

I. FORSCHUNGEN

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The Herner *Polenaufstand* of 1899

One hundred years ago here in Herne, in late June and early July of 1899, events occurred that deserve our recalling them, as Europe approaches a new century. Today Europe is of course more united than a century ago and even more than just a decade ago, when Soviet domination lost its hold on Eastern Europe. This year Poland together with Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO. In a few years these former Warsaw Pact members may be admitted to the European Union. In light of these developments, it might well be worth considering the meaning of the events of 1899, which are known in history as the *Herne Polenaufstand*.¹

The meaning of any historical event is subject to debate, and this is certainly true of the *Herne Polenaufstand*. The most fundamental question about these events a hundred years ago is whether they are accurately characterised as an *Aufstand*. One might argue, on the contrary, that what occurred here was a strike, similar to other miners' strikes. Opponents of the strike labelled it an *Aufstand*, either because that is how they perceived it, or as a way of discrediting it. To reach a conclusion in this regard, we have to examine the origins of the events in question and whether they logically point to a strike or to an *Aufstand*. Did the participants express legitimate grievances? We also have to examine the origins of the violence that occurred here one hundred years ago. Violence accompanied all of the major strikes of miners that occurred in the Ruhr region before World War I. Violence is also a basic attribute of an *Aufstand*. Finally, we will have to examine the role of Polish miners in these events. Was a Polish group or a section of the Polish community in the Ruhr region connected with these events? Did the Polish participants act primarily because of their identity as Poles or because of their identity as miners? What influence did the Polish role have on the course that these events took and on the reaction to the events of the other actors in these events: the mine managements, the press, the Prussian authorities, other miners, and the miners' unions?

Large numbers of Polish migrants from eastern Prussia began to come to the Ruhr region to meet its labour needs after the Franco-Prussian War. By 1893 a quarter of the miners of the Ruhr region had been born in the German provinces of East and West Prussia, Posen, and

1 Hermann Hilbert, *Die Zusammensetzung der Grubenbelegschaft des Ruhrkohlengebietes um die Jahrhundertwende und ihre Probleme*, (Unpublished Dissertation) Cologne 1955, p. 93. For a more detailed account of the events described here along with additional documentation, see John J. Kulczycki, *The Foreign Worker and the German Labor Movement: Xenophobia and Solidarity in the Coal Fields of the Ruhr, 1871-1914* Oxford, Providence 1994, pp. 105-153.

Silesia.² Not all of these migrants spoke Polish as their native language, but the number who did rose rapidly in the 1890s. In 1897 nearly a fifth of the work force of the mines consisted of Polish-speaking German citizens.³ In 1898 and 1899, as the work force in the mines grew in size by more than 33,000 men, well over half this increase came from among those born in the provinces of eastern Prussia.⁴

These migrants converged mainly on the northern part of the Ruhr region, where the greatest expansion of the mining industry was taking place. In these years the largest increases in migrants from eastern Prussia came in the mining districts of Recklinghausen, Gelsenkirchen, and Herne. Within these districts, some mines drew more eastern migrants than others. Mine owners frequently recruited workers in a particular area of the East. Migrants typically urged family members and neighbours to join them in the Ruhr region and then found jobs for them at the mines where they worked. As a result, by the end of the century, there were eleven so-called Polish mines, that is, mines where migrants from the East constituted over half the work force.⁵ This led to jokes about the whole work force of a particular mine having the same Polish grandmother.⁶

The language difference between the Polish migrants and the native miners served as a barrier between them. Neither of the two main coal miners' unions in the Ruhr, the Christian *Gewerkverein* and the socialist-oriented union known as the *Alter Verband*, were able or willing to accommodate the Polish miner's need and desire to use his native tongue.⁷ In 1898 this failure led to a conflict over the nomination of candidates for election as pension fund elders and to a lasting split between the *Gewerkverein* and the *Wiarius Polski* (Polish Veteran or Fighter), a Polish newspaper in the Ruhr that served as the standard bearer of the region's Polish community. The argument that a Polish-speaking elder could better serve the Polish migrants brought no concessions, only the response that the migrants should learn German. The Prussian authorities in the Ruhr opposed any concessions to the official use of the Polish language, just as they did in the Prussian eastern provinces.⁸ In January 1899, the *Oberbergamt* of Dortmund issued an ordinance requiring mine owners to employ only those "foreign-language" workers who understood German well enough to comprehend the oral instructions of their supervisors and co-workers. The ordinance also restricted the employ-

2 O. Taeglichsbeck, *Die Belegschaft der Bergwerke und Salinen im Oberbergamtsbezirk Dortmund nach der Zählung vom 16. Dezember 1893*, Dortmund 1895-96, vol. II, pp. xii, xxi.

3 *Die Polen im rheinisch-westfälischen Steinkohlen-Bezirk*, published by Gau Ruhr und Lippe des Alldeutschen Verbandes, Munich 1901, pp. 10, 115.

4 Staatsarchiv Münster (hereafter cited as STAM), Oberpräsident (hereafter cited as OP) 2748, Bd. 3, ff. 214-225; this source corrects the widely cited figure for 1900; see John J. Kulczycki, *Polscy górnicy w Zagłębiu Ruhry. Próba charakterystyki statystycznej na podstawie nieznanego źródła (1 stycznia 1900)*, *Przegląd Polonijny* XIII (1987), pp. 21-26.

5 STAM, OP 2748, Bd. 3 ff., 214-225; *Die Polen*, pp. 18-19, incorrectly listed 19.

6 Hilbert, *Zusammensetzung*, pp. 24-25.

7 John J. Kulczycki, *Nationalism over Class Solidarity: The German Trade Unions and Polish Coal Miners in the Ruhr to 1902*, in: *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, XIV (1987), pp. 261-276.

8 John J. Kulczycki, *The Prussian Authorities and the Poles of the Ruhr*, in: *The International History Review*, VIII (1986), pp. 593-603.

ment of “foreign-language” workers in specified supervisory and technical positions to those who could “speak German and read it in script and in print.”⁹ Although ostensibly the ordinance aimed at promoting safety in the mines, the Polish migrants knew from experience in their homeland that officials could exploit such a regulation to discriminate against them. At a protest meeting in Bochum, the editor of the *Wiarus Polski* claimed that the ordinance sought to deprive the Polish worker of the possibility of earning better wages by excluding him from the higher-paying jobs to spend his life hauling wagons. Nevertheless, the German unions approved of the ordinance, which resulted in further attacks on them by the *Wiarus Polski*.

More than language separated most of the migrants from their fellow workers. Although the mines recruited the first groups of Polish migrants from among the miners of Upper Silesia, migrants from the predominantly agricultural regions of the Prussian East soon overwhelmed them. By 1898 just over 10% of the Ruhr’s miners born in the East came from Upper Silesia. In 1899 most of the recent eastern migrants, being new to mining, filled the lowest-paid positions in the underground work force, those of horse handler and hauler, rather than those of the relatively well-paid hewer and apprentice hewer, who did the actual digging at the coal face.

Both as “foreigners” and newcomers, unaccustomed to mining or even to industrial labour, many of the migrants aroused the suspicion of the native miner as potential “wage-cutters” or “strike-breakers.” They also became the scapegoats for ills associated with rapid industrialisation: a rise in crime rates, the spread of diseases, an increase in mining accidents, and the proletarianisation of the work force.¹⁰

Thus, both the fact of “foreignness” – though the migrants from eastern Prussia were German citizens – and the response of the native population and the state authorities fostered a separation of the migrants along national lines, rather than the social solidarity with their fellow workers. As early as 1877, mine managers looked upon migrants as potential strike-breakers. Only later were Polish miners sufficiently numerous to play any role in the labour movement in the Ruhr. The events of 1899 were to show what that role might be.

Despite the name *Polenaufstand* for those events in Herne one hundred years ago, they began peacefully. On Friday, June 23, 1899, some seventy haulers and horse handlers at the von der Heydt mine near Herne refused to enter the pits after the mine director rejected their demand for an immediate pay raise of 20 pfennigs per shift. According to a report of the local Prussian official, when a company official ordered them to get off the mine’s property if they did not want to work, they left quietly. Indeed, the calm induced the local authorities to view

9 STAM, Regierungsbezirk Arnsberg (hereafter cited as RA) I, Nr. 149, *Górnik* [Miner], Nr. 32, 1898, in German translation.

10 John J. Kulczycki, Scapegoating the Foreign Worker. Job Turnover, Accidents, and Diseases among Polish Coal Miners in the German Ruhr, 1871-1914, in: *The Politics of Immigrant Workers. Labor Activism and Migration in the World Economy Since 1830*, ed. by Camille Guérin-Gonzales and Carl Strikwerda, New York 1993, pp. 133-152.

the matter as having no significance. The next day as the strike at von der Heydt continued and spread to two neighbouring mines, Julia and Shamrock I/II, the local authorities again reported to the *Landrat* that peace nevertheless reigned everywhere.¹¹

Those who later branded this movement an *Aufstand* claimed that it was a pointless, inarticulate outburst. But when the movement began at Von-der-Heydt, the strikers, mostly young, Polish workers, had just received their pay for May and found it reduced by an increase in pension fund (Allgemeiner Knappschaftsverein) deductions, for which they wanted their employer to compensate them. The earliest reports of Prussian officials at the scene during the first two days of the strike confirm this. A pay raise equivalent to the increase in deductions would have satisfied the discontented workers and forestalled the strike. But the mine management equivocated and then tried to blame the work stoppage and its prolongation on the strikers. According to a letter from the Arnsberg *Präsident* to the Westphalian *Oberpräsident* on June 27, the mines were prepared to grant the pay increase. But to preserve their authority in the mines, mine officials required that the workers present their demands properly and individually or through a delegation, not, as they claimed, happened here, as a group, trying to extort the demands through supposedly disorderly conduct.¹² Yet, that very day the strikers' demands for a 25 to 30% pay increase for haulers and horse handlers and a lowering of pension deductions were presented by three Polish delegates to the respective mine managements. They now responded that they would not negotiate with strikers.¹³

The leader of the *Alter Verband*, trying to explain his union's lack of support for the movement, claimed that the strikers, acting out of ignorance, sought to force a change in the pension fund statutes, over which the mining companies had no control.¹⁴ While some strikers did apparently believe that the mine management set the pension deductions, from the beginning of the movement their concern focussed on their pay after deductions. They were clearly pursuing their economic interests as they understood them.

The Prussian authorities denied that the events in Herne stemmed from any legitimate miners' grievances. Because the increased pension fund deduction had actually begun the previous month, officials claimed that it served only as a pretext, even a welcome excuse for the strike. Yet, the new pension fund regulations particularly affected the younger, lower-paid

11 Stadtarchiv Bochum (hereafter cited as StAB), Landratsamt (hereafter cited as LR) 1271, LR report to RA, 22 Aug. 1899, draft; LR report, 24 June 1899, draft.

12 Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf (hereafter cited as HSTAD), Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf (hereafter cited as RD) 24720, f. 447, Regierungspräsident Arnsberg (hereafter cited as RPA), 27 June 1899, copy; STAM, RA I, Nr. 41, undated draft. For similar statements, see that of a mine director at a meeting with officials, STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 6, 28 June 1899, and RA I, Nr. 41, Bezirks-Polizeikommissar, Bochum, 25 June 1899.

13 STAM, Bergamt (hereafter cited as BA) Herne A8, Nr. 15, draft to Minister für Handel und Gewerbe, 28 June 1899; Rheinisch-Westfälische Arbeiter-Zeitung, 28 June 1899, No. 148, reported such delegations at Julia, v.d. Heydt, Shamrock, and „Grosser Fritz,“ RA I, Nr. 42, clipping.

14 STAM, RA I, Nr. 42, Deutsche Berg- und Hüttenarbeiter-Zeitung, 8 July 1899, No. 26, clipping; Otto Hue, *Neutrale oder parteiische Gewerkschaften?* Bochum, 1900, p. 99, repeated the view that the strikers believed that they could change the pension fund statutes by means of a strike.

haulers and horse handlers. Previously, those under thirty years of age contributed somewhat more than half the amount paid each month by older workers. Now all miners without distinction had 80 pfennigs per week deducted from their pay, which meant an increase in deductions of just over 5 marks per year for the older workers but 22 marks for the younger workers, some of whom earned as little as 2 marks per shift or 52 marks per month.¹⁵ Moreover, the change from a monthly to a weekly basis for the deduction meant that the workers had more taken out of their pay in June than in May. Mine owners commonly made a variety of deductions from the workers' pay without extensive explanation, so that miners never knew in advance exactly how much they would receive on pay day. It seems likely that the young Polish migrant understood little or nothing about the change in pension fund regulations and only reacted when the deductions increased for the second month in a row.

Even before the increase in pension fund deductions, dissatisfaction with their wages was widespread among all miners. The *Alter Verband* itself organised several public meetings attended by thousands of miners on 9 October 1898, which demanded a 10% increase in wages for all miners. When the mine owners' association did not respond, a meeting of union delegates protested in January 1899, and warned the owners that they would be responsible for the consequences. A week later the *Gewerkverein* general assembly passed a resolution calling upon mine owners to raise wages in accord with the existing favourable coal market. More than a year later, in demands sent to owners in February 1900, the *Alter Verband* again insisted that the wages of the lowest-paid were still too low. Meanwhile, the market for coal was pushing up profits and creating a labour shortage, ideal conditions for the miners to press their wage demands.

In those circumstances we can take the request for a pay raise by the haulers of the von der Heydt mine at face value. Furthermore, in its initial phase, the Herne strike paralleled other miners' strikes. Haulers had initiated the strikes of 1889 and 1891 at mines not far from Herne. Younger workers were typically more inclined to express their discontent through impulsive, autonomous acts rather than to look to the generally cautious miner organisations. As early as 1875 a mine official singled haulers out as the element of the work force most inclined to disturbances. Since the increased pension fund deduction particularly affected the younger workers, they shared a common grievance that made them ripe recruits for a strike. When the strike began at the von der Heydt mine and over the next few days spread among haulers and horse handlers at neighbouring mines, there was no need to refer to the participation of Polish migrants to explain it.

After the strike began, a small group of Polish socialists in Herne tried to influence the movement. They, together with leaders of the *Alter Verband*, planned a miners' meeting for Sunday June 25 in Herne.¹⁶ The union later claimed that the speakers intended to urge an end to the strike. But before the meeting could begin, a police official, out of consideration

15 Knappschaft, Satzungen 1899, pp. 7, 8, 17-21; STAM, OP 2847c, RPA, 17 July 1899, report.

16 STAM, OP 2847c and RA I, Nr. 41, Bezirks-Polizeikommissar, Dortmund, 6 July 1899.

for public order and safety, ordered everyone out of the overcrowded hall where the meeting was to be held. Outside, the police resorted to the use of weapons to disperse what they perceived to be a threatening crowd and arrested seven people in the process. The unions later attributed the spread of the strike and its violent character to the dissolution of this meeting and to the use of excessive force by the police. In a report written that Sunday evening, even the police commissar of Bochum, who had been in Herne, took the view that the speakers might well have brought an end to the strike. Now, based on conversations with miners at several taverns, he expected the strike to grow.¹⁷ Similarly, the police commissar of Essen reported two days later that he expected the strike to spread to the Düsseldorf district because the reckless step of the Herne police contributed to the agitation.¹⁸

Contrary to the fears of these officials, the strike did not grow or spread like earlier movements. Although it eventually affected thirteen mines, all in the vicinity of Herne, and involved about 8,000 men or about 35 percent of the work force of these mines, the haulers' strike did not expand into a general miners' strike, as happened in 1889. Instead, the predominance of Polish workers among the strikers became the focus of attention of officials and of the general public. In his final report on the events in Herne, the *Berghauptmann* of the *Oberbergamt* characterised the strike as a kind of test of strength of the Polish worker against the German. Specifically referring to the conflict between the *Wiarus Polski* and the *Gewerkverein* over the election of pension fund elders in 1898 and to the favourable response of the German unions to the language ordinance of January 1899, he suggested that the deepest cause of the strike lay in the recently intensified opposition between the German and Polish miner population.¹⁹ Officials also blamed Polish nationalist agitation as well as the Polish character, with its supposed propensity for violence. Some German newspapers seemed to welcome the occasion to vent their hostility toward what they referred to as Polish rowdies with the inevitable cudgel, the pigeon toes, and the greasy forelock. If the socialist press showed more sympathy for the plight of the Polish miners, it had no less of a negative opinion of them: undemanding, crude, ignorant elements brought to the Ruhr to depress wages, according to *Vorwärts*.²⁰

Neither of the two main German coal miners' unions in the Ruhr supported the movement. Early in July, when it had all but dissipated, the *Gewerkverein* distributed handbills urging members to try to halt the strike brought about by what it regarded foreign imported workers who could scarcely be considered true miners. The leaders of the *Alter Verband* also called on the strikers to resume work. But both unions accused mine owners of deliberately keeping the migrants ignorant and stressed the grievances of the miners. Indeed, five months after the strike, a long article in the *Gewerkverein's* newspaper *Bergknappe* blamed the whole episode on the Prussian authorities without mentioning the Poles at all. It was as if the strikers ceased to be "true Poles" as they became "true miners."²¹

17 STAM, RA I, Nr. 41, Bezirks-Polizeikommissar, Bochum, 25 June and 9 July 1899.

18 HSTAD, RD 24720, f. 455.

19 STAM, 2847c, Oberbergamt Dortmund, 8 Sept. 1899.

20 STAM, RA I, Nr. 42, 30 June 1899, No. 150, clipping.

21 *Bergknappe*, 9 Dec. 1899, No. 43.

In seeking to repress the strike, the Prussian authorities also focussed on the Polish workers. As during previous strikes, on Tuesday June 27 the Bochum *Landrat* issued a notice warning participants about relevant laws, ordinances, and regulations. But this time the *Landrat* prefaced the notice with comments blaming “young mine workers [Bergarbeiter] mostly of Polish descent” for the “ill-advised” strike and “especially the Polish mine workers [Bergarbeiter], as well as their wives” for “a gross example of the disregard of existing laws” in the “gross excesses” that occurred with “firearms and stones” used against police officers. At the same time he called on “the sensible, older miners [Bergleute], especially the German heads of families of those striking without cause,” “to pave the way for order and through word and example to lead the imprudent youths back to their duty.”²²

Nevertheless, on the day the *Landrat* issued his notice, significant numbers of hewers and apprentice hewers, the older and better-paid aristocrats of the underground work force, for the first time joined the strike. The mine management and the Prussian authorities attributed this to a fear of being abused by the strikers. When the next day the highest Prussian officials of the region, including the *Oberpräsident* of Westphalia and the *Berghauptmann* of the Ruhr region, met with the directors of the affected mines, the discussion principally concerned the question of whether the protection of non-striking miners required the dispatch of military troops to the area.²³ The mine directors strongly favoured such an action, and the officials agreed. In a telegram to Kaiser Wilhelm requesting the troops, the *Oberpräsident* emphasised Polish involvement and the brutality of the attacks against the security organs, property, and non-striking miners. He also assured the Kaiser that nearly all of the strikers were Poles, who were “plainly” influenced by Polish socialists. In a telegram to the minister of interior, he added the claim that almost all non-striking miners were German, which allegedly increased the bitterness of the strikers.²⁴ Although supposedly concerned about the violence, the Prussian officials and mine directors at their meeting made hardly any reference to the bloodiest incident, the so-called “battle of Bahnhofstrasse,” which occurred the day before and resulted in the only fatalities of the whole *Polenaufstand*. Just as on Sunday, Prussian security forces on Tuesday found themselves confronted by a supposedly hostile crowd; this time they fired into it, wounding some fifteen people seriously enough to be hospitalised and at least as many less seriously. One died at the scene, another later that day, and a third sometime afterward, all due to their wounds.

Other violent confrontations occurred prior to Tuesday’s “battle.” According to the Bochum *Landrat*, on Monday evening gendarmes returning from guard duty at the Shamrock I/II mine encountered countless pistol shots and flying bricks as they passed through the mine colony, though they suffered no casualties.²⁵ That same evening, what a report of the *Oberbergamt* referred to as a raging mob attacked the Shamrock I/II mine during the shift change, causing some property damage.²⁶

22 StAB, LR 1271, an original poster.

23 STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 6, minutes of the meeting.

24 STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 6, 28 June 1899, drafts.

25 STAM, RA I, Nr. 42, 11 July 1899.

26 STAM, OP 2847c, 8 Sept. 1899.

Additional incidents occurred on Monday June 26 at the Friedrich der Grosse mine. As the strike began there with the morning shift, its participants sought to negotiate with the mine's technical director. They departed quietly, however, when he ordered them to enter the pits or leave.²⁷ But when a crowd gathered at the mine during the mid-day shift change, it did not budge when so ordered until the security officers drew their sabres and put it to flight.²⁸ According to the *Amtmann* of Baukau, the crowd, many of whom wore red scarves and flowers, had thrown stones at the officers and had blocked the way for non-striking miners to go to work. When in the evening another crowd confronted the police, they warned the people to disperse and then resorted to the use of firearms, shooting into the crowd as it fled.²⁹

The mine owners later accused strikers of abusing non-striking workers from the very beginning of the work stoppage. The Prussian authorities, however, noted the first such incidents only on Monday June 26, when nineteen miners later reported being physically mistreated, usually by bands of strikers. Nevertheless, on the day following the dissolution of the Herne miners' meeting on Sunday, strikers vented most of their anger and frustration on the mines and on the Prussian security forces guarding them, rather than on their non-striking co-workers. Furthermore, in those cases of strikers abusing miners where the location of the incident is known, more occurred near the Friedrich der Grosse mine than any other mine, precisely where the Prussian authorities had used the most violent means against a crowd of strike supporters.³⁰ Prussian officials denied the aggrieved young low-paid workers a chance to hold a meeting and to present their demands in a legal and orderly manner. When the mines became the target of their anger, Prussian security forces beat them back, giving no quarter. Only those miners who had failed to show their solidarity with the strikers remained vulnerable to one form or another of pressure from the strikers so that the movement might achieve its goal. The violence of the police against strike supporters bred the violence of strikers against non-striking workers.

In their reports on the events of June 26, the Prussian authorities particularly emphasised Polish involvement in the violence. But this misrepresented the growing movement. Since a considerable portion of the haulers and horse handlers at the affected mines were Polish, they were similarly numerous among the strikers. Yet, no Polish hewers or apprentice hewers had so far joined the strike. Nor were all those who gave vent to their hostility Polish. Of fifteen people accused of committing various crimes on June 26, six had German surnames. More significant for the character of the strike was that they were nearly all young haulers. By focusing on the Polish element in the strike and the violence, the mine management and Prussian authorities diverted attention from the strike's real character and goal, transforming what

27 STAM, BA Herne A8, Nr. 15, report, 28 June 1899; StAB, LR 1271, Amtmann, Baukau, 11 July 1899.

28 StAB, LR 1271, LR, 11 July 1899, draft.

29 STAM, RA I, Nr. 41, report, 5 July 1899; StAB, LR 1271, Amtmann, Baukau, 11 July 1899, and LR, 11 July 1899, draft.

30 STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 7, f. 4 of Anlage 1, Verein für die bergbaulichen Interessen im OBAD, Essen, 24 Oct. 1899; OP 2847c, Anlage B and C, RPA report, 22 Aug. 1899.

began as a haulers' strike into a *Polenaufstand*. This affected the response to the strike of the general public, the other miners, and their unions.

The strike movement for the first time encompassed significant numbers of hewers and apprentice hewers on Tuesday June 27, especially during the afternoon shift. At the von der Heydt mine, where the management now fired those strikers who had missed three shifts in a row, nearly the entire afternoon underground work force as well as some above ground workers joined the strike. At Shamrock I/II and Friedrich der Grosse, over 400 workers at each mine, a majority of the afternoon underground work force, also joined the strike. During the mid-day shift change at these two mines, confrontations took place that may have intimidated some miners into joining the strike. Crowds at the mine entrances threw stones at miners who were not on strike, injuring one seriously. At Shamrock the police and gendarmes intervened with drawn sabres. Miners from the afternoon shift were especially vulnerable since strikers could recognise them as they went to work in broad daylight and take revenge as they returned from work in the darkness of night. Strikers even attacked non-strikers who lived on the same street as they did.³¹

Yet, many miners, both haulers and hewers, might have used the threats as an excuse for not working without suffering the consequences of supporting the strike. Fear of reprisals cannot alone account for the expansion of the strike to such large groups of hewers and apprentice hewers. They depended on haulers in their work. If there were not a sufficient number of haulers or if they did not work quickly and efficiently in moving the coal dug by the hewers, the earnings of the hewers, who worked for a piece rate, suffered. Furthermore, although the lower pay of haulers and other shift workers made it harder for them to bear the large increase in pension fund deductions, it also affected a considerable number of hewers. Consideration of their own self-interest could motivate some hewers to join the haulers' strike.

In his informal survey of miners on Sunday, the Bochum police commissar found that the older miners agreed with the demands of the haulers and horse handlers because of their low pay, and he predicted that the strike might grow because of feelings of solidarity.³² Miners depended on each other for their physical safety as well as their earnings. They also shared the same work experience. Hewers once worked as haulers, and haulers could expect to be hewers in a relatively short period of time. In this respect, mining differed considerably from other industries. Even the pay differentials among miners were not as great as among other workers. These features of the mining industry led to the creation of what has been called an "occupational community" among miners that served as the basis for the solidarity they demonstrated in their protest actions.³³

31 STAM, RA I 42, Gelsenkirchener Zeitung, 10 Feb. 1900, No. 33; Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung, 28 June 1899, No. 480, 28 June 1899, No. 481, clippings; Generalstaatsanwalt Hamm I 12.

32 STAM, RA I, Nr. 41.

33 For M.I.A. Bulmer, *Sociological Models of the Mining Community*, in: *Sociological Review*, XXIII, No.1 (1975), pp. 76-89, the term occupational community also involved the social relationships beyond the work setting.

Reinforcing this community was a greater tendency among miners than other workers to live in homogeneous neighbourhoods, next door to fellow miners. The way the strike spread in 1899, in most cases, from one mine to an adjacent mine, suggests that strikers might have won converts among neighbours who worked at other mines. In fact, a Royal District Police Commissar attributed the outbreak of the strike at the Mont Cenis mine to its proximity to Herne, where a large part of its work force lived.³⁴ For many of the miners of the Herne region, there were other communal ties besides those of occupation and residence that could serve as the basis of solidarity in the strike of 1899. These were the communities of culture and of origins in eastern Prussia. Indeed, two of the three mines where more than half the underground work force struck on Tuesday afternoon had the highest proportion of Polish miners in the Herne mining district. According to a survey in 1897, 55% of the von der Heydt work force and 50% of the Friedrich der Grosse work force were Polish miners.³⁵ On January 1, 1900, miners from the eastern provinces of Prussia constituted 51% of the work force at von der Heydt, 53% at Friedrich der Grosse, and 41% at Shamrock I/II. Furthermore, a large majority of these miners from the East came from Posen province, the German province with the highest percentage of Polish population and the centre of the Polish national movement in Prussia: 69% at von der Heydt, 75% at Friedrich der Grosse, and 72% at Shamrock I/II.³⁶ Solidarity based on communal ties of culture and origin can in part explain why large numbers of hewers joined the haulers' strike at two other mines, Julia and König Ludwig, where more than half the underground workers of a particular shift struck. In 1897 Polish miners constituted 45% of the work force at Julia and 55% at König Ludwig. Migrants from eastern Prussia formed 46% of the work force at Julia and 56% at König Ludwig on January 1, 1900. Of these migrants, 74% at Julia and 85% at König Ludwig came from Posen province. Particularly in the case of König Ludwig, where the strike reached larger proportions only after the troops sent to maintain order arrived, such communal ties seem much more relevant than fear of violence.

The only other mine where more than half the work force of a particular shift participated in the strike, Mont Cenis, experienced hardly any violence in its immediate vicinity. In a report on the strike there, the Dortmund *Landrat* specifically stated that no disturbances occurred in his district.³⁷ The mine, however, had fewer Polish miners. Since a large number of workers at Mont Cenis lived in Herne, the key to the strike there seems to lie in solidarity based on communities of residence as well as of occupation more than on those of culture and of origins. At seven other mines or shafts to which the haulers' strike spread, it did not win the support of at least half of the underground miners for even a single shift. Significantly, the work forces at these mines generally had a lower degree of shared communities of culture and origin with the haulers who initiated the strike. At all but one, shaft Wilhelm of the Pluto mine, migrants from Posen province constituted less than 30% of the work force, at half of them

34 STAM, RA I, Nr. 41, 27 June 1899, report.

35 Die Polen, p. 111.

36 STAM, OP 2748, Bd. 3, ff. 214-225.

37 STAM, RA I, Nr. 41, 29 June 1899.

only 10% or less. The location of shaft Wilhelm, like that of Mont Cenis, might explain its exceptional status. Although at the start of 1900 half its work force had been born in Posen province, it lay on the periphery of the area affected by the strike, and a haulers' strike began there only on Friday June 30, a week after the strike began at von der Heydt.

In a report on the strike, the *Bergamt* in Herne distinguished between older German striking miners, who were supposedly restrained from working by threats and abuse, and the Polish miners who supposedly willingly joined the strike of their younger comrades.³⁸ At the meeting with government officials on June 28, the director of the Shamrock mine reported that older miners, especially German miners, almost without exception declared themselves ready to support only the management by taking over as haulers, work that otherwise they regarded as inferior.³⁹ Among those who did not join the strike at Friedrich der Grosse were ninety-five hewers and thirty haulers whom the management had brought in from overwhelmingly German Lower Silesia, although two weeks before the strike the Herne *Bergamt* had noted great dissatisfaction among these hewers and much anger directed against the authorities.⁴⁰

Particular circumstances affected the course of the strike at each of the mines in the Herne region. But the distinction made by officials between Polish and German miners takes on added weight because of the composition of the work force of the mines involved. At eleven out of the thirteen mines affected by the haulers' strike, where migrants from Posen province constituted at least 30% of the work force, the strike became general; where they formed less than 30%, it did not. Communal ties of culture and of origin could prompt the older Polish migrants to support the strike where they were sufficiently numerous to influence its course. National consciousness combined with social consciousness to form a sense of common identity that served as the basis for collective action. In this way, what began as a haulers' strike became a Polish strike, if only because of the lack of solidarity on the part of German miners.

Did it become a *Polenaufstand* or a social protest as some have claimed?⁴¹ The strikers of Herne of 1899 responded to the lack of solidarity of their comrades in a way that was characteristic of other strikes, especially where unions were weak. In all of the major miners' strikes of the Ruhr region, strikers attempted to enforce solidarity by means of threats and violence directed against strike-breakers. When the management of a neighbouring mine reported to the Bochum *Landrat* that crowds had gathered at the Mont Cenis mine during the shift

38 STAM, BA, A8, 16, 15 Sept. 1899, draft of quarterly report.

39 STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 6, minutes of the meeting.

40 STAM, BA, A8, 16, 9 June 1899, draft of quarterly report; RA, I, Nr. 41, 9 July 1899, Bezirks-Polizeikommissar, Bochum.

41 Klaus Tenfelde, Die 'Krawalle von Herne' im Jahre 1899, in: Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, XV (1979), p. 93, classified it as a social protest; Christoph Klessmann, Polnische Bergarbeiter im Ruhrgebiet 1870-1945. Soziale Integration und nationale Subkultur einer Minderheit in der deutschen Industriegesellschaft, Göttingen 1978, pp. 74-78, cited the events in Herne as an example of the migrants' „deviant behaviour,“ proof of a deficiency of their social integration. These accounts take the same point of view as a contemporary account by the Alter Verband leader Otto Hue, Die Krawalle von Herne, in: Die Neue Zeit, XVII (1899), Vol. 2, 534-540.

change to intimidate non-strikers, it commented that this method was also employed during earlier strikes.⁴² Although mine owners and Prussian officials claimed that the level of violence in 1899 exceeded that of previous strikes, it would be difficult to prove that it exceeded that of the strike of 1912, when again solidarity among miners was notably absent. What alarmed the authorities was not so much the level of violence as the Polish participation in it.

The largest number of incidents of strikers engaging in illegal activities and violence occurred on Tuesday June 27. A court later found a group of thirteen miners, only one of whom had a Polish surname, guilty of collectively taking part in a public procession and of committing gross misconduct by cheering during the procession.⁴³ The charge against these miners stemmed from a decision of the Prussian authorities to arrest as many people as possible rather than from the nature of the incident itself. Strikers did, however, physically abuse non-strikers, especially miners returning from work at Friedrich der Grosse in the middle of the night. In addition to the thirteen noted above, thirty others were later accused of committing crimes on that day, twenty-five with Polish surnames and five with German surnames. Of those whose positions were identified, all except two were listed as haulers or young miners – the oldest was twenty years old. Nevertheless, in his final memorandum on the strike, the *Oberpräsident* of Westphalia characterised Tuesday night as relatively quiet.⁴⁴

In assessing these events, we must keep in mind that also on Tuesday June 27 the “battle of Bahnhofstrasse” had occurred in the early evening and that Prussian police and gendarmes had resorted to force against strikers at the Friedrich der Grosse mine. Powerless in the face of the Prussian state, strikers turned against their more vulnerable comrades who by not striking seemed to side with the mine owners and Prussian authorities. The participation of Germans and young miners suggests that the incidents that occurred on Tuesday stemmed from the lack of solidarity with the haulers’ strike rather than from any Polish *Aufstand*.

Yet, clearly national differences influenced the course of the Herne strike. Among the older miners the evidence indicates that Polish miners responded to appeals for solidarity with the haulers’ strike in greater numbers than German miners did. The Prussian authorities and the German unions also acted in ways that encouraged this differential response. Polish miners from Posen province had learned in their homeland to counter the hostility of the Prussian authorities and of Germans in general with national solidarity. The experience of the Herne strike, during which their German fellow miners and the German unions also seemed to put national solidarity above social solidarity, despite circumstances favourable to a strike, verified this conclusion.

Thus, the so-called *Herner Polenaufstand* had different meanings for its contemporaries. For the mine owners, the Prussian authorities, and many German miners and their unions, it confirmed their prejudices about the Polish migrants. For the Polish migrants it meant that

42 StAB, LR 1271, Gewerkschaft des Steinkohlenbergwerks Lothringen, 28 June 1899.

43 STAM, Generalstaatsanwalt Hamm I 12, ff. 31, 46, 21 July 1899, 29 July 1899, Staatsanwalt Bochum.

44 STAM, OP 2847, Bd. 7, Oct. 1899, memorandum draft.

they must look to their own strengths to protect their interests, which they did when three years later they formed their own separate Polish trade union, the *Zjednoczenie Zawodowe Polskie*, in 1902.⁴⁵ Then in 1905 the Polish trade union and the Polish miners proved their ability to strike in solidarity with German miners and their unions. Treated as equals, they behaved as equals.

⁴⁵ For a history of the union, see John J. Kulczycki, *The Polish Coal Miners' Union and the German Labor Movement in the Ruhr, 1902-1934: National and Social Solidarity* Oxford 1997.