Association (GWVA), Rev. Munro of Chalmers United Church in New Aberdeen, Dr. M.T. Sullivan, the Liberal Medical Officer of Health, various labour groups and, of course, those from Wolvin. To all he responded that the federal government had no role to play in ordering troops to Cape Breton. To Armstrong's request for Mounted Police, Mackenzie King is reported to have said, "if we wished to create an industrial disturbance of very serious proportions, possibly the best way we could go about it would be to order the Mounted Police into those areas." He had, at that time, informed the local authorities (in Nova Scotia) that "if they were unable to maintain law and order themselves, as they were supposed to do", they could call in the militia but he assured them that they would be responsible for expenses incurred.⁴³

Harrington would have known that the arrival of the militia would lend support to the radicals but there is no evidence to show whether he used his military contacts to try to restrain Thacker. MacBrien was away from his post as Chief of Staff at the Department of National Defence, but General Currie retained considerable influence there. And Harrington himself had had a direct connection with Thacker. In an informal letter to MacBrien in December 1919, Harrington updated him on his holiday including news of some of their colleagues and said that while in Halifax he had seen Thacker "and wound

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power," 48.

up on a 10 day hunting trip to New Brunswick.” It is not clear if the two statements are related but it does establish a connection between Harrington and Thacker.⁴⁴

Henry Spracklin and William McDonald, president and secretary respectively of the GWVA, no doubt supported by GWVA members including Harrington and Morrison, wrote Labour Minister James Murdock arguing that if a military presence was needed, members of the GWVA could fill that role.⁴⁵ Mayor Morrison, a member of the provincial legislature representing the Farmer-Labour Party, and a member of the UMW, issued the following statement:

I have been today twice requested to sign a requisition for troops and have refused. I have refused because I felt that there is no need for troops in here. There is absolutely no disorder, much less violence. To bring armed men into the district under these circumstances is, in my opinion, unfortunate and ill-advised and totally unnecessary.⁴⁶

Armstrong cabled Federal Finance Minister W.S. Fielding that “the militia...couldn't cope and 2000 men were needed to protect the mines.”⁴⁷ He also asked the Federal Justice Minister to send RCMP to help the Provincial Police force.⁴⁸ The military arrived and set up on 16 August at No. 2 yard (New Aberdeen) and apparently did not stray from there.⁴⁹

On 19 August 1922, Premier George Murray, from his home in North Sydney, sent for Gordon Harrington and the executive of the UMW. Following their meeting, the

⁴⁴ LAC, MG 30-E 63, MacBrien Papers, Harrington to MacBrien, 10 December 1919.

⁴⁵ BI, MG 9.13, Spracklin to Murdock, 16 August 1922.

⁴⁶ *Halifax Herald*, 16 August 1922.

⁴⁷ LAC MG 26-J, King Papers: Armstrong to Fielding, 16 August 1922. An attached note points out that words are missing from the cable.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Armstrong to Gouin, 19 August, 1922.

⁴⁹ Stories persisted, even among other branches of the military that many of the picketers recognized soldiers from the war, and they were seen playing baseball together. Historian Desmond Morton reiterated this in a story told by his father who served elsewhere in Canadian military during that time (Morton, by email to the author, 12 January 2014).

executive agreed to send the maintenance men back to work.⁵⁰ A week later on 26 August the *Glace Bay Gazette* reported, “Eleven o’clock last night saw the close of the four days’ conference between U.M.W. executive and officials of B.E.S. corporation. The session yesterday lasted eleven hours. Rev. C.H. MacKinnon and Col. Gordon Harrington were present and assisted the parties in reaching an agreement.”⁵¹ The *Toronto Star* reported:

At one o’clock this morning Col. Gordon Harrington representing the miners, F.W. Gray for the British Empire Steel Corporation and Dr. Clarence MacKinnon principal of Pine Hill Presbyterian College, Halifax, who had been called in as an extra mediator emerged from the conference room and announced that an agreement had been reached. Col. Harrington, legal adviser of the united miner workers spoke to the press. “After considerable negotiations I believe a mutually satisfactory program has been concluded. The attitude of the conference throughout has been satisfactory and the agreement holds great possibilities for the industries in Nova Scotia.”⁵²

Both newspapers outlined the main details of the agreement: a minimum rate of \$3.25 per day with a minimum raise of 40 cents per day; rates to include Sydney Mines, and contract rates to be increased by 12½ per cent. Both papers reported that the outstanding feature of the settlement was the long-term contract, something for which the miners had long been arguing.

In June of 1925, the *Sydney Post* carried a statement from a former Besco vice-president, D. H. McDougall, who had resigned in 1923, claiming that Harrington, who was hired by Murray’s Liberal government to negotiate a settlement in the dispute between the UMW and Besco in August 1922, had not been paid “one cent” for his services in connection with the settlement of that coal strike. McDougall said that

⁵⁰ Wade, *History of District 26*; MacGillivray, “Military Aid to the Civil Power,” 85.

⁵¹ *Glace Bay Gazette*, 26 August 1922.

⁵² *Toronto Star*, 26 August 1922. The *Toronto Star* stated that Harrington reported at 1 a. m., likely the time it received the news.

Colonel Harrington “rendered the Government and the Province laudable service in helping to bring the 1922 strike to an end. On the other hand, McDougall said, MLA D.A. Cameron, (who was also present at the negotiations) was paid \$2,300 out of the Provincial Treasury for prosecuting rioters during the strike. McDougall said that, “Harrington’s services combined with the profound respect both the Company and the Unin [sic] had for his honesty and integrity were exclusively responsible for the settlement that was reached.”⁵³

The same edition of the newspaper quoted Harrington as saying that from 18 August 1922 until the wage agreement was signed on 1 October, he had been in the continuous employ of the Nova Scotia Government.⁵⁴ Harrington claimed the settlement saved the government \$200,000 to \$300,000, including the cost of the 1500 soldiers and 200 provincial police at a daily cost of about \$10,000 for the time they were in Cape Breton. The days the mines were not working also meant a loss of royalties at between \$2000 and \$3000. He said he stopped MacDougall, MacKinnon and Independent Labour MLA Forman Waye from publicly contradicting the Liberal press when it gave credit to Liberal MLA D.A. Cameron for settling the strike.⁵⁵ Harrington said that both the union and the company were aware he was employed by the government. The new agreement was to run until 15 January 1924, giving the men more security with the longer-term contract but in July of 1923, the men were again on strike.

⁵³ *Sydney Post*, 20 June 1925.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Sydney Post*, 20 June 1925.

The *Maritime Labor Herald* began publishing in the fall of 1922.⁵⁶ The paper was funded by District 26 and distributed free to its members. The paper also started a short-lived Labour Club aimed at public education where prominent people such as Rev. Clarence MacKinnon, Rev. J.J. Tompkins of Saint Francis Xavier University, and Gordon Harrington were invited to speak.⁵⁷ Within a short time, original founders Robert Baxter and Silby Barrett left the paper as it became the voice of the radical left. J.B. McLachlan, secretary treasurer of the union, would not have a formal position on the paper until 1924 but from the beginning he provided most of the anti-capitalist copy.⁵⁸

At the same time, communist activity increased in the region. Glace Bay was on the speaking circuit for many socialist and communist orators. During 1923 Harrington defended three well-known communists in court. One was Malcolm Bruce, organizer for the Communist Party of Canada (CPC). He spoke at the Savoy Theatre in Glace Bay. Following the speech a warrant was issued for his arrest on the charge of making seditious utterances at a public meeting. Determined to rid the province of “Reds,” Nova Scotia Attorney General Walter O’Hearn traveled to Glace Bay to personally prosecute the case in front of Stipendiary Magistrate, A.B. McGillivray. O’Hearn attempted to have Bruce convicted of making seditious utterances at a public meeting. Harrington mounted a defence that saw the charges dismissed in June. In the interim, O’Hearn’s warrant for Bruce’s arrest allowed police to search McLachlan’s home from which a quantity of

⁵⁶ *Glace Bay Gazette*, 22 August 1922.

⁵⁷ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 22 September 1922; 14 October 1922.

⁵⁸ Frank, *McLachlan*, 214.

communist literature was removed that would be used in the trial of J.B McLachlan later in the year.⁵⁹

More labour trouble had already begun at the Sydney Steel plant in the spring of 1923 when an employee, Syd McNeil, was fired for insubordination and the rest of the men walked out in sympathy. Harrington was called, and an agreement was reached that sent the men back to work.⁶⁰ Then on Thursday, 28 June 1923, of the 2800 dayshift workers at the steel plant, approximately 1800 walked off the job seeking an eight-hour day and recognition of their union. Around 1000 initially remained at their posts, while the 1000 strong night shift “scabbed” throughout the strike.⁶¹ One striker remembered that so many workers stayed on the job that picket-line violence inevitably ensued.⁶²

On the Thursday and Friday nights, strikers stormed #4 gate on Victoria Road with the intention of removing those who continued to work. Even with the help of the company police, the 20-man Sydney police force could not continue to contain the strikers, who broke holes in the fence to try to shut down the plant and threw rocks at the police. Twice the magistrate came to read the Riot Act but had to withdraw when he was pelted with stones. Troops from Halifax and Quebec arrived after Besco again asked Judge Duncan Finlayson to request military aid to the civil power. Evidence at the trial of J. B. McLachlan was that on Friday night, the newly-arrived soldiers fired shots over the heads of the strikers and as a result, things were calm on Saturday night.⁶³ Provincial

⁵⁹ LAC, RG 13, vol. 1233, File 25777, The King vs. J.B. McLachlan, 205.

⁶⁰ Wade, *History of District 26*.

⁶¹ John Manley, “Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922-1935,” *Labour/Le Travail*30 (1992): 78.

⁶² Ron Caplan, “The 1923 Strike in Steel and the Miners' Sympathy Strike,” *Cape Breton's Magazine*, Issue 22, 1979, 1.

⁶³ The King vs. J.B. McLachlan, 195.

police arrived on Sunday, 1 July 1923 and on Sunday night 16 police officers from that force armed with batons and mounted on horseback rode through the crowd at # 4 gate and attacked people on Victoria Road in Whitney Pier.⁶⁴

Following the attack by the provincial police, McLachlan sent a letter to union locals outlining alleged atrocities committed by the police. The letter alleged that a seventy-year old woman had been beaten senseless and was close to death, a nine-year old had a broken breast bone from a horse's hoof, and that a pregnant woman gave birth prematurely and the baby died. He went on:

The Government of Nova Scotia is the guilty and responsible party for this crime, No miner or mine worker can remain at work while this Government turns Sydney into a jungle, to do so is to sink your manhood and allow Armstrong and his miserable bunch of grafting politicians to trample your last shred of freedom in the sand. Call a meeting of your Local at once and decide to spread the fight against Armstrong to every mine in Nova Scotia. Act at once. Tomorrow may be too late.⁶⁵

The miners went out on strike, demanding that the troops and the provincial police be removed from Sydney. District 26 President, Dan Livingstone delivered a copy of McLachlan's letter to Besco Vice President D.H. McDougall's Glace Bay office where Assistant General Manager F.W. Gray gave the letter to Andrew Merkel to send out on the Canadian Press wire. The letter was published in two Nova Scotia newspapers, the *Sydney Post* and the *Halifax Chronicle*, on 5 July and the result was the arrest of Livingstone and McLachlan on 6 July. They were taken to Halifax and charged with publishing false statements. Harrington was hired immediately as McLachlan's lawyer for the trial scheduled for 15 October, 1923 in Halifax. David Frank has noted that

⁶⁴ Frank, *McLachlan*, 302.

⁶⁵ The King vs. J.B. McLachlan, 177.

Harrington's junior counsel, J.A. Walker, fought successfully in Halifax for bail despite rather extreme efforts by Attorney General Walter O'Hearn to prevent the men's release.⁶⁶

Concurrently, on 7 July, Prime Minister Mackenzie King sent a detailed telegram to Armstrong who by then was Premier of Nova Scotia, stating that E.M. Macdonald, Acting Minister of National Defence, had cabled him that troops were not necessary in Nova Scotia. The Prime Minister said the federal cabinet unanimously agreed that Armstrong should advise Finlayson and Thacker that the situation in Nova Scotia was causing problems in other areas of the country and ask them the advisability of Armstrong making a public statement that no further troops were required and those there would be withdrawn." King went on "I hope your government will do all in its power to cooperate with our Government in avoiding this critical situation."⁶⁷ Armstrong was unmoved by the Prime Minister's request.

The UMW International President, John L. Lewis, ordered the District 26 executive to obey its contract and not call for the miners to go out in sympathy with the steelworkers. McLachlan claimed (and according to Forsey he still believed in 1926) that: "While we work you [the coal company] will pay that wage rate. While you pay that rate we may work or we may not work. You have the right to throw us idle. We have the right to stay home." McLachlan said the contract was deliberately crafted so there would be no

⁶⁶ Frank, "The Trial of J.B. McLachlan," 213.

⁶⁷ LAC, MG 26-J, King Papers, King to Armstrong, 7 July 1923. Correspondence among King, Labour Minister Murdock and Armstrong in July and early August 1923 indicates a federal government intent on withdrawing troops facing an intransigent provincial premier.

breach of contract in going on strike.⁶⁸ When District 26's executive defied Lewis's order to return to work, Lewis responded by suspending the district charter on 17 July, ousting the "Red" executive, including Livingstone and McLachlan, and placing Silby Barrett in charge of managing the district. He also declared that neither Livingstone nor McLachlan could run for re-election. Forsey, who worked with Barrett later at the Canadian Congress of Labor (CLC), claimed Barrett was a man of his word who saw to it that union and employer both adhered to any contract they signed.⁶⁹ Harrington applied for an injunction against the order, claiming that under the District's autonomy clause, Lewis had no right to fire members of the executive.⁷⁰ The injunction was denied. The local's charter was revoked and Silby Barrett's appointment as head of the provisional administration was confirmed.

At the time the Governor General, Lord Byng of Vimy, was en route to Pictou for celebrations honoring the 150 years since the ship *Hector* had arrived in Pictou Harbour with a contingent of Scottish settlers. In an unusual and unexplained series of events, Independent Senator John Anthony McDonald – an Amherst and Halifax business figure appointed to the Senate by the former Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen – contacted E. M. Macdonald, Acting Minister of Defence at his home in Pictou to tell Macdonald that, at Amherst, he had approached the Governor General and forwarded a request that Byng meet with McLachlan, Livingstone and with Glace Bay mayor and MLA, D. W. Morrison. Byng agreed to the meeting. There is no indication where this

⁶⁸ Eugene Forsey, *National Problems of Canada: Economic and Social Aspects of the Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1926): 60. Forsey questioned whether the company would have agreed to this interpretation of the contract.

⁶⁹ Eugene Forsey, *A Life on the Fringe: The Memoirs of Eugene Forsey* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 83.

⁷⁰ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 18 April 1923.

request originated. It led to a series of telegrams and messages among E.M. Macdonald, the Prime Minister, Morrison and representative of the Department of Labour prior to the proposed meeting.⁷¹ Afterward, King needed assurances that Byng had not, as outlined in a telegram from Mayor Morrison to King, overstepped his constitutional authority by promising either the removal of troops or a Royal Commission. E.M. Macdonald also advised the Prime Minister that the Governor General knew that McLachlan and Livingstone had been deposed from the UMW and had no formal authority to speak for the miners and steelworkers.⁷²

From Sydney, Byng forwarded to King petitions presented by representatives of the miners and also a detailed letter from future District 26 President John W. MacLeod outlining living and working conditions in nearby Dominion No. 6. Byng told King that he was impressed by MacLeod and the letter, which he forwarded to King along with the petitions.⁷³ Byng was taken aback by the poor housing and lack of amenities provided for the steel workers. He wrote: "Whilst visiting the steel works, I could not help noticing that so little was done for the employees in way of provision of recreation rooms, grounds, clubs, compensation in the case of accidents, pensions, etc." He said the miners returned to work feeling defeated and that this spirit might well bring them out on strike again. "But," Byng continued, "if the troops were removed and an investigation held into

⁷¹ NSA, Biography 10619, Macdonald, Hon. E.M., political correspondence, 1900-1940. Nothing has been found that would tie Senator McDonald, but Harrington would have known Byng overseas and may have moved behind the scenes to effect that meeting as well as the one with MacLeod.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ LAC, MG 26-J, King papers, Byng to King 26 July 1923. The following year MacLeod would become president of District 26 and was accused by the radicals of allowing Harrington to run the union.

the grievances of the steel workers by an independent body of experts, it would produce a feeling that the men's case had been seriously considered.”⁷⁴

King thanked Byng for his comments and added:

... in my own opinion, the British Empire Steel Corporation is very far behind the times in its labour policies if indeed the Corporation has any worthy the name. The condition of chronic unrest there has been for years past is sufficient evidence. No work is harder or more unpleasant and agree [sic], that too great consideration cannot be shown in those matters which make for humanizing of all phases of employment.⁷⁵

King told Byng that one of the difficulties facing the federal government was the province's desire to keep Ottawa out of the situation except to send troops.

On 10 August King wrote Nova Scotia Premier Armstrong to say that an investigation into the situation in the coal fields was imperative and asked whether Armstrong thought the provincial or federal government should take charge of the inquiry.⁷⁶ Armstrong replied that the province would “cooperate in any proper and legitimate way with the federal government,” but he believed that normal conditions were being gradually and permanently restored, that agitators had been dealt with, that Besco was being maligned and there was really no need for an inquiry.⁷⁷ This was the second time that Armstrong had refused a direct and detailed request from the Prime Minister. This, and Armstrong's insistence on calling troops into the area against King's wishes, might have limited federal government assistance to the provincial Liberals in the Nova Scotia provincial election in 1925.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ LAC, MG 26-J, King Papers, King to Byng, 1 August 1923.

⁷⁶ Ibid., King to Armstrong, 1 August 1923.

⁷⁷ Ibid., Armstrong to King, 18 August 1923.

On 7 September, 1923, in preparing for the McLachlan trial, Harrington filed an affidavit in which he stated that he was hired as counsel for McLachlan since his arrest for alleged offence against Section 236 of the Canadian Criminal Code. “The said J.B. McLachlan at present stands committed for trial in the City of Halifax, for the said alleged offence of publishing false tales of the activities of the Provincial Police of the Province of Nova Scotia, at Sydney of or about Sunday the 1st of July, A.D. 1923.”⁷⁸ Harrington went on to state that “the defence would have to examine up to 18 witnesses all of whom are resident in or around the City of Sydney...the locality in which the said activities occurred.” Harrington, arguing for a change of venue, wrote that the defendant advised that he could not afford to transport witnesses to Halifax. (McLachlan had been deposed from his position with the UMW and the Nova Scotia Workers’ Defence Committee that was paying for his defence apparently had not raised enough money to pay for witnesses to go to Halifax.)⁷⁹ Further, Harrington wrote, a jury would need to be familiar with the premises, (that area in Sydney in which the alleged offence occurred), since the location could not be easily explained.

Frank noted that on 24 September, J.A. Walker – a Halifax lawyer and assistant to Harrington – filed a change of venue request in Halifax, arguing that the trial should take place in the location where the alleged offence took place. It is unclear whether this was a new request or whether it was the same as one that Harrington had filed earlier in the month. Attorney General O’Hearn appeared in court personally to argue that a jury in

⁷⁸ NSA, RG 39, C, vol. 706, B164, affidavit sworn by Gordon Harrington on behalf of J.B. McLachlan before James Maddin, commissioner of the Supreme and County courts for the County of Cape Breton, 7 September 1923.

⁷⁹ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 11 August 1923.

Sydney would be too sympathetic to the defendant.⁸⁰ This claim must have been made prior to 7 September, at which time Harrington stated in an affidavit:

I was counsel for accused persons charged with offences growing out of the strike at the coal mines in Cape Breton County in the year 1909, when many of such said accused persons were convicted of the said offences charged, by petit juries drawn in the Court of Cape Breton and containing laborers of the class to which the accused persons belonged.”⁸¹

O’Hearn also argued that the case should be heard in Halifax because the letter was published in a Halifax paper. Harrington stated both in his 7 September affidavit and again in court:

During the month of July, A.D., 1923, after the arrest of said Defendant, I was present in the City of Halifax for a period of over two weeks and, during that time [sic], discussed the matters involved in this charge with a number of persons of the class from which juries are customarily drawn, and I found such persons strongly prejudiced against the accused, because of inaccurate and unfair newspaper articles and reports, which had appeared in the City of Halifax regarding the events in question and regarding the said accused.⁸²

In 1923 the justice system allowed considerable leeway to the judge and the prosecution. There was no necessity for the prosecution to disclose information to the defence. It was quite legal to change the charge in court, and there was no impediment to the judge showing open bias. But even then, Harrington, on behalf of the defence, and having called no witnesses, should have spoken last to the jury. For reasons unrecorded, the usual process was overturned and O’Hearn had the last word.⁸³

⁸⁰ Frank, “The Trial of J.B. McLachlan,” 215.

⁸¹ It is more likely that O’Hearn was referring to his own recent loss to Harrington in the trial of Malcolm Bruce.

⁸² NSA, RG 39, C, vol. 706, B164, Harrington’s affidavit on behalf of J.B. McLachlan. The time period mentioned in this paragraph of the affidavit suggests that Harrington may also have been present for Livingstone’s and McLachlan’s bail hearing. (The file, *The King vs. J. B. McLachlan*, obtained from Library and Archives Canada is missing significant information, as is the file at the Nova Scotia Archives.)

⁸³ Verbal consultation with attorney, Richard Row, who reviewed the transcript of the McLachlan trial.

The two-day trial began with a change to the charges, from publishing false statements to seditious libel, a much more serious charge that could bring a sentence of 20 years. The libel outlined in the original charge, which would consider the relative truth of the statements and for which the defence was prepared, was not heard. Under the new charge, only those related to sedition were to be considered. Harrington's objections to the form and content of the charges were ignored, as was his argument that the sudden change in the charges left the defence unprepared. Harrington argued that the charges were unsustainable and lacked specificity but his objections were overruled by Judge Humphrey Mellish.⁸⁴

Although McLachlan had been removed from his position with the UMW between the time of indictment and the trial, apparently material sent from the prosecution to him at his former address went astray. The prosecution again had material to which Harrington had no access, once more putting the defence at a disadvantage.⁸⁵

The Crown introduced witnesses giving the province's view of the events at the Sydney Steel Plant on 1 July 1923. Over Harrington's objections that the events were unrelated to the new charge, Judge Mellish, a former Chief Counsel for the coal company, deemed the information necessary background, but the defence was refused the opportunity to present contrary evidence on the same event such as an article in a Sydney newspaper alleging abuse of citizens by the provincial police.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The King vs. J.B. McLachlan, 184, 186-187, 189 and 191; the pages between are scribbled notes or blank.

⁸⁵ The King vs. McLachlan, 239.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 191.

From that point it was clear the case was lost.⁸⁷ Yet Harrington struggled to counter the prosecution's case. Under his cross-examination, witnesses called by the prosecution had their comments questioned or at least modified, although to a jury unfamiliar with the context it is unlikely the corrections registered.⁸⁸ Harrington questioned the editor of the *Halifax Chronicle* about publishing the letter with the headline, "Miners Duped by False Statements." He challenged the editor, James Hickey, to point out the false statements in the letter.⁸⁹ The editor admitted he was unable to do so because he had no idea of the truth or falsehood of the material but he did write the headline nevertheless. When Harrington asked the court why his client was on trial while Gray (who had the letter published in the newspapers) and Hickey (who published "false statements" in his headline) were not, Mellish retorted that those men were not on trial. McLachlan was.⁹⁰

The prosecution introduced communist literature recovered illegally from McLachlan's house in the spring as part of a search for Communist Party organizer and speaker Malcolm Bruce. A delegate to the June convention of District 26 in Truro said that it was likely McLachlan who had written a policy aimed at "the complete overthrow of the capitalistic system and the capitalist State, peacefully if we may, forcefully if we must."⁹¹ The policy had been withdrawn by International President John L. Lewis, but the jury did hear of McLachlan's support for the communist cause. Truly significant was

⁸⁷ Frank, "The Trial of J.B. McLachlan," offers a concise rendition of testimony at the trial.

⁸⁸ *The King vs. McLachlan*, 240. Harrington also asked speculative questions such as whether the provincial police had been drinking and he introduced names of those allegedly attacked.

⁸⁹ McLachlan's letter was referred to as a circular during the trial.

⁹⁰ *The King vs. McLachlan*, 242–244.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

Mellish's address to the jury.⁹² In seven pages of direction, he reminded the jury of McLachlan's communist views and, with regard to the material removed illegally from his house, said it did not matter whether the material was gathered legally or illegally, nor whether the statements in his letter were true. The jury was to consider McLachlan's intention. Mellish said he questioned (but told the jury not to take his opinion) why labouring men, if they wanted wrongs addressed by lawful means, would want the removal of the police and the military. He claimed that the question of the actions of the provincial police:

in doing what they did is not directly before you and I don't think it has very much bearing on this case....they restored order...whether they trampled this one or that one under, whether they broke anyone's hand or whether they exceeded the reasonable demands of the situation in dealing with the crowd there at that time is not, I think, a matter of very much import.

The jury found McLachlan guilty on 31 October 1923 and he was sentenced to two years in Dorchester Penitentiary. Following the conviction, the defence filed an appeal listing 11 errors in law that occurred during the trial.⁹³ Frank noted that the judges who denied the appeal did set aside the conviction on the charges related to the article appearing in the *Halifax Chronicle*, thus undermining the reason why the trial was held in Halifax.⁹⁴

On 10 January 1924, Mellish responded to a request from the Solicitor General of Canada to supply the indictment, the transcript of the trial and his address to the jury.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 251-258.

⁹³ NSA, RG 39, c, vol. 706, B 164, Notice of Appeal.

⁹⁴ Frank, "The Trial of J.B. McLachlan," 222.

⁹⁵ The requested attachments were not in the file from Library and Archives Canada. The change in the law was only mentioned in the letter to the Solicitor General. It did not come up during the trial.

Mellish's letter noted that he had been more lenient than he would have liked given that the laws had recently been changed to allow for a 20-year sentence. Harrington applied for leave to petition the Privy Council. Provincial Supreme Court Justices Russell and Chisholm agreed and Chief Justice Harris claimed he reluctantly went along, signing the petition on 15 February 1924. Justice Chisholm wrote that the use of written material found in a suspected person's library might be considered "a question of great general and public importance."⁹⁶ On 27 February 1924 Governor General Byng signed a "ticket of leave" for McLachlan, essentially probation that allowed him to serve the rest of his sentence in his home town but subject to the usual restrictions including reporting monthly to an officer of the court.⁹⁷

The *Sydney Record*, despite being a Liberal newspaper, printed a report from the Canadian Press in which Harrington argued that to call McLachlan a communist was to label all those miners who continually voted for him and invoked the argument for freedom of speech. The paper quoted Harrington's rhetorical question about why, when others published McLachlan's letter to local unions, they were not in the dock along with McLachlan.⁹⁸ The *Sydney Record* quoted the Attorney General as saying that murder trials on the docket were not as important as McLachlan's, because for years he had heard people criticize the police and that he was determined when he had the chance he would lock horns with them. O'Hearn said that he held no brief with Hickey or Gray but if they

⁹⁶ The King vs. McLachlan, 410.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 338.

⁹⁸ *Sydney Record*, 17 October 1923.

were charged he would convict them, a comment reflecting O'Hearn's unusual sense of justice.⁹⁹

In November, Harrington was back in Cape Breton successfully defending "Moscow Jack" MacDonald on the charge of sedition. The *Maritime Labor Herald* on 3 November reported;

G.S Harrington gave a fine address to the jury. He stressed the point that one of the witnesses for prosecution had admitted to taking several drinks of liquor before attending the meeting and it was therefore possible that he might have been mistaken about the words used by the speaker. He ridiculed the idea that it was a crime to criticize the government of the country. He pointed out that the members of the cabinets of Canada had toured the country denouncing the previous governments. He claimed that the evidence presented by the defence proved that the words charged had not been uttered and there was no seditious intent.¹⁰⁰

From 1921 to 1924, it seems Harrington's negotiating and legal skills proved valuable to the UMW. Temperamentally he would have sided with the moderate wing of the union yet he did not shirk his duty to the radical executive when it was elected. No doubt the trial of J.B. McLachlan would have been frustrating and disappointing, but it did little to damage Harrington's reputation. Despite McLachlan's conviction, it was generally recognized that the result of the trial was a foregone conclusion. Further deterioration in relations between the union and Besco would see Harrington drawn further into the activities of the UMW in 1924 and 1925, but in the meantime the evidence indicates that during the already-stormy earlier years he had fully undertaken the role of dutiful counsel to the union.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 3 November 1923.

Chapter 5

Prelude to Provincial Politics

On 6 October 1923 the *Maritime Labor Herald* reported that Phalen Local of the UMW in New Aberdeen was requesting other locals' support to have the Provisional Executive ask the company to end its contract with the union in January, 1924 and to request a 40 per cent raise under a new contract.¹ The *Financial Post* reported that Phalen's request for a 40 per cent increase was designed to embarrass Silby Barrett, head of the provisional executive, who had come to be thought of as a "satellite of [International President John L.] Lewis," whom they believed to have abandoned them in their struggles in 1922.²

At that time, the Provisional Executive had asked for a wage increase of about 20 per cent. The Corporation gave notice of a 20 to 25 per cent reduction, whereupon both sides agreed to draft the contract of working conditions and procedure first, going on to the wage scale afterwards. The Corporation whittled down the proposed decrease to 10 per cent with further details including a return to summer and winter rates and offered to guarantee four days per week at Sydney Mines and five at Glace Bay. The contract was to run until January, 1925. The men insisted on an increase and walked out on 15 January 1924. Roy Wolvin eventually capitulated to a 6.32 per cent increase, on condition that the union would accept as part of the contract, a rigid clause on the subject of maintenance

¹ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 6 October 1923.

² *Financial Post*, 3 December 1923.

men staying on the job during strikes and that the union would also agree to stop the locals from providing financial support to the *Maritime Labor Herald*.³

C.B. Wade wrote that the financial aspect of the agreement was a good one considering the falling markets and growing unemployment in the country. The Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mines of the Province of Nova Scotia, 1925, known as the Duncan Commission of 1925, later reported, “We find the reduction of wages in 1922 was not justified at that date; a reduction would have been justified at some date in 1923; further that the wage increase given in 1924 was unwarranted”.⁴ Despite the miners’ disappointment with the contract, coal production increased, according to the *Glace Bay Gazette*:

The output at the collieries this week (1 April 1924) has shown marked increase and the output for the month is likely to be a record one. On Tuesday and Wednesday the collieries produced over 14,000 tons and it is expected that this figure will be reached today. When No. 1B begins to hoist coal the output figures should get close to 18,000 tons daily.⁵

In September, 1924, a reinstated District 26 elected a new slate of officers. J.W. McLeod from Dominion No. 6 was elected president, defeating Robert Baxter. Joe Nearing became vice president and Alex MacKay was elected secretary treasurer. In an easier time, with a more responsible management, life would have become more settled with the election of McLeod. His stated goal was to heal the rifts within the union. He had a strong sense that Besco was corrupt but, unlike McLachlan, felt that those who wanted to nationalize the mines did not know what would be involved in such an adventure. McLeod operated from middle ground. He told the Duncan Commission:

³ Eugene Forsey, *National Problems*, 62.

⁴ Wade, *History of District 26*, 98 and 100.

⁵ *Glace Bay Gazette*, 2 April 1924.

I first joined the United Mine Workers of America in Dominion No.6 when it was considered a crime by church and state to do so and when preachers used to get up in their pulpits and wave the British flag; accuse us of unpatriotism and all that sort of stuff. And I know what I am talking about from personal experience.⁶

Agnes Macphail, Member of Parliament for Southeast Grey in Ontario, met McLeod on a visit to Glace Bay in early 1925. She reported that he was an “exceedingly sane man,” thought by some to be too moderate. She concluded that the government, the company or “anybody else concerned in the affair, ought to be glad to encourage the continuance of a union under the leadership of Mr. McLeod.”⁷ Sir Andrew Rae Duncan told Andrew Merkel that there was no finer labour leader in England.⁸

McLeod’s collegial relationship with Harrington was criticized by “Moscow Jack” MacDonald , who claimed the union executive now went to Harrington for advice instead of McLachlan. His view has been summarized by David Frank:

MacLeod had never been a member of the [Communist] party but instead of relying on the advice of veterans of the labour wars such as McLachlan, McLeod had virtually abdicated leadership of the union to the district’s legal advisor Gordon Harrington: “The officers went to him for advice. He attends their board meetings, drafts all statements and had the officers sign same”. Harrington was “undoubtedly playing the Conservative game” and does all possible to prevent the adoption of a militant policy.⁹

Despite the change to the UMW executive and the preceding 14 months that the union had been under Barrett’s moderate leadership, Besco continued to blame the union

⁶ Wade, *History of District 26*; Forsey, *National Problems*, 100, quoting evidence from Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Industry in the Province of Nova Scotia (Duncan Commission 1925), 1652.

⁷ Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Canada (31 March 1925) 1732 and 1733.

⁸ Merkel, “Outstanding Political Leaders.”

⁹ Frank, *McLachlan*, 378.

for its poor results. The *Canadian Annual Review* reported on the company's performance during that time in early 1925:

[Besco's] operations... were considerably reduced in 1924 over 1923. The company's official statement dated 16 May 1925, gave aggregate days during which 14 coal mines... were in operation in 1923 as 3,085, compared with an aggregate of 2,713 for 15 mines in 1924. Production in 1923 was 3,342,152 tons and 2,979,039 tons in 1924. Days worked averaged 187 days in 1924 as against 220 in 1923 and average output in 1924 was 198,602 as against 238,725 in 1923.¹⁰

Normally, it would seem that a company whose fortunes were fading might, especially with the election of a moderate union executive, try to develop a collaborative relationship with its employees. But in December of 1924, Besco Vice President J.E. McLurg, who had succeeded D.H. McDougall, presented a proposal for a 10 per cent cut across the board to run from 16 January 1925 to 30 November 1926. It was a "take it or leave it," one-day only-offer.¹¹ For various reasons, the union failed to respond and the offer became void. Besco applied for and got a conciliation board. It had two members whose companies did regular business with Besco. The union registered its objection. Nevertheless the board came to Cape Breton. McLeod made a brief appearance to announce that the UMW would not participate. The union had the sympathy of the Federal Minister of Labour, who admitted that past investigations into conditions in the coalfields had never been as thorough as they should have been.¹²

The refusal of the company to cooperate in good faith with the UMW was hardening the union's position. The union sent an eleven-page brief to the conciliation board outlining its position:

¹⁰ *Canadian Annual Review*, 1924-25, 351.

¹¹ Forsey, *National Problems*, 63-64.

¹² *Ibid.*, 65.

We do not doubt the sincerity or honesty of purpose of any such Board and we mean no discourtesy to it, but we have been through this experience frequently and the procedure is familiar to us...and eventually we will be confronted with the Batons of the Provincial Police and the Bayonets of the Canadian Militia as the final reason for us to accept a cut, when we ask no more than human treatment for our workers and their women and children. Many children cannot attend school owing to lack of food and clothing and whole families face starvation at the present moment...Yet whoever criticizes this corporation is termed "Red" and must walk with great circumspection to avoid the jails of our country.¹³

An article in the *Winnipeg Tribune* stated that before miners who had worked only half time for more than a year were asked to accept lower wages, the financial and commercial conditions of the company ought to be laid bare to the last decimal point, "...and that it be held strictly to account for the method and manner of that operation."

The article went on to say:

no industry has been treated so well in Canada as the steel industry and Besco has no reason not to be profitable given that there is nowhere else on the American continent or in Europe that the mines are right beside the blast furnace and the iron ore deposits "only a short water-haul away".¹⁴

Between 20 and 23 February 1925, Premier Armstrong, seemingly ignorant of Besco's reputation with businesses, newspapers, other governments and unions, conferred with both Besco and the UMW. He then recommended a Royal Commission to investigate Besco's ability to pay, the results of which would bind both parties. The company agreed, but the union saw no advantage in approving something in advance given its past experience.¹⁵ As well, the union suspected, and the Duncan Commission later confirmed, that Besco was using profits in the coal industry to sustain other

¹³ MacGillivray, "Cape Breton in the 1920s," 57.

¹⁴ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 26 February 1925.

¹⁵ Wade, *History of District 26*.

branches of its operations, so the financial picture it presented was not specific to the coal mines.¹⁶ At the same time International President Lewis wrote to Ottawa, stating that in December the most militant collieries, No. 2, No.4 and No.6, worked only eight days, seven in January and four in February. Lewis complained it was obvious Besco was deliberately punishing the miners in these areas by working those mines on short time.¹⁷ With more than 1500 people dependent on short time, McLeod told the Duncan Commission that the union believed it had a verbal agreement with the company from December 1924 that these people would be given credit at the company stores for bare necessities of life. On March 2 the company closed the company stores in New Aberdeen (No.2), Caledonia (No.4) and Dominion No.6.¹⁸

We cannot conceive of such a total absence of administrative ability as would allow you to pursue this course and expect results other than tumults and disorder. Lacking courage to produce those unfortunate results by attempting a cut in wage rates, you have taken the circuitous, but equally effective, method of producing them by starvation. If you have authority and desire personally to save the situation, we sincerely recommend to you the following steps: (a) Forthwith reestablish credit in your stores.,. (b) ...immediate orders for commencing work at collieries 2,4, and 6 for a minimum of four days a week You must realize that, in view of your treatment of us as we have outlined above it is an easy matter for us to declare your conduct a lockout of our members, which means a lockout of all classifications of labour in and about the collieries.¹⁹

McLurg reiterated his earlier statement that the company decided it was inadvisable to extend further credit at the stores and that lack of demand for coal made it impossible to work collieries 2, 4 and 6 for the proposed four days per week.²⁰ Eugene

¹⁶ Duncan Royal Commission, 1925 Report, 20.

¹⁷ Wade, *History of District 26*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Frank, *McLachlan*, 373.

¹⁹ Forsey, *National Problems*, 67.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

Forsey was one informed observer who found it odd that McLurg claimed he did not expect any reaction to the closing of the company stores. The reporter Andrew Merkel asked McLurg if he was playing a game of poker, to which McLurg replied that the company held all the cards and in a statement that would come back to haunt the company, he added that the miners “could not stand the gaff.”²¹

The strike began on 6 March 1925 and was followed by another series of fruitless meetings between the union and the company.

International President Lewis left one meeting claiming that Wolvin was out to smash the union, and after a private meeting with Premier Armstrong and Wolvin, McLeod left with the comment that Wolvin had been tactless and truculent.²² Armstrong begged Wolvin to reverse the decision to close the company stores. Wolvin replied that there were some miners determined “to wreck the industries.” Although the company had tens of thousands of tons of coal stockpiled in No. 2 yard, he maintained that:

a reduction in daily wage rate would assure greater production of coal, larger outlets, increased employment and larger annual income to the miner, under present conditions and the refusal of the men’s leaders to accept small wage reductions, what can they expect other than distress conditions.²³

New Aberdeen, Caledonia and Dominion No.6, the most militant collieries with the fewest shifts, were also the areas of poorest housing and sanitation. New Aberdeen consistently had high child mortality rates due to poor sanitation. In 1925, Sarah Gold, a social worker from Halifax, wrote an extensive article in the magazine *Social Welfare* giving a chilling portrayal of the size and conditions of company housing, its inhabitants

²¹ Frank, *McLachlan*, 374.

²² Forsey, *National Problems*, 72.

²³ *Montreal Gazette*, 5 March 1925.

and surroundings.²⁴ There is no doubt that families in these areas were deeply in debt to the company stores, but they were caught in a Catch 22. Without work, there was no money to shop anywhere else and without work they could not pay their bills at the company store. Without credit at the company store, there was no food, no clothing and little chance of children going to school. And, although there was understandable sympathy for the miners, it was Agnes Macphail who declared that the life of a woman in Glace Bay was “a tragedy.”²⁵ William Duff, Liberal MP from Lunenburg, continued to hold the Nova Scotia Government’s party line that all was fine in Glace Bay, except for trouble caused by a few communists. He complained that Macphail had been led astray by “being in bad company” in Glace Bay when she was with the mayor of the town, D.W. Morrison.²⁶ Meanwhile, Conservative and CCF members questioned Prime Minister Mackenzie King vigorously in the House of Commons, but King said his hands were tied until he had a request for help from the government of Nova Scotia. The opposition leader, Arthur Meighen, asked why Canadians could send help to foreign countries but not to needy Canadians.²⁷

On 3 March 1925, one day after the closing of the company stores, federal Conservative Leader, Sir Arthur Meighen, wrote Harrington asking how the issue of the Maritime Rights Movement was playing in his area. Meighen said that he had put a motion on the order papers with respect to the Movement and was disappointed when the

²⁴ The article, “A Social Worker Visits Cape Breton,” was reproduced in *Cape Breton’s Magazine*, Issue 38, 1985, 5.

²⁵ Parliamentary Debates, (31 March 1925), 1733.

²⁶ Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Canada (1 April 1925), 1778.

²⁷ MacGillivray, “Cape Breton in the 1920s,” 59.

delegation from Nova Scotia had watered down their request.²⁸ Harrington responded that, “Unfortunately we have been so disturbed in this community of late, that I have not followed closely the developments regarding your resolution and the divergence from it made by the recent delegation to Ottawa.”²⁹

He went on to say “In this district the movement can be confined practically to two items (1) freight rates and (2) protection on steel and coal.”

Concessions in freight rates for shipments to and from the Province of Nova Scotia are desirable to allow of cheaper rail transport of Coal and Steel from Cape Breton to rail markets, and conversely it should encourage shipments from maritime ports, thereby tending to build up those communities that provide those commodities...the lack of high tariffs has led to the dumping of cheap American coal and “the effort to meet this in competitive prices has caused continuously depreciating standard of living of our Cape Breton miners.”

Concerning Besco, Harrington states that any corporation whose product is protected by tariff should be made subject to governmental control. “The provincial government and Besco are asking for increased duties and rail subventions at the same time that the Corporation announces that they will not reduce consumer prices in Canada and will cut wages to its employees.” Harrington noted that Besco does not appear to be possessed of ordinary business instincts but nevertheless “when tariff protection is given to the commodities produced by a corporation, the government, in a measure, must assume responsibility for the manner in which that corporation, in a general way, conducts its business and especially towards its employees.”³⁰

All in all, for Harrington:

²⁸ LAC, MG 26-1, vol. 118, Sir Arthur Meighen Papers, Meighen to Harrington, 3 March 1925.

²⁹ Ibid., Harrington to Meighen, 6 March 1925.

³⁰ Ibid.

until some very severe restrictions are placed upon it in the handling of the monopoly it has in my opinion, it would be unwise to protect the industries operated by this corporation, industries based on the natural resources of our country. The absurdity of this corporation asking for tariff concessions on the one hand, and reduction in already too meager wage scales on the other hand must be apparent ...Further the corporation appears to be hopelessly unsound and its direction is beyond comment. We have practical starvation amongst us here at the present moment, owing to the inability of this corporation successfully to conduct its industries.³¹

Meighen was apparently not entirely convinced, replying, "I quite realize the feeling is very general in Nova Scotia as respects the British Empire Steel Corporation and the reaction of this feeling on the protection issue. Still the company can be reformed and a policy is either right or wrong irrespective of the character of a single concern."³² Meighen was stating Conservative Party policy with respect to protection of domestic industry, which had been in effect since the 1870s. Harrington, nominally a Conservative, disagreed with the Party's policy when it came to Besco and his response to Meighen showed how strongly he believed in his point of view.

CCF parliamentarians James Irvine (Calgary), Agnes Macphail, and J.S. Woodsworth (Winnipeg), visited Glace Bay at this time, and in Parliament they engaged Liberals from Nova Scotia in a debate about conditions there. Generally, Liberal members remained neutral or supported the Nova Scotia government's stance, although one member, William Carroll, from Richmond County, said that the Corporation had to pay its men a living wage, and once the men had that, it was incumbent upon them to work diligently.³³ The impending devastation from the closing of the company stores and

³¹ Ibid., Harrington to Meighen, 16 March 1925.

³² Ibid., Meighen to Harrington, 20 March 1925.

³³ Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Canada (24 February 1925), 498.

the lack of work, meanwhile, was foreseen by community leaders in Glace Bay such as Rev. A.A. McAvoy, minister at the Glace Bay Baptist Church, who organized the Glace Bay Central Relief Committee. The Committee, in religion-conscious Glace Bay, included a Catholic priest, a Protestant minister and leaders of the Salvation Army along with the wife of a prominent Jewish merchant, as well as the mayor's wife, the former mayor's wife and several volunteers. It operated out of the YMCA in Glace Bay, and organized relief stations in many communities, demonstrating that the need went beyond No.2, No.4 and No.6.³⁴

McAvoy was interviewed by the *Toronto Daily Star* in April 1925. He reported on a meeting with a Parliamentary Committee in which William Duff (Liberal MP for Lunenburg, Nova Scotia) continued to claim that all was well in Glace Bay except for a few communists. McAvoy responded the men were not communists but people looking for a decent standard of living. He said they were as loyal as any other Canadians, having 4000 returned veterans among them, and also noted that the single men were leaving at a rate of some 200 per week to find work elsewhere.³⁵

The individual and organizational response to conditions in Glace Bay was overwhelming. Various sources note the numbers and variety of assistance that poured into the town. The Great War Veterans' Association drew large funds from across the country. The Quaker Oats Company sent a trainload of oats and CN Rail offered its services to transport goods. The Salvation Army opened two depots in Toronto to collect

³⁴ Photo of the Glace Bay Central Relief Committee, *Cape Breton's Magazine*, Issue 38, 1985, 47.

³⁵ Lawren Harris, "Dr. M'Avoy's Fight to save Glace Bay from Starvation," *Toronto Daily Star*, 25 April 1925. The *Star* article is accompanied by a head and shoulders line drawing of McAvoy drawn by Harris.

money and clothing.³⁶ The Canadian Trades and Labor Council not only assisted materially but encouraged the International UMW to increase a \$5000 donation to \$10,000 per week.³⁷ The *Toronto Daily Star* sent Group of Seven painter Lawren Harris to Glace Bay to write articles for the paper. Harris was also inspired to paint his famous *Glace Bay Miners' Houses*, currently hanging in the Art Gallery of Ontario.

The *Star* ran articles almost daily and, along with other newspapers including the *Halifax Herald*, set up relief funds to help the community. Prime Minister Mackenzie King made a private donation,³⁸ but the Province of Nova Scotia was not so helpful. Finally pushed to action, it donated money to the Red Cross. On 8 April, McAvoy told the *Sydney Post* that donations were slowing because it was thought by donors that the province had stepped in. In fact, the Armstrong Government had allocated funds to the Red Cross, which was directed to use the money only on the “sick and infirm” and not for relief. McAvoy said that on that day alone the Relief Committee had cared for 1926 families comprising 10,090 people, and he questioned whether the Committee could carry on without further contributions.³⁹

The impasse between the union and the company continued and frustration escalated. On 11 June, a violent confrontation occurred between company police and miners at the New Waterford power plant. One miner, William Davis, was shot and killed and several men on both sides were seriously injured. Troops were once again called into

³⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 March 1925.

³⁷ Forsey, *National Problems*, 71.

³⁸ Parliamentary Debates, Commons, Canada (1 April 1925), 1771.

³⁹ *Sydney Post*, 8 April 1925.

the area but not before some buildings, including company stores, were looted and burned.

Just weeks before these events, on 27 May, Harrington and Joseph MacDonald had been nominated to run for the Conservative Party in the upcoming provincial election, following the usual practice of one Catholic and one Protestant on the ticket. The Conservative *Sydney Post* commented on the unusually large number of labour representatives at the nomination meeting.⁴⁰ Harrington and MacDonald were running in the new constituency of Cape Breton Centre. The Liberal government, understanding it had lost the miners' vote, gerrymandered Cape Breton constituencies, corralling almost all the mining communities into Cape Breton East where J.C. Douglas and Alex O'Handley were running.⁴¹ In his acceptance speech Harrington said he preferred to live his life in seclusion, but there were times when duty overrode personal convictions. He said he was running to try to obtain a "Canadian standard of living" for miners. His objectives were to have ministers of education and health, to establish a department of labour and to see the community benefit from the work of the miners.⁴²

Once again, Harrington claimed to want peace and seclusion while stepping into a hornet's nest of disunity and intrigue. This time it was the Nova Scotia Conservative Party. By 1922 the provincial Conservative Party had almost completely collapsed, after more than thirty years of continuous Liberal government. Some efforts were made to initiate a revival, and a new leader, William Hall of Queens County, was elected in June

⁴⁰ *Sydney Post*, 28 May 1925.

⁴¹ Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, 105.

⁴² *Ibid.*

1922.⁴³ Hall began to campaign in rural Nova Scotia to revive interest in the party, but funds were in short supply.⁴⁴ By 1925, moreover, W.H. Dennis, publisher of the Conservative *Halifax Herald*, was complaining to Arthur Meighen that there were conspirators within the party trying to destroy Hall's work and his reputation. Dennis claimed that Party President Frank Stanfield was sitting on thousands of dollars that should be used to help Hall in his single-handed efforts to raise the prospects of the Conservative party.⁴⁵ In a series of subsequent letters, Dennis urged Meighen to pressure E.N. Rhodes to come to Nova Scotia to lead the party into the 1925 election.⁴⁶

Rhodes, a graduate of Acadia University and a lawyer, had been elected to the House of Commons to represent Cumberland County in 1908, 1911 and in 1917. He was appointed Deputy Speaker of the House in 1916 and Speaker in 1917. He was re-appointed under the Liberal government in 1918 and had not lived in Nova Scotia for some time. His father and his maternal uncle, Nathaniel Curry, had owned the Amherst-based Rhodes Curry Company, which among other business ventures had built several thousand company houses in Glace Bay and area in 1901. In Amherst, the company's rail car business had been the largest employer in the town, although its merger in 1909 with two Montreal concerns to form the Canadian Car and Foundry Company had led to a scaling down of the Amherst Operations.⁴⁷ On 19 February 1925, Meighen responded to Dennis's request that he encourage Rhodes to lead the Nova Scotia Conservative Party into the next election by saying he had discussed the possibility with Rhodes, who had

⁴³ Forbes, "The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party," 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁵ LAC, MG 26-1 Sir Arthur Meighen Papers, W.H. Dennis to Meighen, 24 April 1925.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Dennis to Meighen, 15 March 1925.

⁴⁷ Nolan Reilly "The General Strike in Amherst, 1919," *Acadiensis*, 9: 2 (Spring 1980): 61.

made conditions that Meighen was not at liberty to divulge.⁴⁸ On 28 March, Dennis wrote to Meighen:

Through intrigue on the part of men who should have been supporting and assisting Hall and strengthening his hand in every possible way, conditions in Nova Scotia are in a state of chaos. Hall is about disheartened. Two or three prominent men – it is not necessary to mention names – who are not friends of yours, have carried a most insidious campaign against Hall among Conservative people throughout the Province, with the sole object of so thoroughly discrediting him that the Conservative Party would get down on their knees and pick the leader of the group to take over the leadership. You have no conception of the intrigue that has been going on. It is diabolical.⁴⁹

On 1 April, Meighen wrote to Dennis that Rhodes was “personally averse to taking on the responsibility,” but he thought Rhodes might be convinced that the esteem in which he was held might be lessened should he refuse.⁵⁰ It appears that this argument worked. Stanfield and Dennis were convinced that Hall could not win the upcoming provincial election and convinced him to resign, which he did on 12 May. Claiming there was insufficient time for a convention, the party executive and nominated candidates met on 21 May, and chose Rhodes to lead the Conservatives into the July election.⁵¹

The Conservative party won an overwhelming majority in the provincial election of 1925, leaving the Liberals with only three seats. The assumption that the provincial government supported Besco against the miners distressed many voters. This and the issue of Maritime Rights was enough to ensure the government’s defeat.⁵² Voters in many areas of the province were infuriated with Besco’s treatment of the miners and their

⁴⁸ Meighen Papers Meighen to Dennis, 19 February 1925.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Dennis to Meighen, 28 March 1925.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Meighen to Dennis, 1 April 1925.

⁵¹ Forbes, “Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party,” 56.

⁵² Forbes, *Maritime Rights*, 137-139.

families. Armstrong was seen to be timid in not wanting to take sides in the strike but, in fact he had done so when he not only refused to go to Glace Bay but made the unfortunate comment that the poverty in Glace Bay was exaggerated.⁵³ When cabinet minister A.S. MacMillan went to Glace Bay, he said that he had seen poverty but it was mainly among “shiftless” people who had put nothing aside for a rainy day.⁵⁴ By 1925, continuing disagreements with Mackenzie King over labour troubles led the federal government to wash its hands of the Nova Scotia coal industry and it refused to accommodate Armstrong’s request for commission to investigate the coal industry, thus diminishing federal support in the election the provincial Liberals needed.⁵⁵ The gerrymandering that pulled nearly all the miners in one constituency fooled no one. The Liberal government then changed course and went so far as to accuse Harrington of deliberately prolonging the strike.⁵⁶ They then accused the Conservatives of being communists and Bolsheviks, an argument that must have amused Rhodes.⁵⁷ More interesting is what appears to have been the successful collaboration between the Orthodox Conservative, Rhodes and the “Red Tory,” Harrington who was sworn in as Minister of Public Works and Mines.

⁵³ Forbes, “Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party,” 47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁵ Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, 103.

⁵⁶ Forbes, “Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party,” 53. The letter from Harrington, legal counsel for District 26, to its president, speculated that if the men refused a rollback in wages, it would lead to Wolvin being replaced by someone more favourable to labour. Forbes surmises this was simply a suggestion for negotiating strategy. Harrington ran in a constituency with few miners’ votes and won an overwhelming majority.

⁵⁷ In 1914, the Nova Scotia Liberal Government pushed through a bill privatizing the Halifax Tramways Corporation. The interests behind the venture included Nathan Curry and E. N. Rhodes. The consortium soon sold the business to American interests for considerable profit. Many prominent Conservatives fought the legislation. See Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, “Getting Your Way in Nova Scotia: ‘Tweaking’ Halifax 1909-1917,” *Acadiensis* 5:2 (Spring 1974): 105-131.

An editorial in the *Ottawa Citizen* urged Rhodes to make a quick settlement of the miners' strike, pointing out that not only were the mines in danger, but women and children had been "barely existing for months for want of food." It went on to say that the outcome of the election showed that the electors of Nova Scotia, and people outside the province had confidence in the Rhodes government. "There is no such evidence of confidence in Roy S. Wolvin or James B. McLachlan. The blind stubbornness or reckless hostility of extremists on either side cannot be allowed to strike shattering blows at the credit of Canada. Conciliation and common sense must be allowed to prevail in Nova Scotia."⁵⁸

Rhodes, as Premier, has been given credit for settling the miners' strike in Cape Breton at least temporarily. Rhodes arrived in Nova Scotia sometime in May of 1925, just weeks before the election. Harrington, except for his time with the OMFC, had lived and worked with the miners. There was also no doubt Besco knew where Harrington stood, but perhaps expected Rhodes to bend more in its direction. If that was the case, Wolvin and company did themselves no favours by lecturing the new premier on what he must do in formulating his approach to his stated goal of settling the strike. Among Besco's recommendations were what wage rates he must advise the miners to accept. In an article in the company's in-house newsletter, Wolvin told Rhodes it was his duty to determine how the "Red" element could be exterminated and how to get it done. As well, Rhodes "must consider very carefully" if he should have any communication with officials of the United Mine Workers of America. The article suggested that Rhodes must be aware of past failures due to "the determined and unreasoning opposition of the spokesmen for the

⁵⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 July 1925.

miners to any proposal made to them for settlement,” presumably this included the Minister of Mines, who just weeks earlier had been counsel for the UMW.⁵⁹

It would appear that Wolvin, McLurg and Besco executives were so far out of touch with public opinion that they saw no difficulty in actually printing this directive to the new government, as well as their reaction to the outcome of Rhodes’ and Harrington’s negotiations. The interim decision by Rhodes and Harrington was designed to get the men back to work quickly, and would run for six months pending a full inquiry into the coal industry in Nova Scotia.⁶⁰ The terms of the contract would be those of the 1924 contract with the wage scale to be that of the 1922 contract estimated to have been between six and eight per cent below the scale of 1924. Regular employees were to be hired before outside labour was engaged. The government was to rebate 1/5th of its royalties for 12 months, and the government agreed to conduct a binding referendum on the check-off. All other contentious issues were to be directed to the Royal Commission investigation that would soon convene under the leadership of Sir Andrew Rae Duncan.⁶¹

Wolvin’s reaction to the government’s release of its plan to end the strike, to the company and the union at the same time, seemed to be one of incredulity. His letter, published in the *Besco Bulletin* recognized that the decision of the government “must be given due consideration.” He noted however, “We find that this proposal having been given to the union becomes a barrier to any effort of this Corporation to effect a better arrangement direct with its employees.” He urged Rhodes to reconsider “this drastic

⁵⁹ BI, *Besco Bulletin*, 18 July 1925.

⁶⁰ Harrington would set this in progress in a letter to Col. Amery on 6 August 1926.

⁶¹ BI, *Besco Bulletin*, 8 August 1925.

proposal.”⁶² Rhodes replied that the decision did not preclude any further or other agreements between the Corporation and the men but was intended to get the mines working. He re-affirmed the government’s decision and said it was not open to reconsideration.⁶³

Frank wrote that the miners’ experience with Besco led to a permanent distrust by Cape Bretoners of outside capitalists.⁶⁴ The distrust was far more pervasive. Harrington was well aware of a deep-seated distrust when he wrote his friend Col. L. M. S. Amery, British Secretary of State for the Colonies asking him to recommend “a chairman of outstanding merit” to come from Britain to head a Royal Commission on Nova Scotia's coal industry. Harrington suggested that if Amery were to give him the information quietly, a formal request would be sent from the Province's Lieutenant Governor. In the letter, Harrington explained that there had been great difficulty in the industry for the previous five years. “There has been pronounced dissatisfaction with the Corporation that controls the [coal] production in the Province, and latterly a spirit of mutual distrust between this employer and its employees has made satisfactory operation of the coal areas impracticable.”⁶⁵

In fact, the Duncan Commission of 1925 found several layers of distrust existing between the company and the miners as well as within the company and within the union. The company had a history of spying on the union and it put undue emphasis on the communist activity within the union. But the commissioners found that within the union,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Frank, “The Rise and Fall of Besco,” 34.

⁶⁵ BI, MG 9.35, Harrington to Amery, 6 August 1925. Harrington also asked that the proposed commission investigate the living and working conditions of the miners.

trade union activity and industrial negotiations “were being confused or overridden by the political and social theories and aims of avowed communists working within the Union.”⁶⁶ The commissioners found the men nursed petty grievances rather than consult the union, which it felt was preoccupied with more general issues.⁶⁷

There was no doubt Besco used the fear of communism to gain support for its treatment of the UMW and its leaders. During the Royal Commission hearings, Wolvin and other representatives of the company continually brought up the large part which communists had played in the troubles of the previous four years. McCann told the Commission there were about 1200 communists, but in conversation with Forsey he said 500, while the communists themselves told Forsey they had barely 100 followers. Forsey does say that there was no doubt their influence was out of proportion to their numbers.⁶⁸ The Commission condemned the *Maritime Labor Herald's* “press propaganda being actively conducted in certain mining communities with the object of making well-ordered and amicable relationships within the existing order of industry impossible.”⁶⁹

On the other side, the Corporation refused to give local management the authority to “settle claims and complaints on their merit.”⁷⁰

The Duncan Commission of 1925 reported that in 1922, events changed within a few months such that the demands made by the company were greater than they might have been. This led to a belief by the men that the company's demands had been “unnecessary and insincere.” Feelings became so embittered that they destroyed

⁶⁶ NSA, MG 9554, N93, R88, 1925 Report of the Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mines of the Province of Nova Scotia, the Duncan Commission of 1925, 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁸ Forsey, *National Problems*, 87.

⁶⁹ Duncan Commission of 1925, 15-23.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

confidence in the reliability of figures supplied by the operators in subsequent dealings. The men believed that if the figures related to coal production were separated out from other constituents of the Corporation, the figures would be more favourable. In other words, the men felt they were “being called upon, without their consent, and without reliable knowledge, to make sacrifices in order to maintain other constituent parts of the Corporation.”⁷¹

These circumstances in part explain the hopelessness which seems to have characterised both sides throughout the last few years that they could not reach common ground. They seem never to have got into such a serious discussion as to make it necessary for either side to understand the other’s point of view. There cannot be good will and sympathetic understanding between the parties if they rest content to talk at each other through public prints instead of **to** each other over the table.⁷²

Concurrent with the establishment of the *Maritime Labor Herald* by the original founders, was the organization of the Workers Education Club at the UMW offices where one of the rooms had been set aside for a library. Lectures were planned on a broad range of educational pursuits including economics, politics, poetry, literature, art and philosophy.⁷³

On 14 October 1922, the *Maritime Labor Herald* reported that Gordon S. Harrington was the first speaker at the first regularly scheduled Friday night lectures sponsored by the Workers’ Education Club.⁷⁴ In Harrington’s lecture, which the paper took pains to report was “not in the least dogmatic,” he said that current institutions were developed by man to meet his needs as he evolved from the cave to a modern existence

⁷¹ Ibid., 20-21.

⁷² Ibid., 21.

⁷³ *Maritime Labor Herald*, 23 September 1922.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 14 October 1922.

and, in answer to the communists who wanted to destroy traditional economic structures, he said that even if those institutions were to be criticized and required improvement, they should still be respected for the roles they played.

Harrington asked why it was that in a province made up mostly of workers, that the majority of those elected to the Legislature were lawyers and other professionals. He said he believed that in order for government to represent the working man, the working man needed to elect men educated in History, Economics, English and other subjects to help him best understand and represent his constituents. He suggested that District 26 make a ten-year agreement with universities to waive tuition for three students each year from the union to take these and other courses. Under this proposal the union would provide money for living costs and the students would be required, when not at university, to return to work and to educate their fellow workers both on the job and in evening courses.⁷⁵ This possibility was not pursued, but it does reflect Harrington's belief in the power of education that first brought him to Glace Bay.

Harrington argued that a broad education would lead people to develop their own informed opinions; to understand economics, history and politics to see both sides of a situation, and appreciate other points of view. He believed that a general education would also add light to the everyday living and working experiences of miners and their families. Education would address the sense of helplessness resulting from being buffeted by the various factions vying for the miners' support.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

Prior to the official opening of the club, Dr. Clarence MacKinnon and local businessman Stuart McCawley met with members to discuss the possibility of a trade school in Glace Bay. The coal company had an agreement with the provincial and federal governments whereby the company would pay future students five days' pay to attend the trade school for three days each week. The project failed. First the Province backed out of the agreement and the Federal Government followed. MacKinnon and McCawley asked the group if they should approach the Carnegie Foundation, which was funding education projects in the province. The idea was turned down because distrust prevailed when it was considered there might be strings attached.⁷⁷

Nine months later, on 12 July 1923, Andrew Merkel of the Canadian Press, who put J. B. McLachlan's letter on the wire service, wrote an extensive article on conditions in the coalfields of Cape Breton that was shared with all Canadian Press' subscribers. He admitted that having read other newspaper reports, he arrived with a prejudice against the miners but soon reversed his position.⁷⁸

Merkel said he was struck by the vehemence with which the miners believed that everybody was against them including newspapers, the international president of their union, and the provincial and federal governments. The deep underlying reason for this state of mind, according to Merkel was "the persistent reporting of false tales in newspapers."⁷⁹ He gave as examples reports that the coal pile at Dominion Number 2 was in imminent danger of destruction. It was not. It was reported, erroneously, that the mines were rapidly filling with water. He said that five thousand miners heard their leaders

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 12 July 1923.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

speak, then, the next day they found that words had been put into the mouths of those leaders which they know were never uttered.

With distrust running so deep, it made sense that the people of industrial Cape Breton voted for Harrington in the 1925 election. In 1922, it was Harrington the miners wanted to represent them when successive industrial commissions failed to understand their plight. And it was Harrington the Liberal Government hired to end the strike that saw the military removed from the town. In 1923, it was the moderate Harrington who was hired to defend communists in court, and in 1924, it was Harrington who worked with MacLeod and the moderate wing of the UMW to try to reach an honourable peace in the coalfields.

In office, Harrington, as Minister of Mines and Public Works, devoted most of his energy to the mines portfolio. Merkel wrote that, even after Harrington became Premier in 1930, it took months to move him from the ministry office to the more prestigious Premier's office.⁸⁰ In a response to congratulations on his election win in 1925 from General Currie, Harrington wrote, "After my experience wrecking myself in the Overseas Ministry you will no doubt agree that it was supreme stupidity for me to undertake anything of this character, and unless I can get from under some of the pressure it will probably mean a collapse such as Rhodes has had recently."⁸¹ Apparently health problems did recur. In 1927 Harrington wrote Rhodes from New York on his way south. In the note

⁸⁰ Merkel, "Outstanding Political Leaders."

⁸¹ LAC, MG 30 E, 100, Arthur William Currie Papers, Correspondence General, H, Harrington to Currie, 10 December 1925.

he said that after the trip, if he still needed time to rest, he would do it in Nova Scotia.⁸² And in 1928 while Harrington was recovering at his camp from an undisclosed illness, Rhodes wrote that he should take the full month to recover and that he, Rhodes, was “tickled with the added importance of being able to put my finger in the pie of Public Works and Mines.”⁸³

Harrington may have been recovering his health but his thoughts were not far from his portfolio. In May he wrote to Rhodes detailing his concerns about the leadership in Nova Scotia’s coal and steel industry. As long as McLurg and McCann were involved, he believed, there would be friction and the “entire situation may boil up at any time.” He wrote that they and others, whom he named, knew nothing about running the industry and the men knew it. He added that F.W. Gray also had the contempt of the miners due to his years of support for Wolvin who had resigned in January 1928.⁸⁴ He argued for a change in leadership, on the ground that “I feel that the present contract which calls for the cooperation of the men may be jeopardized by retention of these old officials,” and perhaps referring back to negotiations in 1925 he continued, “and you know how I feel towards attempting again to smooth out difficulties.”⁸⁵

C. B. Wade wrote in his unpublished *History of District 26* that he was unable to discover why the Conservatives were so anxious to get rid of Wolvin. In all likelihood, however, Harrington, during his ongoing involvement with District 26, would have

⁸² NSA, MG 2, vol. 623-628, 29651, Rhodes Papers, Harrington to Rhodes, 5 October 1927. An article in the Sydney Post on 14 November 1927 reported that the Harringtons returned to Nova Scotia on 12 November and that Harrington’s doctor ordered another three months’ rest. According to the article, Harrington’s doctor sent him south to recover after an operation but does not disclose the nature of the operation.

⁸³ NSA, MG2, vol. 623-628, 29632, Rhodes Papers, Rhodes to Harrington, 16 April 1928.

⁸⁴ Frank, “The Rise and Fall of Besco,” 32.

⁸⁵ NSA, MG 2, vol. 623-628, 29651, Rhodes Papers, Harrington to Rhodes, 4 May 1928.

become very frustrated with attempts to negotiate with Besco and particularly Roy Wolvin. Harrington had successfully negotiated the terms by which Canada gained control of its own troops from Britain in the First World War, through hard work he earned the role of Deputy Minister of Canadian Forces and he negotiated the final financial settlement with the British War Office. Yet subsequently he found himself being stonewalled by the intransigent head of Besco, who had neither knowledge of the industry he led nor concern for the lives of his employees.

Andrew Merkel wrote that the traits he admired most about Harrington were his sincerity, his inflexible will and his modesty.⁸⁶ No doubt it was his sincerity and inflexible will that guided his determination to see improvement in the miners' living and working conditions. The only way to do that in 1925 was to step into the political fray. There can be little doubt that Harrington ran for election on the Conservative ticket on the understanding that he would get the mines portfolio. L.D. Currie, from Glace Bay, a future Liberal cabinet minister said that Harrington had "neither the political record nor local party support to match [John C.] Douglas."⁸⁷ Douglas represented the Conservatives in Cape Breton East, the constituency that contained most of the mining communities. Douglas also had a long association with the UMW, was a stalwart of the party and a long-time supporter of Rhodes. But the post was given to Harrington. No doubt this "outsider" getting such an important portfolio must have rankled some traditional Conservatives but that would have been only part of the internal turmoil boiling within the party as it took over from the forty year-old Liberal government.

⁸⁶ Merkel, *Halifax Mail*, 5 March 1947.

⁸⁷ Forbes, "The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party," 100.

In his interview with Beverley Owen for *Maclean's Magazine* in 1931, Harrington, even after being elected and re-elected as a Conservative, claimed he was a Conservative by birth only and had no deep philosophical bond with any particular party. This attitude and opinion no doubt dismayed many in the party and Harrington said he bore as much criticism from within the party as from without. He said there were those on the outside who criticized him, claiming he was a "died-in-the-wool Tory opportunist who pretended to be a socialist to gain the miners' trust and then betrayed them to win the election." Owen pointed out that Harrington had won elections in 1925 and 1928 with large majorities, something, he said, that would not have happened had the miners felt betrayed.⁸⁸

Forbes wrote that Harrington had taken over the post of Minister of Public Works and Mines at a time when the relations of labour and management, embittered after a long period of strikes and violence, were probably at their worst in the history of mining in Nova Scotia:

Within a period of five years...the strike had ended, the mines had been reorganized under new management, and the mining continued without reports of strikes or even serious disputes between labour and management, in the process, Harrington.... maintained the largest personal majorities at elections of any candidate in the Province.⁸⁹

It appears likely that in his role of legal counsel for the UMW District 26, Harrington expected that he would work behind the scenes, but from 1922 when the miners asked that he represent them in negotiations and when he negotiated a settlement at a time when, according to the Duncan Commission of 1925, relations between the

⁸⁸ Owen, "Premier of Nova Scotia," 26.

⁸⁹ Forbes, "The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party," 134.

company and men were at their lowest ebb, the course appears to have been set for his eventual entry into politics. Certainly, having had several successful negotiations with the British War Office, he probably would have found that being stonewalled by the intransigent President of Besco in efforts to effect a reasonable settlement between the union and the company left him little choice.

Harrington, the “Red Tory,” introduced many socially progressive measures both as Minister of Mines and Public Works and as Premier including a minimum wage for women, improved access to education and a Department of Labour. His attempts to introduce an old age pension failed to materialize. In 1933, although Harrington was re-elected, the Conservatives lost the election due to a combination of the Depression, patronage issues, internal squabbling and an attractive new leader of the opposition Liberals.

The effect of the “Franchise Scandal” in the Conservative loss is difficult to assess. Staff in the Conservative Party office designed a plan to disenfranchise thousands of citizens and noting that the Liberals made great use of it in its propaganda, Beck points to an article in the Herald showing that some 40,000 more citizens had been registered compared to 1928.⁹⁰ Forbes wrote that the scandal turned the Conservative loss into a “rout.”⁹¹ Beck is less emphatic on the issue but agrees that the vote might have been closer without the scandal.⁹² Harrington was again suffering poor health but there is no indication if, or how, this might have contributed to the loss. Harrington wanted to resign

⁹⁰ Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, 149.

⁹¹ Forbes, “The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party,” 195.

⁹² Beck, 150. The Conservative’s popular vote fell from 50.6 to 45.9 per cent in the 1933 election.

but his dedication to duty saw him encouraged to stay on as leader of the opposition until he lost his own seat in 1937.

Chapter Six

Spheres of Usefulness

In his ongoing search for peace and seclusion, Gordon Sidney Harrington made no attempt to be popular, nor did he aspire to a life in politics. In 1934, after Harrington had won his seat in three consecutive elections, Sydney MP, Finlay MacDonald, observed that Harrington had no “particular gifts as a politician.”¹ In 1925, Harrington personally told that consummate politician, Sir Robert Borden, that he found politics distasteful. Certainly that comment reflected the sincerity that Canadian Press superintendent Andrew Merkel admired in Harrington. Merkel said he was also impressed with Harrington’s inflexible will and his modesty. He confirmed that Harrington was not a glad-handing politician, and said that he would eventually pay the price for not playing the political game. However, it was likely these very characteristics that led people to put their trust in him. This was very significant in a community where trust was a rare commodity.² It seems rather unusual that a young lawyer from upper class Halifax would set up an office in the booming mining town of Glace Bay and within seven years, in 1913, become so in tune with the town and its people that he would be elected mayor. This was all the more surprising given that a few short years earlier, in 1909, the town had been fractured by a violent dispute between two unions that caused hardship,

¹ LAC, MG 26 K, Bennett papers, MacDonald to Bennett 24 October 1934.

² Andrew Merkel, “Outstanding Political Leaders.”

poverty, family rifts and military intervention. Harrington, it must be remembered, worked for the losing side.

Then, in a town highly segregated by religion, he, an Anglican, married a Roman Catholic just sixteen months before his election. Future mayor D.W. Morrison served on council when Harrington was mayor and said that the town made significant progress while Harrington held that post. At the time, one of the major impediments to progress was negotiating which parts of the town were the property, and responsibility, of the coal company and which fell to the mayor and town council. Despite the tradition in Glace Bay to alternate Protestant and Catholic candidates for mayor at the completion of a term, Morrison said that, had Harrington stayed in town in 1915, he would have been re-elected. Instead, Harrington inspired young men from Glace Bay and surrounding areas to join the 185th Cape Breton Highlanders "B" Company. He trained them and accompanied them overseas in October, 1916, believing promises that men from the same units would fight together. The British ignored these promises as battalions were broken up to fill vacancies in the British forces. It is difficult to imagine how this betrayal would have affected Harrington who knew these men personally, had encouraged them to enlist and no doubt voiced the promise that they would fight together. It is also impossible to speculate how the break-up of the battalions by British commanders would affect his determination in future negotiations with the British War office.

When Harrington was promoted to the OMFC in April, 1917, he had progressed through various training and administrative positions and had seen action at the Front, a condition of employment at the OMFC at that time. Sir George Perley, Canadian High Commissioner, was advised by the Prime Minister to hire a confidential secretary. He

consulted Militia Minister Sir Edward Kemp, who recommended some young Conservative officers from Toronto whom Perley rejected. Yet, when Kemp himself became Minister of the Office of the Ministry of the Forces of Canada, according to Morton, he took his time searching the ranks for that officer who would best fill the post.³ Kemp divided his time between London and Canada, trusting the young Harrington, first as Acting Deputy Minister and then Deputy Minister, with onerous responsibilities. Harrington was also a major figure, and in fact may have been instrumental, in the negotiations that took the management of Canadian Forces away from the British and put under Canadian control. Re-establishing the broken trust in the OMFC by Canadian Forces in the field was a major priority. Among those whose trust was required was General Arthur Currie, with whom Harrington developed a personal friendship.

Harrington did not fully recover his health following his bout with the Spanish Influenza near the end of the war. General Currie wrote that anyone who was overseas in the First World War would have reduced immunity to illness, and, in addition as Kemp wrote to Borden, Harrington's workload further weakened his health. Certainly the frustration of making ongoing arrangements to get the Canadians back home after the war would further test his well-being.

So it was with broken health that Harrington returned to Canada in 1919, to Ottawa, a place he detested, but where he was needed. When Kemp's doctor refused to allow him to travel to Britain to negotiate the final financial settlement with the British, it was Harrington who was entrusted to take his place. Harrington's dedication to duty saw

³ Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, 158.

him stay until every detail was complete even though he was anxious to get home to Nova Scotia.

Despite his questionable physical health, there can be no doubt about the strength of Harrington's personality or his negotiating skills. Striving for peace and quiet after the war, instead of accepting business or political positions likely offered to him, he chose to go to Sydney, the small steel city not far from Glace Bay, where he had begun his career. Harrington said he had originally moved to Glace Bay to practice law but also to engage in his avocation of studying economics and sociology. For this, Glace Bay was fertile ground given the influx of new cultures and a new form of existence that saw miners and their families crowded into rows of small, poorly-built houses with little space between them and without running water or sewers. Large sections of the town were ready-made for disease, rampant early childhood deaths, and poor educational prospects. Harrington and his fellow veterans found that after years of loss and deprivation overseas those who returned faced a town where little had improved. In fact the post-war depression and the lack of markets for steel meant fewer shifts in the mines and at the steel plant, deteriorating housing and increased illness.

If there was pervasive sentiment in the coal mining communities in the early 1920s it was distrust. On 12 July, 1923, Andrew Merkel of the Canadian Press wrote from industrial Cape Breton that his most striking impression on arriving there was of the vehemence with which the miners believed that everybody was against them. Not only the company but also the newspapers and the provincial government were the targets of

the miners' scepticism.⁴ As Harrington himself would put it some two years later, "There has been pronounced dissatisfaction with the Corporation that controls the [coal] production in the Province, and latterly a spirit of mutual distrust between this employer and its employees has made satisfactory operation of the coal areas impracticable."⁵ The Report of the Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Mining Industry in the Province of Nova Scotia, commonly known as the Duncan Commission of 1925, confirmed this position and went further, saying it had found levels of distrust within the coal company and within the union as well.⁶ Yet Harrington, despite the reservations of the more radical among UMW leaders, proved able to generate trust and confidence first as legal counsel to the UMW and subsequently as an elected official. His subsequent political life would have mixed success. He served as Premier for some three years and although he was re-elected in 1933, his government experienced defeat. Along with continuing health issues, his early years – both in Cape Breton before and after the First World War, and in the war itself – formed the essential preparation and background for the evolution of his political career.

⁴ Andrew Merkel, "Cape Breton Miners Believe Every Hand is Against Them," *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 12 July, 1923.

⁵ BI, MG 9.35, Harrington to Amery, 6 August 1925.

⁶ NSA, Royal Commission Respecting the Coal Industry in the Province of Nova Scotia (the Duncan Commission 1925).

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