

# Questioning Mine Mill in Yellowknife: The Need for a Northern Labour History

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**Abstract:** This article chronicles the contributions of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers to the social, political and economic development of Canada's Northwest Territories, and particularly its capital Yellowknife. A remote region with a largely Aboriginal population, the emergence of a gold mining industry around Yellowknife Bay starting in the mid-1930s led to the arrival of Mine Mill activists within less than a decade. The union's strong ties to the Communist Party at the time left a limited radical imprint upon northern working-class development. The union contributed to community and regional development, while at the same time fighting a losing battle against a right-wing Canadian labour movement. The demise of Mine Mill in the North, and throughout Canada, came at a time when the labour movement both regionally and nationally began its transition from being primarily industrially-based to one grounded in the public service.

Prior to 1992 most people were unaware of the role of organized labour in Canada's Northwest Territories. The bombing of Yellowknife's Giant Mine in that year and the subsequent conviction of a local union activist on nine charges of first degree murder focused national and international attention on labour strife in the North for a short time. More importantly, it exposed the absence of any scholarly study of organized labour in what was at the time Canada's largest member of Confederation. Other than the little that journalists touched upon the subject to put the Giant Mine disaster in some sort of context, the pages of northern labour history largely remained blank ones.<sup>1</sup> The publication in 1994 of William Morrison and Kenneth Coates' *Working the North* began to fill those empty pages, but their work addresses issues of an unorganized workforce throughout the northern areas of the western provinces, Alaska, and the Yukon as well as the Northwest Territories.<sup>2</sup> To

date, the subject of organized labour in the Northwest Territories is still largely unexplored by historians. This is especially the case for the period prior to 1967, before the northern labour force became dominated by civil servants and their bargaining agent the Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The Northwest Territories, and Yellowknife in particular, has a rich labour history, one that is very much intertwined with the history of the labour movement in Canada. Unlike most of Canada, however, the history of organized workers “North of 60” does not spring from the mainstream. Rather, it shares a legacy with the Communist Party of Canada for the role it played in organizing and leading the only union present in the Northwest Territories between 1944 and 1967: the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (Mine Mill). Not limiting itself to the negotiation of collective agreements and the filing of grievances, Mine Mill practised social unionism. It was involved in all aspects of community life. This is not to say that Yellowknife was ever a union town. It was never more a union town than it was a company town. Local popular histories of the community completely ignore the presence of organized labour, often even the presence of a working class. Instead they pay homage to local entrepreneurs, notable professionals, and senior civil servants.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the limited popular labour history emanating from the Giant Mine bombing gives the impression that Mine Mill was far more influential than it in fact was. Part of this stems from the reality that Mine Mill was a radical union; of that there is no argument. The tendency among journalists has been to attempt to link this history of radicalism to the 1992 bombing. Though it makes for interesting journalism, it is not history. The questions that need to be asked are how radical was Mine Mill in Yellowknife—and by extension the Northwest Territories in general—and, more importantly, how influential was the union in the day-to-day lives of Yellowknifers. While Mine Mill certainly made a valuable contribution to the economic, social, cultural, and political development of the North, at no time did it dominate in these areas.

Collective bargaining in the private sector did not begin in the Northwest Territories until after World War II. Prior to 1920, the major economic activity in the North was the fur trade, which relied upon a dispersed and unorganized Aboriginal workforce. Even with the importation of large numbers of non-Aboriginal workers with the discovery of oil, and the subsequent development of a petroleum industry at Norman Wells beginning in the 1920s, labour remained unorganized.<sup>4</sup> Although the reasons for this are not clear, William Morrison and Kenneth Coates, in their study of World War II defence projects of the northwest, attribute the virtual absence of unions in the North

to subsidized travel, high wages with ample opportunity for overtime, cheap room and board, and high mobility. If workers felt themselves to be unjustly treated, “they tended to leave rather than go on strike.”<sup>5</sup> Though these same factors were likely at work in Norman Wells, they do not explain why unions would become so popular among northern miners where similar conditions prevailed.

Organized labour in the Northwest Territories had its beginnings in the gold mining industry that developed around the Yellowknife Bay area in about 1935. By the late 1930s six mining camps were established with other explorations ongoing. By the 1940s the three largest gold mines in operation were the Con, Negus, and Giant respectively.<sup>6</sup> It was not until 1944, however, that attempts were made to organize the Yellowknife miners. That responsibility was taken on by Mine Mill.

The International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers began as the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) in Butte, Montana on 5 May 1893.<sup>7</sup> Prior to its more inclusive name change in 1916, the WFM had been instrumental in founding several radical labour centrals, including the well-known Industrial Workers of the World, or “Wobblies.”<sup>8</sup> Almost extinct by the 1930s, the passage of the Wagner Act, which gave legal recognition to unions in the United States, and the emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), breathed new life into Mine Mill.<sup>9</sup> Like many CIO unions in the 1930s, Mine Mill was heavily influenced by the Communist Party. Known to be honest, hard-working, and effective organizers, Communists were known to deliver on the bread-and-butter issues—such as wages—and it was this that made them popular with non-Communist union members. It was undoubtedly these characteristics, which prompted Mine Mill President Reid Robinson to hire many Communists as staff members and organizers.<sup>10</sup> The CIO expelled Mine Mill on 15 February 1950 in the anti-communist hysteria of the post-war era.<sup>11</sup> The CIO’s Canadian counterpart, the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), had already expelled Mine Mill the previous year.<sup>12</sup>

The history of Mine Mill in Canada largely mirrors that of the union in the United States. WFM locals appeared in Canada in the Rossland, British Columbia (BC) area in 1895, but were virtually extinct by 1920.<sup>13</sup> Reinvigorated in the 1930s with the emergence of the CIO, Mine Mill’s Canadian ranks were swelled, largely by the organizing efforts of Communist Party activists. Irving Abella, in his study of the CIO in Canada, emphasizes Mine Mill’s high proportion of Party leaders.<sup>14</sup> It was hostility towards this Communist influence that led the Canadian Congress of Labour to expel Mine Mill in

1949, leaving the union vulnerable to raiding by the United Steelworkers of America (Steel) who promptly launched an aggressive and protracted war against Mine Mill.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its isolation and vulnerability to raiding, Mine Mill continued to organize and grow in Canada. In 1949, the year they were expelled from the CCL, the Canadian district of the union had a membership of 25,000 in thirty-eight locals. In contrast, Steel was twice as large and could use its strength to chip away at Mine Mill. In 1955 the Canadian district of Mine Mill was recognized as an autonomous district within the international.<sup>16</sup> The merger of the CCL and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) in 1956 gave the Steelworkers' war on Mine Mill the support of almost the entire Canadian labour movement. Nevertheless, Mine Mill continued to grow. In 1959 it reached a membership peak in Canada of 33,000 members in forty-one locals.<sup>17</sup> It could not, however, withstand the sustained attacks of Steel forever. On New Year's Day 1968, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers ceased to exist.<sup>18</sup> All of its locals became locals of the United Steelworkers of America, including Mine Mill's five locals in the Northwest Territories.<sup>19</sup>

Mine Mill's first organizing attempt in the Northwest Territories was in 1944. In that year two members of the union acquired employment at Yellowknife's Negus Mine with the intention of organizing the employees there. Although they were successful in signing a majority of the workers and were chartered by the international as the Yellowknife District Miners' Union, Local 802 on 23 June 1944, the local at Negus was broken when management fired its leading members and established a company union in its place. It is not clear if the two members who attempted to organize Mine Mill at Negus had been sent by the union or they simply made the effort on their own. It is significant, though, that without any professional staff on site all it took was the dismissal of the leadership to halt the organizing drive. It was not until 1946 that Mine Mill was firmly established in Yellowknife, and then it would be at the Con and Giant mines.<sup>20</sup>

The circumstances surrounding how and why Mine Mill became established in Yellowknife are something of a mystery. Was it a situation where workers felt the need for a union and began to organize, or did the union send organizers to town unsolicited to begin the work of organizing a union? Perhaps the breaking of the union at the Negus Mine resulted in some dismissed union activists being hired by Con or Giant. This is unlikely given the size of the community and the probability of union activists being blacklisted by the three local mines. Popular folklore in the city of Yellowknife credits one-time Mine Mill business manager Fred Henne with organizing

the union. This is based on assertions made to the 1991 convention of the Canadian Association of Smelter and Allied Workers in Yellowknife by Barney McGuire, another former Yellowknife business manager for Mine Mill.<sup>21</sup> However, according to the history of the Yellowknife District Miners' Union published in January 1953 no mention is made of Henne. This is because the article asserts that the union was functioning by 1946. Henne did not arrive in Yellowknife until 10 January 1947.<sup>22</sup> So while it is not known what the circumstances were surrounding Mine Mill's first successful year in the North, we do know for certain that Fred Henne was not a part of it. Still, Henne would play an important role in the early life of the local.

What is known about Henne prior to his arrival in Yellowknife as the business manager for Local 802, comes largely from long-time Mine Mill activist Al King in his book *Red Bait: Struggles of a Mine Mill Local*. The former president of Local 480 in Trail, BC, Henne was an active member of the Communist Party.<sup>23</sup> His politics, however, were motivated more by ambition than ideology. King describes Henne as "a crafty, careful individual." He relates how in 1944 Henne was an employee of Consolidated Mining and Smelting (CM&S) in Trail. As a leader in the sporting and recreational life of the community, Henne enjoyed a wide circle of friends employed by the company. In addition, Henne had several brothers employed by CM&S. Henne approached the union and not only offered to join, but more importantly offered to convince his friends and brothers to join as well. His only condition was that he be made president of Local 480. The local felt the issue important enough to refer to the local branch of the Communist Party. "Party people debated the pros and cons for hours," says King, "and to make a long story short, we did it. And that's how Fred Henne became the instant president of Local 480."<sup>24</sup> Although King does not mention it, it was probably an additional condition that Henne join the Communist Party. Given that within less than three years Henne would find himself in Yellowknife, one wonders whether such manipulative and opportunistic qualities were seen by union and Party alike as essential skills for organizing in the North, or whether his departure for Yellowknife was more akin to a Mine Mill version of Siberian exile. Henne remained with Mine Mill in Yellowknife until 1949. Remaining in the community, he went into business.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the year he had traded in his Communist Party membership card for a Progressive Conservative one.<sup>26</sup> In spite of his ideological inconsistency, Henne's two years with the Yellowknife union were important ones. In addition to the stability that a full-time officer gave to the fledgling local, Henne also deserves credit for negotiating Local 802's first collective agreements.<sup>27</sup>

Taking over as Yellowknife Mine Mill business manager upon Henne's exit was Barney McGuire. An itinerant miner, McGuire had a history of union organizing dating back to the late 1930s.<sup>28</sup> Though only active as Yellowknife business manager for less than a year, McGuire stayed active with the union long after finishing as Yellowknife business manager later in 1949. He reported from various locations in western and northern Canada throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In 1953 he returned to Port Radium on Great Bear Lake to organize the employees of the Eldorado uranium mine where he had been employed ten years earlier. However, probably due to the strict security measures at Port Radium given the strategic importance of the mine, the Eldorado workers were never certified.<sup>29</sup>

When McGuire left Yellowknife he was replaced by Jack Scott. In Bryan Palmer's biography of Scott, *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers' Movement*, Scott gives an animated portrayal of the life of a Mine Mill organizer in the Northwest Territories during the 1940s and 1950s. When Scott arrived to service the 800 or so members of the Yellowknife District Miners' Union, Local 802, Mine Mill, most were employed by the Con and Giant mines. There were in addition several smaller bargaining units "in the bush," the largest of these being the Discovery Mine about 150 miles by air north of Yellowknife. As the entire local was small, spread out, and isolated, the international paid half of Scott's salary. Significantly, between the departure of Henne and the arrival of Scott, war broke out in Korea and young Canadian men were being killed on its battlefields. The cold war was warming up in Canada and to be sympathetic to communism at such a time was tantamount to treason. Scott recalled considerable hostility from the northern membership due to his open and vocal support for the Communist Party. He left the North in 1951.<sup>30</sup>

The contrast of Henne, McGuire, and Scott is revealing for what it says about the history of northern labour. Of the three, Henne is the only one who made the North his home. This is most likely related to his success as an entrepreneur. By the time that Scott arrived in Yellowknife in 1949 Henne was already well on his way to becoming a millionaire. He would eventually become the owner of the local bus company, a Ford dealership, an oil dealership, a car wash, and "a number of other enterprises."<sup>31</sup> To say that Henne had established a stake in the community would be an understatement. The Communist had quickly become a capitalist and needed to stay close to his capital. McGuire and Scott, by contrast, remained wage earners and as such had nothing tying them to the North. Like so many other workers in the Northwest Territories at this time, and indeed to a lesser degree even today, labour was much more transient. This helps to explain the difficulty

in accessing sources for northern labour history. The written records that have been left behind are dominantly those of the middle-class. Those who built the northern labour movement, indeed those who built the North, were often nameless, faceless workers, staying for a short while and then moving on without leaving behind the same visible markers of their middle-class counterparts. As members of Mine Mill, perhaps their greatest legacy is the northern labour movement itself.

Although the post-war era marked the development of substantial transportation and freshwater fishing industries centred in Hay River, the major economic activity in the North remained mining.<sup>32</sup> The area around Yellowknife was dotted with gold mines large and small. Some only produced for a few years, while others lasted for decades. The Discovery Mine operated well into the 1960s. Con remained operational until November 2003. Until the merger with Steel, the workers at all of these were represented by Mine Mill. The opening of the Tungsten and Pine Point mines, and the concomitant development of respectively named communities in the early 1960s, continued to illustrate the North's reliance on mining as well as Mine Mill's commitment to organizing northern miners.<sup>33</sup> It was at Pine Point that Mine Mill successfully fought off a raid by the International Union of Operating Engineers in 1964.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, despite the protracted war between Mine Mill and Steel, there is no evidence of the Steelworkers attempting to raid Mine Mill locals in the North. Perhaps more significantly, there is no evidence of Steel ever attempting to organize in the North prior to its merger with Mine Mill. When the forced marriage took place in 1968 the Steelworkers took control of five Mine Mill locals in the Northwest Territories.<sup>35</sup>

From its earliest days in Yellowknife Mine Mill was active in the social affairs of the community. It is difficult to discuss the role of Mine Mill in northern communities outside of Yellowknife due to a lack of source material; it is indeed sparse enough in the case of Yellowknife. Not only have many of the mines long since ceased production, but in some cases even the communities themselves have disappeared. Most notable among these is Pine Point, which was completely erased from the map, its buildings either being demolished or loaded on to flat beds and moved to communities such as Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, and Hay River. In the territorial capital, however, Mine Mill has left more of a lasting record. By the early 1950s union activists had participated in establishing the community's first hospital, annually electing one of its members to the facility's board of governors. In addition, Local 802 regularly contributed to "worthy causes" and hosted an annual Labour Day picnic to which the entire community was invited.<sup>36</sup> The Northern Territories Federation of Labour continues this tradition to this

day. The union produced radio programs and organized community groups such as the Elks, which also remains a vibrant community organization.<sup>37</sup> Josie Gould, a long-time resident of Yellowknife, moved to the community in 1965 with her husband who was employed at the Con mine. She fondly remembers the social value of attending membership meetings with him:

I saw the camaraderie whenever they had a general meeting at the Con Mine Rec Hall. The whole family was involved, whether you were a member or not. The whole family went because it affected you, even if you were not the member. And that, I guess, was basically the first family I had. I thought it was great.<sup>38</sup>

Gould's participation in the activities of her husband's union, and her observations of other miners' wives' participation, helps to illustrate the role of women in the Yellowknife local. It is significant that Gould equated the union with family. It certainly must have played more of an intimate role in remote, isolated, northern communities where everyone was far from friends and family, often lacking some of the most basic of diversions available in more southern towns and cities.

Mine Mill was also active in the recreational life of the community. Dale Johnson is another long-time Yellowknife resident and entrepreneur. Active in the northern labour movement until his retirement from the Giant Mine in the early 1990s, he acts as something of a repository of local labour oral history. He came to Yellowknife in 1974 from Cobalt, Ontario (itself an old Mine Mill stronghold) and worked at Giant Mine where he became involved with the union. He was active in the successful campaign of 1974-1975 to decertify Steel at Giant Mine and organize a local of the Canadian Association of Smelter and Allied Workers. It was in this capacity that he learned the labour history of Yellowknife, passed down from one activist to another. According to Johnson the union was active in establishing curling and hockey teams, children's parties, and women's sewing clubs on Saturday nights. "The union," Johnson echoes Gould "was a family affair."<sup>39</sup>

Mine Mill played a political role in northern society, both in Yellowknife and throughout the Northwest Territories, though not as much on the electoral stage as might be expected. At the federal level, the Northwest Territories was a part of the Yukon riding prior to 1949. The following year Merv Hardie, a Liberal, was elected as the member for the newly-created constituency of the Mackenzie District. He remained its Member of Parliament until October 1961 when he died of cancer.<sup>40</sup> Barney McGuire asserted that Hardie had been a member of Local 802 since 1945 and by implication was labour's



candidate.<sup>41</sup> Duke Decoursey, founding editor of *Yellowknife's News of the North*, on the other hand, remembered Hardie as working his way up from clerk to manager at Hodgson's General Store.<sup>42</sup> His obituary in the *Regina Leader Post* stated that before becoming one of the first elected members of the territorial council, he was a "bush service manager."<sup>43</sup> It is doubtful that such managerial credentials would have made Hardie eligible for membership in Mine Mill.

Despite the claims of enthusiastic admirers of Mine Mill, there is little evidence to indicate that it played a significant role in Yellowknife municipal politics. According to McGuire, again in 1945, the Yellowknife miners borrowed the slogan from the United States' War of Independence, "No taxation without representation," uniting a broad cross section of Yellowknife society in a campaign for an elected town council and elected members of the territorial commission.<sup>44</sup> If such a campaign took place, it did not result in any union members taking seats in the Yellowknife town council. Northwest Territories Supreme Court Justice M.M. de Weerdts credits the wives of both miners and management for their role in successfully advocating for more responsible local government, especially with regard to community services, in the immediate post-war period. "Young housewives began asking for cement sidewalks," says de Weerdts, "so that they could push their prams easily when they went to the stores."<sup>45</sup> Yellowknife, like all northern communities, can be extremely muddy in the spring. Decoursey, in his history of Yellowknife, puts more of an emphasis on the role of middle-class individuals in the development of municipal government in Yellowknife. Specifically he credits Lloyd "Shorty" Nelson, a Danish immigrant and World War II veteran, with being the first to advocate a more democratic form of local government for Yellowknifers. In 1945 Yellowknife was administered by a council composed of representatives appointed by the federal government on the recommendation of the three major mines. Rather than being a company town in the traditional sense of the word, Yellowknife was a three company town where Negus, Giant, and Con controlled the local political apparatus. In that year one popularly elected member was added to the council—Nelson. While McGuire claimed that Nelson was a member of Local 802, Decoursey stated his occupation as a mines property developer, again indicating a more managerial role.<sup>46</sup>

The following year the Yellowknife council was expanded to seven members, three of whom were elected. Again McGuire asserted that the elected councillors were "all union candidates," but again there is cause to doubt this.<sup>47</sup> As has already been indicated the union at Negus had been broken in 1944. Con and Giant were not certified until 1947. It is possible for

a worker to be a member of a union without yet having a certified bargaining unit, and this indeed might have been the case. However, it is doubtful that the local would be fielding candidates in a municipal election prior to having their own workplaces organized.

In 1953 Yellowknife got its first entirely elected town council, with John McNiven as its first mayor.<sup>48</sup> McNiven had been manager of the Negus mine until its closure the year before. In all likelihood it was he who led the campaign to break Mine Mill at Negus in 1944.<sup>49</sup> Although Fred Henne was also elected to the council that year, he was well on his way to becoming a millionaire.<sup>50</sup> Hence, despite his earlier association with the union, by 1953 it is far more apt to describe Henne as a representative of the business class rather than a labour candidate. Mine Mill's involvement in Yellowknife municipal politics during this period, therefore, appears minimal at best.

Electoral politics notwithstanding, Mine Mill was consistently vocal on political issues in the North. In 1945, Local 802 members Rocky Palmer and Barney McGuire, realizing their own complicity in the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima as former employees of Eldorado uranium mine, were responsible for the Yellowknife Miners' Union being the first union local in Canada to enter the post-war peace movement by passing a resolution urging the federal government to "avoid becoming involved in an atomic axis." This resolution was later adopted at a national convention of the Canadian section of Mine Mill.<sup>51</sup>

The Yellowknife District Miners' Union continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s to attempt to be a political voice for its members. In 1953 the union was able to boast that "continual representation to the government has brought about a good deal of improvement in Workmen's Compensation in the Territories."<sup>52</sup> It was not until the 1960s, though, that the union participated in the most significant development in northern politics to that time, a complete overhaul of the political structure of the Northwest Territories.

By 1966 government in the Northwest Territories was in need of significant change. Still headquartered in Ottawa after almost one hundred years, the territorial "head of state" was the commissioner, appointed by the minister responsible for Northern Affairs and National Resources.<sup>53</sup> Advised by a territorial council comprised of eight members—three elected by residents of the Northwest Territories, and five appointed by the minister—the commissioner was not responsible to it. His staff consisted of fifty-six individuals, most of them resident in Ottawa.<sup>54</sup> With the implementation of many of the recommendations of the Carrothers Commission that year, government in the Northwest Territories was significantly changed.<sup>55</sup>

Officially known as the Advisory Commission on the Development of Government in the Northwest Territories, the commission took its unofficial name from its chair: Alfred William Rooke Carrothers, a specialist in labour law and dean of law at the University of Western Ontario.<sup>56</sup> The Carrothers Commission was the culmination of a series of political events occurring in both Ottawa and the Northwest Territories throughout the early 1960s. In 1961 many of the non-Native population of the Mackenzie District were agitating for political reform in the North. They were able to garner the support of the territorial council in their bid to have the Northwest Territories divided into two separate territories: an eastern, largely Inuit one that would continue to be administered from Ottawa, and a western, self-governing Mackenzie Territory that would have the mechanisms of responsible government devolved to it and eventually be admitted into confederation as the eleventh province. This movement for territorial division gained further momentum when it gained the support of the Conservative government.<sup>57</sup> No mention was made of the impact this would have on the Aboriginal population in the west or east of the territory.

The Mackenzie Territory, as envisioned in 1961, never materialized. Most writers suggest that the idea died on the order paper when the Conservatives were defeated in the 1963 election. Journalist John David Hamilton, however, asserts that when the Conservative member of the Mackenzie River riding, Gene Reaume, became aware that the Indigenous population had no input into the process he took his concerns to other members of the House of Commons and generated enough backing to force the shelving of the proposed legislation.<sup>58</sup> Instead, two years after the fall of the Diefenbaker government, the Liberal government of Lester Pearson established the Carrothers Commission in June 1965.<sup>59</sup> The commission solicited input from respondents on issues such as the location of the capital, division of the territories, provincial versus territorial status, and government structure. As well, it addressed questions pertaining to economic development. Carrothers took submissions and held hearings in communities throughout the North as well as in Ottawa. It heard from individuals representing their own personal views as well as representative of churches, businesses, and community councils. Yellowknife, Hay River, and Fort Smith competed for the capital. The Northwest Territories' only trade union also made a presentation to the commission.

The issues Mine Mill argued for clearly illustrated the progressive and democratic nature of the union. Among the stances the union took were the following:

- development and continued federal control of natural resources;
- incentives to permanent residency;
- continuation of federal grants with territorial control over finances;
- employment and subsidized housing for Natives as well as negotiation of treaties;
- preservation of cultural heritage;
- a fully elected territorial council;
- the establishment of the capital at Yellowknife; and
- the popular election of the Northwest Territories Commissioner.

In addition, the union argued that provincial versus territorial status should be decided by referendum.<sup>60</sup> Mine Mill opposed division of the territories. Its reasoning was likely the same as that of the commission itself, which recommended against division for two reasons. The first was the issue of strength in unity. Carrothers believed that the people of the Northwest Territories would be better served in their dealing with Ottawa if they spoke with one voice. Secondly, division was perceived as being driven by, and for, the benefit of non-Natives. The fear was expressed that the residual eastern territory would remain in perpetuity a politically underdeveloped appendage of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources. "Division," the report stated, "could have the accidental and unintended effect of gerrymandering the indigenous peoples in the north out of effective participation in territorial self government."<sup>61</sup>

What is significant about Mine Mill's participation in the Carrothers Commission is that involvement of the union's northern membership was either minimal or non-existent. Three hearings were held in Yellowknife, yet not one of the five Mine Mill locals in the Northwest Territories participated, including the two locals that were based in Yellowknife. Instead, the union's voice was heard at a presentation at the single hearing in Ottawa by personnel from Mine Mill's Toronto office.<sup>62</sup> Why no Mine Mill locals participated in the Carrothers Commission at any of its Yellowknife hearings is a matter of conjecture. It is possible that the union's headquarters discouraged local involvement fearing it might conflict with the position of the union's national leadership. Perhaps local members favoured the concept of a Mackenzie Territory. It certainly would not have been the first time a union

local disagreed with its national leadership. Also, given the presence of the racial issue and the fact that a Mackenzie Territory was being pushed by non-Natives, it would be interesting to see which side of the racial divide the Mine Mill locals lined up on. Most likely, however, the failure of Mine Mill locals to participate in the Carrothers Commission was related to larger issues within the union as a whole. Certainly the future for Mine Mill did not look good.

Continuing membership losses nationally and internationally, reductions in services, the continuing war with the rest of the Canadian labour movement and the Steelworkers in particular, and continued red-baiting were likely taking their toll on morale in the North as elsewhere. By the time Carrothers' report was published the membership of Mine Mill was preparing for a referendum to merge with Steel. Its days were numbered. By 1964 the union had lost 13,000 members, largely due to Steel's raiding. In 1966 the union took its worst beating with the loss of 7,000 members in a single year.<sup>63</sup> Massive membership losses moved Mine Mill to sue for peace with Steel. Ellen Schrecker, in her study of McCarthyism in America, states that the eventual decision to merge with Steel was ultimately the inability to adequately service its membership. Increasingly directing its resources and energies towards debilitating legal battles, the union was increasingly unable to perform its primary function: representing and servicing its membership. Communism had long-since ceased to be an issue. Mine Mill descended into a vicious circle: the more it was fed upon by Steel and other unions the more vulnerable it was left to further raiding by those same unions. In order for its members to win the union had to lose. The American division signed a non-aggression pact with Steel in August 1966; a year later they merged. "Though the anti-communist crusade was by then only a dim, bad dream," pronounces Schrecker, "Mine-Mill's belated demise may well have been McCarthyism's last victory."<sup>64</sup> As in the United States, so it was in Canada that the decision to merge with Steel was made with the interests of its members in mind.<sup>65</sup> In 1967 the Canadian membership voted three to one in favour of merging with Steel in a membership-wide referendum.

The organizational crises the union faced as a whole in the mid-1960s, was compounded by a growing apathy in northern locals. Local political activism had ceased. In later years long-time members of these locals would complain of the apathy of their younger members, stating they had no appreciation of their union because they had no idea of what conditions were like before there was a union in place.<sup>66</sup> This can be explained by changing conditions in the North and the changing role of the union in the lives of northerners, especially after the merger with Steel. The tremendous development that

took place in Yellowknife following the relocation of the capital there in 1967, the construction of a road, and decreasing air fares all provided activities to northerners previously unavailable and outside the scope of the union. Bill Berezowski came to Yellowknife as a Mine Mill staff representative in 1961 and remained in that position after the merger with Steel. He retired in 1980. Interviewed by *News/North* in 1987, he stated that outside of shop floor issues, the primary concern of the union in Yellowknife in the 1960s was civic boosterism, or as he called it, “community growth.”<sup>67</sup> It would appear that the Yellowknife Miners’ Union, like its former business manager Fred Henne, had become a member of the local business community.

Participation in the Carrothers Commission was Mine Mill’s last significant political activity regarding the Northwest Territories, but it also represented the end of local northern activism. In the decades to follow important union decisions affecting the North would be made increasingly in cities such as Ottawa and Pittsburgh. Though never representing a hegemonic challenge to the mining companies, the union had made a significant contribution to the early history of Yellowknife in particular, and the Northwest Territories in general. Active in the economic, social, and political life of the North since 1944, the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers had enjoyed a monopoly over organized labour in the territories since it first attempted to organize the Negus mine. The implementation of many of Carrothers’ recommendations coincided with the merger of Mine Mill into the United Steelworkers of America on New Year’s Day 1968. This not only saw the union’s disappearance (with the exception of Falconbridge Local 598 in Sudbury), but also coincided with the decline of private sector unions in Canada’s north. Unlike Mine Mill, the Steelworkers were never the preeminent union in the North. Even before the capital was moved to Yellowknife, the first unionized public servants had made their appearance in the Northwest Territories. With the continued implementation of Carrothers’ recommendations, the labour movement “North of 60” was soon overwhelmingly made up of public servants.

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## Notes

1. See Marina Devine, "A Hell of a Way to Get on the Map: Northern Unions and the Giant Mine," *Arctic Circle*, Spring, 1993, 20–25; Lee Selleck and Francis Thompson, *Dying for Gold: The True Story of the Giant Mine Murders* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1997); and David Staples and Greg Owens, *The Third Suspect* (Red Deer, AB: Red Deer College Press, 1995).
2. William R. Morrison and Kenneth Coates, *Working the North: Labor and the Northwest Defense Projects, 1942–1946* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1994).
3. See for example Duke Decoursey, *The Yellowknife Years* (Squamish, BC: Parkview, 1986); John David Hamilton, *Arctic Revolution: Social Change in the Northwest Territories, 1935–1994* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1994); Robert G. Jenkins, *The Port Radium Story* (Summerland, BC: Valley, 1999); and Eric Watt, *Yellowknife: How a City Grew* (Yellowknife: Outcrop, 1992).
4. Kenneth Coates, *Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest Territories*, (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985), 105. Although drilling began in 1920 at Norman Wells, the actual discovery of oil occurred in 1914. The industry itself did not become viable until the mining development that occurred around Great Bear Lake in the 1930s took hold. See L.S. Bourne, "Yellowknife, NWT.: A study of its urban and regional economy," Northern Co-ordination and Research Centre, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, September, 1963, 26–27.
5. Morrison and Coates, *Working*, 17 & 240–245.
6. Bourne, "Yellowknife," 26–28. See also Coates, *Colonies*, 105. Also Hamilton, *Arctic*, 29. Taking its name from its original owner, the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company, the "Con" mine has had a variety of owners since first opening, but has retained its original name.
7. "What is Unionism?" *North Star*, December 1952, 3. It is unclear how many times the *North Star* published. There are only two issues in the Northwest Territories archives: December 1952 and January/February 1953. They have been mistakenly accessioned with a completely unrelated newspaper the *Northern Star*, which published in the early 1990s. Both this article, and the one subsequently cited, "The History of the Yellowknife District Miners' Union" were both authorized for publication by the Yellowknife District Miners' Union. For published work on Mine Mill in Canada see Mike Solski and John Smaller, *Mine Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada Since 1895* (Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1984); Al King, *Red Bait: Struggles of a Mine Mill Local* (Vancouver: Kingbird, 1998); the chapter on organizing for Mine Mill in Yellowknife in Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers' Movement, 1927–1985* (St. John's: Canadian Committee on Labour History, 1988); Mercedes Steadman, Peter Sushnigg, and Dieter K. Buse, eds., *Hard Lessons: The Mine Mill Union in the Canadian Labour Movement* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1995); Robert H. Carlin, *I Know Mine Mill ... Do You?* (Toronto: United Steelworkers of America, 1961);

and the chapter on Mine Mill in Irving Martin Abella's *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935–1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1973). John Lang, "A Lion in a Den of Daniels: A History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Sudbury, Ontario: 1942–1962," MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 1970, concentrates on Mine Mill's battle with the United Steelworkers of America in Sudbury. Similarly, Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *'Remember Kirkland Lake': The History and Effects of the Kirkland Lake Gold Miners' Strike, 1941-42* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1983) gives an in-depth account of Mine Mill's activities in the Kirkland Lake area. Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1998), offer a comprehensive chapter on Mine Mill in the United States from the period of the 1930s to the 1960s. Morris Wright, *Takes More Than Guns: A Brief History of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers* (Denver: International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, 1944), offers a surprising amount of the early history of the union in Canada.

8. Solski, *Mine Mill*, 4–12.
9. *Ibid*, 14–17. Solski incorrectly reports the passage of the Wagner Act in 1933, but it was in fact passed in 1935. See Schrecker, *Many*, 27. Mine Mill had ceased entirely to operate in Canada by 1925 and in 1932 had only six locals remaining in the United States (see MacDowell, *'Remember'*, 61.)
10. Schrecker, *Many*, 29, 31 & 72.
11. *Ibid*, 339; also Solski, *Mine Mill*, 17.
12. Abella, *Nationalism*, 109.
13. *Ibid*, 86; also Solski, *Mine Mill*, 19-37, and Carlin, *I Know*, iii.
14. Abella, *Nationalism*, 3 & 45.
15. *Ibid*, 95–110. There is no doubt that at the root of the CCL's attack on Mine Mill was anti-communism. Al King, himself a Party member at the time, is insistent that the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) played an equally important role in the attack on Mine Mill. See King, *Red Bait*, 74–75. For a particularly biased account of the conflict between the Communist Party and the CCF for control of the labour movement during this period, see David Lewis, *The Good Fight: Political Memoirs, 1909–1958* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1981). In the same year Mine Mill was expelled with its 25,000 members, so too was the United Electrical Workers with its 25,000 members. In addition, the Canadian Seaman's Union was expelled from the American Federation of Labour (AFL)-affiliated Trades and Labour Congress with its 6,000 members. All three of these unions were Communist-dominated, indicating a concerted attack on Communists in the labour movement. See *Union Growth in Canada: 1921–1967*, Economic and Research Branch, Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa, 1970, 21. The question must be asked, though, how much were these expulsions and subsequent raiding genuinely motivated by ideology, and how much of it was an attempt by unions such as Steel simply to increase membership and revenues by cashing in on current anti-communist hysteria?



16. Carlin, *I Know*, 3. Carlin argues that recognition of Canadian autonomy within the union, the first for any international operating in Canada, was a ruse on the part of Mine Mill's leadership to get around the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act in the United States prohibiting Communists from holding offices in unions. Schrecker, however, points out that Mine Mill had been in compliance with Taft-Hartley since 1949. See Schrecker, *Many*, 338. The point remains, Mine Mill was the first international union in Canada to recognize its Canadian membership as autonomous.
17. *Labour Organizations in Canada*, Economic and Research Branch, Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa, 1949–1959.
18. There is an interesting exception to this. Local 598 at the Falconbridge mine in Sudbury, Ontario, refused to be bound by the results of the referendum and kept the name Mine Mill despite it being the only local in existence. It is today affiliated with the Canadian Auto Workers.
19. King, *Red Bait*, 150–152. One of the difficulties of researching the history of organized labour in the Northwest Territories is that more often than not in their collection of data regarding labour statistics for northern Canada, the Economic and Research Branch of the Department of Labour groups the Yukon and Northwest Territories together and it is not possible to separate the statistics for each territory. Other times they are reported separately. This problem is common with their various publications including *Labour Organizations, Strikes and Lockouts*, *Union Growth in Canada*, and *Union Growth in Canada in the Sixties*. In 1966 Labour Canada reported Mine Mill with four locals in the Yukon and five in the Northwest Territories. In 1967 there were eleven locals in both, but it is not indicated how many were in each. The two additional locals were probably in the Yukon, but it is impossible to say based on information from Labour Canada. See *Labour Organizations in Canada*, Economic and Research Branch, Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa, 1966 & 1967.
20. "History," *North*, 5. By 1952 Negus had ceased production. (See Bourne, "Yellowknife," 31).
21. Barney McGuire, "Yellowknife Mine Mill 802: The Local's Early Years and Reminiscences of Barney McGuire," Address to the CASAW Convention, 31 May to 2 June 1991 in Yellowknife, NWT. by Barney McGuire. Compliments of Jess Sycamore, Canadian Auto Workers.
22. "History," *North*, 5. For details on Henne's arrival in the North see "Henne recalls: In those days we made our own fun," *News* 15 January 1979, 8; also McGuire, "Yellowknife".
23. "Henne," *News* 15 January 1979, 8; also McGuire, "Yellowknife".
24. King, *Red Bait*, 47.
25. "Henne," *News*, 8.
26. Palmer, *A Communist*, 101, 109. See also Honourable Charles Dent, "Member's Statement on the passing of Fred Henne," *Hansard: Northwest Territories Legislative*

*Assembly*, 70–73 (5) 23 January 1998. Also Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 155. Decoursey describes Henne as an “almost ran” in the 1949 federal election, stating that due to a flight delay, Henne was unable to file nomination papers on time. It would appear that Henne had already joined the Conservatives by this early date as the Liberal, CCF, and an independent candidate filed papers on time and no Conservative ran. Although Decoursey states that Henne later stood as a Diefenbaker Conservative, there is no record of Henne ever running for Parliament. (See Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 115 and 166–168; also Pierre Normandin, ed., *Canadian Parliamentary Guide*, Ottawa, 1953–1968).

27. “Henne,” *News*, 8; also McGuire, “Yellowknife”.
28. McGuire, “Yellowknife,” 14; also Steadman, *Hard Lessons*, 142.
29. Solski, *Mine Mill*, 43–45. Given that the Eldorado mine had supplied the materials for the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, the RCMP and the Canadian military were both concerned with Port Radium’s proximity to the Soviet Union fearing it would only take a small enemy force to wipe out the mine if it was attacked. All employees of the mine had to undergo RCMP security screening and fingerprinting. See Jenkins, *Port Radium*, 123, 192, 233, 241–243. It is also possible that legislation was passed to prohibit unions at Port Radium. In McGuire’s account, the Eldorado mine was organized three times between 1945 and 1953, but each time the employer was able to break the union by using freeze-up and breakup periods to their advantage, and also by opening the employees’ personal mail. (See McGuire, “Yellowknife Mine,” 4.)
30. Palmer, *A Communist*, 108; also King, *Red Bait*, 126. One of the difficulties with Scott’s account is that it is lacking in dates. Typical of memoirs and oral histories, *A Communist Life* is filled with vague reference to time such as “in the early fifties” or “after the war,” etc. As a result it is often difficult to establish dates for events described in his book. In this particular case the reader can assume that Scott left Yellowknife in 1951 as he refers to his subsequent arrival in Vancouver in the next chapter as occurring “around 1951” (111).
31. *Ibid.* Also Dent, *Hansard*.
32. John Campbell Wallace, “Hay River, NWT”, MA Thesis, Department of Geography, University of Alberta, 1966.
33. *NWT Data Book: 1986–87: A Complete Guide to the Northwest Territories and its Communities* (Yellowknife: Outcrop, 1986) 261–217, 188–189. Also Janet McPherson, “The Pine Point Mine” in Everett B. Peterson and Janet B. Wright, eds., *Northern Transitions: Volume One: Northern Resource and Land Use Policy Study* (Ottawa: Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, 1978), 65-110.
34. King, *Red Bait*, 135.
35. *Labour Organizations in Canada: 1966*, 34. This is the last year that Labour Canada reported the number of Mine Mill locals in the Northwest Territories separately from the Yukon. In 1967 they were again combined for a total of 11 locals. At the

same time the United Steelworkers did not represent a single worker in either territory.

36. "History," *North*, 5.
37. Selleck and Thompson, *Dying*, 7.
38. Personal interview, 26 August 1999. Although Gould remembered her husband's union as Steel, as already indicated, the USWA had no locals in the Northwest Territories until after the merger with Mine Mill in 1968. Gould would later distinguish herself as a union activist in her own right with the Northwest Territories Public Service Association, later renamed the Union of Northern Workers. Upon her retirement in 2002 the union established a scholarship fund in her honour.
39. Dale Johnson, personal interview, 24 August 1999.
40. Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 44, 144–145. Also "Regina-born Liberal MP, Merv Hardie, dies," *Leader Post*, Regina, 18 October 1961, 9.
41. McGuire attributes 1945 as being the year in which a number of significant events unfolded for Local 802. It is worth remembering, however, that Local 802 was not established until 1946. Likely this is more an indication of a failing memory and the weaknesses of oral history in general.
42. McGuire, "Yellowknife," 8; Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 145.
43. "Regina-born," *Leader Post*, 9.
44. McGuire, "Yellowknife," 7.
45. Hamilton, *Arctic*, 21–22.
46. Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 43; McGuire, "Yellowknife," 7.
47. McGuire, "Yellowknife," 7.
48. Decoursey, *Yellowknife*, 43.
49. Hamilton, *Arctic*, 34.
50. Long after his ideological reversal Fred Henne would serve several terms as mayor of Yellowknife: 1956–1957; 1968–1973, and 1976–1979 (Dent, *Hansard*, 70-73).
51. McGuire, "Yellowknife," 8.
52. "History," *North*, 5.
53. At the time, Indian Affairs had only recently been transferred to this portfolio from Citizenship and Immigration at the recommendation of the recent Royal Commission on Government Organization.
54. Gurston Dacks, ed. *Devolution and Constitutional Development in the Canadian North* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1990), 27.
55. A.W.R. Carrothers, *Report of the Advisory Commission on Development of Government in the Northwest Territories, vols. 1, 2, & Summary*, (Ottawa:1966)
56. *Who's Who in Canada: 1966-68: An Illustrated Biographical Record of Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: International, 1966), 421.

57. Carrothers, *Report*, 145–146; also Kirk Cameron and Graham White, *Northern Governments in Transition: Political and Constitutional Development in the Yukon, Nunavut, and the Western Northwest Territories* (Ottawa: Renouf, 1995), 48–50; Kenneth Coates, *Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest Territories* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1985), 191–227; Hamilton, *Arctic*, 90–91; and Morris Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914–1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 363–365.
58. Cameron and White, *Northern*, 48–50; also Coates, *Canada's*, 191–227; and Zaslow, *Northward*, 363–365. See Hamilton, *Arctic*, 91.
59. Carrothers, *Report*, vol. 1, 1.
60. Carrothers, *Report*, vol. 2, B21.
61. Carrothers, *Report, Summary*, 5–6. Carrothers' final reason in recommending against division was paternalistic, bordering on racist. He argued that by keeping east and west together the east had much to benefit. It was the stated opinion of the commission that in remaining together the people of the eastern Arctic would continue to have their "level of political sophistication" elevated through interaction with their neighbours in the west. The commission was essentially saying the Inuit still had a lot to learn from non-Natives about politics. See Carrothers, *Report*, vol. 1, 147.
62. Carrothers, *Report*, vol. 2, B21.
63. *Labour Organizations in Canada*, Economic and Research Branch, Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa, 1949-1967. Steel cannot take all of the credit for Mine Mill's losses. Al King refers to a "Three Way Pact" between the Labourers' Union, the Teamsters, and the Operating Engineers who worked in concert to raid Mine Mill. See King, *Red Bait*, 132.
64. Schrecker, *Many*, 358.
65. It has been suggested by one retired labour leader that the decision had more to do with Steel's provision of pensions for Mine Mill's existent leadership and staff at the time.
66. Nils Orvik and Gary Vanderhaden, *Interest Groups in the Northwest Territories* (Kingston: Queen's University, 1977), 42.
67. Craig Harper, "Former union man recalls days gone by," *News/North*, 26 October 1987, 21.