DEMONIZING UNIONS:

RELIGIOUS RHETORIC IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN STRIKE NOVEL

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Demonizing Unions uncovers the significance of a Biblical idiom in American novels portraying violent labor conflicts from the 1910s to the 1930s. I reveal the different ways that Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* and *The Coal War*, Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!*, and Ruth McKenney's *Industrial Valley* employ a Biblical motif both to emphasize the God-like power of Capital over society, and to critique an emergent socio-political faith in business power. The texts I examine demonstrate how it was clear to industrialists in the early 20th century that physical violence was losing its efficacy. Therefore, much of the brunt of the physical conflict in labor struggles could be eased by waging a war of ideas to turn public opinion into an additional, ultimately more powerful, weapon against the potential of organized labor. I argue that in these texts, the besmearing of the discontented workers as violent dupes of "outside agitators," rather than regular folks with economic grievances, takes on Biblical proportions. In turn, these authors utilize Biblical stories oriented around conceptions of power and hierarchy to illuminate the potential of ordinary humans to effect their own liberation.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

David Cosca grew up in Santa Maria, CA. He taught high school English for seven years before he and his lovely wife, Christina Loomis, moved to Ithaca, NY, where they produced and began raising Danny, a delightful, although sometimes berserk, son.

Dedicated to the memory of Corey Williams, whose friendship shaped me, and continues to shape me, in countless ways.

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Introduction

My dissertation examines the assault of American corporatized power upon the lives of American workers in texts portraying militant struggles between Labor and Capital in the early 20th century: Upton Sinclair's duology, *King Coal* and *The Coal War*; Mary Heaton Vorse's *Strike!*; and Ruth McKenney's *Industrial Valley*. Originally, I argue that each of these texts employs a Biblical idiom / motif designed a) to emphasize the God-like power and influence of Capital over individuals and institutions (particularly in the realm of public opinion). And, b) to critique the ways in which irrational social supplication to business power and irrational anti-labor sentiments took on a dimension of religious faith in American society. In contradistinction to Capital's use of religion to mystify its power, I examine, particularly in my analysis of *Strike!* and *Industrial Valley,* Labor's use of Christ's social doctrine to oppose capitalist indoctrination. The novels I examine in this study are dedicated to reclaiming the moral influence and authority of Biblical texts. In these novels, the Bible becomes a contested site adjudicating the warring claims of Labor and Capital in America and is employed to elucidate the ruling class's abandonment of ethical social values and the dedication of the powerful to Mammon-worship.

Each of these texts portrays, with varying levels of accuracy, strikes that occurred in real life – strikes that resulted in violent clashes between strikers and police and / or national guardsmen that made national news. The strikes portrayed take place in locales with different conditions for workers, both on the job and in their going on strike: the Colorado coal fields; the textile mills in Gaston County, North Carolina; and the rubber plants of Akron, Ohio and other nearby cities. Additionally, the strikes respectively take place in different time periods, each period having different general public attitudes in American society. In the Progressive Era 1913-1914 portrayed in *King Coal* and *The Coal War*, the bourgeois American public was

generally business-friendly, but had some reservations about what seemed to be the swift and potentially overwhelming growth of business power in American society. In the pre-Crash 1929 portrayed in *Strike!*, the general (if not uniform) prosperity of Americans had elevated business power in the imagination of the bourgeois American public to quasi-messianic heights. And, in the post-Crash mid-1930s portrayed in *Industrial Valley*, the bourgeois American public was beginning to question the faith that the general prosperity of the 1920s had given them in the potential power that businesses were amassing in the early part of the century. (So were the suffering, impoverished working-poor and unemployed whose opinions were beginning to be given serious consideration by those with real economic power, due to the potential threat they posed, if they were to combine their numbers.)

And yet, despite these differences of location, time, and conditions, we find in these texts a very similar – nearly ritualistic – pattern. We find the spontaneous rebellion of workers against appalling conditions, which is immediately identified by owners as the result of "outside agitators," or some other familiar concoction designed to induce fear and hatred. Despite the rebellion's clear spontaneity, the bourgeois public is more easily able to assign blame for the conflict between Capital and Labor upon an alien source due to the fact that, *after* the rebellion has occurred, labor organizers arrive to give much-needed assistance. (Because the very notion of labor organization has long been associated with an alien "Other" in the public mind, in conjunction with Capital's control over doctrinal systems, bourgeois public opinion easily digests a narrative that scapegoats Labor for disrupting society's harmonious relations.) This rebellion is followed by violence and coercion at the owners' behest, conjoined with a propaganda campaign designed to discredit and demonize the combined efforts of the strikers.

It is a familiar pattern in the history of American labor struggles. At the turn of the 20th

century, when the rise of corporate economic strength began slowly and steadily to establish a stranglehold upon American culture, society, and many of its core institutions, the agents of corporate capitalism conspired to wage war against organized labor, using ruthless and sometimes deadly measures. The agents of corporate power used violence to decrease the ability of workers to manage their own lives and demoralize the collective strength of labor. Additionally, they used espionage and agent provocateur-ism to infiltrate its base in order to confuse and disrupt the cultures of collective solidarity that were established through struggle or that spontaneously erupted as a response to degrading conditions.

In a society that has long prided itself on democratic *ideals* – no matter how restricted the potential for the expression of democracy *in actuality* – there are limits to the efficacy of force and violence. The texts I will be examining portray the ways that it was becoming clear to industrialists in the first two decades of the 20th century that much of the brunt of the physical conflict, in terms of dealing with strikes and pickets through truncheon-wielding cops, rifle-wielding National Guardsmen, along with privately-employed detectives, provocateurs, and spies, could be eased by waging a war of ideas. Brute violence, therefore, was only one front that the labor movement had to face: American workers also faced a doctrinal front in the form of intense propaganda campaigns. Utilizing their increasing control and domination over systems of indoctrination, those in positions of centralized American economic power sought to manipulate the public to accept a way of life that was created in part to foster division and atomization. Capital also widely disseminated the message that American society was under the ever-present attack by an alien Other appearing in various forms – "communists," "anarchists, "Bolshevists," "reds," and so forth. The doctrinal front could thus turn "public opinion" into an additional weapon against the force of labor, and would increasingly besmear the discontented as violent

dupes of outside agitators bent on the destruction of society, rather than regular folks with grievances grave enough to attempt to use the few and scattered tools at their disposal to challenge and transform the status quo. Unified, well-organized groups of capitalists under the aegis of establishments such as the National Association of Manufacturers engaged in what would grow into and eventually culminate in the 1940s to a struggle generally understood as a relentless and "everlasting battle for the minds of men."[1]

It is important to point out that the printed press plays a substantial role in every text I analyze: of great concern in each text are the methods Capital employs to misrepresent Labor's comparatively meek attempts to defend itself from often ferocious corporate violence as illegitimate or misplaced "outside agitation." (This is familiar code language meant to stir up deep-rooted fears of spherical bomb-throwing, moustache-twirling anarchist villains who intend to turn "our" harmonious world upside down in the violent pangs of revolution.) As Australian historian of American business propaganda Alex Carey points out, central to these attempts were the propagation of a "Manichean world-view… dominated by symbols and visions of the Sacred and the Satanic" (15).

It should be noted, however, that mere propagandizing, however intense, does not entirely account for the ostensible ease with which the collective forces of Capital have largely been able to dominate the collective forces of Labor in industrial struggles in America. Generally speaking, American labor power has been particularly weak compared with other Western industrial democracies, the residual effects of which are readily apparent contemporarily: its political influence has been greatly diminished, and practically decimated in the private sector since the early 1980s. And, in a diachronic comparison with other Western industrial societies with similar democratic structures, the fact that it is almost the only one to have never developed

a functioning Labor party makes it a striking anomaly. The enormous influence of business power over society in the United States is undeniable. And yet, business power in other European countries that, at the very least, give concessions to and acknowledge the right of labor to have a bargaining voice, is tremendously powerful as well. The history of the fact that, in the cultural mainstream, the force of Labor has long been, and still is, considered with great contempt and hostility is one aspect of American society that this study is interested in exploring.

There are several complicated roots of this contempt and hostility toward American laborers. It is important to acknowledge that some of the cause of Labor's weakness must be attributed to the attitudes and methods of the very workers engaged in the labor movement themselves. The relative conservatism of the labor movement's methods in general – attempting to gain higher wages hierarchically, within a specific trade, as opposed to mass industrial unionism – fractured potential sources of organization within the workplace. The racial bigotry of workers who perceived that they deserved a "white-skin privilege" affected both labor leadership's and the rank-and-file's ideas of whom to include in the realm of struggle for solidarity, weakening possibilities for organization – and resulting in the treatment of racially / ethnically "Othered" laborers ranging from exclusion to violence and, in some cases, murder. Racial bigotry in the American labor movement was compounded by the fact that America, unique among similar industrial societies, has an infrastructure largely built upon chattel slavery. In the North, infrastructure was created in part by encouraging immigration both for its cheap labor and for its potential to create divisions among workers who would otherwise take advantage of their combined power as a class in confronting the power of Capital.[2]

In this study, I have no intention of attempting to excuse nor justify anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and other types of prejudices that those in the American labor movement displayed

toward their fellow workers. This stain upon the movement should be unequivocally acknowledged as shameful. I feel it is necessary, however, to point out that the forces of Capital, very early on in the process of establishing dominance over laborers, utilized perceived differences between workers as a tool to create a hierarchy of favored and degenerate groups that is relevant to the religious motif employed both in the texts I study and the social milieus they portray.

Business and Religion in the American Imagination

Related to this complex American hierarchy is the history of the religious climate in the American colonies and what eventually became the United States. The ways in which religion affected ideas about business, and vice versa, is an important part of the country's peculiar worship of business values. In *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, Max Weber examines the relationship between the religious doctrines that developed out of Calvinism and a "spirit of capitalism" exalting the notion of pursuing "profit for its own sake" (19) – a "spirit" that Weber associates as "a way of thinking" that is "applauded by an entire nation" (14) (i.e., the United States). The "inner loneliness" and "profound inner isolation" resulting from the alienation, disorientation, and uncertainty of believing in "election by grace" (69), in which the individual is predestined by God to either heavenly reward or perdition, is in part responsible for the rise of this "spirit" of capitalism: "*tireless labor in a calling* was urged as the best possible means of *attaining*… self assurance" (78, original emphases). Weber points out the social tensions that arise from a peculiar "attitude toward outward possessions" (24) that promotes "going to one's grave" in the process of continual material accumulation; the ways that this "spirit" begins to replace the philosophical doctrines and other "norms of the Church" (24-25);

and the ways that human activity subordinately serve abstract rational industrial and economic requirements under this system (26).

Several aspects of Weber's analysis are of particular interest to my examination of the topic at hand. His analysis of an American ethos conflating religion and the pursuit of wealth is, of course, paramount. Also important is Weber's description of this "spirit" as being ubiquitous. He is exaggerating, of course, when he writes that the spirit is "applauded by an entire nation": he also takes pains to point out the ways in which "'traditionalism'" (16) has been a consistent obstacle to the "spirit" when the "spirit" begins to transform economic structures in particular locales (15-16). That is, because "a person does not 'by nature' want to make more and more money," the "spirit" of capitalism "has run up against the infinitely persistent resistance" that would tend to embrace a form of "precapitalist economic labor" (16) in which "'subsistence'" is preferable to "'acquisition'" (19). The history and literature of the labor movement are testament to this precise personal / social struggle: we find time and again situations in which people reject the notion of gaining wealth at the expense of abandoning all social concerns, and instead embrace a spirit of mutualism. We thus see a subtle class bias in his analysis. It is, of course, an expected and predictable (given that Weber produced this text in 1905) class bias, but it needs to be examined nonetheless. When Weber exaggerates that the "spirit" of capitalism is "applauded by an entire nation," he is failing at this particular moment to take into consideration the countless multitudes who, crushed under the oppressive weight of its system – people he acknowledges elsewhere as having "force[d]" upon them "the relationship of the 'market'" (13) – have rejected it. Their lack of applause – their opinions on the matter – are not considered worthy of constituting part of the overall public opinion of the "entire nation."

This tension, of course – the difference between the official "public opinion" of the

nation and the "public opinion" of the poor / immigrants / ethnically Othered – is a continual concern in American labor literature. In this regard, it is relevant that Weber uses Benjamin Franklin as his primary example to capture the "spirit" of capitalism. Weber's long citation of Franklin's "time is money" passage is a famous example of an early instance in which a brilliant thinker reconceives the relationship of human activity to economic life (9-11). Later in the essay, Weber revisits Franklin's text, saying Franklin "was filled with the 'capitalist spirit' at a period when, in terms of its *form*, his printing business in no way differed from any craft business" (20, original emphasis). The implicit connection between "capitalist spirit," "printing," and "business" are particularly important to the ideas I wish to establish in my work here. If Franklin's "printing business" does not differ in *form* from other kinds of late 18th Century business – that is, the ways in which it still has a hierarchy based on a *craft* economy, structure of discipline, and so forth – its *effect* on those who are purchasing its services is radically different from any other type of craft of the time in terms of shaping people's ideas. Buying shoes from a cobbler does not necessarily shape one's ideas about anything other than the utility of the shoes. Buying printed materials is *in itself* a matter of having one's ideas shaped. Weber calls the long passage by Franklin that he cites a "little sermon." While Franklin's business model was pre-capitalist / mercantilist, part of what Franklin is selling, in his role as the author of the business-minded "sermon" that Weber cites, are ideas that, over time, have become quasi-religious in American culture – ideas designed to disseminate a business ethos in order to increase the influence of that ethos.

20th Century Intellectuals and the Role of Business Philosophy

Left-leaning American intellectuals of the early 20th century were apt to make the connection

between not just a religious sensibility, but a structure of religious *hierarchy,* to the ways that the print media[3] used its role as Capital's subordinate voice to influence the cultural consciousness of society. For example, in *The Brass Check,* Upton Sinclair's study of the American newspaper industry, Sinclair refers to newspaper publishers as "priests of the cult of Mammon" (259) that sanction class exploitation. In doing so, he alerts us to the fact that priestly classes whose social purpose is to prop up the status quo of an economic structure of wealthy elites enjoying the material benefits of a degraded and impoverished class of laborers is based on an ancient model – a model that Christ was critiquing in his Gospels, in fact.[4] It is a role similar to that described by Noam Chomsky about seventy years later when he describes chauvinistic "worship of the state," which "has become a secular religion for which the intellectuals serve as priesthood" (19, *Deterring*). (In this case, Chomsky is referring to an economic model that has greatly expanded to exploit an international division of labor.) Sinclair and Chomsky both play on the idea that *class* service – that is, the ways in which a secularized, modern priestly class *serves* at the pleasure of concentrated monetary interests to propagate sacrosanct ideas about the supremacy of profits – is performed with the tacit understanding that straying from these ideas would be heretical. When priestly intellectuals offend power by ceasing to serve that class purpose, they can easily be replaced with others who can do so faithfully.

In *Our Master's Voice: Advertising,* James Rorty, advertising copy-writer turned radical activist-intellectual, examines the ways that technology in the form of print media and radio "shap[ed] the economic, moral, and ethical patterns of the community into serviceable conformity" (16) via advertising. Writing in 1934, he critiques the obstinate dogmatism of business-doctrine after the crash of 1929 – right at "the moment in our history when we needed a maximum of open-minded mobility in public opinion." Rorty recognizes the potential of

business-power's ability to utilize various media as "instruments of rule" (18). He portrays the advertising industry, which, in "the drive for profits, has no concern whatever for human life," as a "coldly whirring turbine whose hum is so loud, so continuous, so omnipresent that we no longer hear it." Advertisers create pictures of "dead men," and the message these animated corpses carry "is the machine" of profit-creation "speaking through them" (67-68), "saturat[ing] the terrestrial atmosphere" (70-71). Rorty's picture is awesome in its power, as well as terrifying. Meant, I suppose, to ironically capture what the power of God might have meant to those living in the days when the Pentateuch was produced, it is an apocalyptic picture. However, it lacks any sense of divine transformation: it portrays only a trajectory towards deafening mundanity. Capital's message is to "promote sales" and to encourage "emulative materialism as a way of life" (74). Like Sinclair, Rorty frames those who work for the newspapers – and, because writing later than Sinclair, "radio broadcasters" – as "priests" in the modern hierarchical structure (135), recognizing that the hierarchical system is more responsible than any single individual (147) for the business-oriented doctrinal content that flows out of "newspapers, magazines, radio, motion picture[s]" – all of which perform as "*advertising media*" (154, original emphasis). In Rorty's portrayal of advertising, we also find the language of religion: "ritual[s]," "tithes," "Apostle[s]," "religious faith" (193), "divine aid" (231): ultimately, Rorty finds "parallelisms between… religious rituals and… contemporary advertising" (283).

Capital as Antagonist

In the criticism written about the literature of the labor movement and working-class struggle, much attention has been paid to the relationship between radical politics and working-class culture in a society deeply rooted in political conservatism, and the ways in which radical culture

is represented; to the lack of feminist representation in proletarian literature, and an investigation of both representations of the feminine and the masculine in working-class literature; and to an investigation of representations (or lack thereof) of race and ethnicity in working class literature. Other topics given attention include a questioning of the canon and where "proletarian" or working-class fiction fits (or has not traditionally fit) into it, or how certain texts about labor have been left out (and occasionally recently "re-discovered"). Some studies have called into question whether or not it is possible to truly categorize a genre of "the working-class" in fiction and have explored the diversity within what is generally understood to be labor literature.

The United States has "the bloodiest and most violent labor history of any industrial nation in the world" (Taft 281). And yet, the scholarly writing on the literature of the American labor movement features no book-length analysis of the genre's portrayal of the intensity of Capital's dedication to confusing and disrupting cultures of collective solidarity that had spontaneously erupted or had been established through struggle. There are no book-length studies of labor-movement literature and what I would call the "doctrinal front"[5] of industrial warfare: that is, the ways in which elite sectors of American society launched a conscious and calculated manipulation of public opinion to supplant the use of outright coercive force in industrial warfare. My study differs from others on the topic in that it examines the combined power of Capital as a character. It examines the ways that American novelists portraying labor strife depicted institutional mechanisms of American society driven only by the inexorable logic of profit and gain, akin to God's power insofar as no human agent is perceived as wielding the reins behind it, and therefore practically invulnerable to human intervention. It examines the ways in which American novels depicting class warfare portray Capital's propagation of a peculiar social doctrine of hatred and contempt for the working-class and examines the role of

the press and other forms of propaganda in American society that crafted, shaped, and honed this peculiar contempt. It provides a close examination of the encounter of the human (individual or group, wealthy or poor) with the incorporeal presence of corporate economic power, in which human agency is easily erased when not in accord with its will. Finally, whereas studies of the literature of the labor movement often reject religion as naturally antithetical to legitimate formulations of class consciousness, my study reconsiders the centrality of religion to community-building in American societies and the ways in which a Biblical idiom has been used to conceptualize the history of the movement's labor struggles and the literary texts that portray them.

Sinclair's, Vorse's, and McKenney's texts use the cultural and moral currency of Biblical mythologies to counteract potent and widespread cultural phenomena, calculatedly disseminated by proponents of business ideology at different stages of the 20th century.[6] American society and culture have long been inundated by propaganda promoting business-friendly narratives with religious themes, including a) the emerging field of public relations in America that, in reaction to Progressive-Era reformism and an emergence of labor radicalism, "espouse[d] the gospel" and "divinity of private wealth and the danger of the [working-class] crowd" in mass media[7]; and b) a messianic "pseudoreligion" based on the notion that the general prosperity in 1920s America was divinely ordained.[8] Utilizing the narrative structure of the novel to re-frame the conflict between Labor and Capital, these texts emphasize dissident perspectives to promote the building of class identity around new interpretations of ancient yet familiar mythological stories. By appealing to the common experiences of working people engaged in class struggle; reclaiming the moral authority of Biblical narratives to institute a rallying-cry against class oppression; and channeling that authority into a narrative coherence based strictly upon the principle of class-

coherence, these novels challenge the story that Capital had been telling for decades. That is, they resist the idea that economic power structures are natural – are part of God's design – rather than man-made institutional creations. Through story-telling, these novels give meaning to the potential meaninglessness of the chaos of class violence and to social structures that, from the perspective of the working poor, can appear to be structureless. These texts also provide a critique of how belief works – they remind us that, as the character of Christ stresses in the Gospels, systems of belief meant to protect the meek and vulnerable can be easily co-opted as tools of oppression by the powerful.

My first chapter examines Upton Sinclair's fictional duology portraying the 1913-1914 Colorado coal war, a critical event in early 20th century American labor history that culminated in the infamous Ludlow Massacre. The coal miners involved in this strike were composed primarily of immigrants from nearly twenty nationalities. Sinclair uses the Biblical story of Babel to conceptualize power relations between a largely immigrant labor force and the plutocrats who control nearly every aspect of their lives through what is historically referred to as "industrial feudalism." Central to Sinclair's analysis of the struggle is the trope of confusion: in the Genesis myth of Babel, God undermines the potential of humans to challenge divine power by causing them to speak many disparate languages. In Sinclair's subversive treatment of the struggle, coalfield owners cause confusion among immigrant workers from disparate backgrounds by confounding their intelligence through espionage and agent provocateur-ism and confounding the intelligence of the national citizenry through jealous control of the print media and other methods of indoctrination.

My second chapter explores Mary Heaton Vorse's novel *Strike!*, a fictional portrayal of the Gastonia, North Carolina textile strikes in 1929. Vorse represents the ways in which the

strike was conceived of as quasi-apocalyptic from both sides of the struggle. Mill owners and those who benefit from the wealth created by those who work in the mills view themselves as having creative powers and paternalistic responsibilities akin to the ultimate Creator in Genesis. Evoking radical role reversals of power and hierarchy similar to the parables and teachings of Christ, Vorse compares the efforts of the National Textile Workers' Union to aid strikers in their time of need to Christ's ministry to the sick and dispossessed. In her portrayal of the viciousness of both anti-labor public sentiment and its culmination in vigilante terror, Vorse reframes the anti-labor public opinion that results from propaganda campaigns as similar to the demons that possess the sick and unclean patients that Jesus heals throughout the Gospels.

My final chapter turns to Ruth McKenny's novel *Industrial Valley*, which depicts the Depression years preceding and leading into the 1936 sit-down strikes in the rubber industry in Akron, Ohio. The narrative structure of McKenny's 1939 novel wavers between brief journalistic vignettes about local and national events and longer chapter-length passages depicting the development of a radical industrial movement in Akron's factories. *Industrial Valley* questions the validity of the message promoted during decades of intense propaganda designed to create faith in a political-economic system that mythologizes and mystifies the power of Mammon. In the wake of the ravages of the system's collapse in the Great Depression, the industrial workers who have produced the wealth feeding the spirit of Mammon without receiving any of its benefits discover something they perceive to be Biblically miraculous. By seizing the reins of industrial production, they may liberate themselves, rather than awaiting the gifts of a power they have been instructed through years of indoctrination to understand as benevolent, as the only means of their salvation.

[1] Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth. *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60*. (52, my emphasis)

[2] These are not by any means the only aspects of American society that have contributed to the weakness of the labor movement. American society is idiosyncratic in many ways, including the fact that it is an off-shoot of a powerful empire isolated by distance from other competitive empires. Part of the nation's mythology celebrates its lack of feudal history. What this mythology leaves out is that European feudal societies often had institutional structures with a history of at least expressing a desire to care for the poor and vulnerable. The history of the development of the legal system, which quickly began to favor the rights of Capital, was also possible due to the fact that those who gained power in American society were able to begin shaping the legal system from scratch. In short, the novelty of the society and its institutions made it possible for those who quickly gained power to create a situation in which they steadily increased this power without the obstacles of traditional social structures to hinder their efforts.

[3] I.e., in advertising copy and articles in newspapers and magazines alike.

[4] See Herzog II (26-28, 55). Making an analogy between the imperial historical context of Palestine 2000 years ago to American society in the early 20th century poses many problems – some might consider doing so hopelessly anachronistic. However, Herzog's exploration of the political context of the Gospels reveals unmistakable similarities to modern times. At the most basic level, using brute force in conjunction with "priestly and other ideological hierarchies… to meet the needs for legitimation" (57) of the status quo are tried-and-true methods that, with adjustments, have continued to produce effective results.

[5] Eric Cheyfitz's *The Disinformation Age: The Collapse of Liberal Democracy in the United States* provides an important contextual background to the structures of belief that have historically propped, and continue to prop, trust in the potential rewards to be reaped by faith in American Capital. The book's chronological scope begins at America's colonial origins, and, more broadly than my study, explores the notion of American Exceptionalism and the potency of the American Dream. That is, it examines economic power, colonial power, and the interrelations between the two. In exploring the history behind the ways that faith in Capital is belied by experience (61, 180, 207), as well as providing a social critique that incorporates a close examination of Christian doctrine juxtaposed to the stark realities of American social policy over many generations, it offers an important contextual foundation to the analysis I have attempted to produce.

[6] These stages have their roots, of course, in the "Calvinist doctrines" mentioned above that promoted the "idea that poverty and failure w[ere] equivalent to sin" (Fones-Wolf, Elizabeth and Kenneth Fones-Wolf "Trade-Union" 155).

[7] See Ewen (*PR* 74, 76). Elizabeth and Kenneth Fones-Wolf remind us that public opinion shifts in cycles. The "acquisitive gospel of wealth overshadowed earlier Christian reform impulses" in America in the 1860s and 70s; the Social Gospel became influential in the first decade of the 20th century ("Trade-Union" 155). As Ewen points out, business propagandists began to fight back. Ewen explores a contradiction facing mainstream American thought in the late 19th and early the 20th century. That is, the public was concerned about the tremendous power over society that corporations were amassing, which led to support for Progressive-Age types of reform. But agenda-setting, bourgeois public sensibility was afraid as well of a rapidly-transforming immigrant working-class populace – increasingly portrayed as a degraded, dangerous class – that was being increasingly perceived as alien by so-called native, Anglo-Saxon Americans (*PR* 43, 55-56). By 1914, "fears of revolt from below began to overshadow the problem of corporate greed" (60).

[8] See Lundén, 2-3, 105.

Chapter 1:

Confounding Solidarity in the Colorado Coalfields

The social critique of Upton Sinclair's *King Coal* and *The Coal War* relies heavily upon allusions to stories in the Bible about power – stories about God keeping discipline and maintaining control over humanity. In the Garden of Eden myth, God punishes humans for trying to gain knowledge by damning them to toil and suffering; in the myth of Noah's Ark, God uses a flood to destroy the wickedness of the masses of humanity, saving a select and favored few; in the Babel myth, God prevents humans from reaching their collective potential to challenge his power by eliminating their ability to mutually understand and communicate with one another. I argue that, in his duology, Sinclair subverts key elements of these Biblical stories to critique the heightening influence and power of American corporations over the mass of Americans. In Sinclair's novelistic treatment, the story of humanity's disobedience in attempting to acquire knowledge in the Garden of Eden myth is ironized into a metaphor for the ways in which Capital manipulates epistemological systems through deception to maintain power structures. The story of the wickedness of the masses of humanity in the Ark myth is subverted into a metaphor for the potential of the masses to rectify the wickedness of a social system that preserves the privileges of a select elite. The story of God creating disorder to prevent humanity's encroachment upon His power in the Babel myth is transformed into a metaphor for the potential of oppressed workers to establish order and agreement through organization, despite the attempts of personified Capital to perpetuate confusion to destroy sentiments of mutualism and solidarity. It is this last metaphor concerning confusion that is most prominent in Sinclair's literary treatment of the Colorado Coal War of 1913-1914 and most crucial to my argument. In the myth of Babel, the confusion wrought by God is accomplished by the simple task of making humans speak

different languages. In *The Coal War*, Sinclair uses Babel's concept of confusion multifariously to examine the ways in which agents of capital implemented confusion as a weapon in industrial struggles to subvert working people's efforts to defend themselves against corporate power and to confuse the intelligence of the public through control of systems of knowledge and communication. Ultimately, through re-imagining these Biblical myths about power and knowledge, Sinclair emphasizes the moral vacuity of a social power structure dedicated zealously and quasi-religiously to Mammon-worship while trumpeting its cultural supremacy as the standard-bearer of law and order and (Christian) ethical values.

Historical Background: Genesis of a Dangerous Class

To understand Sinclair's critique of American capitalism, it is necessary to examine the history of fear and hostility that American business elites and their representatives have had towards their workers. The United States has long had a broad legal climate hostile to labor that did not exist in similar industrial democracies.[1] In addition to the widespread use of American business power to enlist private armies – "detective agencies" such as the Pinkertons – that were largely allowed by American courts to commit violence with impunity,[2] the court injunction against picketing, conspiracy prosecutions, and even prohibitions against the boycott all comprised the judicial arsenal that business power could utilize to stifle the efforts of organized labor.[3] Substantial Red Scares, occurring roughly every ten years and corresponding with market panics, depressions, and other historical events from the 1870s into the 20th Century, shaped the American mainstream bourgeois public's conception of the dangerousness of the American working class. Consequently, the term "Communist," along with "Un-American" and other near-synonymous labels, became effective epithets to vilify any movement dangerous to the interests

of Capital as an *alien* force.[4] Yet, upon the inception of the "new sovereignty" of capitalism in the 1840s, the American working class, without requiring foreign intellectuals or philosophers to articulate the relation for them, generally perceived *capitalism* as the "radical force" (Ware 12) threatening their lives and values, begging the question, a force *alien* to *whom*?[5]

The general post-bellum corporate takeover and control of labor, first through mechanization and the factory system and later becoming more sophisticated through Taylorism and other types of "scientific management," increased profits while establishing a permanent class of wage earners, increasing poverty for workers. Eliminating workers' control over their labor through the introduction of managerial authority and by creating an environment of ruthless competition had the additional benefit of social control, insofar as it induced workers to internalize obedience and supplication (if they wanted to continue being employed) and wore away their ability to exercise mutualism.[6] Meanwhile, the realization was setting in among business leaders that competition among *themselves* was destructive and wasteful: a climate of "capitalist collectivism" emerged among business interests beginning in the 1870s and 80s, even as those same interests continued to promote values of competition and individualism for and among the social body at large.[7]

At the turn of the century, corresponding with the "great wave of consolidations" by which "large corporations had come to dominate the American economy" (Weinstein 63), this sense of collective self-preservation among business elites caused the National Association of Manufacturers, a well-organized group of mid-sized industrialists with enormous financial resources, to become militant in its design to obliterate unionism. The organization would be the most prominent and vociferous ideological foe of labor for decades.[8] In 1903, the NAM essentially declared war on unionism in the country, launching an ideological assault on the

public imagination through a massive propaganda campaign, targeting public schools, colleges and universities, the press, the clergy, and governmental agencies, while lobbying tirelessly and often successfully against legislation favorable to labor.[9] In its own quiet estimation, by 1910, it had established a social climate that was antagonistic to unionism, while its propaganda told a different story, claiming – preposterously – that labor, with its bullying tactics and overwhelming power, controlled the national press.[10] Capital's projection onto labor of its own power would remain characteristic for decades – and, arguably, it still exists in modified form today.

The Novels / Critical Context

The narrative of *King Coal* follows Hal, a coal magnate's son, as he tries to improvise a "summer course in practical sociology" (179) to conduct an "experiment in social amalgamation" (301): Hal decides to work undercover as a miner to determine if what he is learning about economics in his college courses accurately reflects reality. After experiencing the hardships of coal-mining, Hal decides that he should use his privilege to help the oppressed miners he has befriended in the process. He unsuccessfully attempts to do so, first within the system in his position as a miner, then from outside the system by trying to enlist the influence of his wealthy friends and fiancé, then by using his own class prestige to enlist judicial avenues. After witnessing pockets of spontaneous resistance, he attempts to help lead them through militant activism. Ultimately, his efforts mislead those he has befriended into thinking that the time is right to strike: United Mine Workers of America leaders inform him that worker unification and funds are inadequate. After rectifying the problems he has created for the miners to the best of his ability, he leaves the coal fields, relieved to escape the conditions he has witnessed. *The Coal War* chronologically follows *King Coal* and portrays the events leading up

to and of the infamous 1913-1914 strike. Most of the material of the novel is closely based on the events of the strike, with Hal interacting with literary versions of historical figures like "Big Bill" Haywood ("'Big Dan' Hogan" in the novel) and Mother Jones ("Mother Mary" in the novel).We see the situation unfold from Hal's perspective: throughout the conflict, he juggles his sense of duty to the strikers with his class allegiances to his wealthy family and fiancé.

Little criticism has been produced about either of these novels. John Graham's excellent introduction to the 1976 publication of *The Coal War,* now out of print, points out what he perceives as the aesthetic failings of the text's characterization due to its characters being "solely determined by social and economic determinations" (Graham lxxxvi),[11] while stressing Sinclair's strengths and importance as a social commentator. Graham's analysis, however, leads to his assertion that "the protagonist of *The Coal War* is capitalism. As a consequence, Sinclair was not primarily concerned with the inner world of his characters" (lxxxv). The notion that capitalism could be the *protagonist* of a duology that follows for close to 800 pages the inner struggles of a main character who, despite having every material advantage at his fingertips, decides not only to use his social advantages provided by capitalism *against* capitalism, but to actually pick up a rifle and engage in industrial warfare, killing a man in the process, is somewhat perplexing. Capital clearly is the antagonist in these texts, rather than the protagonist.

The introduction to *The Coal War,* and a brief article by Graham in *Colorado Quarterly* in 1972 in which he discusses Sinclair's personal involvement in the struggle and mentions *The Coal War* only to point out that the manuscript was still unpublished (65-67), are the only pieces that have been written on the novel. This scarcity of criticism can be partly attributed to the fact that the novel did not see publication until 1976. Graham points out that the reasons for this delay are several and complicated. When Sinclair first heard of the conflict in Ludlow, after

engaging in activism in New York City to bring attention to it and then traveling to Colorado, he began as one novel what eventually resulted in *King Coal* and *The Coal War* after having his first manuscript rejected due to the fact that "it was too much a historical reconstruction of the Colorado strike" (lxxvi). *King Coal*'s publication itself was delayed because the "effect of war conditions in the publishing industry prevented publication until September, 1917" (lxxx), and, by the time *King Coal* had been published and not sold well, the national drama of the Colorado Coal Wars was "no longer topical, but a relatively stale issue" as "the American public was daily concerned with a much larger war in Europe" (lxxxi).

The little that has been written about *King Coal* is flawed, partly because it misrepresents or does not take into account aspects of the historical background leading to the conflict in Colorado, and primarily because it does not acknowledge the existence of *The Coal War*, despite the fact that the novel had already seen publication when all of the critical material on *King Coal* was produced.[12] The most prominent criticism on *King Coal*, which appears in Laura Hapke's impressive study of proletarian literature, *Labor's Text: The Worker in American Fiction*, published in 2001, illustrates some of the ways in which *King Coal* has been misread and misunderstood. Some of her critique is important and accurate: for instance, Hapke notes the ways in which Sinclair treats African Americans in the novel, "in which blacks work with white miners, albeit in a silent helping capacity" (132). The text should similarly be criticized for the prominence primarily of European immigrants as characters, while Japanese and Korean immigrants and Mexican-Americans and Hispanos show up only in ancillary roles, and quite often only to reflect other characters' bigotry against them (if not, in fact, Upton Sinclair's). There are plenty of other similar prejudices that one could point out in both novels.[13] However, in addition to minor errors,[14] some of Hapke's claims are puzzling, others totally misleading or

misinformed. For example, she suggests that "Sinclair *chose* not to relate the worst abuses of the actual Ludlow strike, particularly the fact that corporate gun thugs set strikers' tents on fire and gunned down immigrant leaders" in *King Coal* (127, emphasis mine), despite the fact that the original version of Sinclair's novel was rejected *due to the fact* that it too closely followed the 1913-1914 Colorado strike culminating in the Ludlow Massacre.[15] Also perplexing is the assertion that Hal is Sinclair's "stand in for the socially conscious son of the oligarch mine owner John D. Rockefeller" (127). This claim makes little sense, as John D. Rockefeller Jr's involvement in this strike encapsulates much of what Sinclair is criticizing in these novels. Rockefeller Jr. certainly played up the public persona of a socially-conscious plutocrat, visiting the camps in a publicity campaign and playing with miners' children in photo-ops in the wake of the Ludlow Massacre. His involvement in the conflict behind the scenes leading up to the massacre, however, as Frank Walsh revealed during hearings conducted by the Committee on Industrial Relations in 1915, was ultimately to give explicit support to the management of Colorado Fuel & Iron Company in every single tactic they used (Adams 162-168).

Hapke's discussion of *King Coal* is part of a larger segment of *Labor's Text* in which she argues that Hal Warner fits into the model of the labor Übermensch in American literature, in which a well-born but idealistic "labor savior" (128) "seeks wisdom through downward mobility" (127), but ultimately the Übermensch, despite his "proffered sympathy for a small band of [his] enlightened followers," has an "atavistic" perception of "the mass of proletarians who do not heed [his] Socialistic leadership" (128).[16] However, Hapke's understanding of Hal as either a "labor savior" or any kind of Übermensch at all is flawed. While idealistic and persistent, Hal also often acts as a bumbling fool in *King Coal*. There are several moments throughout both novels where Hal's *inability* to understand the ramifications of his actions due to his class

prejudices are part of Sinclair's class analysis.[17] Moreover, quite often at least one of the purposes of having made the protagonist a wealthy young man is to demonstrate the discrepancy of justice distributed along class lines or to highlight other privileges that he begins to recognize as being completely undeserved.[18] (In *The Coal War*, Hal correctly tells a militia officer who has arrested him that there is "'one law for the rich and another for the poor'" [204].) Another important purpose is to present conditions through the often unbelieving naivete of Hal who, like Sinclair's presumptive audience, knows very little about the severity of conditions in the Colorado coal camps and mines. (Middle-class and wealthy readers are clearly Sinclair's main target audience: the many didactic moments in both novels are aimed at them, rather than at American workers.)

Hal gradually begins to understand throughout *King Coal* that spreading awareness of the corporate crimes he is witnessing will be crucial in fighting corporate tyranny. Given his corresponding frustration that the most efficient channels of doing so are unavailable due to the suppression or misrepresentation of events in both the local and national presses, it seems likely that Hal is, to some degree, loosely based on Sinclair himself. While a considerably older man than his character Hal, Sinclair's involvement in writing these novels stemmed in part from his own frustrations in trying to raise awareness about the Ludlow Massacre, which he writes about in his non-fiction examination of the American press, *The Brass Check*. Sinclair had experienced similar frustrating experiences since the serialized version of *The Jungle* began to be published, when the response from the "Meat Packing Industry" was to initiate attacks in the press, both upon Sinclair's work and his personal character, including what they represented as his radical views on marriage (*The Brass Check* 28-38, 40, 90-91). Hal's personal character is similarly made the subject of slander in both novels: a sub-plot point for having "Red" Mary Burke be a

potential (but perennially deferred) love-interest is to provide fodder for the local press to make provocative suggestions about their relationship in both novels. This leads Hal to realize in *The Coal War* that "if you lifted your voice in opposition to [the] greed and oppression [of agents of capital], they crept upon you in the dark and shot you through with a poisoned arrow" (223), an opinion Sinclair also voices in *The Brass Check*. Also, in *The Coal War*, Hal comes to the realization that the "only way to let the public know about strike-outrages is to get oneself in jail!" (210). While describing his failed attempts to attract national attention to the story of the Ludlow Massacre, Sinclair writes in *The Brass Check* that "You just have to get yourself arrested," which Sinclair did in Manhattan whilst protesting silently outside of the Rockefeller building – 26 Broadway – "and instantly the concrete-walls turn into news-channels!" (145). This last metaphor concerning communication and the flow of information and interchange is particularly important for the events of the Coal War as portrayed in these two novels.

Language and Power: Creating Reality

The first page of *King Coal*, in fact, brings our attention to Hal's incompetence and illiteracy, not as a would-be labor savior, but as a would-be objective observer, highlighting the potential for miscommunication and misunderstanding along class lines. (From early in the novel we see developing the ways in which linguistic structures based on class and ethnicity are related to the hierarchy of American society, a theme that becomes important in *The Coal War*'s use of the Babel myth.) Before he has been identified by name (initially Joe Smith, incognito), a "young man" steps from a train into "Pedro City." After a description of his disguise, the first thing we learn about him is that, "Sitting in the smoking-car of the train, the young man had listened to the talk of the coal-camps, seeking to correct his accent" (13). Immediately there is something amiss

in this description: is he *really* learning *the* accent of the coal camps? We find out soon enough that, not only is there not a single unifying accent spoken in the camps: there are, rather, a variety of *languages* from all over the world. For that matter, would it be possible for him to learn *any* accent of actual coal workers from the passengers on the train? Hal never questions, not only *why*, but *how* coal miners would pay for a seat in any car on the train: the miners are described in the first paragraph of the novel as those who "came trooping down" on "Saturday nights," whilst the economically more privileged "ranchmen" have the relative luxury of coming "in on horseback and in automobiles." This passage sets up a problem that Joe / Hal is perpetually struggling with throughout the narrative: Hal wants to blend in for ostensibly benevolent reasons, but to a great degree there are certain codes, certain aspects of language he cannot learn. After being mistaken for a "labor agitator" by the guards, they tell him that they targeted him because he "talks like a college professor" (22). Once he has gained access to the camp and tries to associate with the miners, he is chastised in hushed tones for not knowing that to even vocally express any sort of discontent (48-49), or even to be heard *speaking* the grave words "union" (47) (or, later on, "strike" [119]) is enough to have one "run down the canyon." When he befriends Mary Burke, a miner's daughter, she immediately realizes through his manner of speech that he is not himself a miner. She asks him, "Where did ye learn to talk like ye do?" (37) – a line encapsulating in nine words that emphasize her Irish-American accent conflicts among different origins, languages, types of education, class divisions.

There are important structural parallels between the first and second novel emphasizing Sinclair's critique of the relation between language, power, and class in American society. *King Coal* begins with Hal trying to construct coherence out of confusion from his privileged point of view, only to see by the end of the novel that his attempts towards leadership are in important

respects counterproductive to the struggle of the miners. On the other hand, *The Coal War* begins by letting "Little Jerry," the son of a militant-socialist Italian immigrant shot-firer turned union-organizer, as it were, to briefly "t[ake] up the story" (4) to a certain extent. (Soon after, the narrative follows Hal to a university campus and then to Europe before he returns to help the strikers in whatever capacity he can.) The novel begins with Hal's decision to take Little Jerry to a Christmas party to mingle with Colorado's wealthy elite; his attempts to give Little Jerry a crash course in linguistic conventions, and Little Jerry's chronic mispronunciations rendered in the text's spelling – e.g., substituting "Mr. Otter" for "Mr. Arthur" – are intended to have a cute and comic effect that comes off rather awkwardly. Nonetheless, the situation has parallels to Hal's own inability to learn linguistic and other types of codes early in *King Coal*. Also, *The Coal War* begins with an account of the miners' struggles coming from Little Jerry's own honest, simple, and accurate conception of the conditions in the mines. This conception is juxtaposed to that of the deluded wealthy of Colorado, who have received a sufficiently elite education and have been sufficiently indoctrinated by various sources – the press, the clergy, bourgeois common-sensibility – to prevent them from believing that conditions are as bad as they are. *King Coal* begins from the perspective of Hal, who knows nothing about mining, for the reason that he wants to *learn* about conditions. *The Coal War* begins with giving the opportunity to Little Jerry, who has aspirations of becoming a "teacher of working-class solidarity" (11) by becoming a union organizer like his father, to speak honestly to people who have a vigorous disinclination towards discovering anything at variance with their own narrow viewpoint. Jessie's father, a banking magnate, disdainfully dismisses the "torrents of information" (17) Little Jerry has to teach, and later attributes Hal's acceptance of Jerry's description of camp conditions to "a disordered state in" Hal's mind, proving that "he had been listening to agitators!" (41).

Dressed *up* (compared to Hal's dressing *down* in disguise at the beginning of *King Coal*) in "a complete party outfit" (8) in a disguise "as never a Dago mine-urchin had been dressed in history before" (7) in order that he might "pass at the party for the crown-prince of Italy!" (9), what little Jerry finds at this party is that

> [e]verything about this place was bewildering: the carpets under his feet, which were like soft grass; the chairs, which were like feather-beds when you sat in them; the dim lights, the softly shining furniture, the pictures, which were not like other pictures, but were *realities magically brought and transferred* to the walls" (14, emphasis mine)

The parallels between Little Jerry's experience in a mansion and Hal's experience in the mines are important. What each finds is surreal from his perspective. What Little Jerry experiences is surreal from his perspective as an impoverished boy experiencing opulence while being paraded around in another "experiment in social amalgamation" (6, 8, 9) by a well-meaning but insensitive would-be radical from the leisure class. The concept of "realities magically brought and transferred" becomes increasingly important throughout the sequel. Picking up thematically from *King Coal*, it demonstrates the ways in which wealth and resources are perfectly capable of "magically" creating realities *in people's minds* where none existed before, whether it be in the perspective of a dazzled mine-urchin or in the minds of a social body that needs to be persuaded of the innate supremacy of the rule of capital. Also noteworthy is that, while Little Jerry is overwhelmed by and afraid of some of the things he sees in this mansion and is intimidated by wealthy "fairy-tale children" who look "like they had just stepped out of store-windows" (14), his awe at the spectacle of wealth and power is ambiguous. The "bronze-barred doorway" of the mansion reminds him of a jail (13), a prominent and symbolically-important edifice in the coal camps. He does not fall for the illusion, and he ultimately "recall[s] his duties as an organizer" and propagandist for the union (15).

Knowledge / Prophylaxis / Identity

Sinclair's portrayal of the labor struggle in Colorado begins in *King Coal* by depicting the brutal conditions that Hal finds once he is able to gain entrance to the "closed camp" by supplicating himself to the operators' hierarchy. Hal finds abysmal living conditions above ground, hellish working conditions below ground, widespread repression, a well-oiled politically-rigged legislative machine in favor of the operators, a climate of sexual-harassment and the constant threat of rape for the camp's women based on the near-total power of the owners – essentially, what is described in histories of the topic and even in state and federal investigations as a system of "industrial feudalism." Historically, major militant strikes roughly every decade since the 1880s had led the companies to militarize the boundaries of the camp through what they referred to as "prophylaxis," unionism being likened to a contagious disease. The greatest obstacle to organization within this structure is a system of espionage largely precluding any complaint over existing conditions: one never knows if he or she is talking to a company spy, as company spies are under orders by management to grumble over conditions to *provoke* sympathetic responses, in order to eliminate those who may have tendencies toward organization.[19] Thus, there is a constant sense of confusion concerning whether one is speaking to an actual human being with similar needs, sores, and interests, or a ventriloquist for the company. I would suggest that this confusion, based not on linguistic difference but upon pretense of purpose, is a kind of metaphorical "confusion of tongues" that becomes prominent in both novels.

The practice of framing leaders and loyal members of organizations as being greedy agents or spies of capital (which the operators attempt to do to Hal) while also offering rewards and incentives for snitching (which the operators also attempt on Hal) augment the sense of confusion among the miners. Thus, in a rather convoluted web of deceit and manipulation,

Sinclair frames the absurdity of this situation in *King Coal* by having the bosses attempt to sour Hal against labor solidarity through individual incentives, paying him to pretend to be in favor of labor solidarity to flush out those who are in favor of it. When it turns out that he is sincerely in favor of labor solidarity and has been encouraged by a labor organizer to become a spy to *falsely* target miners who *actually* have anti-union inclinations as miners who actively *promote* unionism, a practice known as the "inside / outside" system at the time, the operators attempt to *falsely* frame him as a spy for the company. This, in fact, he was! – but with the duplicitous intention of helping the miners as a double agent. Ultimately, Hal's shenanigans get him arrested and imprisoned: the narrative comments that "Just as the bosses had tried to bedevil him, to destroy his influence with his followers, so later on he saw them trying to bedevil the labour-movement, to *confuse the intelligence* of the whole country" (161, my emphasis). The bedevilment of the labor movement begins when the "bosses" attempt to do two things: misrepresent the rights of the workers (or elide the matter altogether) while at the same time proffering the temptation of advancing in the hierarchical scale through *obedience*: "'You stay by it, and when you've learned to manage mules, I'll make a boss out of you, and let you manage men'" (81). It is important to keep in mind that this is the *only* way to advance – a rather degrading way – making more complex Little Jerry's conclusion that the doors to the mansion he enters appear to have bars like those of a jail, no matter how shiny the bars may be. Similarly, disembodied Capital attempts to sour the movement by trying to undermine solidarity through creating the façade among "the whole country," through propaganda, that the movement is attempting to undermine the harmony of the nation.

In the case of the Colorado coal operators, historically their attempts to confuse the intelligence of the public were frequently complicated by mine explosions, which they typically

blamed upon the carelessness of the miners, the work of anarchists, or both. Protocol was not only to never assume responsibility but to go to various legal and political lengths to ensure they would not be held responsible by external bodies.[20] (Colorado's death rate in coal mines was twice that of those recorded in the rest of the country, major explosions being a factor.[21]) After an explosion in 1910, reporters were not allowed within "a quarter mile of the entrance," those responsible for enforcing this prohibition being instructed to, if necessary, smash cameras or use other violence, the purpose being to "shiel[d] the operations of the CFI as far as possible from the critical scrutiny of outsiders." Despite these and other precautions, such as not removing the bodies of victims during daylight, "it was immediately speculated that better ventilation of the inner workings or a speedier rescue system might have saved them" (McGovern 64-65).

Hal's imprisonment is interrupted by just such a mine explosion, with the same speculations about poor ventilation and a delayed rescue in order to preserve profits, and, in the aftermath, we see the peculiar logic of capitalist mathematics and its relation to language and identity. As the miners are discussing the explosion in one miner's cabin,

> there arose a discussion as to the number of men entombed in the mine. The company's estimate of the number was forty, but… Any man who went about in the crowds could satisfy himself that there were two or three times as many unaccounted for. And this falsification was deliberate, for the company had a checking system, whereby *it knew the name* of every man in the mine. But most of these names were *unprounounce-able Slavish*, and *the owners of the names* had *no friends to mention them – at least not in any language understood by American newspaper editors*. (*King Coal* 215, my emphases)

The word "unaccounted" is important here, as the term *account* has both a mathematic and a linguistic (i.e., to tell a story) connotation. That is, we have the factual numbers in economic tablature, and the conceptual "falsification" utilized to conceal from "American newspaper editors" the notion that something might be amiss in terms of social justice in the Colorado mines. From the perspective of the operators, the gibberish-nature of the "Slavish" names make

them unpronounceable due not merely to the linguistic difference between English and the Slavic languages, but also because the names' alien sounds would lead the company to assume that the death of such a name-holder would not carry as much emotional weight as would a more anglicized-sounding name. These names also become unpronounceable metaphorically, as they are easily erased, historically and conceptually, in the public mind. Any friends to these "Slavic" peoples do not have the influential voice to pronounce their names to the world, as the *facts* do not *translate* in any way into language that the press, being *slavish* (submissive to centralized power) in its own fashion, will publish.

The operators' strange form of mathematics becomes ghoulish as Hal and Mary Burke argue about how, and perhaps why, the operators will not let the families of those working in the mines at the time of the explosion assist or even see the blast site: Mary tells Hal,

> "Maybe they [the women of the injured miners] couldn't [expect to crowd around the injured and the dead] but that's not it, Joe, and ye know it! They been bringin' up dead bodies, some they found where the explosion was – *blown all to pieces*. And they won't let anybody see them. Is that because of the doctors? No, it ain't! It's because they want to *tell lies about the number killed*! They want to count *four or five legs to a man*! And that's what's drivin' the women crazy! I saw Mrs. Zamboni, tryin' to get into the shed, and Pete Hanun caught her by the breasts and shoved her back. 'I want my man! She screamed. 'Well, what do you want him for? He's all in pieces!' 'I want the pieces!' 'What good'll they do you? Are you goin' to eat him?'" (303, emphases mine)

The motif of *pieces* – or something similar, in terms of fragmentation, parts made disparate – is important in several different senses in *King Coal*, as Sinclair is portraying different languages, perspectives, conflicting narratives, along with different financial, ethical, and other personal interests, and the intersections that exist among these. Most central for my purposes, however, is the fact that the companies are dedicated to fragmenting the workers as a body. In this passage, the motif becomes hyper-dramatic: the individual human body itself is fragmented – exploded – into various pieces. This spectacle becomes something that one side desperately wants

suppressed (to prevent the broader social body of the US to feel sympathy for the miners) and that the other side desperately wants disseminated (to enlist the broader social body of the US to feel a sense of sympathy and unification with the miners). As the doctors are company-owned and, as "the doctor was part of the company machine" (118), their position is more beholden to the bosses than the patients they are supposed to be treating. The imperative of the corporate machine becomes that of a mad scientist, creating monsters out of men by attributing to them the amount of legs possessed by sea-stars or insects to lower the death rate in the public mind. In this vision, the patient is no longer the worker, but the reputation of the corporation, and "the lies about the number killed" becomes the balm – at least in the short term. Similarly, the cannibalistic logic of the corporation is projected onto those who simply wish to discover the fate of their loved ones. Hal tries to convince Mary that the situation is improving, and her response, "How do ye know what they're doin'?", is notable: "They might be sealin' up parts of the mine down below! That's what makes it so horrible – nobody knows what's happenin'!" (303). People either don't know that these events are taking place, due to their suppression in the press, or are getting a corporate-sterilized version.

Order and Chaos in the Coal Fields

If the mine explosion in *King Coal* effects mass solidarity among the miners, some of the most dramatic moments in *The Coal War* concerning workers' solidarity occur when the strike is on the verge of its own metaphorical explosion. Sinclair portrays the battle between the titans of Capital and the masses of Labor as having nothing less than Biblical stakes in *The Coal War*. Hal returns from Europe to join a UMWA convention determining whether the miners of the southern fields should vote to go on strike. He takes a train with Billy Keating, a reporter

sympathetic to labor struggles (based on Don MacGregor, a local reporter who decided to retire his notepad and pick up a gun to help the strikers in the shootouts occurring after the Ludlow Massacre). Upon their arrival, Hal and Billy find at the station people speaking "many tongues" (83), many of whom are leaving, understandably, to avoid "the coming trouble" of violence that is sure to ensue. When Hal and Billy arrive at union headquarters, they find "another Babel; swarms of people who had been turned out of their homes and had no place to go…" (83). Sinclair was not the first to make the Biblical allusion to Colorado's labor force in the coal mines: by the 1910s, Colorado's mines employed probably as diverse a workforce as any industrial workplace in the United States,[22] and Colorado Deputy Labor Commissioner Edwin V. Brake claimed in 1913 that a coal company official had told him that the companies intentionally changed the complexion of laborers, increasing the ratio of immigrants "to produce in advance a condition of confusion of tongues, so that no tower upon which they might ascend the heavens could be erected."[23] Elements of the myth of the (failed) construction of a tower to reach the heavens make it relevant in a novel portraying labor strife. It is a story that features labor physically performed, as the laborers who are attempting to "build us a city and a tower" (Gen. 11.4) are cooking bricks and mixing "slime… for morter" (11.3); but it also features them in such a way as to presage their ideological counterparts in the modern age of industrialism, as they are trying to "reach unto heaven" (11.4) in order to "*make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad* upon the face of the whole earth" (11.4, my emphasis). Recognizing their collective strength, they are attempting to establish solidarity: a unified name, such as organizing under the banner of a union like the United Mine Workers of America. In "the Lord['s]" arbitrary solution to the problem of "the people [being] one" (11.6), of "confound[ing] their language, that they may not understand one another's speech" (11.7) and "confound[ing] the language of all the

earth" (11.9), we should note that the multiple connotations of the term *confound* – especially "to defeat utterly, discomfit, bring to ruin, destroy…" and "to throw (things) into confusion or disorder" (OED) – are very much at play in Sinclair's application to the history of American labor, as is the term's etymological connections to the word *confuse*.

The linguistic confusion created by the impending strike is exacerbated by the fact that there were "a hundred organizers to keep in touch with, and twice as many spies and detectives to dodge" (83). This additional source of confusion is elaborated upon by

> Jim Moylan, the district secretary, a long, tall, black-haired Irish boy, who had come to take charge of this *chaos and bring it to order*… Moylan was a *fountain of news*, poured out *in a torrent*… but then he hastened to add a word of caution – *one must not believe everything*, for there were no end of spies posing as miners, and they too had *stories to tell*. (*Coal War* 83-84, my emphases)

Moylan's vision and method of transforming "chaos and bring[ing] it to order" is radically different from the company method of coercion and violence: while the "chaos" from the operators' point of view is simply any labor unrest that would impede profits, the chaos that Moylan is concerned with is, in part, the *flooding* of news, the chaotic way in which the "fountain[s]" and "torrent[s]" of information inspire both fervor and anxiety among those preparing for industrial warfare.[24] For Moylan, part of curbing the "confusion" is warning against overzealousness when dealing with the "stories" of "outrage[s]" which are real and need addressing. However, choosing the methods of doing so is a delicate matter, in the sense that the methods of Capital seem to know no limitations, and spies have been employed to sow confusion in the public mind by provoking the very violence that Capital, with all of its societal influence, has persistently insisted comes only from the side of labor in a perpetual battle between lawlessness and order.[25] As Sinclair puts it earlier in the novel, as agents of Capital were "putting down violence with one hand, they were fomenting it with the other" (92).

The description of the train ride that Hal and Billy take to the southern fields provides both another Biblical parallel – the Ark myth, once again subverted – and another parallel to the introductory moments of *King Coal*. Billy has "suggested… it would be safer traveling *in pairs*. So they set out – in the smoking-car, *where there was education to be got*" (82, my emphasis). Again riding in the "smoking-car," as he was in the first page of *King Coal*, the "education to be got" by Hal is instructive this time; once we discover the kind of personage being carried in the train car, we see why Sinclair chose specifically the phrase "in pairs" as opposed to other phrases that could convey the wisdom of avoiding solitary travel. (Syntactically, in fact, it would make more sense to write *in a pair*.) While Hal and Keating are two of the same species – labor organizers putting themselves at great risk – the others on the car are portrayed in less admirable terms:

> Rough, evil-faced fellows with revolvers and whiskey-bottles bulging their pockets, they sprawled over the seats, filling the air with the odors and sounds of the bar-room; they leered at the women passengers, making jests and singing ribald songs… There had been a fight on the last trip, and two had been thrown off the train. (*Coal War* 82)

Sinclair first alludes to the story of the Ark in *The Coal War* by emphasizing Mr. Arthur's opulence from Little Jerry's perspective: "His place was a series of history-lessons, a regular trip *around the world*; it was almost a Noah's ark – there was a deer park, and peacocks and lyre-birds, and ducks from China, and pheasants from Thibet, and chickens from a score of places which had to be looked up in the atlas" (21, my emphasis). In the instance involving Hal and Billy Keating, however, literal animals are replaced by the "evil-faced fellows," beastly creatures belonging in the lower, danker quarters of the Biblical Ark, two of whom who are "thrown off" in another *pair*, calling back Keating's suggestion of travel-safety protocol and further emphasizing Sinclair's allusion to the ark. These ruffians are in the "pay of the Schultz Detective

Agency" – Sinclair's literary substitute for the notorious Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency, the services of which were solicited two months before the strike even began, and which was well-known for hiring characters of ill-repute (Martelle 13). They are alleged to come from

> *every corner of the world*; there was an ex-policeman from South Africa, discharged for drunkenness; an ex-soldier, who had demonstrated the "water cure" upon Filipinos; an adventurer from Central America, who had fought wherever there was loot; a pick-pocket from the "Barbary Coast" of San Francisco; a couple of gangsters from "Hell's Kitchen", in New York – men who had not been out of prison long enough to grow their hair**.** *Only one question* was asked by the Schultz Detective Agency: "Do you know how to shoot?" (83, my emphasis)

The hyperbolic phrase "every corner of the world" further ironizes the allusion to the Ark story: while Noah is given the task of collecting all the animals upon the "face of the earth" (Gen. 6.1, 7, 7.4, etc.) in pairs to preserve their posterity, in Sinclair's imagination the Baldwin-Felts Agency has opened its arms to men representing aggression and brutality incarnate, violent desperadoes who have been involved in colonial struggles all over the globe[26] whose linguistic abilities need only entail a simple, affirmative answer establishing their ability and willingness to use violence.

In Sinclair's hands, the animals needing protection from the threat of the flood have become those posing the threat. Accordingly, Sinclair associates the labor side of the conflict with "the flood" as he positions Hal and others witnessing "the *flood* of Slovak eloquence" coming from the organizer Mike Sikoria (based on real-life organizer Mike Livoda) in a language Hal cannot understand (84, my emphasis). Sinclair's metaphoric description of the march to the convention captures both the physical and the verbal: "All day Saturday the *human floods* poured down the canyons; and the afternoon there was a great procession, with a brass band at the head, and painted signs to *proclaim men's feelings*" (86, emphases mine). Floods and torrents of individual feeling have been expanded into a procession in which people solidify in a

body, democratically electing "delegates" at great risk of black-listing and "expulsion," united by a "sense of intolerable wrong" (86). Sinclair has taken a peculiar approach to the well-known story of the world-destroying flood: those *in power* are the ones causing and creating "intolerable wrongs" – a pervading "wickedness," I suggest, paralleling the "wickedness" (6.5), "corrupt[ion]" (6.11, 12) "evil" (6.5) and "violence" (6.11, 13) that caused God to create the flood of Genesis. However, in Sinclair's more democratic allusion, strikers translating into a common language "the battle-cry of union!" (86) *in a mass are the flood* that can cure the wickedness, violence, and evil corrupting American society.[27]

Sinclair's portrayal of the convention portrays these ordinary people involved in an extraordinary movement as

> uneducated men, with no gifts of oratory, no experience in affairs… one by one[28] they came forward, and in the best English they could muster told the story of their grievances. They came from two hundred different camps, their destinies were under the control of more than seventy different companies – yet the stories they told were all alike! Hal Warner… found himself thinking that if he had shut his eyes, he would have been unable to tell which of them was the delegate from North Valley. (87)

Each individual is separated by camps, companies, nationalities – a Babel as confused perhaps as the end result of the eleventh chapter of Genesis – and yet "the stories they told were all alike," validating their grievances, one of the primary problems in dealing with the operators being getting the companies to even *acknowledge* that their grievances were legitimate (and not simply the result of outside agitation) (87-88). As Capital is operating in perfect concert and with monolithic ruthlessness in the Colorado coalfields, with the same anxiety as God in the story of Babel, it is only though their own voices speaking in concert that the miners can begin to compete against the tyranny of capital. This subversion of the crisis of the Babel myth is dominated by conditions of physical deprivation, cruel weather conditions (primarily involving

conditions that both histories of the Colorado miners' struggle and Sinclair's version describe as flooding), and psychic desperation. However, at this moment in the struggle, the overwhelming impulse is not to fight violence with violence but through insisting upon the ability and right to *communicate*, to be understood, to be granted recognition:

> If you had anything to do with the union, you were besieged by fifty men and women at once, trying to ask you questions in what appeared to be fifty different languages. The Tower of Babel was the only thing one could compare with it; but there could have been no such desperate haste in the Tower of Babel… it did not snow or sleet in that neighborhood, and there were no shivering women and children to be got under shelter. / Yet, incredible as it might seem, it was not for food and shelter that these people clamored first; it was *for their souls they wanted food* – their souls which had been starving for years in those lonely mountain fastnesses. Wet, shivering and hungry as they were, they were aflame with excitement and enthusiasm, and *their cry was for "talk"* (95-96, emphasis mine)

"Not… by Bread Alone, But by Every Word"

During the various crises leading up to the strike and during much of the strike, the UMWA sought perpetually to meet with the operators or their representatives. Furthermore, Colorado Governor Elias Ammons, federal investigators, and even Woodrow Wilson attempted numerous times to get the operators to meet with union officials to negotiate, always facing the same deceptive and nonsensical reply: the operators' position from beginning to end was that their employees were perfectly satisfied, that the strike was due to terror and union intimidation from the outside, and that to recognize the union would to be to go against the interests of the employees themselves. This claim, variations of it widespread among American business titans in labor struggles, was absurd generally: in the case of the 1913-1914 strike, the claim was utterly preposterous.[29] However, one incident in which the coal operators made a pretext to hear the plights of the miners, portrayed in *The Coal War* and discussed in Thomas Andrews's *Killing*

for Coal, provides some insights as to how the operators devised a manipulation of discourse between Labor and Capital. As Sinclair portrays it, while the operators had "refused all discussion" and "refused even to be in the same room with the union leaders" (178), three miners are allowed an "all-day and all-night conference with the men who had ruled their lives since they were born" (179). The result is predictable: every time the miners try "to bring the discussion to an issue… they were shunted aside, led down a side path, and bogged up in unessentials" (179). One of the three protests, "'You understand, gentleman, …that we are simple miners. We are a bit awkward, and we have not got the same expression, and we would like a little consideration on account of that'" (179); however,

> these farcical proceedings did not settle the strike; those who were in charge of the situation had never had any idea that they would. They had quite a different program – to cow and terrify the strikers, to weaken their spirit and convince them that the contest was a hopeless one. It was like *a big dam*, which they meant to undermine and bore full of holes; let the water get started through in one place, and you would *see the whole structure collapse*. (180, my emphases)

Sinclair's portrayal of this incident is notable for several reasons, the first being that his version of the miners' predicament is close to a verbatim account of an actual meeting that took place.[30] After the meeting, the president of Colorado Fuel & Iron wrote to Rockefeller to inform him that the meeting was successful on the side of the operators insofar as it "'accomplished a great deal of good[,] convinc[ing] the Governor that the grievance [sic] of the men were of a trivial character.'" However, the meeting was unsuccessful in terms of its *ostensible* purpose, i.e., reaching an agreement: "'We reached no direct understanding" – and, "'in fact[,] we wanted none'" (266, qtd in Andrews). That is to say, the operators' dedication to perpetuating confusion was steadfast enough to hold a meeting with miners, with the Governor of Colorado attending, with the intention of *not* reaching an agreement – of closing off with finality any communicative

channels. In addition to its relation to the motif of bodies of water, Sinclair's metaphor of the operators treating the conflict like "a big dam" is useful, if not aesthetically novel: a primary reason that the operators did not want to resolve the conflict peacefully was to justify the use of force against violence that they themselves were provoking through various measures (Martelle 54, 98). If the "structure collapse[s]," then the benefit is twofold for the operators, as they can both enlist further repressive measures *and* continue to reiterate their claims that the strike is *causing* violence, rather than being the result of atrocious conditions and *violence against the miners*.

Reading the historical accounts of this conflict, it would seem that, in regard to Sinclair's metaphor of a precarious dam slowly being chipped away, the operators could not have set the situation up any better than they did. Once it became clear to the operators that a strike was afoot, they enlisted Baldwin-Felts agents with the apparent intention of provoking violence, and the deputization by local sheriffs of Baldwin-Felts employees created an atmosphere of terror. The first fatality was UMWA organizer Gerald Lippiat by two Baldwin Felts agents.[31] Soon after the strike officially began on September 23, skirmishes led to deaths on both sides. The first gun battle took place October 7, and on October 17 bullets from the infamous "Death Special," the strikers' epithet for the Baldwin Felts Agency's armored car fitted with a machine gun, rained down on a strikers' colony.[32] Governor Ammons called in the National Guard over UMWA opposition and under tremendous pressure of not just the operators but other local business interests. Two weeks later mine guards had been enlisted in their ranks, joined later by Baldwin-Felts agents, and within a month they were openly escorting scabs, the Governor rescinding his original orders to head of the Colorado National Guard General John Chase to prevent this.[33] General Chase essentially dismantled civil law despite the fact that martial law was never

officially declared, and the breakdown of law and order that ensued *on the part of the National Guard* is almost unbelievable, including armed robberies of saloons and of individuals in the streets, sexual harassment, and violently breaking up a demonstration of miner's wives and other women.[34] Eventually Colorado militiamen ceased to be neutral agents (if they ever were so, General Chase being openly anti-union in his sentiments from the outset). Now having within their ranks the strikers' enemies, mine guards and Baldwin-Felts agents, the militiamen began to receive double pay from both the state of Colorado and Colorado Fuel & Iron (Long 290). Again, the historical accounts very much corroborate Sinclair's version, which includes all of these details: he confidently asserts, both in the text of *The Coal War* and in a Postscript, that his account of the way things unfolded is based on research of trial transcripts, the work of federal investigators, and other similar documents. All of this is, of course, before the most infamous parts of the story: the Ludlow Massacre resulting in the murders of over a dozen women and children, followed by what can be described as small-scale warfare between infuriated and grief-stricken strikers and their tormentors.

An American Manicheanism

Hal's reactions as this madness is unfolding are part of Sinclair's critique of American society: what it reflects is a quasi-religious system of belief in the sanctity of the power and benevolence of Capital, which has a firm grip on Hal's consciousness despite his sympathy for the miners he has befriended. Hal's exposure to American society's conceptualization of labor organization as essentially criminal is an important part of his education that runs through both novels. Probably the most important moment in *King Coal*, in terms of plot development, is Hal's discussion with Thomas Olson, an organizer for the UMWA. Before meeting Olson, Hal "had heard a lot about

'trouble makers' in the camps, but so far the only kind he had seen were those hired by the company to make trouble for the men." By the time Hal meets Olson, in his mind

> an organiser was *a mythological creature, whispered* about by the miners, *cursed* by the company and its servants, and by Hal's friends at home. An incendiary, a fire-brand, a loudmouthed, irresponsible person, stirring up blind and dangerous passions! *Having heard such things all his life*, Hal's first impulse was of distrust. (97-98, emphases mine)

From Hal's perspective, everyone seems to have a passionate ideological position about this creature out of mythology, the organizer. And yet, after being convinced by Olson that his primary goal is to organize the workers merely to convince them to fight "to have the law enforced" (102), Hal is willing to suppress his faith in things he has "heard… all his life." This is by no means an easy process for Hal: even after he has fully committed himself to the miners' cause – as he has by the end of *King Coal* and the beginning of *The Coal War* – there are still ideas that he has difficulty accepting. These include the idea that labor leaders can be rational citizens who do not "thriv[e] upon trouble" (*The Coal War* 74-75); that respectable citizens would be capable of framing innocent men in order to discredit the labor movement in the eyes of the public (94); that strike leadership would eschew violence and embrace instead the concept of the "weapon of solidarity" (116); that newspapers friendly to business interests would exaggerate and even lie about the miners in order to portray them in a poor light to the public, including the notion that the strike was "a state near to insurrection" (117); that "the forces of law could be continuously used in the service of anarchy" (139); that the Colorado National Guard could be used not to establish peace but as an instrument to break a strike (as it also was during the 1903-1904 strike) (147). And, ultimately, as Sinclair places Hal in Horton (Sinclair's fictional fill-in for Ludlow) during the beginning of the massacre, Hal "could not believe that [a lieutenant of the Colorado National Guard] would permit the burning up of women and children"

(329).

Hal's class-related beliefs are inveterate enough that he refuses to believe facts *as they unravel in his presence*, demonstrated by his inability to make sense of his circumstances as machine gun fire breaks out. Sinclair places him narratively at Horton (Ludlow) when the "Death Special" is unleashed by the Schultz (Baldwin-Felts) Detective Agency. All of a sudden, as a "wild clamor br[eaks]," causing "Women and children [to run] this way and that, screaming," Rosa Minetti informs Hal that it is "bullets" causing the disorder:

> At first Hal *could not believe her*. "Listen!" she exclaimed; and he heard a swift whirring, like the sound of a flying machine; also a whining, buzzing sound, that might have been the hiving of bees. "Bullets!" cried Rosa. "They shot us all!" / Now Hal had never heard the sound of a machine-gun; he had never thought of such a weapon as a possibility *in his life of culture and ease*. "It's an automobile!" he declared. (*The Coal War* 121, my emphases)

Hal's disbelief of Rosa's accurate interpretation of the sound of bullets is notable for several reasons, in addition to the reason that Sinclair makes explicit: his class position – a "life of culture and ease" – does not allow him to entertain it as a possibility. His immediate, rather idiotic declaration, that it is "an automobile!" is yet another instance of an individual being unable to understand a language in the text: in this case, it is the language of violence and repression manifested through machine gun fire. He cannot correctly decode it even when he is being aided by a translator who, as the wife of a militant miner, immediately recognizes these sounds for what they are. During his privileged life, Hal has *never heard* the sound of a machine gun: therefore, he cannot acknowledge that it is a machine gun he is hearing. The situation bears similarity to that of mine superintendents who hear complaints from miners that their weights are not being met, but who refuse to recognize the sound of industrial robbery; similar to that of managers who are aware that activism is growing and reaching a level that will almost certainly

become a strike, but who refuse to recognize the sound of mass discontent; similar to that of an adjutant general of the National Guard who hears stories condemning the growing criminal tendencies of his men, but who refuses to recognize the sound of degeneration and debauchery that ended up being condemned by both state and federal investigators.

The narrative never allows Hal the conscious realization that he was wrong about the source of the unearthly sound he was hearing. The narrative shifts to the "other men" who come running "with rifles and revolvers, even axes and picks. They looked about wildly, but could not tell where the shooting came from, even though the bullets kicked the dirt into their eyes and mouths" (122). These bullets "kic[k] dirt" into "their mouths," an indignity similar to the *curse* (Gen. 3.14) meted out by God onto the Serpent when it had the hubris to try to provide humanity with a knowledge of Good and Evil (recall that the "mythological" organizer is "cursed" by the company officials). This is significant, insofar as God tells the Serpent, "upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat" (3.14). As Hal himself reconsiders his pacifism once he realizes that it is machinegun fire that he is hearing, he wonders what his "proper course of action" should be when bullets are flying: "Shall he crawl" (122) around, serpentine, looking for cover? The miners' instinctual picking up of "axes and picks" – instruments of labor – in the absence of instruments of warfare, is also related to the fact that humanity's punishment for acquiring knowledge of Good and Evil is condemnation to labor. From the paradise of Eden humanity is banished, Adam having to toil and Eve having to suffer the pains of birthing labor (3.16-19). The allusion to the Garden story arises again later in the novel as the strikers discuss the pros and cons of responding to violence through counter-violence (272-273), when John Harmon, Sinclair's fictional fill-in for UMWA organizer / leader John Lawson, cautions against it, referring to violence as the "great temptation." (Temptation is the most important concept, I

would suggest, in the story of Eden, in terms of plot structure, as the temptation that God establishes by giving Adam and Eve a single rule not to break is the first conflict between God and humanity.) The temptation towards violence that Sinclair is exploring is tantalizing for the miners, as they are perpetually taunted by the violence of their oppressors. In fact, historically, while the UMWA's official position was strongly *against* violence, there were plenty of incidents of strikers attacking strikebreakers and company operators / agents, which Sinclair downplays, referring to them rather quietly.

The allusion to the story of Eden is important when we return to and consider in its context the scene of "wild clamor" that alerts Hal to the machinegun fire that he does not recognize as such. The "clamor" takes place in Book 2, Section 20 of *The Coal War*: Book 2, Section 19 opens by exploring the various reasons that the operators "wanted violence" to occur in the conflict. One important reason that the operators wanted the governor to bring in the National Guard, not just in the context of this particular strike but in the 1903-1904 strike and subsequent conflicts that never became wide-scale strikes, is that "*the public would perceive* the [Governor's] act [of calling in troops] *as proof* that the miners were riotous and needed quelling, calling into question their reasons for walking out in the first place"[35] (Martelle 53, 86, my emphases). Before the arrival of the troops, however, mine guards and Baldwin-Felts agents tighten the screws on the miners using harassment and various types of repression, the result of which is that, after futilely appealing to law-enforcement agencies essentially controlled by the political machinery established by the coal companies, "naturally[,] the miners took to arming themselves" (119). Sinclair frames this situation in a broader history and context, comparing how this situation would look to a public that is already prone to "believe that the strikers were law-breakers and desperadoes," and how it would look to the strikers themselves. Tempting the

miners into violence will have the very clear benefit of *demonizing* the laborers in the public eye – of setting up a very efficient, useful construction of *knowledge* concerning Good and Evil:

> The public understood that the coal-companies had to employ guards to protect their properties, which otherwise would be burned or dynamited; also to protect the men who wanted to go on working, who would otherwise be beaten or shot. When you asked the public to believe that guards were being secretly used to beat and kill strike-breakers, and even to burn and dynamite properties, in order that the public might be led to think that the strikers had committed these crimes – then you went *out of the realm of reality*, you set yourself down for a *romancer of the "penny-dreadful" ord*er. Unless by chance you were something worse – a secret abettor and fomentor of crime! (119, emphases mine)

Just as Hal's initial reaction to meeting a union organizer in *King Coal* is to consider him within the context of being a *mythological creature*, Sinclair understands that the general public's understanding of labor conflicts has been carefully framed by propaganda disseminated over decades to indicate the degeneracy of the laboring classes, in a carefully-constructed *realm of reality* that is difficult to suspend one's disbelief in if one has a certain amount of societal comfort and privilege. However, it is important to consider that, as Sinclair points out, "to the strikers[,] these matters appeared quite differently. Not merely did they know the 'penny-dreadful' tales were true, that these strike-breaking agencies were 'framing things up' on them; they knew that they did this systematically, as their regular business routine" (119).

Violence and the Press: A Venomous Formula

Hal attempts, futilely, to enlist the help of the publisher of "The Western City Herald" – Sinclair's fictional fill-in for the *Denver Post*. As Hal approaches his destination, he sees "before him *tower[ing]* a great building" with an enormous sign trumpeting its merits "*graven in stone*, so that they would last forever": "Justice, when expelled from other habitations, make this thy dwelling-place!" (*Coal War* 226, emphases mine). The Biblical language used here is important,

both in terms of its emphasis on the towering influence of the press from above, often disseminating nonsense to confuse the public, and the ways in which the press can *engrave* ideas upon the public imagination. Sinclair explores the ways in which a significant part of the problem for the cause of labor is the press, both local and national. Labor faces the obvious problems of Capital's financial control of the press, giving the operators the ability to tell the story from their point of view (*King Coal* 215-216; *The Coal War* 117, 249), publishing falsehoods (152), or simply refusing to publish certain facts (145).[36] The concomitant problem is that of a "working man's paper" having little comparative influence upon the public (the story being set in a time in which "working man's paper[s]" still enjoyed circulation, however modest, among working people) (*King Coal* 233). Then there is the issue of the not-so obvious capacity of business-friendly papers to intimidate labor-friendly papers in various ways (*The Coal War* 48). At the national level, we find in these novels a problem Sinclair also deals with at length in *The Brass Check*: the corporate structure and bias of the Associated Press – which was in many ways "the power of public opinion" (*King Coal* 222) – insofar as "the one thing the press association cares about in a correspondent is that he should have respect for property… [so] he can learn what news is, and the right way to handle it" (230). Similarly, Hal is confronted by a general "conspiracy of silence" (*The Coal War* 254) when trying to spread word of the crimes being committed during the strike – the same "conspiracy of silence" that Sinclair discusses in *The Brass Check*, concerning his own attempts to bring national attention to the conflict.[37] Sinclair puts it a little melodramatically when he writes that the situation was that of "'Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne'" (271): it is certainly impossible that all of the miners and labor leaders involved in this struggle were angelically incapable of deception. But what is clear from the historical accounts is that the miners as a body showed remarkable

restraint given what they were subjected to, and that the operators were perpetually disseminating untruths, from the very outset in their stalwart insistence that their workers were overwhelmingly happy and that the strike was the result of outside agitation, coercion, and terror by the UMWA.

However, we cannot determine that they were *lying* by disseminating these untruths, insofar as it is entirely possible that they believed every word of what they were saying with something bordering on zealous, dogmatic faith in their cause. As Sinclair puts the situation in *Mammonart*,[38] "There are lies so generally accepted and conventionalized that the very liars do not know them as such, and are amazed and wounded in the feelings when their attention is called to the truth" (26). It is noteworthy that the effect of these circumstances upon the most reactionary elements of society is reflected in the rector of Hal's church, Dr. Penniman, who "knew all about the strike – he had read the details of it every day in the newspapers. There were fierce foreign criminals, with anarchistic ideas in their heads and daggers and bombs in their hands…." This version of "modern infidelity and sedition" having been loosed upon the sensibilities of the public, Hal reflects that responsibility, "more than anything else," could be aimed at "the newspapers! Twice a day people read these class-owned sheets, and it was if they breathed poison gas" (226). The comparison to "poison gas" is significant, insofar as it suggests that the effects of the inundation of anti-labor and pro-capital ideas become less something that one reads about in the press and more something that citizens absorb through a type of social osmosis. [39] We find these sentiments in unlikely sources in the text: Hal points out to General Wrightman of the Colorado National Guard (Sinclair's fill-in for the rabidly anti-union General, John Chase) that, despite the fact that Wrightman despises Hal, Hal's wealth makes him "'protected [as if] by a mystic spell!'" (204), as if he had mythological powers. Similarly, later in

the novel, Mary Burke, in one of her constant reminders to Hal of the ways in which his actions are inveterately tinged with his own class privilege, is flabbergasted when she learns that Hal was in the home of Peter Harrigan (Sinclair's composite fill-in for operators / managers of the Colorado Fuel & Iron company like John Osgood and L. M. Bowers, and the absentee owner John D. Rockefeller and his son John Jr.). To Mary, as initially Tom Olson was to Hal a "mythological creature," Harrigan is a "mythological monster," and the fact that Hal was able to even enter his home gives Hal "superhuman qualities" (305) in her estimation. When Hal is considering breaking off his engagement with his wealthy fiancé to marry her, Mary tells Hal that they could never be compatible as a couple: from her class perspective, she knows him better than he knows himself (*The Coal War* 310-311), knows that the allure and temptation of his class position is "like a poison; 'tis in the food ye eat, in the clothes ye wear, *in the air ye breathe*!" (311, my emphasis). The "evil spell" of the temptation of a lifestyle of affluence, ease and privilege will potentially forever be an "evil spell" upon his consciousness, as is, presumably, potentially true of anyone with similar privileges.

For this reason, it is important to look past the role of the press to more deep-rooted problems that Sinclair also examines at length. It's not really the press, *as such*: rather, the problems of the press are part of a much bigger problem, in terms of the social framework that allows people to think in the terms that they do (or prevents them from thinking in terms that they cannot) in *The Coal War*. Sinclair persistently questions the legitimacy of a mainstream, self-adulatory American social doctrine that focuses on the supremacy of self-interest whilst simultaneously claiming to exist in a tradition of Christian benevolence, ignoring abysmal social problems that people in positions of privilege seem impervious to seeing. That is, as Hal reflects, while the church he grew up in preaches the message of the Gospels, "the world outside was

organized on exactly the opposite principle from his church; [the church] was trying to teach men to be brothers on Sunday, while all the rest of the week the world was teaching them to be wolves" (230). Early in *The Coal War*, before the strike, after having secured a parlor-maid position for Mary Burke,[40] Hal and Mary discuss the growing discontent among the miners. Afterwards, Hal contemplates the

> comfortable, kindly people… [who] went about their affairs of pleasure and profit… who had formulas, whereby they justified themselves in leaving the world as it was. Religious formulas – they were rendering unto Caesar the things that were Caesar's! And economic formulas – they were maintaining the beneficent system of freedom of contract, *laissez faire* and the "open shop" – while eleven thousand men, with thrice as many women and children dependent upon them, were bracing themselves in anguish and despair for a struggle against annihilation! (79)

Sinclair frames those who go "about their affairs of pleasure and profit" as not just "comfortable," but "kindly," as it is theoretically possible to be a kindly person in one's personal life and still dogmatically follow and support "formulas" that lead to atrocious social outcomes. Like Sinclair's ambiguous use of the term *account* mentioned above, his use of *formula* is similarly ambiguous: a *formula* is a principle that can be mathematic, in the sense that it is "express[ed] in algebraic symbols," or chemical in the sense that it "an expression of the constituents of a compound by means of symbols and figures" – that is, a formula can be rigorous and *scientific*. However, a formula can also connote a "set form of words in which something is defined, stated, or declared, or which is prescribed by authority or custom…." In this sense, it sometimes refers to "rules unintelligently or *slavishly* followed, to fettering conventionalities of usage, to beliefs held or professed out of mere acquiescence in tradition…." (OED, my emphasis). The socially-sacrosanct "religious" and "economic" formulas[41] that Sinclair refers to here are related to another type of formula that he mentions a bit later. Once the strike begins, the violent thugs and desperadoes recruited by the Schultz Detective Agency only

need to "mumbl[e] a magic formula" – an oath making each a "deputy sheriff." Now they all have "the powers of government on their side," transforming, myth-like, beasts, who "the day before had cringed and slunk away at the sight of a policeman" (91), into heroes.

Sinclair invites us to take "*account* of the spiritual factors" at play in this struggle: "When you took *account* of hope, which before had been despair; of liberty, where before had been bondage. If you do not know how much *difference* this makes, you have indeed missed a great lesson of life" (110, my emphases.). Sinclair, in expressing the more intangible elements of the labor struggle, again incorporates terms that are commonly used in business, such as *account* and *difference* (mathematical terms). In contrast to the "magic formula" which is lackadaisically "mumbled" by the bestial strike-breaking forces of the operators, we see that the strikers, of course, have their own "magic formula":

> Now suddenly a *storm swept among them*, they were *lifted up* and borne along by a tremendous force. They learned the meaning of a *magical word* – solidarity. They had a *new interest* in one another, a *new meaning* to one another. They had something to *think about*, something to *talk about* (111, emphases mine)

Contrasted with the tepid "magic formula" of the operators, in Sinclair's conception, is a force implacable as a storm causing a flood: economic terms like "interest" become associated more with words like "meaning" – instead of all "meaning" being focused on profit, meaning is associated with productive thought and action toward solidarity.

"I Am Jesus Christ"

In another example of Sinclair's use of Little Jerry as a character for pathos value, we find Sinclair portraying the night before the massacre – a type of "Eve," if you will. As the strikers are engaging in community education and other types of activities to "keep up the morale of the

community," the scene has a sense of joyousness, similar to the Christmas party which began *The Coal War*, despite the severe financial deprivation of the miners' being on strike. Little Jerry, after an "hour of story-telling before bedtime," is focused on a "thing called a 'geenee,'" which is capable of "scattering destruction [and] smash[ing] them militiamen like they was cockroaches!" (319). In his own class-conscious version of a "new and more modern form of fairy story" (320), Little Jerry says he would like to send the "geenee" to "'get that feller Jesus Christ'" (319). Jerry is referring to Lieutenant Stangholz, who terrorized women and children shouting "I am Jesus Christ! All my men on horses are Jesus Christs, and must be obeyed!" (245). Like the quote from the practical miners mentioned above, the quote is close to verbatim: Stangholz is Sinclair's literary fill-in for Lieutenant Karl E. Linderfelt, a much-hated and particularly brutal officer of the Colorado National Guard who, in addition to constantly harassing miners up until the massacre, infamously, "according to a witness… had bellowed at some strikers, 'I am Jesus Christ and my men on horses are Jesus Christs, and we have got to be obeyed.' From that time on workers generally referred to him as 'Jesus Christ Linderfelt'" (Adams 158).[42] Sinclair's parallel between the Christmas party beginning the novel, and the weird confusion in Little Jerry's *hating* Jesus Christ (not the character in the Gospels, but the maniac who declared himself to be the human incarnation of God on earth), wanting to see him crushed, is powerful. Sinclair would clearly much prefer to see a different vision of Christ influencing American society: that of the activist, the champion of the poor, "the carpenter's son" (132).

Conclusion

After portraying his literary version of the Ludlow Massacre and the ensuing shoot-outs between

striking miners and agents of the coal companies, Sinclair expands his portrayal to the resultant "struggle of publicity and politics" the companies reckoned with in the aftermath. After all of Hal's efforts to get the story of the strike into the national press fail, ultimately it is "the killing of unarmed prisoners, the burning of helpless women and children" that "had broken the conspiracy of silence of the great press association" (*Coal War*, 272), which ultimately began a new "struggle for public opinion of the country" (381). We see the ways in which Peter Harrigan, who in *King Coal* is only mentioned as a character due to the fact that he is "in New York" (256), is in *The Coal Wars* a composite of the managers in Colorado and the absentee-owner John D. Rockefeller: "For the first time in history, Old Peter issued statements to the newspapers… he was forced to set up a regular publicity-bureau – a sort of journalistic fire-department, to put out the flames of popular indignation" (381). This "publicity campaign to poison the mind of the entire country!" (382) is based on the Rockefeller family's own publicity crisis. When John D Rockefeller, Jr., faced the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, he initially charmed the audience when the Commission questioned him in New York City Hall (Adams 163). He claimed that he did not oppose trade unions and felt that labor had the right to organize: it was, rather, the officials of CF&I who refused to recognize the UMW. He "pleaded almost total ignorance" of the miserable conditions for laborers, the institution of company stores, and the hiring of private detectives as spies, but claimed that, once his attention had been called to the recent events in Colorado, he had realized that there was "'something fundamentally wrong'" with the situation (162-163).

However, Frank Walsh, probably the most progressive member of the commission, had collected and studied "an ever-increasing file of letters from Rockefeller, Bowers, Welborn, and members of the millionaire's staff." When Rockefeller Jr. continued to claim ignorance as the

hearings continued in Washington, Walsh revealed that Bowers had kept Rockefeller Jr. informed of all CF&I's policies, which Rockefeller approved of from the beginning, including mobilizing business leaders and newspaper editors to "intimidate" the governor to allow the militia to aid strikebreakers (portrayed in *The Coal War*). With Rockefeller's support, Bowers acted as intermediary to convince CF&I management in Colorado to "spurn even a personal request from President Wilson, who had requested arbitration" (Adams 164-166) (also portrayed in *The Coal War*).

Rockefeller Jr.'s involvement in the strike went considerably beyond his explicit approval of Bowers's tactics, however. As Sinclair portrays it in *The Coal War*, the Rockefellers hire "a press agent, a highly trained person who was paid a thousand dollars a month. His name was Oakes, and as the strikers came to understand the character of his work, they gave him the surname of 'Poison'" (382). "Poison Oakes" is based on Ivy Lee: dubbed "Poison Ivy" in the labor press, one of the founders of the Public Relations industry, his involvement in the corporate crisis following the Ludlow Massacre is considered a foundational moment in Public Relations histories.[43] Using his own funds, Rockefeller, Jr., hired Lee, who, "Under Rockefeller's guidance… *flooded* the country with pamphlets and newspaper advertisements issued under the name Coal Mine Operators Committee" (Adams 167, my emphasis). Rockefeller provided recommendations about potential "clippings, articles, and ideas to use as propaganda," including a NYU economist's essay denigrating "unskilled labor" as "animated machinery" and condemning "union principles" as "preach[ing] robbery and murder" (167). Most striking, perhaps, when considering the potential of Capital to erase the agency of individuals,

> Documents in the Chairman's possession clearly showed that *Rockefeller personally collaborated with Lee in ghostwriting a letter for Governor Ammons to send to President Wilson*. This communication presented a completely pro-company view of the struggle

> and damned the strikers. Rockefeller himself had instructed Lee on several points which he desired to include in the letter… *Walsh and his associates believed it of "national importance"* that Rockefeller so ruled Colorado that he deemed it possible to *use the governor as his mouthpiece* in official correspondence to the President of the United States. (Adams 167-168, emphases mine)

There is a confusion of tongues here, not concerning different languages, but about *who* or *what* is speaking this correspondence among some of the most powerful and influential people on the planet. There are various levels of representational confusion, as well. There is not only deceit and manipulation using new types of print media to "flood" the country with corporate propaganda: there are also different voices occupying different levels of financial power and political influence blending into one another through ventriloquism. This manipulation even reaches "official correspondence" to the highest *political* office in the country. (We should keep in mind, of course, that the power of President Wilson's office was not backed by the Croesus-like wealth of the Rockefellers). Sinclair concludes *The Coal War* by suggesting that Capital has attempted, God-like, to establish "an artificial *creation*" through its control of "newspapers, political machines, churches, colleges… organizations maintained and controlled by privilege" (388, my emphasis). This "artificial creation" is "'the public'" – the human beings, the masses of the country – their attitudes constructed near-mythically, near-mystically to perpetuate the status quo. This "artificial creation" would take new and more sophisticated forms in the aftermath of the Colorado Coal Wars, which indicated not only to the Rockefeller corporation but business elites in general that the efficiency of naked violence had severe limitations.

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[1] See Sexton 30, 37-38, 55.
[2] See Donner 31-32; Goldstein 11-12; Sexton 56, 60, 66, 73.
[3] See Goldstein 17-19; Sexton 68-69, 71-72.
[4] See Adamic 27, 87-89, 106; Goldstein 25, 33-35, 45-48, 50-51; Trachtenberg 71-72; Watts 37-38, 56-58, 66-68.
[5] See Montgomery 1-2, 3-4; Ware xii-xviii.
[6] See Montgomery 17, 22, 42, 45, 53, 253; Trachtenberg 38-39, 43, 78, 92; Watts 6.

[7] See Brady 190, 191-193; Montgomery 22, 71, 128, 151, 152, 176, 177, 192; Trachtenberg 82, 84, 87, 93-94.
[8] See Adams 36; Brady 191-192; Taylor 11, 14-15.
[9] See Adams 36; Taylor 14-15, 63; Watts 143, 146, 151-153.
[10] See Taylor 71; Watts 154-155.
[11] This claim deserves examination. It does not account for the fact, utterly confusing to most wealthy characters in the novel, that someone in Hal's position as a rich coal magnate's son would risk so much – even his life – to assist in a labor struggle that could very well hurt the profit margins of his family business. Further, it is a labor struggle of an ethnically diverse workforce comprised primarily of immigrants whom society, both local and American in general, regards largely with disdain or even outright revulsion.
[12] For example, Kraver's suggestion that Sinclair is portraying the "birth of the fighting spirit" of the miners fails to take into consideration that the history of organization and industrial strife in the region, which very often had dire consequences for organizers and the organized alike, had been taking place for at least forty years. Similarly, her assertion that Hal learns that the miners "are more than simply a mass to be pitied or despised" but rather "an array of individuals" (219) fails to take into account the fact that, in *The Coal War*, Hal learns to see them as a mass once again – not to be despised, but to be respected for its potential in fighting corporate power.
[13] For example, using one-dimensional, if basically sympathetic, characterizations of Jews as either merchants or radical intellectuals, and even more prominently, his often-condescending attitude towards women.
[14] These include her claim that the Colorado Coal Strikes beginning in 1913 were led by the Western Federation of Miners (the radical WFM had been instrumental in the 1903-1904 strike, but played no part in the 1913-1914 strike, which was led by the more-conservative UMWA), and that the strike was "in Ludlow" (Ludlow was one locale among several throughout Southern Colorado in which the strike was fought).
[15] *The Coal Wars* had been in publication for over twenty years when she made this claim.
[16] Elements of this description have merits: the effect of making the protagonist a wealthy young man masquerading as a worker can be unsettling at times.
[17] The structural class differences between Hal and those he thinks of himself as helping lead Hal's friend (and potential love interest) Mary Burke, who by the end of *The Coal War* has decided to dedicate her life to the labor struggle, to point out to him various times throughout the narrative the ways that he is misunderstanding the struggle. Additionally, more than once he and other characters reflect that, if it weren't for his wealth and status, coal company thugs would certainly have imprisoned or deported, and possibly would have killed him, for his activities.
[18] Structurally and logistically there seem to be several reasons for having done this that have nothing to do with hinting at the inferiority of the working poor. Particularly important is giving Hal narrative access to conversations, arguments, and other types of intercourse with middle-class and wealthy characters in order to examine and ultimately undermine their assumptions, political outlooks, and value systems (or lack of a value system).
[19] Historically, often these spies were extremely well-versed in union rhetoric, even fanatically espousing radical politics more extreme than the comparatively conservative American form of unionism prevalent in major labor organizations like the UMWA or the AFL. This was useful for purposes of provocateur-ism, disruption, or infiltration, with embezzlement and other forms of discrediting the union from the inside being end goals. Some companies boasted that they had infiltrated the highest levels of union leadership effectively enough even to control union policies (Sexton 56, 59).
[20] See Andrews 216; McGovern 67.
[21] See Long 258-259.
[22] Including African Americans, Bohemians, Bulgarians, Croats, English, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Irish, Italians, Japanese, Koreans, Mexicans / Mexican Americans, Polish, Russians, Scandinavians, Scots, Serbs, Slavs, and Welsh.
[23] See Andrews 103-104; the quote is from Martelle 26.
[24] This should remind us of the previously mentioned "torrents of information… [that] poured out" of Little Jerry's mouth early in *The Coal War*.
[25] Some detective agencies – including the Baldwin-Felts Agency – made a point of hiring unsavory men with backgrounds in criminality and violence both as thugs and as spies, enacting violence from both ends of the struggle. See Sexton 58, 60; Martelle 13, 54, 98. In 1914, one federal investigator examining labor-related practices of nearly 275 US detective agencies concluded that the men employed by these agencies were "of the lowest kind, hoboes,

thugs, ex-convicts, gunmen," and, despite this fact, they were able to "bend the local authorities to their will," becoming essentially the "entire law and order force themselves" (McGovern 86).

[26] As far as I can tell from the histories of the struggle, Sinclair is taking artistic license by suggesting that the Baldwin-Felts men came from all over the globe – although the strikers, with good reason, suspected that the gunmen who ended up being hired from the ranks of the mine guards to wear the uniform of the National Guard were the lowest kind of criminals from all over the *country*: "the *scum of the earth*, barrel house bums, professional killers from *every part of the country* who think nothing of human life" (Long 29, emphases mine). Also relevant is that, as strikebreaking became an actual, profitable business, one prominent agency at the turn of the 20th century recognized the efficiency of "broke" ex-soldiers returning from campaigns of the Spanish American War fought in the Philippines (Norwood 61).

[27] When the strike has begun, the metaphor is expanded to describe both large bodies of human masses and the language they use: a "human flood" (96) flows into the strike zone; in the rain that made the beginning of the strike particularly difficult, "water and mud and strikers pou[r] out of the canyons in one turbid flood"; in a meeting of the strikers, Sinclair describes an "ocean of human sound" (98); and when strikers are prevented from retrieving their belongings from the homes they have been evicted from for the crime of striking, "floods of coal-camp English pou[r] out – rage, denunciation, despair!" (109).

[28] This description effects a conflation between the Babel myth and the Ark myth. While in the Ark myth, creatures "went in[,] two and two… into the ark" (7.9), the procession "one by one" self-consciously contrasts to the motif of "pair"-ing Sinclair will soon allude to, emphasizing the fact that the laborer's conditions are very much the same, even in their individuality.

[29] McGovern dismisses the claim flat-out as total nonsense (137). The other historical accounts cited in this chapter amply demonstrate the appalling conditions that the miners were attempting to improve by confronting – consciously knowing they were doing so at great risk – the powers of concentrated Capital.

[30]Andrews portrays the same scene in his historical account of the strike, during which three practical miners (not union representatives) meet with three coal company executives: "'You understand gentleman,' Allison stammered, 'that we are just simple miners. We are bit a bit [sic] awkward and we have not got the same expression and we would like a little consideration on account of that" (261).

[31] See Martelle 62, 98; Andrews 235; Long 267.

[32] See Long 270, 278; McGovern 122.

[33] See Long 279, 281-282; McGovern 138, 141.

[34] See McGovern 142; Long 283.

[35] Another was that they "wanted the Governor to order out the militia" because, among other reasons, the "cost of paying and feeding the guards and deputies amounted to something like ten thousand dollars a day; and this expense the operators wished to put off on the state" (118) (which, historically, they were able to accomplish).

[36] Andrews discusses the ways in which the operators utilized the channels of information dissemination of local newspapers to color local public opinion (244).

[37] There are plenty of other examples, and ultimately, what it boils down to, not surprisingly, is that in this "struggle going on for the sympathy of the public," the forces of capital can "publish whatever they pleas[e] in the papers, not merely their arguments, but their news; they ha[ve] unlimited funds to be used in propaganda, public and private" (*The Coal War* 165).

[38] Sinclair's non-fiction examination of the ways in which "the path to honor and success in the arts [in Western Civilization] has been through the service and glorification of the ruling classes" (7).

[39] The comparison to "poison gas" is significant also because of the historical context of the recent Great War, which seemed to many class-conscious laborers as simply a war for empire and profits fought by laborers – one country's laborers against the other country's. In addition to the relevance of poison gas being a new type of warfare, Sinclair is also interested in comparing this conflict with the broader conflict when he mentions the "preparedness" movement that began as the US government was taking tremendous propaganda efforts to turn what was a pacifist country when the war broke out into pro-war zealots – an interesting anachronism, as "preparedness" as a movement did not begin until after the events that Sinclair is portraying took place.

[40] This is one of several unsettling aspects of Hal's relationship to Mary, in which Hal feels *he* should fight for workers whilst protecting Mary from the hazards of industrial warfare, against her better judgment. Once again, it is difficult to determine how much of this is Sinclair's critique of Hal, Sinclair's own sexism, or some combination.

[41] It is noteworthy that the many with economic and social influence at the time, through correspondences and other writings, revealed that they considered their wealth and prestige to be divinely-ordained – including Rockefeller and many of those writing propaganda for the NAM – or considered the struggle between labor and capital as taking place on a quasi-apocalyptic plane of good vs. evil.
[42] See also Martell 151, McGovern 166.
[43] See Ewen 60, 78-81; Marchand 98, 109, 115; Olasky 4-5; Tedlow 36-37.

Chapter 2:

An Unclean Spirit in Gastonia

Strike!, Mary Heaton Vorse's novel of the Loray Mill Strike at Gastonia, North Carolina, in 1929, portrays the conflict between Capital and Labor through a religious frame. In the novel, the powers behind Capital employ a religious motif to demonize organized labor and to celebrate the power wielded by individuals over their perceived inferiors to create profits. Vorse counteracts this by emphasizing the overwhelming – in a sense, God-like – power of Capital to influence public opinion. She frames this demonization of Labor as an "unclean," "contagious" spirit that manifests itself in a "violent certainty" akin to religious faith, reclaiming the Christian religious motif to embrace the message of compassion and mutualism promoted in the Gospels.

Proponents of the will of Capital in the form of textile mill owners and managers perceive their own social role in terms of their paternalistic, God-like ability to have created the opportunities and conditions for society to flourish. (This, despite the fact that those who toil to create society's wealth are generally impoverished.) Those who support this economic structure perceive the strike as a manifestation of the arrival of Anti-Christ. The strikers, on the other hand, perceive their participation in this battle through an understanding of the world in which their leadership represents to them "David defying the Goliath of the mills" (108), in which the Union offers them a Messianic vision. Roger Hewlett, the Northern labor journalist from whose perspective the novel is primarily presented, begins to adopt this view, perceiving his obligation to the public in a religious context. The result is that the novel begins to present this modern industrial conflict, perceived by its combatants as "civil war" (20),[1] through a language and picture of the world evocative of the Gospels. While there is much physical violence in the novel, primarily against unarmed strikers, the most effective weapons of Capital are waged on an

economic front: it is largely a "'war on old women an' kids…'" (60) in which an observer is likely to see people with physical complexions "by which in wartime one recognizes prisoners" (47).Vorse portrays a) the conscious abandonment by the wealthy and privileged of an interpretation of the Christian ethic as rooted in fraternal mutuality, and b) their commitment to eliminating any social movement that would foster such attitudes and sentiments among the poor and dispossessed. *Strike!* explores the ways (rooted very much in real life) [2] in which Capital and its apostles accomplish this objective through creating a structure of belief among politically influential segments of the public that Unionism presents an existential threat to their existence. This it does largely through campaigns of hysteria-building, incitements to vigilante violence, and disinformation on an ideological front, backed by Capital's "great machine of wealth" (235) and its overwhelming influence upon social institutions.

Business and Religion in the Public Mind

Before the Gastonia strike, there had been a historical tradition of the conflation of business and religion in print media in the region. In *Millhands & Preachers: A Study of Gastonia*, historian of the Gastonia strike Liston Pope notes that, from the mid-19th century, there had been praise of "the new industrialists as redeemers of a people and a region" by ministers and "religious publications" (21) among textile towns in the area. Pope shows that both "religious periodicals" (such as the *North Carolina Christian Advocate* and the *Raleigh Christian Advocate*) and the business press (such as the *Southern Textile Bulletin* and *Textile World*) in the late 19th to early 20th century associated the growth of business power and prestige with religious faith, the Christian character of mill managers, and the divine blessing or power of the Almighty (22-25). (In one case, a preacher published an article in a business journal in 1927 likening the success of

local businessmen as akin to being "'prophets of God,'" their work being "'God's way for the development of a forsaken people'" [25].) Industrialists of the region and their supporters frequently described the industry in religious terms: "Brochures depicting tiny Southern villages as industrial Edens… were prepared and distributed widely" (14) in the early 1900s. Additionally, when it became clear to Gaston County industrialists that union organization was occurring in the area, industrialists responded with an immediate public opinion campaign that was in part driven by circulars, handbills, and full-page advertisements in the local newspapers stressing, among other features of the strike leadership, their Godlessness and the threat to organized religion they presented (252-254). When the strike broke proper, the employers produced propaganda designed to convince the workers that "'outside agitators'… [we]re after their money, and… [we]re teaching them all sorts of doctrines that r[a]n diametrically contrary to the Christian religion" (278).

It should be noted that this regional association between business power and a divine purpose reflected larger ideological trends that were current across the nation. In *Business and Religion in the American 1920s*, Rolf Lundén points out that, compared to similar societies in Europe, American "business appropriated religious values and became a pseudoreligion" (2-3). In the 1920s, as wages increased generally and as "social injustice was no longer as glaring as it had been" (35), the limited influence of the Social Gospel movement waned (33). Meanwhile, in American society, the influence of business values on Protestant churches – and the influence of religious concepts and terminology on business methods – increased. In general, in the 1920s, Capital "made use of religion to sell their ideals, methods, and occasionally even their products, to the largely unsuspecting American people"; equated Christianity to "individualism and free enterprise" (91); fostered belief that "capitalism not only was the best of the economic systems

but also created by God (105); and used "scriptural authority… in speeches, articles, and books to support specific ideals and methods" favorable to Capital, such as the notion that "God was… against government interference and for free competition" (108). In this regard, in the 1920s in America, "business had assumed a religious dimension": Capital and its advocates saw business "as a spiritual force" (121), leading to a cultural "worship of the 'American Way of Life' and a conviction that America and Americans have been chosen to carry out God's will on earth" (125).

The Novel / Criticism

The novel begins with labor journalist Roger Hewlett arriving to "Stonerton" (Vorse's fill in for Gastonia) to cover the strike. He is immediately horrified by the atmosphere of terror surrounding the Northern organizers, the strikers, and their sympathizers. The local population's "comfortable people" – the term Vorse uses to describe those who support Capital's will and its determination to repress the strikers' efforts to organize – feel that the strike threatens their very existence. Strike leader Fer Dean (based on organizer Fred Beal), however, insists upon pacifism, which the strikers generally abide by despite the misgivings of many of the men. As Roger becomes accustomed to Southern strike conditions, fellow labor journalist Hoskins provides him with comparative and contextual analysis of different labor movements he has covered since the Lawrence Strike in 1912. (Dee Garrison points out that Roger and Hoskins "represent Vorse in various stages of her life" [237], Roger representing a novice's journalistic idealism and Hoskins representing a more hardened journalistic cynicism.)[3] From early in the narrative, Roger finds himself moved emotionally by the strikers' efforts, losing whatever journalistic objectivity he may have had. Rooming with strikers in union-friendly houses, he

becomes increasingly involved throughout the narrative as an activist for their cause.[4] The National Guard appears, comprised mostly of young men who seem to be surprised that they are waging a "'war on old women an' kids'" (60). Nevertheless, violence between them and strikers ensues, mostly unprovoked by strikers – some of them throw rocks – with many unarmed strikers brutalized and arrested. As Fer and Irma Rankin (based on organizer Vera Buch), the other principal strike leader, squabble about tactics, the number of strikers dwindles and the Union struggles to provide resources for those who remain. A masked vigilante group, "The Committee of One Hundred," raids and destroys Union headquarters in the night, ransacking the Union food supply. Soon after, the National Guard appears, only to arrest the strikers on the pretext that they destroyed their own headquarters. Events like evictions and other setbacks have the effect of strengthening, rather than weakening the remaining strikers' resolve, forging them into a loyal core. However, with each passing week, public opinion among the "comfortable people" becomes more hostile.

In the wake of continuing evictions, the Union sets up a tent colony, providing the strikers with a brief refuge. The local police chief and deputized officers, some of whom are drunk, raid the tent colony; the strikers defend themselves, and when shots are exchanged, the police chief is struck fatally. A reign of terror ensues, with mobs destroying the tent colony and sending families into the woods to hide, where they are pursued by bloodthirsty crowds. The "comfortable people" interpret the police chief's death as evidence that the Union has intended all along to overthrow government in North Carolina, and Fer and other strike leaders are put on trial for murder. The proceedings result in a mistrial. Mob violence ensues once again, and vigilantes, deprived of their opportunity to see the defendants executed, break into Union sympathizers' houses, abducting and flogging organizers, destroying the new Union

headquarters, and committing other outrages that go unpunished. A mob stops a truck on its way to a Union meeting, opening fire upon the passengers and killing strike balladeer Mamie Lewes (based on Ella May Wiggins). When Fer is let out on bail, he plans, against the protests of Roger and other strikers, to attend another walkout. When a scuffle breaks out at the walkout, deputies shoot demonstrators, some in the back as they flee, and Fer is killed instantly, others succumbing to their wounds later. After austere funerals, Roger and other strikers discuss further plans for organization of the South.

As Sylvia Jenkins Cook points out, the novel "adheres closely to the events" of the Loray Mill strike, aside from the "fictional massacre" that concludes the novel, which is "based on events at Marion, North Carolina": the novel "appeared so precipitately in 1930 that it outran the actual Gastonia incidents on which it was based" (93).[5] All of the major characters are based on actual participants, with some characters acting as composites (e.g., Roger and Hoskins). It should also be pointed out, however, that while most of the major strike and court events are portrayed with detailed similitude to how they occurred in real life,[6] there are noteworthy aspects that Vorse does not include, some presumably for propagandistic purposes.[7] For example, while the novel portrays Fer (Fred Beal) and Irma (Vera Buch) arguing over tactics, the novel does not give any sense of the fact that Fred Beal, a former organizer for the IWW who Vera Buch later wrote "had the anarcho-syndicalist's distrust of all leaders" (188), opposed many of the Communist Party Leadership's directives, which eventually came to promote international revolutionary aims. (Beal intended to accomplish moderate trade-union objectives.) Overall, in fact, the novel does not hint toward the fact that the CP leadership was frequently at odds with its local representatives.[8] Vorse's disillusionment with the Communist Party USA, which was under the close scrutiny of Stalin, may account for this type of selective portrayal (Garrison 234).

Criticism on *Strike!* takes several approaches. The novel's relationship to the proletarian novel of the 1930s is often discussed, particularly as the novel fits into Walter Rideout's classification of the "strike novel" in his influential *The Radical Novel in the United States* and into sub- genres such as the "conversion theme" (174).[9] Critics explore the relationship between ideology and narrative in the novel,[10] including the fact that, according to Sylvia Jenkins Cook, "the novel is heroless, or rather it has as multiple hero the entire body of strikers" (94). Related issues are the novel's realism / the degree to which it is a realistic portrayal of the strike,[11] as well as the novel's relationship to journalism and literature,[12] as Vorse was a first-hand witness in her role as labor-journalist to some of the events she portrays, covering the strike for *Harper's*. Vorse biographer Dee Garrison argues that, in Vorse's "decision to reveal the growth of her philosophy through two male characters… she realized that speaking though a male reporter would legitimize her views in a way that a woman character would not" (237).

Criticism on *Strike!* commonly amalgamates it with the other five "Gastonia novels."[13] More often than not, this multi-text criticism is aligned with the four novels of the six that were penned by women. The novel's relationship to portrayals of femininity and maternity, particularly in relation to radical / radicalized politics, is an important theme, in a variety of manifestations. Suzanne Sowinska's "Writing across the Color Line: White Women Writers and the 'Negro Question' in the Gastonia Novels" examines, uniquely in the extant criticism, the phenomenon of "Women writers [of the Gastonia novels] [being] at the forefront of demonstrating that literary texts could be successfully used to combine important discussions of race with… class analysis." Importantly, however, "*Strike!*… is more concerned with addressing issues of gender and class oppression than in answering questions of racial equality," despite the fact that "Vorse based two of the main characters in her novel [Irma Rankin and Mamie Lewes]

on women [Vera Buch and Ella May Wiggins, respectively] who were crucially involved in organizing black workers during the Gastonia strike" (124). (Ella May Wiggins, in Buch's opinion, was assassinated due to the fact that she was trying to organize Black workers at one of the few mills in the region that employed Black millhands.)[14] Vorse alone of the "women Gastonia writers" nearly elides "the race agenda of the union movement" (124-125).[15] Vorse portrays racism, but ignores the racism of the strikers: "Racism thus becomes anti-unionism; a hunt for 'niggers' becomes a hunt for 'strike leaders'…. That the terms for unity within the structure of the union might be threatened by inequalities measured along race lines is not a question she takes into consideration" (Sowinska 125). Like eliding the various fragmentations among organized labor, the decision to avoid the racial oppression perpetrated by the millhands themselves would seem to stem from the propagandistic purpose of the novel: to portray Labor's cause as inspirationally as possible without portraying a sense of responsibility for the social harm caused by policies driven by the bigotry and self-interest of the workers themselves.

The role of Vorse's portrayal of Ella May Wiggins (Mamie Lewes) in her role as assassinated activist-balladeer also runs through criticism on *Strike!*.[16] Critics also examine Vorse's portrayal of the "feminist cause of poor white women" (Cook 57), including the fact that much of the responsibility of the picketing (and the brunt of the violent repression) was taken up by women and children, in large part due to the fact that many of the men were unwilling to picket without being armed.[17] Women were often similarly overburdened by the fact that they were fulfilling multiple duties, insofar as they were performing industrial labor at the mills and domestic labor at home.[18] On the other hand, those men who were willing to picket unarmed resented the leadership roles granted to women. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the Communist Party leadership, which trumpeted its theoretical ideals of racial and gender

equality, in practice demonstrated sexist chauvinism[19] felt bitterly by organizers such as Vera Buch.[20]

Bearing Witness: Labor Organization and Religion

The extant criticism lacks a serious, in-depth analysis of Vorse's portrayal of the tactics of Capital and the attitudes, ideas, and beliefs that it propagates and fosters in the public within its sphere of influence. As a result, my approach to the novel examines more closely an aspect that is mentioned in the criticism but not provided any sustained exploration. Both Cook and Garrison point out that the novel is presented from a Northern journalistic perspective: Garrison points out the journalistic perspective to emphasize Hoskins's knowledgeability of the labor movement, and Cook points out the same, curiously, to suggest that his perspective "record[s] and synthesize[s] the seemingly random and capricious moods and movements of the strikers"[21] (an assessment that ignores Roger's being inspired by the strikers' development of a sense of solidarity, fortitude, and mutual affection). However, none of the criticism addresses how a journalistic perspective *specifically* affects the narrative. That is, *Strike!* is a novel that features newspapers inciting violence and journalists "writ[ing] their stories from their various points of view" (28). As such, it is a novel about perspectives and biases as they are disseminated through print culture and other hegemonizing channels and how these perspectives become part of a cultural consciousness. Through Roger's perspective, *Strike!* becomes a novel about the possibilities for combatting the exploitation of mob mentality in the ideological press.

My approach differs in particular from Cook's, which, because it examines the novel's radicalism in relation to "the long established literary personality" of the "poor white," tends to focus on the "peculiar attitudes" of the strikers.[22] Specifically, I would refute Cook's analysis of

the strikers' religious sensibility. She associates this sensibility with "His [the poor white's] propensity for the irrational" (*Tobacco* 87) and examines it more from the perspective of the Communist Party than from the perspective of the workers whom the Party was supposed to be representing. Cook suggests that Vorse portrays the strikers' religious sensibilities with "ironic detachment" ("Gastonia" 62-63) – an unsupportable position in my view, in part because the novel critiques exactly the type of political dogmatism that automatically considers religion antithetical to social struggle. Cook considers the strikers' tendency to "see the union not as a rational means of organizing but as something mystical, more akin to religion, a power that exists independently of them" and their holding "meetings patterned on the revivalist practice of testimonials, where mass enthusiasm is whipped up by personal accounts of dramatic conversions" as "mental attitudes that portend trouble from the beginning *for the northerners*" (*Tobacco* 95, my emphases). While it is true that Vorse portrays crucial weaknesses in the way the strikers engage in the strike – primarily because they have little to no experience and tradition compared to Northern strikers – one problem with this line of reasoning is that Cook fails to mention that Vorse makes it clear, from close to the beginning of the novel, that there has been a connection between the religious feelings of the strikers and their ability to create leadership, to congregate as a group. When asked how the strike began, Fer answers that "'what they don't understand either here or in the North is that the folks down here have been organizing themselves. There've been spontaneous strikes in four or five different states… Two fellers, Wes Elliott and *Dan Marks*, came over to where I was in Rockhill, so I came over here'" (12, my emphasis). It is important to keep in mind that, were it not for the millhands' initiation of what the novel accurately portrays[23] as a "'spontaneous uprising,'" the strike wave (including the Loray Mill strike at Gastonia) would never have occurred in the first place. Furthermore, later in

the novel, at a meeting from which Fer is conspicuously absent, it is *Dan Marks*, realizing that "'we'd best begin this yere meetin,'" who enlists Max Harris to help begin: "They had none of the indirection which assails some crowds of workers when they have no leadership. The two men who had organized the workers in the beginning[24] could carry on meetings and picket lines" (52). The importance of the religious sensibilities of the strikers to their understanding of the stakes of the strike becomes clear when Dan tells the awaiting strikers that "'we cain't begin enny better than to let Brother Williams lead us in prayer.'" Brother Williams, putting his "arms out in the form of a cross," preaches:

> "*Oh*, how these people have suffered, Lord! / "*Oh*, Lord hear them in their struggle! / "*Oh*, Lord, *oh*, soften the hearts of their employers! / …"*Oh*, I come from the mountains where folks is free to breathe God's free air! / "*Oh*, I seen women and little, little children aworkin' in the mills whar they wasn't meant to! / "*Oh*, the Lord sent the children of Israel out of bondage! / "*Oh*, the Lord softened Pharaoh's heart! / "*Oh*, ain't Basil Schenk's heart goin' to be softened?" (52, original italics)

Williams's prayer frames the strikers' "suffer[ing]" and "struggle" through multiple religious angles: it frames contemporary corporate tyranny with an analogy to Pharaoh and the first major Biblical event concerning mass economic / labor exploitation (and subsequent liberation of the Israelites); it appeals to a theological perspective in which the earth's resources are God's gift to all mankind (not something to be privatized); and it references Christ's concern for "little children." The result is that "The prayer had knit them together and focused their emotion into a flame" (52). Directly after this prayer, Dan Marks introduces Mamie Lewes, "a sister that's made up song-ballits" (52). As Mamie sings, the strikers "liste[n]… with moist eyes. It was their own story put in incredibly simple terms. Every one had lived through this… it was the history of every one there put into song" (53). The effect of the meeting overall is that "Something alive and quick emanated from them. They felt a sense of companionship and power. The crowd had

its own powerful vitality" (53). The effect of the association that Vorse creates here between the strikers' struggles, their religious traditions, and Mamie Lewes's traditional ballads hardly amount to "ironic detachment." Furthermore, it demonstrates the ways in which religion can potentially provide a collective identity against an individualistic, capitalistic mentality.

My effort to make these points certainly does not stem from any sense of any religious chauvinism. It is also important to mention, as Cook and others point out, that religious doctrine was used by "clergymen whose salaries [were] supplemented by mill funds" to implore "docility" among the millhands ("Gastonia" 62), and was used by spokesmen for Capital in the broader nation-wide industrial struggle mentioned above.[25] However, I feel it is necessary to keep in mind that, while the relationship between organized religion and Labor is complex, and that Capital has throughout the history of the American labor struggle done its best to usurp Christianity for its cause, [26] the American labor movement has from its inception often understood the stakes of its struggle through a religious lens. It's not difficult to discern why if one has even a cursory knowledge of what Jesus has to say about wealth in the Gospels. From the radical left to the middle-class Social Gospel movement, those who have sought to challenge the power of organized, concentrated Capital have a long history of utilizing religious conceptions and language to fight their various battles. Some examples include the notion that Jesus was the son of a carpenter (or sometimes himself a carpenter), a "common mechanic," an "evicted peasant"; a proponent of the poor who condemned the injustice of the wealthy and whose insistence upon "suffer[ing] little children to come unto me" did not translate into sanctioning child labor in factories; an agitator who chose his disciples from proletarian fisherman and a revolutionary leader who was executed for "disturbing the national order of things," the cause of which was "Brotherhood."[27] Other Biblical concepts informing labor's

cause is the fact that God was Himself an artisan creator of the earth, who gave the earth to *all* men (Gutman 92, 98); Moses and Aaron were "Walking Delegates" (94); that the new rulers of Capital are "Pharaoh's descendants" (100); that wealth inequality is the result of the "elevation of a false God" (93).

The Biblical Stakes of Creating Commerce

The rhetoric of Capital pervades *Strike!* in speeches, headlines, conversations about articles and editorials, and so forth. Vorse's rendition of the industrialists' account of how the prosperity of the Piedmont region came about indicates how they conceive their social role religiously. Because "the way the Northern press had handled the situation" after the strike became national news "had not pleased the South[, it] was felt that an education was needed" for Northern journalists. When the local Chamber of Commerce "giv[es] a luncheon to the newspaper men to meet the prominent business men and to familiarize them with the problems which confronted them," a "professional booster" presents his optimistic assessment of the industrial conflict (76). He promotes the "'new buildings everywhere… showing that millions are made and spent'"; points out the "'impetus to our industries'" provided by the Great War and the fact that industrialists had "'never let it die'"; touts the fact that Stonerton is "'the garden spot of the world… [with] natural advantages… unparalleled'" in the country and is "the choicest center of the textile industry" (77). The language used conflates creation with industrial entrepreneurship, eternal life, an Edenic garden. Vorse drives the provocative, Edenic language home by describing the next speaker, Mr. Jameson, as "a man who looks upon the world as a good place" (77). Vorse is here referencing Genesis 1, in which the phrase "saw that it was good" (or some variation thereof) is used seven times to describe God's reaction to his creations as he creates

them.[28] After Jameson is done speaking, in the next scene, Roger visits a nearby mill town, Hastings. “Mr. Hastings” (80) gives misleading and evasive answers to Roger’s questions, essentially demonstrating a perspective in which the operations of the mill are presented as philanthropic to the community (80), but in which it is assumed that the workers need to be protected paternally from their own childish weaknesses (81). Roger, meanwhile, reflects over the “the pride of [those][29] who had actually created a town where there had been nothing” (81) – another evocation of Genesis. Incidentally, as historian Liston Pope points out, the industrialists of the region and their supporters frequently described the industry in religious terms, analogizing, for example, mill business to the work of the Apostle Paul (16) and suggesting that “the industrial awakening in the South was in a sense a religious movement” (17). Pope observes that these religious connotations were often made along class lines, insofar as business leaders perceived mill hands as their inferiors in their utilization of industrial paternalism to increase levels of production (18-19).

The Biblical rhetoric is not merely a local phenomenon of the hyper-religious South. One scene in particular captures the above-mentioned emerging ethos of corporate public relations that had been becoming influential nation-wide: Vorse depicts a speech, put on at “large expense by the Chamber of Commerce” by “Heart Beats” Jellico, a speaker from the North, the topic of which is “‘What Is Americanism?’” – a scene based on an actual speech given by Joe Mitchell Chapple on “the glories of individualism” given April 26, 1929 (Weisbord 203-204). After strikers have “politely and timidly” requested and been denied a chance to speak (Vorse 21), Jellico speaks about “brotherly love,” and, in his nationalistic rhetoric about American supremacy compared to the nations of Europe, “invit[es]” the Union “to consider the flowers of the States and how they grew.” This is a paraphrase of Luke 12.27, “Consider the lilies how they

grow: they toil [work] not, they spin [weave] not"[30], a reference that surely means something different than was intended to the overtoiled textile workers, some of them weavers themselves. The context of the passage is complex. Jesus makes an analogy about natural phenomena in relation to the importance of having faith in God's ability to provide for humanity in its time of need (12.31). Just like birds do not need to labor to eat (12.24), nor do the flowers need to labor to grow (12.27), God provides for those who maintain faith (12.31). At first glance, this would seem to be the perfect message to deliver to impoverished, overworked textile workers: simply have faith, and God will provide. However, the end of the passage puts a different spin on Christ's message: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms" (12.32-33). Having faith, in this context, does not mean delivering oneself to the vagaries of divine will in the hopes that one's family will not starve to death. Rather, the entire point of the sermon is to promote the idea of abandoning one's connections to material possessions in order to share with those in need. God will reward mutual sharing – will reward an ethos directly contrary to "individualism."

The point of Jellico's speech is to rally everyone to "ban[d] together against unionism, socialism, communism, anarchy. For in the minds of the important people assembled there beside Jellico, all these things were synonymous" (22). The notion that any economic system contrary to one that promotes the "glories of individualism" is the same as any other – that is, equally intolerable – has been pervasive enough historically in mainstream American consciousness for attendees of this speech to miss the irony that the rallying cry is for "important people" to *band together*, to *unite* against *unionism*. As per usual, mutualism and combination are fine for the "important people" and them *only*. The overall effect of this speech upon the strikers is confusion, restlessness, disappointment – primarily, it seems, because all attendees

were expecting an "attack" on "the Union." How does one reconcile "brotherly love" with "banding *together against*"? The strikers of Stonerton are learning what other activist workers in other parts of the country have known for quite some time: "brotherly love" from the perspective of those who have designated themselves the architects and protectors of society essentially translates into banding together to stave off any disharmony that might impede capital growth and profits.

Strikers and Mutualism: "Ballits," Songs, and Psalms

Immediately after "Heart Beats" is done speaking, Hoskins (who, as Garrison points out, is based in part on Vorse herself) chastises Irma[31]:

> "Well… you'd best have listened to Fer. What happened to the ex-service men and their demonstration? What you needed was a bunch of mothers and children with Mamie Lewes to sing one of her song ballads" / "The workers shouldn't be pathetic," she said dogmatically. "They should be militant!" / "We haven't been anything," said Fer in his matter-of-fact way. "We've just been a goose-egg, Irma." His reasonableness and absence of fanaticism was one of the reasons why Irma didn't consider him a leader. (22)

This exchange brings to light several tensions within the strike: the tension between Hoskins's analysis of the strike as a reporter trying to instruct organizers about leadership; the tension between Irma's dogmatic Communist ideas about how to demonstrate worker militancy (as a staunch Communist / atheist, she does not approve of "hymns" [116]); the tension between Fer's and Irma's ideas about how the strike should be run. While several critics correctly mention either Mamie Lewes's prominent role as a strike balladeer or Irma's strength as an organizer, none has pointed out Irma's hostility to Mamie Lewes's approach to activism. Irma's role in the novel is complicated insofar as her analytical contention that singing a ballad is "'pathetic'" rather than "'militant'" demonstrates her "dogmatically" narrow viewpoint: she is entirely

unaware of the social importance of the "ballads" that later in the novel end up being used as rallying cries in the face of brutality.[32] In fact, not long after the exchange between Hoskins and Irma mentioned above, Roger notices "an atmosphere of affection" among the strikers in which there is "rea[l] car[e] for one another," in which "kinship mean[s] something," in which even in their poverty they feel that "at least they ha[ve] each other." After Roger and Fer eat with the strikers, "one of the boys brought out a fiddle. They started singing spirituals. They never sang popular music. They sang their own mountain ballads and hymns" (30). If, for the strikers who have befriended Roger, song is related to traditions reflecting mutualism and affection, when Capital sings "beautiful songs" it is to celebrate "'the country's wealth'" in the form of wealthy families' children in pageants put on by schools that mill children are too poor to attend (98); or, to metaphorically describe the way in which the mills publicize that "'they got workers enough'" in spite of the fact that "'Over eighty per cent'" have walked out. Fer clarifies to a striker that "'They always say that. That's their regular song. What they mean… is they could get scabs enough – if we'd let 'em come in'" (34). Vorse here associates Capital's song with the social message Capital would like to spread: praising the superiority of the wealthy and privileged and announcing to the strikers that their mutual struggle is futile in the face of superior resources, in order to *counter* the type of solidarity that Mamie's "ballits"[33] are meant to inspire.

The relationship between song, hymn, and "ballit" becomes more Biblically-centered in the novel as Vorse establishes a connection between the *song* and the *psalm*. At a Union fund-raising barbecue for the defense team (163) for those charged with the murder of Police Chief Humphries (based on Police Chief Aderholt), local organizer Dewey Bryson obsesses over the imprisoned strikers and the fact that if "they were convicted, they would burn in the electric chair. The thought of that *shadowed* everything else" (164, my emphasis). As he overhears some

other strikers discuss the "'lights… go[ing] dim in the death house,'"[34] he feels like the entire field of strikers is in "the shadow of the death house" (165). When he sees Mamie Lewes, the phrase "shadow of the death house" is repeated when he decides to muster up the courage to speak with her: "Usually he was shy with women… the shadow of the death house had killed his self-consciousness" (165-166). After they each discuss the effect the Union has had on them personally – Dewey never engaged in public speaking before, and "'The songs… just seem to come'" to Mamie "'now since the Union come'" – they feel a common "contact" and "passion" (166). She excuses herself from Dewey to go sing for the crowd. As she does, "The words s[ink] comfortingly into [his] heart… as if the long shadow of the death house was dimmer…. He fe[els] the bulwark that the Union was against the death of their leaders" (167). These passages, in which Dewey's fear of the "shadow of the death house" is placated by the "comfor[t]" he feels in her song and through the "bulwark of the Union," have unmistakable resonances with Psalm 23, a psalm of "individual lament" and "confidence" [35] which has become "the best known of all Psalms" (Day 12, 28, 53), particularly verses 4-5: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies…" (23.4-5, original emphasis). Confidence in the Union is substituted for confidence in God's protection as Dewey experiences these intense emotions at an event in which the Union hath "preparest a table before [him] in the presence of [his] enemies" in the form of a fund-raising barbeque. Mamie Lewes's songs "had brought them together… no longer [were they] individuals," making them "powerful," which for him is "A miracle" (168).

Fer as Christ and/or Anti-Christ

As the Stonerton strikers are particularly apt to understand their mutual struggle in a religious context, so are they apt to conceptualize the strike leadership that has been sent "down from the North" (223) in a similar context. The first few pages of the novel firmly establish the religious timbre of Vorse's portrayal of strike leader Fer Dean's leadership. Once Roger has arrived to Stonerton, when young striker Henry Tetherow points out Fer to him, "[t]he two words which he had dropped, 'That's Fer,' g[ive] Roger a measure of the boy's adoration. He could not have said '*That's God!*' with a more earnest simplicity of worship" (3, original emphasis). The fact that Fer refers to his talk as "'my sermon'" and concludes it by reminding them pacifistically, "'I don't want no violence. Let the violence come from them, not us'" (4) reinforces the religious connotations Vorse has established. So does Roger's feeling as he watches Fer's effect on the strikers that he is "*witnessing* a happening of importance" (3, my emphasis). Throughout the remainder of the narrative, there are several aspects of the text that suggest an association between Fer and Christ, some more explicit than others, particularly among the strikers. At one point, he is described as "the core of the strike," surrounded by a "dozen men and women" clearly framed as apostles, who constitute "the striker's center of obstinate resistance… the people who were dedicated to Unionism. For them it was a religion for which any sacrifice was to be made" (145). Immediately before he is shot and martyred, his followers make his "name fil[l] the heavens" (216). He is often followed around by "crowds" ("multitudes" in the King James version of the Gospels).[36] At one moment, when in prison, as "boys crow[d] around" him when Roger goes to meet him, "The boys ha[ve] a spiritual look, almost like young members of an order (197).

However, while most of the force of the analogy of Vorse's portrayal of Fer as a Christ

figure lies in the emotional reaction of the strikers, portions of the narrative channeled through Roger's perspective also reflect religious implications of Fer's involvement in the Stonerton struggle. After Fer is murdered, Roger concludes that "coming down from the North Fer had known" that he would be killed. And yet, "He had gone on patiently on all the long path which led directly to this," getting "no exultation, no feeling of a martyr's crown. Being killed with him was part of the day's work. You got killed if you had to" (223). Roger conceptualizes Fer in a religious context in a particularly potent moment soon after Roger arrives to Stonerton and witnesses firsthand the spirit of terror, intimidation, and the "threat of violence" (11) personified that the strike has stirred up. Roger chats with Fer, Irma, and a few strikers, and as they talk, Fer begins to "sp[eak] rapidly and eagerly, and with an enthusiasm that made one understand why the little Tetherow boys addressed him as though he were God" when Roger first arrived in town. What Fer has to say further emphasizes the religious motif: "'The movement seems dead and you think that there's nothing doing. Then all of a sudden it's alive again. It's never dead'" (12). Fer's analysis of the labor movement – that one must track its progression in cycles of ascension and descent – takes on the language of resurrection and immortality. Furthermore, it suggests that the *spirit* of the movement, rather than Fer as an individual, is ultimately the Christ figure in the novel: the strikers shower Fer with adoration, but he is, after all, simply all-to-human, riddled with weakness. Other characters come to be portrayed in a similarly religious light, including Mamie Lewes and Dewey.[37]

Aside from the first paragraph-long section, the first chapter of the novel is presented from Roger's perspective. When he arrives into Stonerton, he sees the strikers' "parade" they "were holding in honor of [Fer's] return" (2). The chapter contains parallels to Luke's account of the celebration of Jesus's entry into Jerusalem, during which "the whole multitude of the

disciples beg[in] to rejoice… for all the mighty works that they had seen" (19.37).[38] Jesus is commanded by "some of the Pharisees" to "rebuke [his] disciples," to silence them by making them "hold their peace." In Fer's case, as Hoskins points out, it's not specifically Fer and the other organizers that the citizens are afraid of: "'it's what's behind them they're scared of'" (16). Christ's "answe[r] unto" those who tell him to "rebuke [his disciples]" is that, "if these should hold their peace" – if his *disciples* should be silent – "the *stones* [of the buildings of the city] would immediately *cry out*" (39-40, my emphases).[39] As Roger drives to the "mill village," he notices that, "At the start the houses all had lawns… the street was lined with wooden shacks and *mean brick* stores, which *cried aloud* that here people bought but little" (4, my emphasis). The stones that Jesus suggests would "cry out" if his followers were to "hold their peace" have, in Vorse's treatment, their analogues in the bricks from the "mean brick stores, which cr[y] aloud" the poverty and desperation of those who inhabit them. Vorse carries the allusion further: after Roger has been in town for a few days, he has witnessed enough to become "mad" (26) at the injustice the strikers are suffering. He "decide[s] to rest by driving around and diverting himself with a look at things [to] see what sort of *story* the *stones and bricks* would have to tell him" (32, my emphases), echoing the moment that he notices that the "brick stores" were "cr[ying] aloud". Immediately before this passage, Roger is contemplating "the question of Fer. Roger saw one person, and Irma saw another. Fer appeared as the very anti-Christ to the Parkers [some of the 'comfortable people' Roger has met with] and as a Messiah to the workers…. Actually this burdened anxious boy was all these many different things" (32). The placement of this provocative language evoking Jesus's "stone" metaphor alongside Roger's own perception of the quasi-religious stakes at play in this struggle, in conjunction with his understanding how groups and/or individuals allegorize Fer, suggest that the novel's religious tone is coming from Roger's

consciousness and perspective. The explicit association Roger makes of Fer as Messiah, which is essential to his contemplation of the dynamics of the strike, is similarly essential to understanding "the story the stones and bricks" will tell, as well as the ways in which the story of the novel unfolds. The narrative, as it goes on to tell the "story the stones and bricks would have to tell him," adopts free indirect discourse: "They never lie to you. They will, if you let them, tell you all the aspirations of the people. They will name their rulers and their gods and tell you of their defeats and victories. The story was this" (32). This sentence is followed by a paragraph break: "the story" that follows is *not* a story that Roger could possibly have gathered simply by taking "a look at things" in the city. It is a story that an investigative journalist would construct after doing research – and doing research from a very specific point of view, primarily a progressive / leftist economic interpretation in which a "cotton mill boom" created conditions by which the wealth created by the inhabitants of "Old Town" Stonerton had enabled "the new town of Stonerton [to] rea[r] its head." New Stonerton seemed "as though… a different world" with the modern planning of its streets, "modern shops," "fine new public buildings." What he sees touring these cities is unignorable evidence of a chasm of class inequality between the residents of New Stonerton, who enjoyed "this prosperity, and the workers who had made possible this prosperity" (33). Ultimately, this "story" of class inequality, told by stones and bricks, and all of the hatred and fear, solidarity and enthusiasm resulting from this inequality are central to the story that Vorse is crafting in this novel, largely through Roger's consciousness.

Roger as Convert

John M. Reilly points out that "the Gastonia novelists faced not only the problem of ideology in their own imagination; they faced also a problem of epistemology in portraying characters and

communicating to readers" (505). Reilly, along with other critics, points out the importance of the development of Roger's sense of justice and class-consciousness throughout the narrative, and cites Walter Rideout's inclusion of *Strike!* in his analysis of the novel's "conversion theme" (506). However, Reilly fails to mention that, as a labor journalist, Roger Hewlett *as a character* "face[s] a problem of epistemology in portraying characters and communicating to readers" what he is witnessing. When Roger first arrives in Stonerton on "assignment to do an article about the… strike," it is with a "spirit of adventure" (3). However, he quickly comprehends the severity of the stakes and the danger of the anonymous reactionary terror for the strikers and the strike leadership. Overwhelmed by his experiences and the historical analysis of Hoskins, who gives his opinions about the strike that evening, Roger decides to seek comfort in the company of "the Parkers," a family he knows. The Parkers are wealthy enough to "spen[d] their summers in Maine, where Roger's family went." On the way to their house, he is reflective: "How was he going to write his article? How was he going to give other people the impression he had received? How can you tell people who have never seen a strike what it means to the people who are striking? How can one indicate in the space of a few pages what makes people strike? How are you going to make other people feel terror?" (17). Given the opportunity to process everything he has experienced, including the open, public persecution of Fer, the weight of his responsibility as a journalist begins to sink in while he experiences the relative luxury of tree-lined streets and gardens. The idealism of what he feels is his journalistic responsibility is reflected in the terms of his thoughts: he has "received" in his "impression" a sort of "gi[ft]" to be passed to "other people." And yet, part of the complexity of forging this intellectual "gi[ft]" requires communicating both "terror" and the "mean[ing]" of a strike for those who are willing to endure this terror "to people who have never seen a strike."

What he finds at the Parkers' home immediately after having these thoughts are additional obstacles to what he senses is his professional responsibility. The Parkers – presumably the type of audience Roger would like to influence in his writing – are driven by fear and paranoia that reinforce their confidence in the factuality of misinformation that they have unwavering faith in. The effect is that they develop a "belie[f]" in keeping the peace" through extra-legal violence (19). Furthermore, whilst they lament the "credulity" of the strikers, the Parkers expect Roger, in his role as journalist, to write and distribute the misinformation he recognizes as such in the papers (19). Further complicating matters is that, after leaving the Parkers in horror and disgust, he sees in the lobby of his hotel other newspaper men who give him the impression of a "pack of hunting dogs" (20). Cook's assessment of the novel is that a third-person claim made later in the narrative (168) is its "moral[:] that 'Collectively human beings are at their best or their worst. They climb perilous heights of beauty and sacrifice together. And together they revert to the hunting pack, creatures aslaver for blood…'" (Cook [*Tobacco*] 94). If we grant that this is true, the parallel between this "moral," its conception of the "hunting pack," and Roger's view of his fellow journalists as a "pack of hunting dogs" suggests that Vorse is underscoring the potential for the print press to either exacerbate or ameliorate irrational violence. The potential for human beings to act "collectively" certainly encompasses the phenomenon of newspaper writers influencing the "collectiv[e]" consciousness of the public, which may then influence the public's willingness (or unwillingness) to participate in or provide tacit support to either benevolent sacrifice or cruelty and degradation.

The extremity of the violent sentiments of respectable families such as the Parkers exists in a social context in which public opinion both shapes and is shaped by the ways information is disseminated by the press – the ways in which, as Gastonia Strike historian John Salmond puts it,

the "tone" of the local press "both reflected the spirit of the community and animated it" (76). Dejected, and having experienced all of these aspects of the struggle, Roger goes "to dinner by himself, seeing the world about him whirled into parable" (20). His feelings of alienation after the whirlwind of emotions he has experienced in one day lead him to see the world metaphorically – importantly, in a type of metaphor loaded with religious connotation, specifically in the method of Jesus's teachings in the Gospels. While ultimately he "c[omes] to no conclusion" after considering his experiences parabolically, he reflects that "Hate and Mob were a multiplication of the Parkers" and "their fury" (20). Further, he begins to understand that, given the ways in which the papers work ideologically at both a local and national level, his role as a journalist is less simple than one would expect from a member of the ostensibly objective press. In both his interactions with Hoskins and numerous contemplations after particularly unsettling events, we see his struggle in terms of how to himself portray the events he witnesses. As Hoskins and Roger watch the above-mentioned town demonstration that the strikers had requested to be a part of and been denied access to, Hoskins laments that

> "workers are so polite and timid. Those are the sorts of things that never get into the papers. Workers stand everything. They naturally shrink from initiative. They don't act until the breaking point. When we write about them in the papers, we always write about the moments of the breaking point, which gives the effect that the workers are always militant, looking for trouble." (21)

Hoskins's analysis of the problem of *representing* labor is multifaceted insofar as he recognizes the crucial role that the power differential between Labor and Capital often plays in conflicts such as the Gastonia strike. His assessment paints the workers as weak and rather pathetic. However, behind the politeness and timidity is economic necessity. If the idea that "workers stand everything" is hyperbolic, in some cases it is only *slightly* so, as the difference between near-starvation and actual starvation is often the difference between resistance and compliance,

and the complexity herein is something that will not make it into the press and the public consciousness. Furthermore, during this conversation, Hoskins points out that experienced union organizers like Fer, "'a decent quiet chap'" who has "'read the history of strikes… knows what happens when anybody gets shot in a strike.'" That is, Fer knows violence is typically attributed by the press to the side of the strikers, and the strike is then typically doomed to failure. Nevertheless, the Parkers and the comfortable people like them "'think Fer has hoofs and a tail,'" and "'believe that… Fer alone… has made the workers break out in a strike'" and "believe a strike is a virulent disease like smallpox – catching'" (21). This focus on misguided *belief* – framed in a religious context – is part of what Roger is concerned about when he reacts, "'I know that's so, but how are we going to let the public know that it's so?'" (21). His reaction has meta-fictional ramifications and is at the heart of what the novel is trying to accomplish. Acutely aware of the potential of journalism (as print media) to transform public opinion by disseminating falsehoods and vapid Manichean dualities, Roger is compelled to set the record straight for the public, using journalism as a corrective. Similarly, *Strike!* as a novel (in its role as a print medium) strives to perform as a corrective by both communicating the plight of the strikers and by exploring the ways in which journalism fosters anti-proletarian prejudices in public opinion.

Dual Perspectives of Removal: Northerner / Journalist

Hoskins's and Roger's perspectives – which have similarities as well as divergences – influence the narrative in important ways. Vorse's insertion of Hoskins's analysis of the battle between Capital and Labor makes it clear that, although the Gastonia conflict might have represented a new conflict for novelists, journalists, and other commentators to interpret and portray insofar as

it became "a symbol of Communist-led struggle in [the] brutally hostile environment" of the South (Garrison, *Mary* 213), this is not a new war. It is a different manifestation of a war that has gone on for a very long time. Furthermore, a significant element of this war is the conscious manipulation of ideas. Commentators at the time – as well as Roger, in the early stages of the novel – interpreted the events of this strike as evidence of the barbarity of the South compared to the more civilized North (Salmond 121, 130). Hoskins, however, recognizes the hypocrisy of the "'snoot[iness] and self-righteous[ness]" (13) of the North concerning labor strife, for, "'As soon as better labor conditions, shorter hours, [and] slightly better wages made competition with the South difficult, Northern capital moved its mills right down here" (14). He also recognizes that, while the "terror" the participants of a strike experience in the South is "altogether different" from similar circumstances in the North, there is "'not such a gap between the treatment of the Northern and Southern textile workers when they go on strike'" (13). As they discuss the matter, the first example he provides to Roger, who is unnerved after witnessing "open threats of lynching" on his first day covering the strike (9), comes from Hoskins's experiences during the Lawrence Textile Strike of 1912, led by the I.W.W., during which "'All freedom of speech and assembly were taken from the workers.'" Although people might not have openly threatened strike leaders during strikes he has covered in the North (14), Hoskins recalls that, during the Lawrence Strike, "'there was just this bitterness… on the part of the respectable people. I collected editorials from conservative Boston papers which were incitements to violence, incitements to lynch, a whole series of them'" (13). Hoskins does not ascribe any foundational causality to this "bitterness." That is, it cannot be determined that the "'incitements to violence'" were the *result* of bitterness (editorials *by* Boston citizens) or were the *cause* of bitterness (editorials *to* Boston citizens). Presumably, the relationship between public opinion and the press

/ media was (as it still is) not unilateral, but porous and symbiotic. Further, what can be determined with certainty is that the strikers had their ability to promote their side of the cause substantially curtailed, having been deprived of the opportunity to assemble and speak out.

Hoskins recalls the tendency of the press to publish "incitements to violence" in 1912 Lawrence. Naively assuming that portions of the citizenry could be appealed to emotionally, he recalls as well the rigidity of their thinking and belief-systems.[40] Armed with the statistics of a "woman doctor"[41] on "'infant mortality'" and the "'tuberculosis rate of the young people who had worked in the mills… compared with normal tuberculosis charts of Massachusetts,'" Hoskins attempted in Lawrence to enlist the public opinion and good will of "'representative men, doctors and ministers,'" who were so "'furious against the Union leaders… that you couldn't even get them to listen to the fact that hundreds of children died unnecessarily in Lawrence'" (14). The extremity of violence that Hoskins was trying to raise public consciousness about was not reactionary physical repression by agents of Capital but *systemic* violence. Rather than raising intangible questions concerning wherein the fault of violence arising from industrial strife lay, Hoskins relied purely on tangible health results of the industrial economic order to make his case. The "'representative men'" whose influence Hoskins attempts to enlist are "'*doctors and ministers*'" – professionals who specialize in physical and social health – who not only develop violent sentiments against the strikers, but are incapable of being convinced or understanding "'that a strike is *about life*,'" that a strike's roots lie not in "'outside agitat[ion]'" but rather that "'agitat[ion]'" arises due to material, physical, and spiritual needs. If these "representative men" who have assumed responsibility for the physical and spiritual welfare of the population are incapable of being convinced by hard facts, convincing those whom these men "represen[t]" poses an even more difficult problem.

Representation / the Dispossessed

These problems Hoskins laments to Roger that he had in 1912 Lawrence – trying to appeal to the goodwill of prosperous and/or influential representatives of the overall local society – emerge both in the plot of *Strike!*'s representation of the 1929 Gastonia strike and in the thematic, motivic development of the novel. As a result, they emerge in Vorse's approach to "how… to let the public know" that these injustices exist. Part of her approach is to portray the desperate social conditions portrayed in the novel in a conceptual frame or a language evocative of the concern shown in the Gospels for the plight of society's most vulnerable. After the erection of the tent colony, Roger witnesses "people in great numbers [who] had come to hear what the Union had to say about dispossessing sick people and children" (136). The welfare of *little children* is of great concern among the strikers. This echoes a provocative and well-known phrase from Matthew occurring when, after Jesus's ministry and miraculous healing have made him dangerous to those in power, he tells his disciples to "suffer [i.e., allow] little children… to come unto me."[42] The phraseology arises in different versions of dialect / dialogue, including Brother Williams's prayer mentioned above. When one woman – a "'Mis' Winstead,'" who has "'got foaw li'l chillen…'" – is dispossessed in the "first eviction in the strike," some of the "men grow[l]," thinking aloud, "'Say, ain't thet a shame with all her little chillen'" (86). During this "event," a "minister" and "a student of economics" arrive, accentuating the connection between ethical and material social issues, "to investigate the strike first hand." Vorse describes the anger of some strikers over the fact that vigilantes are able "to wreck a building and destroy food intended for women and *children* without any one having to *suffer* for it" (69, my emphasis). Vorse utilizes the peculiar phraseology of Jesus's insistence that his disciples *allow* the children access to his healing powers to emphasize that, rather than having any semblance of Christian compassion for those

most vulnerable in society, the societal power structure of Stonerton a) allows [suffers] the *suffering* of children to be perpetrated by mob violence intended to further systematize material deprivation beyond the poverty-level wages that the strikers are struggling against; and b) allows [suffers] mob violence to occur without any retributive *suffering* of or reprisal against the perpetrators. When strike conditions become particularly heated, it becomes clear that there is a possibility that the conflict between Capital and Labor, if sustained for long enough, could make "'chillen suffer'" through "'starv[ation]'" or other forms of deprivation if their parents continue to resist the collective power of Capital rather than submitting entirely (116).

The narrative also focuses on the plight of the ill, particularly in the context of the callous disregard the "comfortable people" demonstrate for them as general society neglects their misery and as the Union cares for them. Strikers discuss the status of a "'sick woman, Mitty Jones,'" whom a doctor has asserted "'he couldn't do nuthin fer [because] she's got appendicitis en' she's gotta git op'rated on right off'" (87). When an organizer attempts to secure medical help for her, "the closest hospital… refuse[s] to take the patient, – a striker, – without pay. In Stonerton were three other hospitals, all supported by different churches. Not one of them would take in the sick woman" (87). Cook's assessment is that the role of the union in the novel "becomes instantly a charitable organization, and as the more able-bodied workers slip embarrassedly back to the hills and mills… it is left with the care of cripples and babies, the old and the weak, an ironic solidarity of nonworkers" (*Tobacco* 95). However, this assessment neglects the fact that scenes portraying a "stream of sick people coming and begging for medicine" demonstrate that the social context of this situation provides the strikers not only with "a place to stay," but with

> a place where they might meet one another…. People met one another and learned to know one another. Here they discussed all the details of the strike; they discussed their rations; the latest atrocities, and in the back of the hall, they sat together singing spirituals

> and some of the new song 'ballits' about the strike. / History was making here and they were proud of it. (86)

This passage portrays the union providing workers with a template to learn – to learn about solidarity, to learn about commonalities in and of their mutual dispossession, to embrace the culture they have in common ("spirituals") in order to create new strength ("new song 'ballits'").

In a scene based on an infamous real-life event, when evictions begin, a doctor attends to ensure that "no people who were really sick were evicted," as a judge had decided that "special mercy should be granted in case of sickness" (113). The doctor decides that a child whose eyes are feverish with smallpox is no longer contagious (and therefore fair game to be evicted) (113). At a different home, the same doctor goes about his work declaring, "'This one's got sore throat. She hed it in bed. Likely there will be a sick person in bed in every house we go to. Fresh air won't hurt 'em. This mill's been mighty patient. This place has been a hotbed of unionism right from the first. They'd oughta been cleaned out long ago'" (114). His particular focus on the bedridden-ness of his patients, with whom he is being particularly *impatient* in his rush to assist the Mill's personified will to eliminate whatever vestiges of unionism exist in mill-owned homes, is noteworthy as Roger makes more "visits through the mill village seeing about the old people and sick people" and discovers that many had even, in their sickness, "gotten up from their beds" (117) in order to facilitate the process of eviction. Vorse's portrayal provides a peculiar, ironic spin on a miraculous command from Jesus in the Gospels showing up in two different Books: to "Arise" from "thy bed."[43] In Mark 2.11, Jesus instructs a sick patient (paralytic) to "Arise" from his bed and "go thy way into thine house." However, in Vorse's treatment, instead of "go[ing their] way into [their] house[s]," the sick are ushered out of their houses. Furthermore, the doctor's association of illness, whether conscious or unconscious, with

a "hot*bed* of unionism" (my emphasis) is notable. From the perspective of the wealthy, while illness is easily ignorable if it exists materially in literal human suffering, it is intolerable if it exists metaphorically within its manifestation as a "hotbed" of social influence, in the way it manifests as a social "contagion".[44] (For the strikers, the result of actions such as sanctioning the eviction of sick children fulfills his assessment of unionism as "contagion." The chapter immediately following the chapter portraying the first wave of evictions begins, "They walked along in silence. The women's anger had been contagious" [90].)

Capital's perspective admits that social conditions are imperfect but understands the trope of illness not in human terms but in economic ones. Mr. Jameson, a mill representative speaking at the above-mentioned Chamber of Commerce-sponsored luncheon given to educate the journalists from the North (76), recognizes that there are "ills" to be addressed in the relation of employers to employees. However, Jameson's perspective is that "'Society is filled with reformers who, without making a diagnosis of our industry's ills, are offering their cures. The unionization of textile workers is one of the panaceas suggested'" (78). Jameson gives a standard evasive answer to whether or not the cure of unionism is appropriate in this case. He begins by asserting that he assents to unionism "where not in conflict with the best interests of society." However, the decision of what constitutes society's "best interests" virtually gives veto power to those who have deemed themselves the protectors of society – the wealthy. He then moves into a complicated, at times non-sequitur treatise on the "'labor problem'" of the region (78-79), citing abstract "'laws of supply and demand'" whilst ignoring material deprivation. Jameson ultimately lays the causes of the "industry's ills" to the "'impulse[s] of economic self-interest'" of the mill *workers* (not the mill owners!) and the "'agricultural… foundation'" of the local economy. Ultimately he concludes that "the stretchout" – an increase in production per individual (leading

to decreased employment per mill), accompanied by a decrease in wages – "[is] a good thing." This line of thinking leads Hoskins to comment sarcastically to Roger, "'You can understand now that because the famers do not make enough… is the reason why the mill workers shouldn't'" (79). Despite Hoskins's cynical response, however, the general reaction is that "A feeling of contentment and comfort [goes] through the audience at these familiar words" (79). Jameson's words began as a critique of "'reformers… offering their'" misguided "'cures.'" However, his *words* (rather than *deeds*) offer "contentment and comfort" ostensibly to those who wish to continue enjoying their physical comfort and privilege without feeling any pangs of conscience for the plight of those who are literally physically ill and malnourished, ultimately promoting the idea that the "'panaceas'" of reformers are no solution to the "'industry's ills.'" Curiously, however, there are no solutions – at least, not any that follow "'sound business principles'" (79) – that will provide comfort of any kind to the mill workers.

The trope of illness as a social metaphor is understood differently by the side of Labor. Mrs. Thorn, a striker who began working at the mill and married at the age of thirteen, has seen the struggles of mill workers both within and against the mill. She understands that "'what *ails* 'em now'" is that "'they won't keep together'" (100, my emphasis). Similarly, the inability to "'*feel* unionism,'" – to, as Fer puts it, establish a "'feeling of solidarity, that real heart of it, that "all for one and one for all," and the kind of feeling that the scab is the lowest thing on earth'" (109, original emphasis) – is a "symptom" of this *ailment*. (Although, to be fair, it is a metaphorical symptom augmented by literal "starv[ation]" [109].) In times of particularly intense adversity (as opposed to the expected, predictable aversity of being on strike in general), there is a palpable feeling of "compact human beings being dragged apart," of "The strike spirit bleeding to death, starving to death" (110) that reflects upon the health, the *life* of the strike.

Reconsidering a Christian Ethic

Vorse makes it fairly clear that, in her representation of the Gastonia strike, she has in mind the types of reversals that Jesus utilizes in his sermons in the Gospels – the supremacy of concern for those in need, the weak, and the dispossessed over respect for the relative power of those who enjoy wealth and material comfort. For example, "a lame woman [on] the picket line" (43) is accosted by a National Guardsman for "'crawlin' along… to be aggrivatin.'" When she protests, """Cain't you see I'm a cripple?,""" "'Three or four'" of the Guardsmen "'lif[t] [her] right up and thr[o]w [her] into a car.'" As she tells her story, "The people st[and] around, listening solemnly… Their world had been turned upside down by the strike. The sheriff, whom they had helped to elect, had turned against them" (48-49). The phrase "turned the world upside down" comes from the Book of Acts, when Jesus's followers are described as "These that have turned the world upside down," "troubl[ing] the people and the rulers of the city" insofar as they "do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (17.6-8). In the case of the strikers, the reversal is ironic, insofar as expectations of at least vaguely democratic rule would lead them to believe that their sheriff would uphold "decrees" of law and order. The ways in which *their* world has been turned upside down is not that the low have become high, but that the high are not responding to the needs of the low in a system that should not permit such injustice. We find a similarly unexpected reversal after Police Chief Humphries is killed in the conflict at the strike headquarters and mob violence explodes. Vorse provides the perspective of the "police[, who] seemed to have gone insane":

> The death of the police chief, which they all believed to have been a planned murder, gave them all a feeling of insecurity. The people whom they had baited, choked and arrested had turned upon them. People whom they had prodded with bayonets had retaliated. They had never thought that the *meek*, docile strikers would defend themselves. The *order of the universe had been upset*. The harmless rabbit had proved to

be a man-eater. (155, my emphases)

The social reversal here is a bit more complicated than that experienced by the strikers. The initial shock of Police Chief Humphries's death in the shootout serves to vindicate and ossify a pre-conceived *belief* that the arrival of strike leadership has ensured that no one is safe and that swift and merciless vigilante justice is necessary (19). However, the "comfortable people" have a deeply engrained understanding of textile-mill workers as defenseless and *meek* – a religiously loaded term from the Sermon on the Mount – in their inferiority. The strikers thus simultaneously occupy a dual-fold position of low and high. They are low in that they are socially degraded: their position is to serve in their capacity as docile labor. They have the potential to be high in that they have an apocalyptic potential to destroy society when misled by devils appearing in the shape of union organizers like Fer, who is perceived as Anti-Christ. This contradiction drives Hoskins's frustration earlier in the novel. While the strikers are "polite and timid," the fact of their politeness and timidity "never gets into the papers" (21). On the contrary, the print press generally depicts them as an existential threat to the socio-economic order.

While Vorse utilizes these allusions to social reversal in the New Testament, it is important to keep in mind that the novel is also motivated by a *historical* understanding of the social reversals promoted by Jesus in his concern for the powerless, oppressed, and dispossessed. Hoskins, as usual, provides in this instance the voice framing the grander historical scale Vorse wants to present: when another journalist prods Hoskins on his view of whether or not the strikers have "'got a chance'" of succeeding, Hoskins responds, "'Gosh, boys… I don't say who's got a chance, when I think of Rome and the early Christians, and I remember the Catacombs and what happened to Rome. Then I remember that, after all, the Roman Empire won out and the Christian statuary became as expensive as Caesar's!'" (34). The primary reversal

Vorse has in mind in this moment is that a group of illiterate proletarians followed and began to propagate the doctrines of a fringe leader who broke away from an already-persecuted religion in circumstances of imperial occupation. In an incredible historical irony, this fringe religion of persecuted Judaism – Christianity – was adopted a few hundred years later as the imperial religion of Rome. Similarly, Vorse reminds us, the doctrines of the Christians transformed – like the "Christian statuary" under the rule of the Roman Empire – not only to act as a justification for class warfare and persecution, but to buttress a devotion to a philosophy of Mammon-worship.

Premonitions, Catastrophes, and Signs

After the death of Police Chief Humphries, anti-strike sentiment, which was intense enough when the novel began *in media res* to have resulted in Fer's kidnapping and bringing in the National Guard, rises to an apocalyptic hysteria. A reporter comments that "Stonerton City… had ceased to be a place – it had become a state of mind" (158). Hoskins assesses that "'Comfortable people in Stonerton believ[e]… that agitators and Reds [are] hiding behind every burdock, ready to bounce a bright red bomb off their beans.'" The quotation ends, and the paragraph adopts this train of thought:

> a colossal plot was existing whose very essence was assassination… [and to] kill people and incidentally destroy the State and industry. All Union people were low, skulking murderous radicals who wormed their way into simple-minded workers' confidence, with a view to using them as tools in their dastardly works of destruction. So went the editorials in the papers; so went the thoughts of the comfortable people… They imagined plots spread like a network throughout the country. (158)

The seeds of Cold-War paranoia in this pre-atomic-age description are striking. The ways in which the press shape this nightmarish vision in the region are also noteworthy, insofar as later

in the novel the effect of these editorials is written to have produced a "frightful sense of tension throughout the whole town," from which "No one was free" and which affects both rich and poor. It "permeate[s] through all the comfortable people. There [i]s not a mill worker anywhere, whether he [i]s a mill worker or striker, who didn't feel he was in the presence of some imminent catastrophe" (195). However, the ways in which it affects rich and poor are different. One important distinction that separates the collective spirit of "the comfortable people" and the collective spirit of the strikers is that, while the strikers are rightly terrified of the consequences of what may happen to them if they continue to engage in activism, for the "comfortable people," there is "Nothing too extravagant to be *believed*" (195, my emphasis). Vorse's use of the term *extravagant* is noteworthy here: as opposed to terms such as *outlandish* or *preposterous*, *extravagant* stresses the relative luxury of being able to embrace fears that have no basis in reality in order to justify support, tacit and explicit, for unleashing violence in order to maintain the status quo (or increase the strength of organized Capital). The support of the "comfortable people" buttresses the "mob['s] belie[f]" in a Union plot. It is what enables the "mob *spirit*" which becomes a "*contagion* [that] fill[s] first one person and then another" (198, my emphases).

The language of *destruction* and *catastrophe* promoted by the papers finds its way into Dewey's consciousness as he prepares for a strike meeting. The day before Mamie Lewes is shot, "Thursday, there [are] more warnings in the paper" (198). Dewey again feels "the shadow of mob gr[owing] long and dark… It was like knowing by the clock when a catastrophe of nature was to occur. As though one could foretell earthquake. As though cyclone had a schedule. Only this was a cyclone of evil, and it was unclean" (198). The religious language of the passage, particularly the terms *evil* and *unclean*, are noteworthy, particularly in relation to the above-mentioned terms *belief*, *spirit*, and *contagion*. *Unclean* is a term used at least 16 times in the

Gospels to describe *spirits*[45] – that is, demons responsible for the illnesses that Jesus and his apostles are ministering to and healing. In this context, the *contagious spirit* of violence and animosity disseminated by "warnings" (threats) in the papers take on not only a connotation of demonic possession, but a connotation of "warnings" as *signs* which are religious, supernatural, prophetic – notions that, as mentioned above, Dewey has demonstrated an interpretive proclivity for. There are, of course, instances in the Gospels in which "the clock" is intimately related to "catastrophe[s] of nature," to an "earthquake." Through Dewey's consciousness, Vorse's free-indirect narrative evokes the crucifixion as portrayed in Matthew, when "darkness" (27.45) over the land precedes Christ's death by three hours, and, at "the ninth hour" (46), "the earth did quake, and the rocks rent" (51). A few pages later in the same chapter, Dewey's sense of premonition is fulfilled when Mamie Lewes, whose contributions to the "spirit" of the strike have been at least as important – or even more so – than Fer's, is martyred.

Conclusion

The comfortable people's delusional, Capital-friendly belief in the potential for societal-catastrophe empower Capital's agents to perpetuate actual catastrophes upon the lives of strikers and the spirit of the strike. Meanwhile, the few characters in the novel willing to brave the terror of the mob to try to disrupt, or at least diminish the effect of the zealousness of mob-spirit are faced with a daunting task. Eleanor Thurston, the "student of economics" present at the evictions mentioned above, had "burst out" to Roger shortly after she arrived to Stonerton that "'People don't know about it. People can't know about it. They wouldn't allow it if they did'" (90). She appeals to the "clergyman" whom she is with,[46] "'you can [tell the girls at the University] better than I.'" He promises her, "'I'll tell'" about the "'cycle'" of abuse and exploitation he has

witnessed. The scene is presented from Roger's perspective. As Thurston and the clergyman meet with a striker to get statements from her about how she had been brutalized by the police, Roger sees

> all three of them as they were, tiny, powerless people, confronting a highly organized machine, part of whose business was to crush workers' organization, committed to the policy of anti-unionism. Back of them, the body of the indifferent people, who when they were moved out of the indifference, only became angry at the workers or the workers' leaders. Comfortable, indifferent people, who, when they were stirred out of their indifference, were soil[47] to grow a mob" (90-91).

Right after Roger has this reaction, Eleanor Thurston insists, "'I'm going to make them [those who have not witnessed these things for themselves] believe!'" (91). However, the picture we get from Roger's journalistic perspective of three individuals themselves representing distinct perspectives – Labor, the Clergy, Academia – is rather disheartening. The informed perspectives of those dedicated to informing a citizenry apathetic to human misery and the injustice of the policies of Capital are simply no match for the awesome power of Capital's influence, particularly when that citizenry perceives, correctly, that to even attenuate the plight of the strikers could potentially threaten their privileges and advantages. It is understandably easier to supplicate oneself and one's allegiances to an effective vehicle for the protection of privilege than to startle oneself out of atomistic indifference and side psychically with the "powerless."

Later in the novel, when Fer is on trial for murder, Roger explains to another reporter that "'There is nothing too fantastic for these comfortable people to believe.'" Soon after, Eleanor arrives at the trial, distraught that she has been unable even to convince her own family to "'believe the things [she told] them'": "'I thought that all I had to do was to let them know what I'd seen myself, and tell the people about it myself as I did'" (178-179). During the trial, Hoskins reflects that, although he witnessed first-hand Fer's staunch *pacifistic* approach to the strike,

"'everybody in the community knows with the same violent certainty that" Fer had planned a conspiracy to kill the Police Chief (186). The juxtaposition between Fer's pacifism (based on Fred Beal's real-life pacifist commitments[48]) and the comfortable people's violent belief in Fer's commitment to violence and a planned assassination (as well as their belief in / commitment to violence, as we have seen above), is related to the "certainty" that Hoskins describes. Furthermore, this relationship portrays essentially a willingness to submit to a structure of belief that enables one to commit oneself to utter fantasy. This commitment to delusion is further accentuated when we see how justice is played out in Gastonia, when agents of Capital are on trial for the *actual* violence they have committed: "In the courthouse an investigation of the kidnapping and flogging [of Dewey] was being held. The story of the mob night was being told in homely words. Over and over again it was being told. It was as though the courthouse was the core and around it gathered the coming cyclone. Hate and fear stalked the town" (199). The passage ironically echoes the above-mentioned description of the "dozen men and women" who form the "core" of strikers for whom "any sacrifice was to be made" (145). Instead of "sacrifice" being used in an intransitive sense, however, for the comfortable people of Gastonia, if the story of the beneficence of Capital is told repeatedly enough, if the narrative framing of terror and violence has been presented in a socially-palatable terminology and "homely" enough words, "Hate and fear"-personified becomes willing to transitively sacrifice the lives and livelihoods of others in order to protect its wealth and privilege.

The "highly organized machine" that Roger comes to understand the mechanics of throughout the novel is extremely efficient. From early in the novel, Hoskins comments that many of the most enthusiastic strikers "'haven't the slightest idea what they are bucking'" in their rebellion, as "'back of these manufacturers is the Textile Manufacturers Association and

back of that are all the organized employers of the South'" (34). Fer himself understands "how powerless he [is]," "how mighty were the forces arrayed against them" (108), how "puny" he "and his little handful of workers in relation to the vast Cotton Manufacturer's Association" (130) and the power of "the market" (132). Eventually, those who are most "dedicated to Unionism" – those for whom "it was a religion for which any sacrifice was to be made" – come to realize the power of "the mighty forces of the Cotton Manufacturers' Association, and through them, all of the vested interests in the South which by mobs, by police and by the Courts, resisted the Union. They hadn't measured the strength of the enemy. They could never know it" (145). After all the terror and violence, the demonstrations and funerals, Roger sees the battle as being between "the right and dignity of human life against the crushing power of money" (233), the "great machine of wealth" (235). During the trial of the Sheriff and the deputies (eventually acquitted) who kill Fer and four other strikers, "Mr. Schenk" (the owner of the Stonerton Mill) approaches a magazine writer, telling him, "'If you're fair, you want to blame the leaders,'" complaining that members of the press have "'been trying to bully me.'" He claims, "'There is no Union!'", and that "'If you're fair you understand [the strikers] have themselves to blame.'" Hoskins, who sees the exchange, comments that

> "He's the spokesman for all the comfortable people in Stonerton… Every one on the prosperous side will believe Basil Schenk… The public opinion that counts, the public opinion that has money, that controls newspapers, churches, schools, business organizations, will all believe exactly as Basil Schenk does. 'They brought it on themselves.'" (229)

Vorse's novel demonstrates the ways in which societal values, under the influence of the unchecked prerogative of Capital, can become so perverted that challenging the tyranny of Capital can be perceived as bullying. A commitment to fairness entails scapegoating the powerless. Vorse demonstrates the ways in which powerful and influential segments of the

population who perceive the world through what they consider a Christian ethic, if properly informed and educated by personified Capital, can be rendered incurably blind to human suffering and the fact of their own commitment to serving Mammon as master.

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[1] The text frequently describes the strike in martial terms: 36, 42, 43, 47, 58, 60.
[2] See Gilmore 81-82; Salmond 37.
[3] Garrison's assertion that "the story is told from the perspective of two eastern journalists, Rogers [sic] and Hoskins" (237) is debatable: my interpretation is that Hoskins's dialogue with Roger influences Rogers's perspective, whose perspective is much more crucial to shaping the narrative than Hoskins's.
[4] The same happened to Vorse during her career as a journalist: beginning with her experiences in "Lawrence [in 1912, through] the Mesabi [Range strike], in the steel strike [of 1919], in mining towns in Pennsylvania, [and] in the New York lockout" in 1920, she "sharpened her political and social analysis," becoming a "seasoned union activist" (Garrison, *Mary* 169).
[5] See also Laura Hapke 54. Vorse portrays strike leader Fer Dean – based on National Textile Worker's Union organizer Fred Beal – as being killed in the Marion massacre; in real-life, after his first trial for conspiracy to murder Gastonia Police Chief Orville Aderholt on flimsy evidence ended in a mistrial, he fled to the Soviet Union after posting bail. He later returned to the United States, serving part of his sentence before being pardoned.
[6] Like the final walkout violence, some of the events that take place away from strike events, like dynamitings and other violence against the strikers, took place in other labor conflicts in the region around the same time, as well as small details such as "Machine guns [being] planted on the top" of mill roofs (31).
[7] I use the term "propagandistic" in a value-neutral way, only to point out that the novel does not try to conceal its pro-Labor political agenda.
[8] See Beal 128-129, 157-158; Pope 241; Salmond 23.
[9] See Cook (*Tobacco*) 91, 94; Hoffman 188; Rabinowitz 78-80; Reilly 498, 501, 506.
[10] See Reilly 499, 503, 514.
[11] See Reilly 516; Rideout 209; Schreibersdorf examines the relationship between "maternal testimony" in "women's radical fiction" (305) and the "documentary effect" of the novel (306).
[12] See Cook ("Gastonia") 54; Rideout (174).
[13] Sherwood Anderson's *Beyond Desire*; Olive Tilford Dargan's *Call Home the Heart*; Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread*; Myra Page's *Gathering Storm*; and William Rollins Jr.'s *The Shadow Before*.
[14] See Dee Garrison ("Introduction") xvi; Laura Hapke 156-157, 158.
[15] Sowinska points out that while "racism is a pervasive part of the overall climate" of the novel, "it consistently either remains in the background or is used as a counterpoint against which the relative terror of the white organizers is measured. Black characters are seen but not heard" when they are forced to leave the trials due to Jim Crow laws "or are shyly heroic when they recover a white male union member" after he has been brutalized by a mob (124).
[16] Lisa Schreibersdorf argues that Mamie Lewes "functions as the maternal presence which attracts and unites" (311) the strikers in the novel; however, Hapke points out that "Vorse emphasizes Mamie's role as a mill mother less than do any of the other novelists…" (159).
[17] See Garrison ("Introduction") viii; Hapke 154, 155, 158.
[18] See Sylvia Jenkins Cook ("Gastonia" 58-59); Cook argues that this reflects a feminist collectivist politics.
[19] See Cook ("Gastonia") 58; Garrison ("Introduction") viii, xvi, xvii; Hapke 158; Urgo 69.
[20] See Hapke 155; Urgo 69.
[21] See Cook (*Tobacco*) 93-94; Garrison (*Mary*) 237; see also Newton (111).
[22] See Cook ("Gastonia") 54; (*Tobacco*) 85-86, 87, 90. Cook's interpretation of Vorse's characters sometimes borders on contempt. This does not apply merely to aspects deserving contempt such as their racism and sexism, but also to their "startling ignorance" about how strikes are supposed to be conducted (93), and for their religious convictions. Garrison similarly suggests that Vorse portrays the strikers as "strangely foreign objects," citing Vorse's use of "clumsy southern dialect" ("Introduction" xv), but points out that "the workers' religiosity is shown sympathetically…." (xvii). Also troubling is that Cook essentially equates the perspectives of Labor and Capital for

their tendency to consider the stakes of a strike of "much greater significance than a mere method of bargaining," despite the fact that those on the side of Labor are in some cases literally starving in their poverty, while Capital is doing anything in its power to prevent the side of Labor from organizing to improve its lot.

[23] See Byrd 58; Hall et al. 212-215; Salmond 14-15.

[24] It is difficult to discern if Fer was wrong about the Max Harris / Wes Elliot identity problem or if Vorse made an error: the Publisher's note preceding the novel states that "several characters experience name changes," and "The decision was made not to violate the integrity of the original text." Also, the Biblical reference in the quote is notable.

[25] See, in particular, Pope 21, 23, 26, 29-30, 35, 36-38, 92, 95, 150-151, 186, 278, 283, 294.

[26] For Capital's use of the notion of the "Gospel of Wealth," see Ralph Henry Gabriel's essay "The Gospel of Wealth in the Gilded Age." For the the complex relationship among Capital, organized Labor, and religion, see Gutman 79-84 and Ken Fones-Wolf's introduction to *Trade Union Gospel*.

[27] See Fones-Wolf 169; Gutman 87, 88, 95, 109; McKanan 112-113, 115, 118, 120.

[28] In the KJV: "God saw the light, that it was good" (4). The phrase "saw that it was good" is then used to five times without variation to describe God's reaction after his creation of the earth (10); grass, herbs, and trees (12); division of day and night / light and darkness (18); the creatures of the sky and sea (21); creatures of land and cattle (25). The final time the phrase "it was good" is used in Gen. 1 is given another variation: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (31).

[29] The text reads, "these two men" – it is unclear whether Vorse means Jameson and the younger Hastings or if there was material with both Hastings men that was edited out. The effect, though, is clear, insofar as Vorse is critiquing the idea of Biblical power self-ascribed in the minds of mill-owners.

[30] The full line is "Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not." The line shows up in Matthew as well: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin" (6.28).

[31] According to Garrison, Vorse's first reaction when she arrived to the "plight" of the Gastonia organizers was "annoyance" and "superiority" (221).

[32] I do not mean to suggest that this characteristic of Irma paints her negatively generally: my interpretation is that Vorse's portrayal of Irma and Fer reflect aspects about the strike leadership of which she was critical. While Vorse and Vera Buch ended up becoming friends, Vorse wrote about her that she was "totally unimaginative," a "pedantic Communist, impossible to talk to because of her mouthing phrases." Beal, she wrote, was "a nice boy, a weak boy, oppressed with the tremendous weight of the strike" (qtd. in Garrison 219-220).

[33] The dialect-spelling Vorse uses when locals describe Mamie's songs, to emphasize, I would suggest, the egalitarian aspects of the strikers' ethos (like *ballot*).

[34] The phrase is used 3 times on one page.

[35] See Day for the different classifications of psalms – there are psalms of "Thanksgiving," "communal lament," "individual lament," etc.

[36] A "crowd," or "crowds," assemble to see or talk to Fer on 4, 25, 26, 27, 28, 34, 51, 86, 87-88, 144.

[37] Vorse suggests a similar contextual frame when a crazed crowd severely beats and nearly succeeds in executing organizer Dewey, and Vorse has one of his striker companions remark, "'Yeah, that mob was a lynchin' mob. They didn't know what they was adoin'" (172-173), nearly a decade before Steinbeck has Jim Casey speak a very similar line concerning the vigilantism of his killers in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

[38] After casting out the money-changers from the temple, claiming they have transformed it into a "den of thieves," Jesus "t[eaches] daily in the temple," while the "chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people s[eek] to destroy him" because "all the people [are] very attentive to hear him" (45-48) – like the "crowd" of faithful strikers who are "silent" at the parade: "There [is] no milling around… No coming and going. The strikers st[and] stock still, drinking in what Fer sa[ys]" (2). In Stonerton, the immediate public response to the strike among the elite sector had been to destroy Fer through various methods, including threats of lynching and actual kidnapping. The intense violence is "fomented by prominent citizens," who might be considered contemporary analogues for the "chief priests and scribes and the chief of the people" who manifest themselves in various ways throughout the novel.

[39] "Stones" in the context of this passage denote the materials used in the construction of the city, as, when Jesus predicts and laments over the destruction of Jerusalem, he prophesies that there will not be "one stone upon another" (41-44).

[40] Hoskins's experience in this regard reflects Vorse's own: see Garrison (*Mary*) 60.

[41] Vorse's emphasis of the gender of the doctor is important, insofar as it is "representative *men*" below who are unmoved by the findings. Vorse seems to be emphasizing the fact that reform movements in the late 19th / early 20th century were commonly spearheaded by women. When Hoskins discusses the difference between contemporary (i.e., 1929) progressive thought on labor and the way the issue was framed in 1912, he emphasizes the points women intellectuals were making in Lawrence, and the ways in which women in North Carolina are probably more progressive than Northern women in 1912 (14).
[42] "Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (19.14-15).
[43] The two lines are John 5.8: "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk"; Mark 2.11: "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." Granted, I have adjusted the significant line "take up thy bed" in my understanding of Vorse's use of the allusion, lacking a context of miraculous-ness (and subsequent ability to do anything that would require physical strain) in Vorse's novelistic treatment.
[44] I.e., "A place that promotes the rapid growth or development of any phenomenon, esp. of something harmful or undesirable." (OED)
[45] See Matthew 10.1, 12.43; Mark 1.23, 1.26, 1.27, 3.11, 3.30, 5.2, 5.13, 6.7, 7.25; Luke 4.36, 6.10, 8.29, 9.42, 11.24.
[46] The minister and student were based on real people who, after the Police Chief's funeral, were "escorted out of town" by Gastonia citizens (Pope 272-273).
[47] "Flowers" and "soil" appear in the novel in association with the irrationalism of anti-Union sentiment in the courts as Roger sees the "flower of justice gr[ow] in mob soil" (177) and the "flowery appeal" used to convince conservative-minded citizens of the threat of unionists who "ha[ve] no religion" (207); and with jingoistic nationalism, as when Jellico praises the "flowers of all the different States" in comparison with Europe and "how much better was America" (22) and "American superiority, brotherly love and the State flowers" (23).
[48] See Beal 147; Garrison 26; Pope 247.

Chapter 3:

Mutualism as Miracle in Akron

Ruth McKenney's novel *Industrial Valley* depicts Akron, Ohio, during the Depression years preceding and leading into the 1936 sit-down strikes in the rubber industry. In this chapter I argue that McKenney frames dogmatic adherence to the idea of the infallibility of Capitalism's benevolent effects upon humans as akin to irrational religious faith. McKenney's purpose in critiquing American socio-economic institutions and power structures in this way is twofold. First, McKenney portrays the quasi-religious power and authority that the doctrines of Capital, primarily disseminated through the print press, have had over the American populace, but that have begun to crumble in the wake of the Depression. Second, as the strength of this dogmatic power over the populace begins to weaken, the unemployed and working poor begin to replace this faith with the recognition of the potential of their combined power. McKenney portrays this potential using a Biblical motif rooted in the miracles of the Gospels. McKenney metaphorically conflates Christ's healing of the sick with activism's ability to overcome the paralysis of the working masses; and conflates Christ's powers over natural phenomena such as the weather with the ability of mutual efforts to confront the ostensibly overwhelming might of Capital. The formal structure of McKenney's text, as well as her portrayal of the seemingly *miraculous* nature of the working poor rejecting societally-sacrosanct dogmatisms, reflect two key ideas. 1) The ways in which differing metaphorical claims to Biblical authority become a contested site upon which Capital and Labor wage a war of ideas. And, 2) the ways that the social *chaos* created by systems that privilege wealth over human welfare can potentially be overcome by embracing a mutualist ethic.

The Novel / Criticism

Industrial Valley is a peculiar, innovative text that resists simple generic classification. Nearly four hundred pages in length, it portrays the circumstances of class struggle primarily in Akron, Ohio, with occasional references to national and international circumstances and more frequent references to industrial circumstances in other areas of Ohio and the Great Lakes region. Covering events from January 1, 1932, to the 1938 national elections[1], the text documents the general deprivation of the working poor during the Great Depression; the general anxiety of the wealthy due to their power and privilege being threatened; and the (re)emergence of class consciousness among the working poor. Formally, it reads almost like a scrapbook of newspaper clippings. The narrative is driven not by chapters but by sections, placed in strict chronological order and provided a title – reminiscent of a headline – and date. Some sections quote from actual newspaper articles and advertisements. Some are close to twenty pages in length, while some are only a sentence or two. (I will refer to these sections throughout this chapter as *items*[2] and will put them in bold type in order to give them the creative narrative weight that McKenney intended in titling them as she did.)

It is also important to note that, when one is faced with examining the historical record behind the events that McKenney is portraying, one is struck by the fact that *Industrial Valley* is cited as a primary text in labor history books that are currently considered to be classics in the general discipline or within a narrower field. (E.g., the history of rubberworkers embracing an industrial union leadership against a traditional trade union leadership; the history of the C.I.O. in relation to its split from the A.F.L; and the history of the sitdown strike). For example, Jeremy Brecher's classic labor history *Strike!*, after briefly assessing it as "over-dramatized but perceptive," cites *Industrial Valley* liberally, using block quotes of up to a couple hundred words.

Other histories also rely on McKenney's portrayal of union meetings and debates, particularly in relation to the 1935 A.F.L schism that resulted in the creation in the C.I.O.[3]

And yet, while the text is filled with useful journalistic and historical material, *Industrial Valley* is not at all a straight history of the events in and around Akron. McKenney worked as a journalist but was known primarily for her work as a humorist and satirist. In the late 30s and 40s, she wrote stories for *The New Yorker*, some of which were anthologized as *My Sister Eileen*, a bestseller that was adapted into a hit Broadway play in 1941 and a film in 1942.[4] These stories are essentially comedic, autobiographical pieces that frequently delve into dark territory. Among topics she makes light of are: burying a doll with her sister on Good Friday hoping that it would "resurrect itself on Easter" (*My Sister Eileen* 63); a college love-interest, claiming to be an exiled Georgian Prince, who harbors a desire to murder peasants and who rejects her due to his romantic obsession with a cow (152, 163); being blamed for a local lumberyard fire and publicly denounced by fundamentalist Christian neighbors for voicing support of evolutionary theory (*The McKenneys Carry On* 58); putting on a pony race as a local publicity stunt for an Ohio newspaper, only to discover bets being taken on how many "'kids will probably break their legs or get killed'" (157).[5] The tone of her work as a satirist is manifest in *Industrial Valley*. The strange formal scrap-book-like structure I mentioned above allows McKenney to experiment with the *items* primarily through the tone she creates through the arrangement of her material / juxtaposition of items. This structure, combined with her sense of social justice, dark humor, and comic pacing are part of what make *Industrial Valley* more than simply a documentary history of class strife and economic warfare in Akron in the early to mid-30s.

Part I portrays events from January 1, 1932, to June 16, 1933. The first item, **Parade**, begins with two men walking to City Hall, along with many desperate unemployed, because they

have heard a circulating rumor that the Mayor will be hiring men due to a new work-relief program. This five-page item is followed by numerous items portraying numerous aspects of society: legal and economic measures taken locally to deal with the Depression; meetings of religious groups; the effect of the Depression on social institutions such as schools and charity organizations; local media campaigns to encourage rejuvenation of consumerist spending; the activity of banks as the economy flounders; scandals about, public events held by, and vacations taken by the wealthy; the local effects of national news such as the birth of the Lindbergh baby, the 1932 election, and the Bonus Army March; and so forth. In one sense, the Depression as a phenomenon is a central character in Part I, with people, both rich and poor, responding to its social effects. If there is a discernable plotline that ties this material together, it is a crudely emerging sense of class identity. This class identity emerges during events such as eviction demonstrations, demonstrations led by the Unemployed Council, the burning anger resulting from the "speedup" – increased production requirements from factory workers with no increase in, or even at reduced pay – and other phenomena that the working poor begin to realize are intolerable.

Part II portrays events from June 26, 1933, to February 14, 1936. Whereas, in Part I, all of the titles of the items are unique except for occasionally-used days of the week (or the vaguely-titled **News Items**, which is used twice), in Part II **The Union Continued** is a title used for thirty items out of around 150. Part II thus sees an increased formal, structural continuity building upon an emerging class identity. Contributing to the growth of a unified working-class consciousness are phenomena such as bank executives facing criminal charges for their role in defrauding citizens of their savings; Akron's wealthy actively developing an aggressive stance toward labor organization even as society (locally and nationally) has begun to support reformist

labor laws; and general shifts in the socio-economic political climate due to the ravages of the Depression. Public opinion, despite the frantic efforts of the media to control it, begins to shift in different, complex ways. With the development of government involvement in the Depression – the National Recovery Act (N.R.A.), the Blue Eagle, and other popular measures instituted by Franklin D. Roosevelt – the wealthy predictably feel attacked on several fronts. However, Akron's rubberworkers, in dealing with an A.F.L. leadership that has essentially decided to protect its power against an emerging call for industrial unionism vs. a traditional trade unionism, begins to feel similarly attacked from multiple directions. Traditional union leadership begins to look to rank-and-file workers as a tyrannical hierarchy similar to the corporate structure. These trends provide insight into why the Committee for Industrial Organization (later re-named the Congress of Industrial Organizations) split off from the American Federation of Labor in 1935 to institute a more egalitarian industrial unionism over an elitist trade unionism that favored the interests of skilled workers over semi-skilled and unskilled workers. The leadership of the newly-founded C.I.O. identifies Akron's rubberworkers as an excellent labor pool to organize along industrial lines. As labor activism emerges, so does a general sense of confusion about whom, if anyone, worker-activists can trust: the federal government? The A.F.L? In fact, Part II is peculiar insofar as the rubberworkers have no single clear antagonist. The A.F.L. is presented as essentially not only a villain in disguise, but as a villain that truly seems unaware of its villainy.[6] Generally, Part II features items depicting confused but determined workers' organization that are less fragmentary and more sustained in narrative length. However, these long **The Union Continued** passages begin also to showcase not merely the efforts of rubberworkers but the efforts of potential leaders like William Green, Coleman Claherty, and John. L Lewis, who are involved in their own struggle for power in the A.F.L. /

C.I.O. split. Ultimately, the rubberworkers end up feeling that they were sold out by the traditional A.F.L. leadership. This leads in part to **The First Sitdown**, which portrays the rubberworkers' rejecting traditional tactics and staging their own strike using a new tactic (i.e., the sitdown).

Part III begins with the infamous February 14-March 21, 1936, strike at Goodyear, with sitdowners having already occupied the plant. The structure of this section focuses entirely on the strike: after **The Prelude**, the titles proceed from **The First Day**, on to **The Second Day**, in numerical order until the strike's conclusion. This section portrays different aspects of the strike, such as behind-the-scenes tactics of both the strike leadership and the corporate bosses; court scenes as Goodyear attempts to secure an injunction against the strike; and strikers' confrontations with police forces that, due to the shift in public opinion, are reluctant to carry out violence. Ultimately, the strike, in all of its complexity, becomes a "pitched battle for public opinion" (333). The text portrays the strike as an unmitigated success.[7] A seven-page epilogue situates the ramifications of the strike within the next three years of labor struggles both in Akron and nation-wide.

Other than Barbara Foley's treatment of the text in *Radical Representations*, Daniel Nelson's Introduction to the 1992 reprint of the text, and William Scott's treatment of the text in *Troublemakers,* the text does not receive sustained analysis, but rather only brief mention in several important critical works on proletarian and working-class literature. Some critics have reflected upon the fact that, as a woman writer within the radical literary tradition in the 1930s, McKenney was not taken seriously among the (self-designated) literary elite.[8] She also separated what she considered her more serious literary endeavors from those she undertook to, in her words, "make a living."[9] However, critics do not agree about the potency of her satirization, nor

how effectively she satirized American society from a radical position within the constraints of the mainstream media of the day.[10] Most of the criticism on *Industrial Valley* points out aspects of the text as documentary or journalistic literature[11] that fit into genre conventions of the strike novel, such as: its blending of fact and fiction[12]; the group (the "strike as") protagonist[13]; a local strike serving as an allegory for the larger national labor struggle[14]; portrayal of the spontaneous strike in the genre[15]; the relevance of the sudden emergence of the C.I.O. in the strike novel[16]; the degree to which the text serves as Communist Party propaganda[17]; and so forth. Both Daniel Nelson (a labor historian) and William Scott (a labor-literature scholar / critic) agree that McKenney's text exaggerates the leadership role that the Communist Party played in rallying the workers towards the two major rubber strikes that *Industrial Valley* portrays.[18]

In *Radical Representations*, Barbara Foley incorrectly asserts that the "'press' circulars and 'newspaper' headlines and articles… obviously issue from the writer's own pen" (420). While I cannot account for every quotation in the novel, and while it is entirely possible that McKenney fabricated some headlines and excerpts from articles out of thin air, McKenney uses at least a dozen direct quotes and close paraphrases of original articles and advertisements from the Akron *Beacon Journal* in Part I alone.[19] Foley concludes that *Industrial Valley* suggests that there are "no 'facts' independent of partisan articulation" and that McKenney's "pro-union" perspective in portraying the story of class conflict in Akron bears similarities to the pro-business perspective reflected in the public discourse propagated by the side of Capital (420). In one sense, this assessment addresses one of the concerns of McKenney's text. In the class struggle, and particularly during the quickly-transforming political climate of the Depression, a key part of industrial warfare is the "great battle of statements" (*Industrial Valley* 296) that McKenney portrays between the representatives of Capital and Labor, in terms of enlisting public opinion.

However, Foley's assessment does not take into consideration McKenney's critique of the imbalances of power at play. Nor does it mention the resources behind and intensity of Capital's campaign not only to spread misinformation about and besmear labor's efforts, but to indoctrinate workers against the very concept of organization.

The text does address the selection and promotion of "partisan articulation" by opposing sides in the process of class warfare. However, it is important to distinguish between different types of articulation – that is, between articulation based on personal experience and articulation based on widely-accepted mythology.[20] For example, while representatives from Goodyear and other "rubber moguls" confidently and authoritatively insist that its employees are happy and satisfied – a standard public relations approach – a government investigation by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics essentially finds "what every tirebuilder knew through his own experience" (117). Translated into the parlance of the workers, the investigation finds that conditions "'ain't human'" (118). The novel is as much about Akron's working poor discovering what their condition is in the wake of the economic collapse, and how to conceptualize it self-reflexively before articulating it publicly. This is especially true in light of the fact that *Industrial Valley* does not promote an unqualified "pro-union" perspective: it critiques the traditional American (read: A.F.L.) union structure as it portrays the rubberworkers of Akron confronting it.

William Scott's treatment of *Industrial Valley* in his important work *Troublemakers* examines the novel as an example of how mass industrial workers could – and, in the case of Akron's rubberworkers, did – utilize the physical factory machinery at their disposal to assert their combined power as a class. In *Industrial Valley*, they do so primarily by using their industrial expertise in machine operation to undermine their own, and the machines', true industrial purpose. That is, they shut down the machines through the simple yet effective tactic

of the sit-down (216-217, 225). Scott does an excellent job of fleshing out McKenney's portrayal of the frustration, sometimes debilitating, that rank-and-file strikers feel and express with A.F.L. leadership. The A.F.L. has become so comfortable in its traditional institutional role that it is practically unaware of the hurts, needs, and interests of its base. In fact, as Scott points out, it is in part because of this situation that the sit-down strike arises as a tactic: it is a way to circumvent the problem of a leadership unresponsive to elemental problems of workers on the factory floor (221-222).

Scott focuses on the way in which the rubberworkers make their collective voice heard by stopping production. However, he and the other critics of the novel do not pay close attention to the ways in which Akron's working poor have to first reject – become deaf to, in a sense – the myriad cultural voices that bombard the American public in order to promote and sustain the status quo. The text examines various cultural sources promoting the idea that one must keep strict dogmatic faith in the superiority of current American institutions, despite the fact that they are failing miserably to deliver on their promises. *Industrial Valley* is unusually sensitive to the power of the doctrinal arsenal that American Capital has for generations traditionally utilized in the industrial struggle. Similarly, the extant criticism of *Industrial Valley* does not examine the importance of public opinion in the text – not just the ways in which public opinion is shaped, but the ways in which the working poor asserted their role in being recognized as having a public opinion that deserves relevant social influence, and the ways in which Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal initiatives implemented programs that attended to this newfound social influence.[21]

Creating Order out of the Chaos of Mass Suffering

A few critics briefly mention the experimental nature of the text, without giving any serious

attention to either the nature (what makes it experimental?) or the purpose of its formal peculiarities.[22] As mentioned above, the formal structure of the text changes over the course of its three main parts. It is important to take into consideration that, formally, the chaotic nature of all the information being presented in Part I reflects the feelings of confusion and helplessness that people are feeling about the social ramifications of the Depression. Part I's content portrays different manifestations of society's weakening faith in long-standing social mythologies that they have, consciously or not, gripped onto with unquestioning, quasi-religious dogmatism (e.g., the Godlike supremacy of Capitalism; the potency of the "American Dream"). Part I's chaotic structure reflects the ways in which faith in these mythologies – and the hope of rewards that displaying this faith will reap – has crumbled and seems to be dying slowly and steadily.[23] The structure of Part II is similar to Part I – that is, with the exception of the emergence of **The Union Continued** thread of the narrative. Part II begins with **The Union**, depicting Communist organizers handing out leaflets to rubberworkers informing them of their newly acquired rights under the National Recovery Act. The subtext is that, now that people have begun to lose faith in traditional (i.e., controlled by Capital) channels of information like the newspapers, new types of information- and doctrine-distribution are becoming more appealing to a wider audience. Also important to take into consideration is the fact that, in Part II, we find headlines such as **The Fallen Mighty**, which depicts the legal problems of former bank executives accused of corruption. **Enter the Serpent** depicts the deceptive nature of the corporate tool of the "company union." **Good News, Maybe** depicts the announcement of Firestone's profits in the newspapers and the negative effects of this news on Akron's working poor. **Brother Workers** depicts the passing of "the word" among local industrial workers that the time to strike is at hand. And **Signs of the Times** depicts the actions of the Central Labor Union to begin to revive its authority.

Notice McKenney's implementation of religious terminology to emphasize, respectively, the "fallen" (evil) nature of the financial system; the "serpent[ine]" nature of trying to convince workers that such a dubious structure as a company union will give workers powers akin to those of the corporation they work for; the idea that unquestioningly interpreting corporate profits as a *positive phenomenon* (i.e., "Good News" as "Gospel") is societally detrimental; the terminology of fraternity used to celebrate the development of a Biblical concept such as "the word" used in relation to labor activism; and a quasi-apocalyptic terminology used to describe a rejuvenation of grass-roots activism.

The structural differences between Parts I and II thus suggest a Biblically-themed trajectory of order emerging from the formal chaos of Part I into the **The Union Continued** thread of Part II. The formal structure of Part III – based on simple numerical order – is so strikingly different from I and II, in fact, that it is surprising to me that no critic has mentioned it. Other than **The Prelude**, the items of Part III are titled only in ascending order of the days of the strike, providing a sense of mathematical order. One passage in Part III describes "a certain order emerg[ing] from the noisy confusion" of a union meeting (301). This Biblically-themed paraphrase of God's work in Genesis[24] could be used as a description of the text as a whole, insofar as the fragmentary, atomic narrative structure established in the individualized *items* of Part I develop into a narrative coherence established through class unification. The sentence concluding **The First Day** is "That was the first day" (300), an echo of the poetic structure of the Creation Story in Genesis.[25] (The pattern is repeated for days Two and Three in Part III of *Industrial Valley*: "That was the second day" [305]; "that was the third day" [310].) Furthermore, although the strike lasted thirty-seven days,[26] McKenney combines three days of the strike in **The Prelude** (February 14-17) and two days of **The First Day** (February 17-18) to ensure that

Part III ends with the item, **The Thirty-third Day**. I propose that McKenney intentionally manipulated the count of the days in this way in order to end the text with an item having a religiously-provocative number (i.e., thirty-three commonly and popularly understood to be the age of Christ when he was crucified). I feel this is especially likely as the last lines of Part III are: "'Glory, Glo-ry HALLELUJAH!' the rubberworkers sang. 'Glory, Glo-ry HALLELUJAH! For his soul goes marchin' ON'" (370). A central part of the trajectory of creating order out of chaos is the rubberworkers' increasing realization and implementation of the idea that a communal, mutualistic ethic is the only tactic with any likelihood of achieving success. Because the rubberworkers have a Christian cultural background (134, 136), their understanding of this is framed within an understanding of a Christian, neighborly brotherhood. At a rubberworkers' organization meeting, John L. Lewis, the former A.F.L. leader who broke away to create the C.I.O., addresses Akron rubberworkers. When he does, these "simple men of simple speech themselves" perceive him, unlike leaders representing the A.F.L., as a man "who put into words… facts they knew to be true from their own experience," a man who can talk with them about "their dreams, their problems, their suffering, cloaked in Biblical phrases…. [H]e said what the people already knew" (250-251). McKenney is here clearly emphasizing the importance of both the workers' own experiential sense of their social situation and their understanding of it within a Christian ethos. Given the amount of material McKenney devotes in the text to the concepts she attributes here to Lewis, I feel that this passage metafictionally indicates that *Industrial Valley* is attempting to accomplish what Lewis was able to accomplish (according to McKenney, at least) with his speeches. *Industrial Valley* is intended to 1) acknowledge and aesthetically capture the workers' plight of being continually confronted with stimuli, information, and doctrines that are counter to "their own experience"; and 2) do so with an

understanding of mutualist tactics that fit into "their own experience," i.e., one that incorporates an ethos that embodies a Biblically-themed critique of power.

The Depression in Akron: Through a Biblical Lens

The novel begins with the item **Parade**, portrayed from the perspective of two former rubber workers, Job Hendrick and Tom Gettling, who are walking to City Hall because "a rumor [has] swept" through Akron that "The Mayor will be handing out jobs at City Hall" (3). As we shall see shortly, the item utilizes several Biblical concepts in its portrayal of Akron's desperation. Simply naming a central character *Job* should alert us to the idea that many of the characters we shall meet in this text are workers who once had comfortable jobs that enabled them to feel they fit the description of living the American Dream. That is, they have recently and, to a considerable degree, inexplicably (insofar as the American ethos continues to insist for years that the Depression is a momentary blip) lost everything that would make them feel secure in that Dream. Immediately the living conditions of Job's family alert us to the general deprivation among Akron's poor and unemployed. Job awakens on a "naked mattress" (the family "sold the blankets"); he has "no pillows" (also sold); and he is surprised that his wife has prepared him a cup of coffee (borrowed from a neighbor) to invigorate him for his task. His thoughts and attitudes as he and Tom make their way toward City Hall, and especially when they have arrived, establish that they possess a sense of *faith* in the operations and power structures of society that will steadily disintegrate, leaving a void in desperate need of being filled. When the two arrive, they "ste[p] shyly" into City Hall, Job speaking "as though he were in church" (6-7). In anticipation of the Mayor's arrival, "crowds [keep] pressing" to get forward, feeling the competitive "need to be first when the Mayor start[s] taking down names" (7). Along with Job,

"three hundred men crow[d] forward wordlessly"; as "mobs of hungry unemployed stor[m] City Hall," Job tries "to speak. He meant to say, 'Take me. Pick me out, for the love of God. I'm a good man and I need the work. I got kids. Oh, Jesus Christ, take me" (7). The scene invokes language and imagery from the Gospels: desperate and sick "crowds pressing" Jesus after having heard rumors of the healing miracles he has performed (Luke 8.40, 45); hungry crowds that Jesus feeds by miraculously multiplying seven loaves of bread and some small fish into a meal for four thousand (Mark 8.1); a conflation of inclement weather with social conflict ("storming City Hall"), comparable to Jesus's warnings to the Pharisees and Sadducees that, although they may be able to interpret weather in a "'stormy… sky'" that is "red and threatening,'" they are not interpreting the metaphorical weather in the social "'signs of the times'" (Matthew 16.1-3). Job's silent appeals to higher powers, and the fact that, in his shock at being turned away, he "hear[s], but at first he d[oes] not understand" (Mark 13.13) add to the sense that the novel's characters' feelings of desperation and need for salvation are intended to be interpreted as thematically Biblical. In addition, his reverent attitude as he "step[s] shyly" (6) into City Hall "as though he were in church" (7) demonstrates the faith that Job and the other "three hundred men" have placed in the old systems and structures of power that will steadily become crippled under the weight of the Depression.

This scene sets up a motif that will persist throughout the novel. McKenney examines the doctrines and dogma that bolster the prevailing social hierarchy, framing them in the language of religious faith and belief. This motif is particularly evident in Part I of the novel, which devotes a considerable amount of textual space to exploring the institutions that largely dominate the economic / material, as well as the intellectual, lives of the citizens of Akron, both rich and poor. McKenney's text portrays a wide panoply of social conditions in Akron, ranging from conditions

of deprivation resulting in the evictions of families with small children (25-32; 40-44); a rat attacking and trying to devour an infant (16); a former business-owner throwing his three-year-old son into a furnace because God told him to "sacrifice [his] only-begotten son to save the world" (141); and impoverished unemployed persons freezing to death (or nearly so) (243, 251). On the other hand, McKenney portrays Akron's wealthy enjoying lavish parties (51, 52, 65, 89, 271), vacationing (34, 50), and attending business conventions of one kind or another (23, 24, 46, 47). McKenney's depictions of the latter – the ceremonies of the wealthy – provide considerable insight into the thought processes of those who control society to a considerable degree. McKenney portrays the types of events that the rich plan and attend much in the vein of religious ceremonies meant to strengthen flagging faith. For example, in Part I, **Silver Jubilee** portrays an event "celebrat[ing] the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Chamber of Commerce" in November 1932. Taking place days after FDR has been elected President (46), during a period when charity services literally do not have enough food to prevent the poor from starving (36-39) and as the Unemployed Council is scrambling to prevent evictions, the wealthy of Akron eat "steak dinner[s]" and listen to speeches, which are "mostly about having faith in Akron" (47-48). Those who have long stood to benefit from, and who have much to lose at the prospect of the failure of the socio-economic institutions that dominate American life similarly typically demonstrate an unwavering faith in them. The vague proclamation of faith delivered at the Silver Jubilee event is repeated a few pages later in an item, **An Advertisement**, describing a "full-page newspaper advertisement" sponsored by "two hundred small businessmen in Akron": "'The men on [the] page'" declare "'their faith in Akron'" "in large type" (51). These declarations of faith – at a public celebration and in print – are notable in that what "Akron" is meant to signify is very much open to interpretation based on one's social / political perspective.

The fact that the endorsement comes from business groups in both instances – in one case from Akron's wealthy and in the next from small businessmen – suggests that "Akron" is meant to signify the interests of those who control capital, as opposed to those who create it through their labor.

Ultimately, however, the Chamber of Commerce event proves for many of the attendees to be just a matter of going through socially prescribed motions. It turns out that "Nobody sitting on the raised platform believe[s] one word of what they or their fellows sa[y]." The scene reads like a parody of a formal church service full of parishioners who attend primarily out of a sense of duty, mechanically and unenthusiastically going through the ritual. Those in attendance watch the "aristocracy of Akron" – the "three rubber company presidents" sitting in "the places of honor" – and "sin[g] in a timid off-key chorus" (48). The item immediately following this one, **One Solution**, emphasizes the religious theme and suggests a parallel between this behavior and church attendance. At a Confirmation sacrament at a Cleveland church, Bishop James A. McFadden quotes from the Gospels, reminding parishioners that "'man cannot live by bread alone," and he urges them to accept that "the influence of the supernatural must pervade our lives or we are lost" (48). When we consider that this brief item follows an item describing Akron's wealthy sitting at a ceremony celebrating wealth, but not "believ[ing] one word" being said, the context of the passage the Bishop cites is crucial. The passage comes from Matthew, when Jesus is fasting for forty days and nights, and, "famished," he is tempted by the devil, who suggests that he need only "'command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But [Jesus] answer[s], 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"'" (Matthew 4.1-4). **One Solution** is two sentences in length, and the class of those to whom the Bishop is speaking is unclear; however, McKenney's placement of these two items

concerning literal and metaphorical nourishment – food and words – is meant to emphasize a chasm of difference between the lives of the wealthy and the lives of the poor in Akron. The literal starvation-level conditions of many in Akron are being ignored by men who can afford to eat steak dinners and declare, with words they do not believe, their faith in a town whose population is suffering in ways to which they are completely blind and indifferent. Meanwhile, those who have assumed responsibility for "administer[ing] charity" are reduced to "handing out grocery baskets and praying the money would stretch far enough to feed the starving" (36). Additionally, the authoritative "words" being spoken among those with power and authority are being promulgated publicly in the papers while privately regarded with diminishing faith by those who have conceptualized them.

The Newspapers: A Modern "Priestly Class"

The parallel that McKenney creates in Part I between the advertisement in **An Advertisement** and the ceremonies of **Silver Jubilee** and **One Solution** is important to the text. It is therefore necessary to examine the role of the doctrinal press in this process of faith-building. A crucial element of the text is McKenney's exploration of the doctrinal role that various forms of media play in bolstering ideas that assist the interests of the ruling classes of both Akron and American society in general. This critique manifests itself in McKenney's portrayal of various media forms (film, radio, speeches, national and local campaigns). However, she gives the press – and, in particular the local press – the greatest attention.[27] Her perspective as a journalist makes her well-attuned to some of the less obvious ways influential channels of information present a very skewed picture of the world, and a considerable amount of the text is dedicated to rendering transparent the tactics involved in the process. The first of many treatments of the press in

Industrial Valley is included under the vaguely-titled item **News Items**, two days after the march to City Hall portrayed in **Parade**:

> The *Beacon Journal* congratulated Summit County for its falling marriage license record. The annual report showed that during 1931 the number of marriage licenses dropped to the lowest level in the past fifteen years. / "There are altogether too many people in the world now to subsist upon the opportunities it affords," the *Beacon Journal* wrote firmly, "and the ignorant and the unfit, having scarcely any other interest in life, will multiply and replenish the earth until we shall not know what to do with them." (9)

Given here in its entirety, the item, its message vaguely reminiscent of eugenics-movement politics, is noteworthy for several reasons. The passage she quotes from the *Beacon* communicates an approval that suggests class-related contempt for those who are so beast-like and animalistic that the process of procreation is the only potentially useful activity of which they are intellectually capable. However, it is an act now rendered inconvenient by the lack of available jobs. Considered in context, the newspaper's use of the reference to Genesis 1.28 and God's "bless[ing]" and command to Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion" is peculiar. Rather than rhetorically invoking Biblical authority in order to support Biblical doctrine, its desired effect is intended to supersede it and counteract its original meaning. Also, there is an important political subtext to this message, insofar as it discourages Akron's poor from "multiply[ing]" *politically* – that is, it essentially encourages the kind of individual, atomistic existence that has been central to the ruling class's prescription to the wealth-producing classes since the late 19th Century. The authoritative use of the Biblical reference also diverts blame for the lack of the "world['s]" resources away from the gross mismanagement of financial resources by those whom the text will argue were largely responsible for the panic, crash, and resulting Depression. Rather, blame is placed squarely upon the shoulders of those whose labor has always been responsible for

creating the financial wealth that has cataclysmically disappeared. Finally, the identity of the "we" used in the passage includes, implicitly, two types of people: primarily, those who consider themselves to be the superiors of Akron's "ignorant" and "unfit" poor; and, secondarily, the voice of the press, which, as McKenney takes pains to demonstrate, is complicit in veiling important facts about the financial security of Akron and American society at large.

The *Beacon Journal*'s position furthermore shows a confluence of abstractly philosophizing about which class of humans deserves an allocation of the earth's blessings; and deciding which individuals should be taxonomized into deserving and non-deserving (who comprises the "ignorant"? the "unfit"?). This kind of abstraction is also displayed toward other social realms, including the extremely unpredictable vagaries of the behavior (to use a term animating a lifeless phenomenon) of the economy. Roughly ten pages after **News Items**, in another quote taken from "The *Beacon Journal*, Akron's leading newspaper" which is "published [in] an editorial," we find another reference to Genesis in the item **This Pinch**: "'It is manifest that this pinch cannot abide forever and that in the long run it is going to be a good thing for the country'" (19).[28] The source of the reference is intimately related to the passage referenced in **News Items**: "When people began to multiply on the face of the ground… the sons of God saw that [the daughters] were fair; and they took wives for themselves…. Then the LORD said, 'My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh…" (Gen. 6.1-3). This passage in the *Beacon* accomplishes several rhetorical purposes even if we do not consider the contextual Biblical source. It endows economic activity with lifelike characteristics. It euphemizes the economic catastrophe as a "pinch" when actual human beings are suffering and starving to death. It irrationally fulfils the role of cheerleading for the socio-economic status quo despite all of the manifest evidence available, particularly the fact that numerically staggering

portions of the national population are suffering. And, in this cheerleading role, it implicitly reinforces growing class divisions as justifiable. Furthermore, the placement of this item makes it particularly dark, tonally. It immediately follows the item **No Carfare**, easily the most gruesome item in this text that unflinchingly depicts several poverty-related scenes. In **No Carfare**, we meet Elmer Snyder, an impoverished teenager with bad teeth who can't afford a dentist. His teacher gives him a "free slip to go to a free dentist," but he is too ashamed to admit that he has no money to pay for fare. When he surreptitiously "catch[es] a hitch" on a car, he loses his grip, rolls on the icy street, and is run over by "truck wheels, grinding and shivering with the smack of the brakes [that] clos[e] over the child, blotting out everything human, leaving only an obscene pattern of blood and bones" (18-19). McKenney suggests that one could only conclude that the economic "pinch," so-called, will "be a good thing for the country" "in the long run" if one ignores this kind of suffering resulting from poverty, manifested in a variety of different ways throughout the text. Finally, the reference, when considered both in its Biblical context and when employed immediately after an item portraying a child being crushed under the wheels of a truck, has the effect of suggesting that the power and might of the marketplace will prevail – *it* will abide forever, even if individual human lives will be lost sacrificially to these kinds of periodical "pinch[es]."

These two examples I have spent some time examining are, of course, dramatic ones. However, McKenney is also attuned to journalistic tactics used to promote a perspective without appearing to do so. A common theme of McKenny's items in Part I of the text is commentary on the length, physical placement within the text, or omission of stories with enormous social ramifications, particularly for the working poor. For example, despite the fact that the "Depression [i]s the only thing Akron really care[s] about in the summer of 1932… the

newspapers… ignore[e] it completely," instead "fill[ing] columns with special stories, editorials, [and] interviews on the Prohibition issue" (24). The local papers report that national rubber consumption has decreased significantly but do "not care to write editorially" that the report they cite is "a harbinger of doom" economically for Akron's rubberworkers, both employed and unemployed, and thus reporting on the matter is "received in dead silence" (36). McKenney writes about the need for "a careful reading of the local papers" to unearth important information, and she writes that the newspapers "tush-tus[h]… ugly stories" concerning what the wealthy clearly understand to be the slow and steady disintegration of the local financial system. During a five day stretch of news in February, 1933 – right before a major bank panic in March – we find items describing the press's portrayal of parties thrown by the wealthy and "eviction riots" staged by the working poor. Interspersed into these five days' material of items, we find that inconvenient, potentially volatile news about bank failures are conveniently buried or remain unreported. McKenney uses phrases like "modest little story"; "a meager story, in both newspapers, well back in the classified advertising"; "No further mention… in the Akron newspapers"; "No further news"; and "small items" in "Both newspapers… on their back pages" to describe material that sometimes does, sometimes does not appear in the newspapers (64-65).

Similarly omitted from the newspapers are stories about the disintegration of social institutions that not only could be preserved by more equitable allocation of resources, but that the wealthy are actively trying to undermine with their influence and control over systems of government. Early in the text, in **School Days**, the Akron superintendent of education "desperately announce[s] in the papers" that programs are being cut and that students are being "crowded into dangerously rickety portable school-houses" (11). However, "neither of the newspapers in town troubl[e] to print" (11) that one reason for this cut in programs and building

renovations is that the wealthy of Akron – the "real estate men and the rubber companies" (12) – have devised a tax scheme to artificially decrease the values of properties in order to reduce taxes owed (11). Two or so pages after this item, McKenney gives us **High Wind**, which portrays a terrified teacher barely managing to lead even more terrified students out of one of the "dangerously rickety" (11) "portable schoolhouse[s]" (14) in a major storm, only to "watc[h] the flimsy wooden schoolhouse tremble on its foundations and then fall in a crumpled heap" (15-16). McKenney concludes the item acidly with a one-sentence paragraph: "Nobody, the newspapers said the next day, was seriously injured" (16). This information in the newspapers is technically accurate, but of course omits many important facts, including the unnecessary danger posed to children in having them taught in decrepit buildings; the fact that a "brick" and a "splintered beam" strike the teacher and a small student, respectively; and the relevant commentary about the fact that this hazard is directly related to the failure of the wealthy to contribute their fair share toward social institutions.[29]

Finally, some of McKenney's item pairings call attention to the fact that Akron's propaganda apparatus, designed to propagate the doctrines of the wealthy, is a form of class warfare – or, as she puts it one of Part II's **The Union Continued** items, "machine guns can be less impressive than 'public opinion'" (193). For example, in Part I, the item **Bonus Army** portrays those in Akron joining the tens of thousands of demonstrators who, in early June 1932, traveled to Washington, D.C., from all over the country to demand an early issue of bonuses they were promised for their service during The Great War. The effect of this demonstration on the town is mixed:

> The newspapers and the decent folk of West Hill watched these bankrupt travelers uneasily. The *Beacon Journal* hinted mysteriously of "red activity" in the ranks of both the local and out of town bonus-marchers. But no public official stepped forward to

> challenge the ragged Washington-bound veterans, and the newspapers were content to talk darkly of "agitators" without naming names or demanding action. (22)

There is, of course, a major dilemma facing "the decent folk" of Akron, and the propaganda voice that the newspapers provide them, in confronting a major demonstration waged by veterans against American government policy. Making accusations against those who, in the public imagination, were willing to risk their lives by enlisting to fight overseas in the Great War is dangerous business. Thus, vague innuendos attempting to conflate the specter of agitators with "red activity" is the best the press can conjure. And herein lies the irony that McKenney intends to arouse among those familiar with American labor disputes: "hint[ing] mysteriously of 'red activity'" and "talk[ing] darkly of 'agitators'"[30] is in 1932 (and has been for years) a standard, predictable reaction to any kind of spontaneous or grass-roots labor dispute in which a suitably "Red" scapegoat cannot be identified. Typically, if the labor disputants are average workers, "naming names" is unnecessary and "demanding action" is often as simple as making a blanket condemnation of labor's tactics and painting them as traitorous dupes of alien forces. But if the labor disputants' labor in question is, in a popular bourgeois American phrase of the times, having made "the world safe for democracy" (or some similar variation), the commonly used rhetorically simplistic tactic loses its emotional, visceral effect. This is particularly true when the veterans' desperate condition – "bankrupt[cy]" – is so reflective of the condition of countless others, including many (who are formerly) of the ruling class.

The crowning irony is that **Bonus Army** is immediately followed by **Forging On**, which features

> George Dunn, Vice-President of the First Central Trust Company, Akron's only big bank, ma[king] a cheerful speech at the opening session of the Ohio Bankers Convention…. Rotund Mr. Dunn said, among other things, "Each of us here has battled through. We may still feel the strain and fatigue of the struggle, but it is no longer overwhelming. We

> can forge on now with renewed courage which will carry us through to an undisputed victory" (23).

Curiously, George Dunn, in all sincerity, frames what the Ohio bankers have experienced in phrases connotating making a sacrifice during wartime. That is, they have attempted to save the remnants of a financial system that ultimately failed in great part because its "bankers took a gamble with other people's money that prosperity would last forever" (78). In doing so, Dunn suggests, these bankers have "battled through," have experienced "strain and fatigue of the struggle," and they can "forge on now with renewed courage." Placing this item directly after **Bonus Army** juxtaposes the activism of literal, impoverished veterans with the doctrinal activities of the wealthy who have conceptually self-designated themselves soldiers in a war with no clear enemy. **Bonus Army** has already alerted us to the fact that Akron's wealthy have sought, if ineffectively, to *portray* these veterans as enemies in class war. McKenney's suggestion is that what Akron's wealthy are engaged in is a kind of ideological class warfare, the objective of which is to protect their class privilege as their perceived social legitimacy rapidly disintegrates.

"Be of Good Cheer"

The breakdown of the economic order and the institutions that relied on its stability, combined with the fact that the propaganda system has consistently championed flimsy economic institutions, has a potent effect on the psychology of Akron's working poor. The idea of making "cheerful" proclamations, as Dunn does, in the midst of terrifying economic circumstances for Akron's poor and vulnerable, is echoed toward the end of Part I in a way that should remind us of the Biblical storm motif hinted at in **Parade**. The conclusion of the year 1932 has a mixed

effect on Akron's citizens: a combination of hope and a "superstitious fury" resulting from ushering in the new year of 1933 is followed by more unsettling news about local and national financial circumstances. From late February to early March 1933, public opinion transforms – one might say *evolves* or *devolves*, depending on one's perspective – drastically. The public is generally afraid of anomalies in the activities of the bank. In response, the *Beacon*, in "hearty newspaper stories," quotes business authorities in order to give "good cheer" to Akron's citizens. The newspaper claims that "'Akron welcome[s] the restrictions placed on withdrawal deposits'" (66); one Vice President declares that "'The public is apparently highly elated over'" (66) the new bank plan; the *Beacon Journal* assesses that "'Akron has every reason to be pleased with its bank plan'" (67). As the public reads these words informing them of their own opinions, "the lobby of The First-Central Trust Company [i]s a madhouse" (67): the "newspapers," however, continue to "spread great cheer over the local banking situation" (67). While local banks begin to show frightful signs of collapse and economic chaos to those running them, a "stunned city read[s] with touching faith the words of good cheer that both the *Times-Press* and the *Beacon Journal* [have] printed about the bank situation" – the "situation" being that withdrawals are being restricted. McKenney's use of the phrase "touching faith" establishes a religious context, and the phrase "good cheer" is a Biblically-loaded term, found in both Matthew and Mark, when Jesus's disciples, who are in a boat on a lake, become terrified when a storm comes upon them. Jesus, walking on water, tells them to "be of good cheer." At this point in the narrative, however, McKenney is employing the terminology ironically, suggesting that to listen to instructions to be "of good cheer" in this case would be to sorely misplace one's faith. This is the case not only because the press is employing a Biblically-related dogmatic authority in order to conceal financial hazards afoot, but also because the owner of the *Beacon Journal* is, in addition to being

the owner, "also a director in the [First-Central Trust] bank" (66).

Once the "bank structure" has become essentially "paralyzed," Akron's citizens realize that self-designated authorities have been feeding them misinformation about economic institutions that have great influence over their lives. The result of this is that "the last faith in the old order of things [goes] up in a bright fire of anger" (70). The first group of people that McKenney gives voice to in this regard are "the small merchants who fought for months against the mounting unemployment in the falling pay rolls, [who] g[i]ve way to despair" (70). One merchant bemoans the fact that "'the common man is left to carry the burden'" (70). Another begins to doubt the mythology behind the notion that America is "the richest country in the world'" (70). Presumably, McKenney gives the "small merchants" first narrative opportunity to voice their discontent for two reasons. One, their "faith" in the system is more steadfast at this point than those who are living at destitute-levels. Second – and more important – is that "These statements and dozens of others like them were printed in the now badly scared *Beacon Journal*. For a week the Akron newspapers had done their best to cover up for the bank. Frightened at last by the ugly spirit in the town, they suddenly shifted ground to reflect their readers' desperation" (70). From the perspective of those who publish the news – and, in an important way, set the framework for popular opinion – the merchants are the first citizens of Akron who think the system has failed whose opinions are considered newsworthy. There is another layer of sad irony here: The *Beacon Journal*'s "readers" are not "the common man" that the "small merchants" consider themselves to be, but, rather, the "small merchants," who, at this point in history, are quite *uncommon* insofar as they still have capital left to lose. (The working class has generally lost everything but their subsistence-level jobs – that is, if they are lucky enough to still *possess* their subsistence-level jobs).

Because they have felt this deprivation for longer than those who are merchants, the psychological effect of the new panic takes a bit longer to reach the actual "common man" – i.e., those who share in common the general deprivation of the Depression. But the effect is powerful: "In spite of the rapid somersault the newspapers made on the bank story, public faith in the local press began to disappear…. Now nobody believed anything they read in either sheet" (81). As Part I comes to a close, the kind of quasi-religious faith necessary to sustain Job's hope when he entered City Hall as if it were a church – that is, to put his trust in traditional authority figures – essentially vanishes. Anyone who is not technically wealthy – "the small merchants, the clerks, the middle class" – ends up feeling a sense of anger that they share, even if they do not realize it, with "the workers in shaking a clenched fist in the general direction of West Hill" (81). And, as

> Akron slowly struggle[s] out of business paralysis, it [i]s a new city. The old fetishes [a]re pretty largely gone. The man who had saved $2,500 for his old age no longer believe[s] that the rich [a]re fit to rule the country. The little merchant who had fought the Depression for years only, in the end, to see his bank account and his chance of expanding into a big merchant wiped out, no longer believe[s] that any honest energetic man could get ahead in the world. (82)

McKenney's language in this passage hints at several crucial elements that have been developing, and will continue to develop, throughout the text of *Industrial Valley*. The reference to "old fetishes" and the possibility of Akron being a "new city" is particularly loaded and requires some unpacking. While the phrase "fetish" is meant to remind us of Marx's ideas on "commodity fetishism," I feel that McKenney is using it here in a more literal sense.[31] That is, she uses it less as an *analogy* than she does to describe the magical powers with which, over time, Americans have endowed the wealthy as a class, including the "belie[f] that the rich," by virtue of their wealth, "[a]re fit to rule the country." The idea that the working poor are seriously questioning whether "the rich [a]re fit to rule" any longer should of course remind us of the

above-mentioned editorial in the city's most prominent newspaper, the *Beacon Journal*. That editorial used Biblical authority to call into question whether Akron's poor should have the right to biologically reproduce. In this instance, however, we find some important reversals. We saw the press denounce the working poor as "ignorant and unfit" in the item on marriage quoted above. At this point in the text, we find that the press has colluded in keeping the populace "ignorant" in order to protect the rich and, now that the veil has been lifted, the working poor consider the wealthy "unfit" to rule. As a result of the "fetish[istic]" narratives about success and "get[ting] ahead in the world" losing their power, the working poor come to a realization that reliance on those they have long considered their superiors is a chimera. (In fact, the idea that they should even have industrial superiors will become questionable.)

Paralysis: Old and New Understandings

Also important to note in McKenney's above description of Akron's citizens losing their faith in traditional institutions and economic structures is the phrase "business paralysis." The term "paralysis" is used often throughout the text of *Industrial Valley,* in a variety of contexts. The term's connotation of being rendered inactive makes it relevant in its context in labor tactics, as a strike is intended to shut down production. More specifically in the case of *Industrial Valley,* the text portrays the first major sit-down strike in what would essentially start a wave of sit-down strikes, the most famous at the Flint GM plant from December 1936 to February 1937.[32] Whereas traditional strikes had a structure that made the picket line relatively porous, in the sense that scabs could easily be brought in to continue production at a *reduced* level, what was so thrilling to strikers (and terrifying to foremen and bosses) about this new industrial tactic was its ability to completely shut down production in a vital sector and, therefore, paralyze production in

other crucial plants.[33]

Even more prominently in *Industrial Valley*, the concept is used to describe business activity in the wake of the Depression. The motif of "crippled" business or business "paralysis" is prevalent throughout the text. Sometimes the message is delivered in the pages of the press. For example, in Part I, The *Beacon Journal* laments that the local "bank structure [has been] paralyzed by" state government policies, and "Both newspapers [i.e., the *Beacon Journal* and the *Times-Press*] repor[t] flatly that business in Akron [i]s paralyzed" (69). As the effects of the financial crash become more dire, local panics that cause "paralysis in the city" are phenomena that need "cur[ing]" (73, 74). "Business paralysis" (75, 80, 82) becomes a diagnosis that requires, as stated in the item **Shot in the Arm**, encouraging "news" in order to revive "a moribund city" (82). The use of the terminology of human health and illness to endow the economic realm of society with animated life is particularly noteworthy insofar as the text portrays a doctrinal perspective privileging the production of industrial wealth over human welfare. Part I, in particular, sporadically devotes material depicting the severity of the effects of the Depression on those who are most vulnerable: impoverished children, the elderly, the mentally ill, and so forth. Early in the text, the item **Don't Hoard** describes an advertisement appearing on February 25, 1932 (before FDR's presidency has begun) in both the Akron *Times-Press* and *Beacon Journal* urging people to revive the economy by spending money they clearly do not have. The advertisement illustrates the perspective of the wealthier citizens of Akron:

> Akron citizens… were considerably startled to read a large advertisement urging them to stop hoarding their money. / The best people in town sponsored the don't-hoard-your-dollar-bills program…. "Idle money," the caption shouted in big type, "is crippling business, forcing men out of work, slowing down the wheels of industry, smothering the entire country's system of credit…." / In more modest type, the advertisement declared, "Oh, it's easy for the average man to say, That's no problem of mine, I haven't a lot of money. But it IS your problem…." Main stream blossomed with the spend-now

> literature, and the hoarding-is-a-crime campaign was well on its way among a very surprised population. (17)

The language used in this advertisement illustrates a chasm between two very different perspectives of the way the world works, captured in the "startle[ment]" and "surprise[e]" of the average Akron citizen. The "best people in town" – that is, the wealthy – have enough funds to pool their money together to sponsor a major advertising campaign to convince the population, a considerable number of whom are out of work and literally hungry, that it was not the failure of the economic model itself that has "'forc[ed] men out of work.'" Furthermore, the "'idle[ness]'" of money (money they do not possess) is "'crippling,'" "'slowing,'" and "'smothering'" institutions more supremely sacred than human welfare: while the city's desperate, destitute, and disinherited are suffering from literal physical maladies, it is "business" and "credit" that are represented in this "literature" as suffering.

Activists agitating on behalf of the poor have a quite different perspective of "paralysis" – which, it is important to keep in mind, is an important concept in the Gospels, as Jesus spends a considerable amount of time healing paralytics. Part I's provocatively titled item **The Beginning** gives us a perspective about paralysis that is both different from that of the wealthy, and that also has radically different prospects for a cure. **The Beginning** in this case refers to a zygote of class consciousness coming into fruition in June 1932 – before FDR's presidency, and within the same month of the Bonus Army marches mentioned above. The item depicts what were commonly termed in the press "eviction riots." This roughly seven-page item begins with a scene similar to that described in the text's first item, **Parade**. That is, a man, Earl Paternoster, gets out of bed in the morning, with no job to go to, and meets with a neighbor. This scene, like **Parade**, will develop into a social demonstration of sorts. **Parade** depicts desperate people gathering at

City Hall to supplicate themselves before traditional powers to save them from socio-economic despair. **The Beginning**, however, depicts ordinary, desperate people gathering to confront traditional powers (in this case, in the form of the police) to try to save one of their own from being dispossessed. Paternoster's friend Pete, who "'heard a guy talkin' on a street corner'" (25-26) about politics, decides to see if this "guy" might be able to help. Scotty Williamson, a member of the "Unemployed Council" (and, incidentally, a member of the Communist Party) has experience in this sort of affair. From Scotty's perspective, metaphorical paralysis is not some kind of economic abstraction. He laments to Pete that "'The unemployed of this town are so goddamned whipped and sort of paralyzed-like that they won't even get out on a picket line to yell for more beans'" (27). Once he has recruited about forty men and women to volunteer in this demonstration, his anxiety about the jobless being "goddamned whipped" prove to be well-founded. The recruits find "Mrs. Paternoster… h[olding a] softly complained baby" (28); a girl of "nearly seven… shocked into deep silence" (29); "women winc[ing]" at the humiliation the Paternosters are experiencing, whilst "police officers wor[k] steadily in great discomfort," as they "fe[el] the soundless protest…[,] fe[el] the woman's tears and the man's despair… [, and] shr[ink] in their flesh under the wordless hostility of the witnesses" (29). Even after the enthusiastic cries of "Scotty's little army" "cut through the silence like a whip," their "cheers die away in the enveloping quiet" and in a "depth of silence." Scotty himself is "paralyzed by the silence," "infected" by a silence that sends a "wave of nausea flooding his throat and palate" (30).[34]

Ultimately, the demonstration Scotty organizes is successful. The crowd (a term used eighteen times within three pages) gains heart, songs are sung, and the Sheriff and his men end up retreating as the crowd grows (29-31). The details with which the "soundless, motionless

scene" develops into a successful, peaceful protest are important in McKenney's critique of the "paralyzed" unemployed of Akron. The crowd's hesitation to react to Scotty's words seems to be based on more than simple fear of the police – or, for that matter, fear of a situation they are unaccustomed to. Scotty exhorts the crowd:

> "Are you going to let this man, a good worker all his life, and his wife, and his little kids, be thrown out on the street?" There was no answer. The nausea came back again to Scotty's throat. They would not follow him. He was a lousy Communist. No ripple swept the crowd with his words. They were paralyzed. Dear God, there was no rousing these people. They were too far gone in despair. (30)

The very notion that the dispossessed have even a *moral* right (not to say anything of a *legal* right) to interfere with laws protecting the rights of property is simply unimaginable to the bulk of the people bearing witness to this eviction.[35] Nonetheless, the "witnesses" to this eviction are, when "Scotty's army" arrives, demonstrating a palpable "wordless hostility" toward the policemen who are carrying out the eviction. Presumably, their "hostility" is "wordless" both because it is silent and because they have not yet developed the vocabulary to articulate the *reasons* for their feelings.

Also important to note is that this inability to act – this paralysis not only of will but of thoughts – is a reciprocal infirmity. Scotty cannot act unless others act with him. Scotty's inspiration to act comes from a profoundly moral, sentimental source, but his ability to act is affected by a sense of feeling and experiencing what the "crowd" is feeling. Their "silence infect[s] him." Confronted with their "parlay[sis]," he briefly "c[an't] move [as their] despair c[omes] over him." His "pity" for them "ma[kes] him blind. Poor people, poor suffering people, poor children. Dear God, there was no cure for them unless they cured themselves" (30). I feel it is no accident that the overwhelming compassion he feels for these disinherited people, delivered in the manner of a personally-intoned quasi-prayer,[36] follows his exhibiting three of the principal

afflictions Christ cures in the Gospels: literal dumbness (i.e., silence); blindness; and paralysis.

Right after this moment, Scotty's "blindness pass[es]" (30). Finding a "shrill voice" (31) he begins to sing "a song to the tune of an old Negro hymn" (30). The "stillness" of the crowd's paralysis "br[eaks]" (31). The three afflictions are cured through collective action. It is significant that Scotty's singing is described as being in an "off-key voice," an echo of the "singing in a timid off-key chorus" performed at the Chamber of Commerce event mentioned in **Silver Jubilee**. The meaningless abstractions about "having faith in Akron" and the "timid singing" during the events described in **Silver Jubilee** are contrasted here with the experience of successful, collective social grass-roots activism. This is a figurative miracle, performed in order to restore sight, voice, and movement to a segment of the population that has been figuratively disabled.

Weather and Society

McKenney uses another Biblical motif – that of weather-related natural phenomenon – in a similar vein in order to reflect social transformation and activism. Close attention to details about the weather runs throughout *Industrial Valley*.[37] This is not particularly noteworthy in itself, of course, in a labor-struggle text intensely concerned with punishing working conditions in factory settings within a geographical setting featuring cruel winters and blazing summers. ("'It ain't human!'" is practically a chorus throughout the novel.) This conceit manifests itself in different ways. For example, McKenney associates turbulence in the weather with the deprivation of the poor. Some are literal connections: the above-mentioned literal storm that destroys a dilapidated school house filled with impoverished children (14); the above-mentioned sub-zero temperatures and icy winds that cause Elmer Snyder to lose his grip upon a car and be smashed into an

unrecognizable smear of blood and bones on the road (18); the effects of "terrible" (289), "howling" (290), "burn[ing]" (291) wind that strikers must endure in an Ohio winter, "weather so terrible big men we[ep] from the cutting wind" (301) and "Men's faces ble[ed] [from] the cold" (305). Some passages direct our attention to the artificial weather created by industrial conditions or industrial conflict: "rubber smoke" is partly responsible for making "the sky… quite dark" at "high noon" (a phenomenon with Biblical connotations) (40); a "gas attack" during a strike causes "clouds of gas [to] bl[ow]" around the neighborhood (the news of which "spread[s] through Akron like wildfire" [237]). Mass deprivation causes metaphorical disastrous weather, as relief organizations are inundated by "floods of new cases" (80) and are "snowed under with relief applications" (146).

Additionally, and most important for my purposes, is the metaphorical turbulence that begins to stir in the hearts of the working poor themselves. **Heat Wave** (88-89) is the last item in Part I portraying the struggles of Akron's workers. McKenney describes the effects of an "intolerable" heatwave in June 1933 on Akron's working poor (the final two items, each one sentence in length, describe the implementation of a bank investigation and FDR's signing into action of the National Industrial Recovery Act). Children "gas[p]" from the rubber smoke that fills the neighborhoods; "Girls who punc[h] tubes sicke[n] from the smell and the pall of heat"; "half-naked giants" "struggle[e] to keep up the inhuman pace" and "kee[l] right over" "[i]n the pit" (a term, with Biblical connotations, the rubberworkers use for the extremely hot factory floors) (89). The physical effects upon Akron's populace, in conjunction with the bitter experiences that have been accumulating over the years, create dangerous social conditions:

> Factory hands who had suffered through the winter, making the increasingly rapid pace without a word of protest, began to grind their teeth in the heat and ask God to witness that they could not stand it. Girls who supported whole families and were afraid of losing

> their jobs suddenly told the woman punching tubes next to them, "We got to do something. This ain't human." / So while on West hill Mrs. F. A. Seiberling entertained the ladies of the Garden Club on her estate, and was duly photographed carrying a large parasol against the heat wave, in the factories a storm brewed. (89)

The passage incorporates several of the text's key concepts into its examination of how Akron's working poor suffer while the wealthy enjoy their usual "entertain[ments]." Their "ask[ing] God to witness" their suffering, in one sense, grounds their "suffer[ing]" within a Biblical motif. In another sense, it emphasizes the essentially *private* nature of their suffering, insofar as to "suffe[r]" "without a word of protest" is to waste the potential of an as-yet unutilized mutual voice. The effects are felt not just by men, but by entire families, including the "Girls" who are "support[ing] whole families." The idea of "girls" forced by economic necessity to carry this burden, particularly in a text published in 1939, suggests a fundamental chaos in the traditional American social order experienced by the poor. These "girls" have had thrust upon them the economic responsibility of supporting "whole families" not within the context of trying to effect equal gender rights due to activism, but because those in control of economic institutions have deemed their labor cheaper than men's labor and, therefore, corporate entities have begun to capitalize on the fact that it is more practical and cost-effective to hire them to do the same jobs for less pay. The "girls" also feel the sting of having to play the dual traditional roles of both breadwinners who might "lose their jobs" (traditionally coded male) and those who perform unpaid domestic labor (traditionally coded female). Meanwhile, they are considered diminutively by society at large to be *girls,* the term used very consciously here with its class connotation. Wealthy *ladies,* meanwhile, enjoy a party funded by the profits gained from low-wage labor provided by "girls." Viewing the metaphorical social weather in this lens, with this kind of social chaos having begun to take its psychological toll upon Akron's working poor, the image

McKenney paints of Mrs. F. A. Seiberling – holding her parasol – begins to take on a threatening tone. It looks less like a wealthy woman enjoying her class privilege, and more like a figure about to be caught unawares and unprepared with a parasol that might prove to be, symbolically, quite flimsy to protect against the impending rage of the "storm brew[ing]" "in the factories."

The text portrays that, by March 1934, the class-consciousness of Akron's workers has been ignited by grass-roots activism; the effects of the National Recovery Act programs; rubberworkers' dissatisfaction with A.F.L. leadership; and public disgust with emerging evidence of corruption in Akron's financial institutions. In Part II's **Brother Workers**, McKenney narratively establishes inconspicuous origins for what will end up becoming a social confrontation involving a storm. It begins with "a stir, like the waves in a quiet lake made by a passing motor boat [going] through the rubber factories…. A whisper, and it gathered strength. A word, and the word passed from tire machine to tire machine, from a man in a washroom to a friend, who told it over a bar after shift end. / 'They're goin' on strike, in Auto'" (141). McKenney is here drawing together several elements as the foundation for what will develop into a kind of social storm. Conceiving the "waves in a quiet lake" as being produced not as organic weather but by the "motor" of a boat is suggestive of the mechanical, technological, and industrial nature of this social turbulence. McKenney is also capitalizing upon the connotative similarities – some of them Biblical – between terms and concepts like *whisper* and *word* with *breath, spirit, wind*. (She later more firmly establishes the conceptual connection when she describes the energizing of organized activity within Akron's Central Labor Union: "At last a fresh wind swe[eps] through the old organization… show[ing] a new spirit" [227].) McKenney combines these concepts and uses a phrase commonly used to describe a growing storm: "gathered strength." As these phenomena develop, the wealthy are *somewhat* aware of what is

growing: “the newspapers reflec[t] the opinions on Main Street. ‘Fear Big Walkout in Auto Industry,’ the *Beacon Journal* headline read[s]” (142). The term “‘Walkout’” used in the headline, however, suggests that, for all of the repressive tools at their disposal – strong and punitive control over management, spies, control over popularly disseminated doctrinal resources – the wealthy are not as in control of the situation as they think they are. The ramifications of a *sitdown* turn out to be substantially different from those of a *walkout*. In order to be effective, these phenomena – these growing whispers – *must* be subtle and secretive as they “gather strength” and spread.

Confronting the Storm

> “In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, ‘I have compassion for the crowd… If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way – and some of them have come from a great distance.’ His disciples replied, ‘How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?’ He asked them, ‘How many loaves do you have?’ They said, ‘Seven.’ Then he ordered the crowd to *sit down* on the ground….” (Mark 8.1-6, my emphasis)

Ultimately, the narrative escalation of the weather metaphor culminates in Part II’s **The First Sitdown**. Having lost hope in the ability of both New Deal programs and the leadership of the A.F.L., fed up with reading about corporate profits in the newspapers, and having seen strike victories by match-manufacturers, bakers, insulators, and rubberworkers, Akron’s tirebuilders at the Firestone plant employ a novel industrial innovation. The nearly seventeen-page item begins with the “mountaineer workers of Akron” going to listen to the “Hungarian who ran the union print shop…[,] the best story-teller in town[,]” as he gives a “new slant on old history” by telling of his experiences during the Great War. He and his fellow workers “‘had an inside strike’” by “‘just s[itting] around by our machines, and, by God, nobody could come in and take our jobs,

and they couldn't arrest us either. We were on the job'" (251-252). As McKenney portrays it, his words inspire the rubber workers to stage their own "sitdown." On the day they have planned to try this (for them) new tactic, outside of the factory "the winds gr[ow] fierc[e]," while inside the mechanical activity of the factory is described as being its own kind of artificial storm. There is a "constant uproar" in the plant (259); workers must feverishly keep up with an "insufferable racket and din and monotonous clash and uproar"; "lights flash" inside (256); we hear the "roar of the conveyor belt and the revolving wheels… [that] drow[n] out" any sound the workers make to each other (258); there is "crash[ing] and whir[ing]" that "blot[s] out every human sound" (256). (The language in the latter two quotes echoes Elmer Snyder having his human features "blotted out" [19] under the wheels of a truck.) Furthermore, McKenney emphasizes language suggestive of a body of water: men stand in "pools of light" (used twice: 258, 261). Further emphasizing the suggestion of the barest whispers gathering strength until they become like the wind is the perspective of the foreman. He feels that something is amiss because "'The fellows ain't talking any'": they are "'as quiet as a bunch of ghosts'" despite the fact that for "'The last two nights they've been howling'" about the firing of a fellow worker that they found unwarranted. Therefore the foreman is intensely trying to detect the "barest whisper" of discontent because he does not want such a thing "'to spread'" (260), terminology echoing the above-mentioned "whisper[s]" and "word[s]" that, "like the waves in a quiet lake," "gathe[r] strength," "pass[ing] from tire machine to tire machine" (141).

The narrative moves that McKenney is making here are complex and require a bit of reflection before I proceed to the item's climax. The tempestuous weather motif, related to various conditions suffered by the working poor, has become conflated with the metaphorical storm that constantly occurs, from day to day, in the factories. The emotional / intellectual

"storm brew[ing]" "in the factories" that has sparked a developing sense of class consciousness has become, in a sense, narratively manifested in the actual physical operations and conditions of the factory. Similarly, McKenney has rendered the motif of voices and their relation to silence / being silenced particularly dramatic, as the roar of the factory's machinery dwarfs any audible sound the workers make. Meanwhile, the foreman ironically becomes anxious about the silence of the previously "howling" workers. So anxious, in fact, that he is trying to hear a sign and discern its meaning in the slightest breath they make. However, they have prepared to make their collective voices heard *metaphorically*, rather than literally.

When, "drawing a deep breath," one of the rubberworkers shuts off the power using the "master safety switch,"

> Instantly, the noise stop[s]. The whole room l[ies] in perfect silence. The tirebuilders st[and] in long lines, touching each other, perfectly motionless, deafened by the silence. A moment ago there had been weaving hands, the revolving wheels, the clanking belt, the moving hooks, the flashing tire tools. Now there [i]s an absolute stillness, no motion anywhere, no sound. / Out of the terrifying quiet c[omes] the wondering voice of a big tirebuilder near the windows: "Jesus Christ, it's like the end of the world." (262)

There are many levels of irony at play here. The factory workers have "stopped" all "noise" in the factory, created a "perfect silence" reminiscent of the muteness that so dismayed Scotty earlier in the text. And yet this muteness – accomplished by a type of *paralysis*, which also dismayed Scotty when displayed by Akron's poor – *speaks* volumes and is an incredible innovation in direct *action*. It is the "perfect synchronization" (261) with which they stage this muteness and paralysis that differentiates it from what was previously portrayed as atomized versions of "silence" and "motionless[ness]". Also significant is the fact that the first "wondering voice" to break the quiet uses two religious concepts: his use of Jesus's name as an interjection, and an apocalyptically-themed assessment. These solidify, in my view, what many elements of

the scene that McKenney has been painting have been hinting at. To these rubberworkers, what they have achieved is essentially a miracle. The "absolute stillness" they have achieved invokes Jesus's calming of "waves" during a "great windstorm" (Mark 4.37) when he and his apostles are in a boat on the sea. Jesus "rebuke[s] the wind, and sa[ys] to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind cease[s], and there [i]s a dead calm" (4:39). The apostles are "filled with great awe" that "the wind and the sea obey" Jesus (4:41).

The line coming immediately after the exclamation delivered by the "wondering voice" further solidifies the sense of miraculousness – the sense of "great awe" reflected in the Gospel tale. However, for the rubberworkers, the foundation of the "miracle" is not so much supernatural as it is the discovery of a previously unutilized human power made manifest through mutualism. That "wondering voice"

> br[eaks] the spell, the magic moment of stillness. For now his *awed words* sa[y] the same thing to every man, "*we done it*! We stopped the belt! By God, we have done it!" And men beg[in] to cheer hysterically, to shout and howl in the fresh silence. Men wra[p] long sinewey arms around their neighbors' shoulders, screaming, "We done it! We done it!" / For the first time in history, American mass-production workers ha[ve] stopped a conveyor belt and halted the inexorable movement of factory machinery. (262, emphases mine).

Part of the miraculousness portrayed in this scene, to be sure, stems from the fact that what these rubberworkers are experiencing has no precedent in American labor history. But what distinguishes this scene of the cessation of a metaphorical storm in the factory exhibiting storm-like features from the cessation of a literal storm in the Gospels is the source of the "miracle." The "great awe" of the disciples is over the power of one man. On the other hand, what the "awed words" of one rubberworker "say" – and the words say "the same thing" to "every man" present – is that what was previously considered to each individual as impossible as controlling the literal weather is possible when strived at by "we." The result is that, instead of silence, we

find “shout[s] and howl[s].” Instead of “shout[s] and howl[s]” of despair, we find shouts and howls of joy. These physical expressions of joy accompanied with the term “neighbo[r]” are also important. The term has obvious Biblical, New Testament connotations – in particular, of course, from Jesus’s focus on loving one’s neighbor as yourself. But there are further relevant connotations within the text that need to be considered in conjunction with this provocative use of a potent Biblical term. Whereas the business community has attempted relentlessly to instill the idea in their workers’ heads that they are *individuals* – to eliminate the slightest notion that there is anything to be gained by initiating reciprocity of action – the idea of a “neighbor[hood]” to be embraced within the factory is practically revolutionary by comparison. If *loving* one’s neighbor is a revolutionary idea within the context of the Gospels, *embracing* one as a neighbor – the man literally standing next to you performing similar work and suffering similar degradation – *within the context of the factory floor* is similarly revolutionary as portrayed in this text, when considered in the context of what can be accomplished by doing so.

The term *neighbor* also has important connotations in the way that McKenney portrays structures of power in the novel. Akron’s factories still turn profits during some of the most terrible economic periods of the Depression. However, the profits are literally going to different neighborhoods. This is true of different neighborhoods within Akron: the inhabitants of West Hill enjoy some of this wealth. More strikingly, however, a considerable amount of the profits goes to the absentee banker-owners in Manhattan and Cleveland. Similarly, the industrial decisions being made that are leading to the conditions that Akron’s workers are rebelling against are also being made in other neighborhoods. *Industrial Valley* examines the role that an unaccountable corporate hierarchical structure plays in the lives of Akron’s poor. Through financial “gyrations whose details leave even financial historians dizzy” (221), New York banks

have ended up "own[ing] enough… to control the fate of Goodyear rubberworkers" (221). A "board of directors" operates in "[d]eepest secrecy":

> Nobody in Akron kn[ows] who belonged to the board of directors, with the exception of one or two names. The men who s[it] at a table changing the lives of Akron workers [a]re considerably more remote from the dirty little Ohio industrial city than any English absentee landlord had ever been from his Irish peasants. These men represent[t] the stockholders. But lots of Akron people h[o]ld stock in Goodyear. [A]re they represented by these mysterious overlords? Not at all. (220)

McKenney explores the way in which this (at the time) relatively new "peculiar form of control" – which, in 2019, has become utterly commonplace – "disenfranchise[s]" even "common stockholders" (221-222). This is to say nothing about local *stake*holders: those whose lives and livelihoods are most impacted by decisions of enormous consequence. Even Paul Litchfield, CEO of Goodyear, has no personal influence over the autocracy of the pursuit of wealth creation (220). Those making the decisions that cut wages, increase hours, and increase unemployment have no incentive, legal or otherwise, to "consider… [the] devastating misery both to Goodyear workers and to Akron" that their decisions will have:

> Since they [a]re so remote from the small Ohio city, and so remote in understanding and knowledge of a factory worker's life, their hearts c[an] not be wrung by the thought of hungry men. Shielded from seeing the ugly consequences of their policies by physical and intellectual distance, they c[an] not dream of the human havoc they pla[n] to *create*. (221, my emphasis)

The phrase "human havoc they planned to create" is a paradox important to both the ideas promoted in and structure of *Industrial Valley*. Creating destruction or chaos is only a contradiction if one ignores everything other than the creation of wealth that results from the process. McKenney provides us with two competing ethics that she forges Biblically. One is a top-down, God-like control over human affairs in order to *create wealth*, with chaotic ramifications that we see reflected in the formal structure of Part I of the text. The other is a

grass-roots wresting of control over economic decision-making in order to *create* a sense of *social order* based on popular activism out of that chaos in a spirit of mutualism that, McKenney is suggesting in the text, captures a Biblical spirit of fraternity that business-minded ideologues have toiled to eradicate from American communities through control of doctrinal systems. Given the concentrated efforts of business power in doing so, McKenney suggests, it rather approaches a miracle when average human beings are able to withstand multiple fronts of ideological bombardment in order demand recognition.

There are important historical parallels between the Great Depression and the post-2008 Great Recession. Of course, in late 1929, no one knew that America was in what would become known historically as a Great Depression. As *Industrial Valley* takes pains to demonstrate, in the early stages of the Depression years, it was common for the most privileged in American society to endorse keeping faith in a system that had been promoted by businessmen since the 1920s as having an aura of divine-ordination[38] – to promote the idea that the economic failure was just a momentary setback in an otherwise perfect system. In the aftermath of the 2008 crash and the ensuing Great Recession, Americans have the available hindsight to understand that it required a global war economy, in combination with the implementation of a Keynesian economic structure, regulatory processes to stabilize market activity, and a more equitable model of taxation and wealth distribution to restore important elements of the "American Dream" that Akron's citizens lament the loss of in *Industrial Valley*. And yet, we find that, despite the fact that these structures and processes have, since the late 1970s and early 1980s, been dismantled and/or stripped away in order to maximize profits on an economy based on financialization as opposed to manufacturing, we find in mainstream public discourse a similarly dogmatic faith in the supremacy of the prerogatives of Capital. The American public is losing faith in the *promises*

of Capital – a public including those who supported and continue to support Donald Trump in the name of Making American Great Again (by lending political weight to policies that further exacerbate income inequality). Yet, Capital's discourse has become ingrained enough in the public mind overall that there is little to suggest that those with real power have any interest in making even minor adjustments in the status quo to mitigate the failures of these promises.[39]

However, there are important differences to be taken into consideration between these two historical phenomena as well. While the social ramifications of the Depression were terrifying to the extremely wealthy of American society for years, in 2008 the very wealthy had very little to worry about in terms of having their power being seriously challenged by those their policies had harmed. It did not take nearly as long for the extremely wealthy of American Post-2008 to have their prestigious positions in *reality* (if not in the public mind) restored. The sense of class-consciousness and -solidarity that was forged during the Depression years is crucially absent contemporarily. Anger and dissatisfaction with the failure of American society to deliver on its promises of an "American Dream" are abundant. However, in part due to the decrease of union strength and the failure of the Democratic party to represent working class interests, the public's wherewithal to direct that anger and dissatisfaction towards those who have consciously instituted policies that direct wealth away from the working classes and towards the hyper-rich has been greatly diminished. Over time, the very idea of a "working class" identity has practically disappeared in this country. The political reaction in the wake of the Great Depression was for FDR to react to human suffering by implementing policies designed to attenuate that suffering – or at least to attempt to do so. A major difference between the crisis beginning in 1929 and the crisis *beginning before* and then *culminating in* 2008 is that, in the 1930s, the working-class had enough of a sense of class-consciousness to amass collectively and make

political demands. By 2008, other than the extraordinary awareness about income inequality (but close to non-existent actual political gains) achieved by the "Occupy" movement, grassroots political activism on class lines has been tepid at best. The Great Depression taught important lessons to the working classes of the United States. Also importantly, this cataclysm taught important lessons to the business community, who have spent the last 90 years honing the sophistication of their propaganda in order to stave off the possibility that the American public would again doubt their competence in shaping social policy.

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[1] The seven-page Epilogue frames the events of Parts I-III, which cover events up until March 21, 1936, within the social context of events taking place during the next two years.
[2] One reason I refer to McKenney's sections as *items* is that, after the provocatively titled **Parade** and **Lethe**, the third item in the text is called, simply, **News Items**. It would seem that, particularly in Part I of the text, she is portraying each story represented in each item as an individual unit without an *explicit* connection to other items in the section. As I explain below, in Parts II and III, this phenomenon – individualized units of information – begins formally to change: the items begin to take on more coherent storylines.
[3] See, for example, Bertstein's *A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941*; Brecher's *Strike!*; Fine's *Sit-down*; and Roberts's *The Rubber Workers*.
[4] See Wald (*Trinity*) 171.
[5] Other examples include making a conscious decision as a child to interfere with the efforts of a lifeguard student to save her from drowning (*Eileen*, 58); learning, as a child, about the violent history of England's aristocracy, including child-murders (*McKenney's*, 3-4); her dog being poisoned by a man she and her sister took to be "a German spy" during the Great War (19)
[6] It is noteworthy that this perception of the A.F.L. – as an institution whose primary role during the emergence of class-consciousness during the Depression was to prevent or retard the efforts of grass-roots efforts at organizing – is detectable in other more traditional (but, of course, subjective in their own fashion) histories of the labor movement. See, for instance, Adamic (346, 360, 362, 405); Bernstein (101-102); Lens (276-277, 280-283, 285-286); Levinson (31, 77, 120, 141); Roberts (97); and Vorse (9)
[7] See Lens (288) and Roberts (151), who qualify the success, particularly the on issue of union-recognition.
[8] See Denning 143; Rabinowitz (*Labor and Desire*) 34;
[9] See Kunitz and Haycraft (883-884).
[10] See Scott, B. (97), who detects "light social satire"; Wald, on the other hand, suggests that McKenney is able to "present a Marxist sensibility in forms accessible to a broad audience" (*Trinity* 172). Denning briefly describes McKenney's tendency to self-satirize within the historical context of being a CP-affiliated woman writer during a period in which radical women writers were not taken seriously (143).
[11] See Blake 155; Foley 420-421; Hapke 229; Wald (*Trinity*) 172.
[12] See Nelson xi.
[13] See Blake 155; Foley 405; Hapke 220; Scott, W. 219.
[14] See Blake 155; Rabinowitz ("Locating Collapse") 25.
[15] See Hapke 229; Scott 217, 220.
[16] See Hapke 219; Nelson xvii, xviii.
[17] See Scott, B. 98
[18] See Nelson xvii; Scott 228.

[19] McKenney uses direct quotes from the *Beacon Journal* on the dates that she cites in her items in the following items: **This Pinch**, March 11, 1932 (19) ("They've Had Their Lesson." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 11 March, 1932, p. 4.); **Jinx Year**, December 31, 1932 (52) ("So Long, 1932." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 31 Dec. 1932, p. 4.); **An Advertisement**, December 31, 1932 (51) ("1933 Marches On!" *Akron Beacon Journal*. 31 Dec. 1932, p. 24.); **Technocracy**, January 24, 1933 (60) ("Stork Defies Technocrats!" *Akron Beacon Journal*. 24 Jan. 1933, p.1); **Price Cuts**, February 3, 1933 (62) ("Suicide of the Tire Barons." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 3. Feb. 1933, p. 4.); **Far-away Drum**, February 21, 1933) (64) ("Comstock Prepares for Bank Reopening." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 21 Feb. 1933, p.22.); **Bombshell**, February 27, 1933 (66) ("Public Accepts Akron Bank Move." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 27 Feb. 1933, p.1.); **Wednesday**, March 1, 1933 (67) ("New Bank Accounts Growing as Akron Situation Clears." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 1 Mar. 1933, p.1.); **Thursday**, March 2, 1933 (69) ("Akron Struggles to Recover." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 2 Mar. 1933, p. 1.); **Friday** (71) ("Bank Deposits Must Be Guaranteed." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 3 Mar. 1933, p. 1.). She uses paraphrases of actual articles or advertisements that capture the spirit of the original on the dates that she cites in her items in **Don't Hoard**, February 25, 1932 (17) (Ohio Edison Company Advertisement. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 25 Feb. 1932, p. 23); **Tuesday**, February 28, 1933 (67) ("And Now, Business as Usual." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 28 Feb. 1933, p. 4.); **Bonus Army**, June 3 1932 (22-23) ("Bonus Seekers Shelterless as They Pour into Capital." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 3 Jun. 1932, p.1.).

[20] In *The Disinformation Age*, Eric Cheyfitz examines different manifestations through American history of the "tension between faith and experience" that have affected the "promise" of American "Exceptionalism" and the "American Dream" (61, 180). *Industrial Valley* offers a portrayal of just such a crucial moment in the American Narrative.

[21] Franklin D. Roosevelt's role in *Industrial Valley* is complicated. In **The Savior**, FDR's "words" are briefly able in 1933 to "cure the panic" over financial chaos "in Akron," particularly among those "in the valley" (i.e., the working poor) (71-73). Due to his novel approach of attending to the needs of organized workers, the wealthy consider him at some points in the narrative to be a dangerous radical, forgetting that his cooptation and channeling of labor radicalism into pragmatic programs had "saved them… from what they had felt sure was revolution and anarchy" (243-244). To the working poor, he is also a complicated figure: as New Deal industrial initiatives such as the National Recovery Act (108) and the "Blue Eagle" (203-204) begin to prove ineffective, Akron's workers' faith in federal programs wavers considerably.

[22] Foley mentions the "montagelike presentation" of the text (411). Nelson points out that the text is "organized in the form of the radical novel and written from the perspective of the activist and social critic" (xi). Wald points out that the text employs "experimental techniques" without clarifying what they are or what their purpose is (172).

[23] Eric Cheyfitz's *The Disinformation Age* provides a critique of the post-2008 Great Recession that contains parallels (see, in particular, Chapters 1 and 6) to the crisis of faith in an American narrative of "Exceptionalism" examined in *Industrial Valley*.

[24] That is, in Genesis 1, God provides order to a cosmos "without form, and void" (1.2).

[25] Genesis 1.5, 1.8, 1.13, etc.

[26] See Fine (121), for example, who gives the same span of days that McKenney does (February 14-March 21). Mathematically, of course, February 14-March 21 does not add up to 33 days.

[27] *Industrial Valley* critiques the three major subsets of the apparatus of the press: articles, editorials, and advertisements. In her critique, McKenney demonstrates that the traditional (if naïve) understanding of these categories as distinct is an illusion designed to veil the intentions of those whose role it is to indoctrinate and propagandize the public. In her portrayal, the lines dividing the categories are commonly rendered blurry, if not totally invisible.

[28] This is a direct quote from the *Beacon Journal*.

[29]Of course, as the newspapers are somewhat dependent on the goodwill of the public, we find that occasionally news about certain events is simply too volatile to either omit or present explicitly from the perspective of the wealthy. It is, therefore, sometimes necessary for the newspapers to, as McKenney puts it, "catc[h] the mood of the town" (33).

[30] McKenney's description is an accurate paraphrase of a front-page item in the *Beacon* from June 3, 1932.

[31] I feel that McKenney means to use the term more literally than Marx. Marx uses the term to make a religious analogy in order to make a point about the relationships between humans and other humans / objects. The phenomenon of "commodity fetishism" certainly has not disappeared in this "new city" of Akron, nor have the "old

fetishes" disappeared for *all* of Akron's citizens (as we shall see, for the wealthy, the *old* ways of thinking shall largely persist throughout the novel).

[32] Henry Kraus's *The Many and the Few* is an excellent text to read along with *Industrial Valley*, as its examination of "the great corporate Personality" similarly reflects corporate power as having God-like power over workers' communities (5-6).

[33] For excellent descriptions of the appeal of the sitdown to strikers, and the fear that sitdowns created in the business community, see in particular Adamic (406-409) and Fine (121-122).

[34] In fact, this moment is merely one manifestation of a motif of the silence of the working poor of Akron that permeates the text. We see, for example, characters who are too timid to speak to their perceived superiors (5); embarrassed to admit condition of their poverty (18); silent in their shuffling out of the factories after shifts (93); tentatively silent as they arrive at union meetings where they do not know what to expect (144); quietly stoic as they await possible violence on the picket line (174, 197); and silently defiant at A.F.L. meetings where they feel that A.F.L. representatives are not meeting their needs (212).

[35] It is not made entirely clear in this passage if Scotty's anxiety that the "crowd" will not react, nor "follow" his leadership, is truly due to the fact that he is a "lousy Communist." It may be that the narrative has simply shifted into a free-indirect discourse depicting Scotty's perspective. However, the crowd, to be sure, almost certainly hesitates because this sort of grass-roots direct action runs counter to prevailing social ideologies: their immediate reaction is of "growing embarrassment, as though they had laughed stridently at a child's funeral" (29).

[36] It is possible that, as a Communist, his internal intonation of "Dear God" is more a figure of speech than a faithful appeal to the Almighty. Whether or not he means the words literally, the effect is to intensify the religious motif.

[37] Historical portrayals of the strikes McKenney portrays in *Industrial Valley* point out the horrendous conditions that Akron strikers braved. See, for example, Bernstein (592, 594); Galenson (271); and Levinson (143).

[38] See Rolf Lundén's *Business and Religion in the American 1920s*. Lundén shows how "business… became a pseudoreligion" in the United States (3); that businessmen promoted the notion that business activity "fulfill[ed] biblical prophecies" (90), and that Christianity was "the foundation for America's national prosperity" (93); that businessmen promoted "capitalism not only [as] the best of the economic systems but also created by God" (105).

[39] In *The Disinformation Age*, Eric Cheyfitz examines different manifestations through American history of the "tension between faith and experience" that have affected the "promise" of "American Exceptionalism" and the "American Dream" (61, 180). In particular, Chapter 6, "The Confidence State: The Limits of Capitalism's Imagination," provides an excellent background of both the economic historical context behind the decade subsequent to the Great Recession; and the ways that the views of those who shape social policy radically differ from the views of the American public who are seeing diminishing returns on their faith in the "American Dream."

Conclusion

Industrial Valley concludes on an unequivocally optimistic note: the text celebrates gains to labor's cause made in Akron, in conjunction with other gains across the nation. (Or, at least, the encouraging knowledge that contributions to the struggle were being enacted by workers with similar problems, having similar reactions.) It is a reaction reflected in many texts on the Labor Movement, both fictional and historical, from the period.

The sense of American class-consciousness erupting from the ravages of the Depression, potent as it was,[1] did not have roots digging as deep into the American psyche as those that had been long-established by the comparatively overwhelming resources of the business community. Those who developed a sense of class-consciousness did so against a history of decades of ideological ammunition celebrating the rugged individual and other such mythologies and an entire public relations industry heralding mass consumption as the zenith of humanity's achievements (Ewen *Captains* 5). The ethos of civil millennialist progress in American culture already had an important history imbuing key societal concepts such as *democracy* and *freedom* with a religious aura (Hulsether 61). In the 1920s, business leaders began to manipulate the idea of *democracy* to connote the freedom to have financial access to engage in the "mental and spiritual satisfactions of… property" through consumption rather than control over production and other forms of societal power (Ewen *Captains* 27-28). Associating democracy not with social processes, but with the conveniences and enjoyments of material accumulation, has a long history in the American advertising industry – a history that has great residual potency currently.

Similarly working against the fact that many in the working class were celebrating this new-found sense of potential mutual power was the reaction to this power of those who historically had run American society. Many business leaders in the United States were

predictably appalled and greatly concerned by the rise of a radical Labor consciousness. Despite the centrality of an ethos of individualism and competition in pro-business propaganda, there was a "business community" that was well-organized upon an elitist, mutualist ethic to protect themselves on sharp class lines against the comparatively meager power of Labor. Beginning in the mid-1930s and into the 40s, business leaders launched a public-relations onslaught to re-establish the legitimacy of its methods in the public mind.[2] While the business-corporate community was not uniformly opposed to unionism in principal, a powerful and influential segment of the community perceived that there were enormous stakes in Labor's emerging power. In *Selling Free Enterprise*, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf provides important context: one business intellectual in 1946 worried that the conflict between Capital and Labor had "'become so widespread and so threatening as to look like nothing less than catastrophic civil war'"; a "public relations firm…. warned in 1947 that 'our present economic system, and the men who run it, have three years – maybe five at the outside – to resell our so-far preferred way of life against competing systems'" (37); hyperbolically, "In early 1946 sociologist Robert Lynd observed that 'the old liberal enterprise system is on the way out and business must organize and fight for its life.'…Business, he claimed, was prepared to 'spend unlimited money' in search of a solution" (32).[3] The forces of Labor launched their own public-relations campaign to preserve its gains, but lacked the resources to compete with business, which spread the Gospel of free-market private enterprise on a massive scale: business associations such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), the Committee for Economic Development (CED), the United States Chamber of Commerce, and the Advertising Council developed propaganda designed to regain its pre-Depression sway over American society.[4] Throughout the 40s and 50s, businesses infiltrated key areas of American society, including the factory floor, schools and universities,

and churches, with a well-funded propaganda campaign in the form of pamphlets, films, books, and radio segments intended "to restore the public's faith in its leadership and to promote the corporate vision of the American way."[5]

Unsurprisingly, the co-optation of Labor's radical dissent in the form of New Deal initiatives also sent a chill through the business community.[6] FDR shrewdly used biblical language to promote a form of politics new to mainstream America, comparing, for example, America's wealthy to the "'money changers'"[7] Christ castigates in the Gospels. Business leaders reacted in kind, enlisting the help of clergymen who referred in nationally-distributed speeches and sermons to the federal government as a "'false idol'" that caused people to covet what belonged to the wealthy, that "'bore false witness'" in claiming that it had potential to cure social ills (Kruse xiv, 7). Kevin Kruse points out the tendency of many historical studies to situate the idea of America as a nation that had always been a "Christian Nation" (xiii) within a Cold War paradigm. He argues that this idea's roots can instead be found earlier in the "Christian Libertarianism" of the 1930s and 40s that emerged as a response to the Depression-Era disruption of faith in American capitalism. In the aftermath of the Depression, businessmen feared the wickedness of Washington more than Moscow (22) and used the language of the Commandments to taint any government encroachment upon private property (26). In the general prosperity of the 1940s and 50s, business power forged a more amicable relationship to the federal government in movements such as "the prayer breakfast meetings of Abraham Vereide," which were the precursors to the National Prayer Breakfast, and Billy Graham's evangelical revivals. Both utilized pro-business, anti-New Deal rhetoric linking a business prerogative with religion. The 1950s saw a "new conflation of faith, freedom, and free enterprise" (Kruse xiv, 36).

These trends, in combination with the Cold War and the "hysterically patriotic atmosphere" that emerged in part from McCarthy politics, helped contribute to a mainstream cultural ethos with a "near religious commitment to the American form of free-enterprise economic system."[8] Additionally, during this period, anti-union politics in the South arose along with a "procorporate populism" backed by "faith-based organizations" that, paradoxically, promoted a so-called free-market supported by federal subsidies to redistribute taxpayer money to the Sunbelt region.[9] (One potent source of the "growth pattern in which government largess was turned into individual virtue by the addition of sweat equity" stemmed from federal homesteading policies of the nineteenth century that furthered the process of American Indian genocide: the displacement and ethnic cleansing of American Indians from their lands in order to help enterprising citizens achieve a Jeffersonian "yeoman ideal" [Moreton 44].)

In the 1950s / early 60s, America saw a rapid decline in radical labor politics and a sharp increase in political conformism. However, the effects of an emerging youth culture in the form of student activism, along with substantial public disillusion with government institutions over Vietnam War foreign policy and the Watergate scandal in the late 60s and into the 70s, led in part to another cycle of public discontent with corporate policies.[10] Beginning in the 1970s and into the 80s, corporate think-tanks like the Business Roundtable, the American Economic Institute for Public Policy Research, and the Heritage Foundation began another propagandistic onslaught on the citizenry to "persuad[e] the American public that their interests were the same as business's interests."[11] By the late 1970s, corporate influence had made college campuses "friendly places for business" by initiating economic education campaigns. These campaigns had their roots in corporate public relations policies designed to promote "economic literacy" programs implemented in schools by corporations in the 1950s.[12] Business propaganda

techniques began to rely not merely on a "grassroots" model that targeted the population at large, but also a "treetops" model that targeted influential social and institutional figures in government and the media: the model was designed to frame the "terms of debate [and] to determine the kinds of questions that will dominate public discussion – in a word[,] to set the political agenda in ways that are favourable to corporate interests" (Carey 88-90).

Organized labor endorsed Carter in 1980 and was startled by an unexpected surge of support for Reagan by blue collar workers: in 1981, Reagan's firing of 13,000 air traffic controllers constituted a legitimization of strikebreaking at the highest level of government not seen for decades. Illegal firings of workers for legally organizing surged dramatically during Reagan's presidency.[13] Since the 1980s, American workers have suffered from wage stagnation, a decrease in living standards, and rising costs of living. Manufacturing jobs, sources of union strength, have diminished through automation and outsourcing. After the Reagan-Bush years, Clinton's pro-corporate Democratic campaign and presidency had made it clear that mainstream political thought had shifted to the right. Union density in the private-sector has diminished from roughly 35% in the 1950s, when wages and benefits were much greater than today, to around 6% in 2018. The establishment of right-to-work laws undermining the job security provided by unions – laws traditionally associated with the anti-union South – became major political achievements in prominent post-2008 Republican governorships, such as those led in 2010 by Governor Scott Walker in Wisconsin and Governor Rick Snyder in Michigan (a state with a long history of union power and influence.)[14] The radicalism of 1930s American unions dissipated long ago: nonetheless, now focusing their efforts on public sector unions, Right-wing politicians use anti-public-union rhetoric. Ideologues like the Koch brothers continue to finance propaganda campaigns attacking the tyranny of "Big Labor" and have recently secured a major victory in the

Supreme Court decision Janus vs. AFSCME.[15]

All societies, particularly huge industrial empires like the United States, have many complex facets: it is impossible to prove some sort of causality between enormous propaganda campaigns and trends in social thought. For example, it is possible that American Post-War general prosperity might in itself have shifted Depression-Era disillusion with Capitalism toward a rosier general outlook toward corporate policies. Similarly, it is possible that a historian of the propaganda of the Soviet Union would not be particularly surprised to find that victims of Soviet repression were unconvinced by what they read in *Pravda*. However, it is difficult to ignore the ways in which the ideas promoted by business-led propaganda have become a part of mainstream American culture, particularly in light of the fact that these ideas have been disseminated through various institutions throughout the nation over several generations.[16]

Business Doctrine throughout the 20th Century

There have been various American business-propaganda initiatives, each meeting the expediencies of an age and social milieu: the advertising campaigns of the 1910s and early 20s, consciously designed to manipulate the public into accepting material rewards in the place of economic or political power in order to stave off potential political activism; business propaganda of the mid- to late-20s, celebrating with messianic zeal the potential rewards to be gained from devotion to the Market; anti-New Deal propaganda, designed to reestablish business authority during both the Depression and Post-War years; and Cold War propaganda, demonizing socialistic politics and thereby, by suggestion, casting a spell of fear over leftist politics, including unionism. Despite the differences in social and national situations in each era, there has been a remarkable degree of consistency in the purpose and message[17] of pro-business

propaganda: a celebration of the supremacy of the individual (designed to alienate and atomize); a celebration of material accumulation; and a celebration of the beneficent powers of wealth / the economy / the market to both uniquely bestow upon humanity material gifts and protect society against the evils of external threats.

There are important contradictions inherent in this propaganda model that need to be examined – contradictions that should remind us of the confusion sowed by Capital in Sinclair's *King Coal* and *The Coal War*. Concerning the celebration of *individualism*, there is no denying that an American cultural ethos celebrating the strength of the *individual* has an important history in the 20th century. However, a cursory reading of American history, particularly the early history of American labor, presents us with problems concerning the popular American conception of individualism – i.e., a conception that fits very neatly into an atomizing business model that conflates *individualism* with *independence*. Before the power of Capital began to transform American society and bend it to its will, independence as a value was cherished for the very idea that one was *beholden to no one's will* but one's own, in terms of being a free human agent, under no external hierarchical control.[18] In the early 19th century, the conservative labor movement, which still existed within a traditional social framework based on mutualism, perceived the growing power of accumulated Capital as a radical force to be resisted for this very reason – that individual independence was threatened by the combined powers of Capital. Under the current model of (corporate) individualism, individualism in most cases means the freedom to choose which structure of power one will rent oneself to, follow orders, and earn a wage while producing profits for a corporate hierarchy. Similarly, over time, individualism in American society has manifested itself in ways that are essentially akin to *ignoring the needs of others* – a trend directly contradictory to the traditionalist modes of existence and subsistence that agents of

Capital consciously set out to eliminate and override. It is a social trend that has spurred sociologist Charles Derber to convincingly analyze the United States as, paradoxically, a "sociopathic society."

Another circumstance that evokes a sense of contradiction and confusion is the fact that terminologies central either to a mainstream American ethos or to contemporary debates about the direction in which American society is (or should be) going – whether through positive or negative connotations – seem to have a tenuous basis in reality.[19] While watching or reading mainstream news channels or periodicals, it is commonplace to see the American economic system described as "free-market" capitalism – "free-market" meaning, connotatively, a system free from outside interference and external distortions. And yet, as mentioned above, American industrial capitalism, so-called, has long been based on public-subsidizing of dynamic technological developments (e.g., railroad contracts based on land-grants, aeronautics, computer technology, development of medical and pharmaceutical research) and privatization of the profits to be reaped. These important technological developments make poor analogies to the influence of Adam Smith's "invisible hand" that is popularly invoked by cheerleaders of American economics. Similarly confusing and contradictory is the use of the term *socialism* as it is now frequently used in a post-Cold War age, which the Political Right continues to use as a scare word. Use of the term *socialist* to describe the New Deal politics of outspoken critics of economic inequality is another manifestation of the confusion resulting from years of terminological obfuscation – a situation made even more bizarre by the fact that those who *promote* this return to New Deal politics, such as Bernie Sanders, embrace the term as well. If socialism in its original sense does *not* involve, at the very least, workers' control of the means of production, it is difficult to determine with any certainty what the term is now supposed to

mean at all.

Jesus Christ as a Literary Character

Finally, because the deployment of Christian rhetoric by Capital and Labor is at the heart of this study, we might examine the doctrines of Christ against the above-mentioned doctrines promulgated throughout the long history of American business-propaganda (i.e., the focus on the individual's supremacy against society, and a devotion to the creation of wealth and meeting the needs of market forces as the foundation of social well-being). Far be it from the scope of my study to approach the question from a theological point of view: rather, from a literary perspective, it would be useful to briefly consider Christ as a character in the Gospels. I concede that the four synoptic Gospels, written over several generations nearly two thousand years ago, hardly offer a consistent picture of the character of Christ. Like the business propaganda campaigns described above, each Gospel deals with socio-historical problems unique to the age and place it was written in. (For example, in the Gospel of John – chronologically the last to be written – there are easily discernable aspects of anti-Semitism in the text, as later Christians were attempting to distinguish themselves from Judaism in ways that early Christians at the time that the Gospel of Mark was written were not.) The portrayal of Christ beginning with Mark – the first written of the synoptic Gospels – as an itinerant teacher providing free health care to the sick, malnourished, and dispossessed of an impoverished populace colonized by the Romans is difficult to fit with a model of individual salvation. His embracement of society's most vulnerable (children, widows, resident-aliens) and castigation of Mammon-worship is difficult to fit with the notion that his followers should supplicate themselves to the powers of a wealthy status-quo. Like other prophets in the Jewish tradition, such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

and Ezekiel (which Christ's teachings emerged from), Christ offered a critique of power that was (unsurprisingly) considered to be dangerous to those in power by those in power.

For this reason, it is important to point out that contemporary theological scholars such as John Dominic Crossan, William R. Herzog II, and Ched Meyers have attempted to reclaim Christ's message from the ways that it has specifically been snatched from its initial historical context and distorted by a distinctly American theological model for a distinctly American ideological purpose.[20] Even Andrew Carnegie, writing in 1889, was honest enough and had the decency to recognize and concede that the message of Christ was communalist and mutualist. His analysis was that the social trends of modern industrial society – trends he saw as positive – were not those of Christ: Carnegie held that Christ's views on how a society should operate have no relevance in a modern industrial society. Business supremacy, he held, was the best way to in contemporary 1889 to achieve Christ's vision.[21] (From Carnegie's vantagepoint, with all of its prejudices and blind spots, it is not difficult to believe that he meant what he wrote.) However, it did not take long for a surreal picture of Christ to emerge in American society. By 1925, Bruce Barton's best-seller *The Man Nobody Knows* was unironically not only framing Christ as history's most successful advertising executive – a strange enough conceptual leap to make in itself – but framing the Galilee of Jesus's ministry as being populated not by desperately impoverished colonized peasant and expendable classes, but as rural folks with "cheerful and easy-going" lives, "families [going] on picnics," "young people walk[ing] together in the moonlight and f[alling] in love in the spring" (10).

Worship of the Market

In an American contemporary age that has witnessed Donald Trump's presidency made possible

in part by crucial help from key segments of the working class, one might easily conclude that the political potential of class-consciousness has disappeared in any meaningful sense. When compared to the emergence of class-consciousness portrayed in *Industrial Valley* and other portrayals of Depression-Era American literature portraying industrial warfare, the possibility of a similar type of class-radicalization seems rather thin. The notion that a billionaire could earn the trust of crucial segments of the American working class as someone who would, when in office, represent their interests is rather astonishing on its face.[22] Even more noteworthy is the fact that his immediate pro-business cabinet choices had no discernible negative reactions upon the faith of his die-hard base. He put the supremacy of business interests on a pedestal in the shape of corporate tax-cuts that framed the reasoning behind it in a "trickle-down" model that has never historically shown substantial gains to any class other than the wealthy. Furthermore, this decision was presented to the public in a way that practically deified corporate power as so unaccountable to human agency that appeasing it through increasing the profit margin for corporate interests was necessary to Making America Great Again. This, despite the fact that, historically, the period the MAGA campaign was (and is) meant to evoke (Post-WWII prosperity into the 60s) was able to sustain elements of general prosperity in part due to the fact that New Deal regulations and initiatives and structures ensured a more equitable distribution of resources and wealth.

Labor's potential as a political force has been practically decimated. Even the limited potential of unionism in government jobs, still theoretically protected by law, has recently taken a serious blow in the Supreme Court decision Janus vs. AFSCME, which severely limited the ability of public unions to collect funds from workers who are non-members but nonetheless benefit from union-led bargaining. And yet, we have recently witnessed a wave of teacher's

strikes in historically non-union states. Pro-corporate, anti-union sentiment is strong in this country. But common-sense potential to fight for mutualist values through communal effort has not entirely disappeared.

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[1] Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front* is an excellent study of the various ways in which political radicalism influenced American culture in the 1930s.
[2] See Carey 79; Ewen (*PR*) 293; Fones-Wolf 25-29.
[3] See Ewen (*PR*) 294-295; Fones-Wolf 15, 32, 37.
[4] See Carey 79; Ewen (*PR*) 296-297; Fones-Wolf 4-7, 46-47.
[5] See Fones-Wolf 25; also, in particular, Chapters 3, 7, and 8 of Fones-Wolf's *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism 1945-60*.
[6] See Carey 79; Fones-Wolf 15-17; Hulsether 86-87.
[7] See Ewen (*PR*) 302; Kruse 6.
[8] See Carey 72, 75; Kruse 36. Robert Justin Goldstein points out that the term *McCarthyism* is somewhat of a misnomer insofar as the rabid anti-communism that Senator McCarthy made into something now considered scandalous was already being implemented in a different, less flamboyant form (*Little Red Scares* xiii).
[9] See Moreton 29, 32, 37-40.
[10] See Carey 89; Moreton 182.
[11] See Carey 89-95; Moreton 184.
[12] See Fones-Wolf 204; Moreton 148, 151, 198.
[13] See Chomsky (*Manufacturing*) xlv; Molloy 120; Zieger et al 251, 259.
[14] See Brecher 337-338; Lichtenstien 285; Zieger et al 250, 309-310.
[15] See Formisano 65; Lichtenstein xviii-xix, 286-287; United States, Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Economic News Release: Union Members Summary*. Washington: GPO, Web, 18 January 2019.
[16] Alex Carey points out compellingly that "the Advertising Council in 1975" launched an enormous propaganda campaign to recapture public faith in business. By 1978, "American business was spending" $1 billion a year for this same purpose. By 1980, Advertising Council polls showed that the percentage of Americans who believed that government was over-regulating business had shown, in one year, a remarkable increase for a short period of time: 42% to 60%.
[17] In the case of the advertising campaigns of the 1910s and early 20s, which were, on the surface, largely apolitical, the message was not always particularly clear: the purpose, however, was to create anxiety, fear, and atomization in order to promote a culture of reliance on mass consumption.
[18] See Ware xii-xviii; Sellers 5-6, 32. I recognize that this value was not exactly an inclusive one, in terms of who had access and who didn't (i.e., women, Blacks, racially-Othered immigrants, and so forth). I also acknowledge that this concept of a free man was used by working men with white-skin privilege *against* those who did not have access to this social value. However, the reason I bring it up is that I think it is relevant to point out that one of the central concepts of American society celebrated in business propaganda – individualism being equated to independence – is essentially based upon the idea that one should subordinate oneself to a corporate hierarchical chain of command that emerged from a military model.
[19] See, again, Eric Cheyfitz's *The Disinformation Age*. Cheyfitz argues that American ideology has ceased to function in the Althusserian sense, insofar as contemporary American ideological concepts no longer have referents in reality. (E.g., mainstream political reliance on American Exceptionalism as encompassing the trope of a majoritarian "middle-class" has essentially become a nonsensical concept, as most Americans are seeing the American Dream of "increasing prosperity" become an unachievable phantasm under / within neoliberal structures.)
[20] For example, In *God and Empire: Jesus against Rome, Then and Now*, John Dominic Crossan considers the message of the Gospels in its specific context as being directly counter to the conquering ideology of Rome – as a "deliberate contradiction to Roman imperial theolog[y]" (106). The primacy in the Gospels' narratives of Jesus's healing the sick and eating communally with social outcasts indicates that his "program built a *share*-community from the bottom up as a possible alternative to Antipas's Roman *greed*-community established from the top down"

(118). In *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed*, Biblical scholar William R Herzog II argues against the picture of Christ as the "kind of teacher popularly portrayed in the North American church [who is] a master of the inner life, teaching the importance of spirituality and a private relationship with God" (27). Instead, Herzog argues for the message of Jesus, "the son of a village artisan who became an itinerant rabbi," as being a distinctly political critique against the power structures that dominated Palestine in his time (7, 17, 27-28). Ched Meyers's *Binding The Strong Man: a Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* provides an analysis, with historical context, of every verse of the Gospel of Mark, which is the first written of the canonical Gospels. Meyers begins this analysis, written in 1988, by situating it squarely within the context which he would like his audience to understand it: of Americans in a "Christian country" who enjoy the benefits of 20th century imperial society without understanding our own complicity in human suffering (6, 8). Meyers understands the benefits of human suffering as having taken on quasi-religious powers of their own: "Nowhere in our culture are symbols and narratives more powerful than the high fictions of the advertising industry. Mundane products take on magical powers and promise to shape new character, reinforcing the primal subtext of capitalism: one is what one owns / consumes" (15). Meyers explains that mainstream American theology has largely wished to ignore the historical and political ramifications of the Gospels, striving instead to depoliticize the story of Christ (9-10).

[21] See Carnegie "Wealth" (6) in *Democracy and the Gospel of Wealth*.

[22] However, considering the ways in which corporate propaganda has shaped American society's views on consumerism (and, therefore, entertainment) in the last several generations, the fact that he is a reality-show star who made multiple appearances as himself on World Wrestling Enterprise specials makes him, presumably, a better, rather than worse candidate in some regards.

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