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By A. C. HUTSON, JR.

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The insurrections of 1891 had arisen over the refusal of the coal miners employed by the Tennessee Coal Company at Briceville to sign an "iron-clad" contract, which would have forced them to relinquish their rights as provided by state law and to promise not to strike when they had a grievance. The company had contracted for and had acquired a number of state convicts to replace the free coal miners. Forthwith the miners were evicted from their work and homes; destitution and starvation descended upon the formerly happy and prosperous valley; concerted condemnation of the state and of the coal company was made by citizens of all classes throughout Tennessee; armed miners released and removed the convicts from their stockades on two occasions only to have them replaced by the state militia with a promise from Governor John B. Buchanan that the state legislature would be called into special session to consider the pressing problems relating to the coal mining industry.

An executive proclamation, issued by the governor in midsummer, 1891, calling the legislature into special session, enumerated the important problems for consideration: the enactment of legislation to empower the governor to execute the laws with the aid of civil or military forces; the repeal of the convict lease law, or its modification so as to reduce to a minimum the competition with free labor; a reform of the criminal procedure of the state; the prohibition of the issuance of scrip

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\*This study is a continuation of the author's "The Coal Miners' Insurrections of 1891 in Anderson County, Tennessee," in *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 7 (1935), 103-121. It was presented at a meeting of the Society in Knoxville, May 1, 1936.

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in payment for labor; and provision for the punishment of those interfering with the labor of the state convicts.<sup>1</sup>

An aroused public indignation denounced the coal mining industry and the leasing system. Numerous solutions to the perplexing problem were offered. Mass meetings, held throughout the state, extended financial aid to the miners, dispatched resolutions and memorials to the governor and to the legislators protesting the iniquities of the coal mining system, and demanded a repeal of the convict lease law.<sup>2</sup> The Farmers' and Laborers' Alliance convention, which met in Nashville, August 12, 1891, favored the repeal of the lease law at the earliest practicable moment and the employment of the convicts on public roads under county supervision.<sup>3</sup> The Nashville *Banner* openly advocated the whipping post for minor offenses, which, it was contended, would eliminate the overcrowded condition of the penitentiary and at the same time accomplish a more effectual cure for waywardness.<sup>4</sup>

Governor Buchanan's message to the legislature, meeting in special session in August, 1891, reflected the influence of public opinion, for, instead of defending the lease system as he had done at the preceding session, he recommended the repeal of the lease law at the earliest practicable time and the immediate restriction of the state's convicts to a few mines, through a modification of the lease contract, as a means of relieving the situation which had produced the revolts of 1891. Two other recommendations were for a change in the criminal law and procedure so as to compel the counties to use trivial offenders on public roads, and for the removal of the penitentiary to a location outside the city limits of Nashville.<sup>5</sup>

Serious consideration of the various proposals by the General Assembly was limited to an earnest effort to modify the lease contract.<sup>6</sup> The lessees informed the legislature that they would surrender the contract, but that they could not consider a modification since they had already suffered severe losses.<sup>7</sup> They presented an alternate proposal, suggesting the erection of a new penitentiary by the lessees and the employment

<sup>1</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, July 23, August 7, 1891. Other problems mentioned, but of minor importance, included a redistricting of the state, correction of the election laws, and the appropriation of funds to the World's Fair. Action was taken on the first two subjects. The latter was ignored. See *Acts of the State of Tennessee passed by the Extraordinary Session of the Forty-Seventh General Assembly, 1891* (Nashville, 1891), ch. 10, p. 25, ch. 12, p. 30. Hereafter cited as *Acts*.

<sup>2</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, July 23, 24, 29, 31, August 9, 10, 1891.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, August 13, 1891.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, July 31, 1891 (reprinted from Nashville *Banner*).

<sup>5</sup>*House Journal of the Extraordinary Session of the Forty-Seventh General Assembly of the State of Tennessee, 1891* (Nashville, 1891), governor's message, 10-24. Hereafter cited as *House Journal*.

<sup>6</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, September 2, 3, 5, 1891.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, September 9, 1891.

of the convicts in coal mines in Marion, Bledsoe, and Sequatchie counties; for this the state would be reimbursed to the amount of \$250,000 per year for the maintenance of the penitentiary.<sup>8</sup> This proposal was not acceptable to the legislature, because it was estimated that the state's penal expenditures would exceed \$250,000, and because it was deemed ill advisable for the state to enter into a contract of twenty-five to thirty years' duration as desired by the lessees. The legislature would not consider the possibility of surrendering the contract since the state was constitutionally obligated to it.<sup>9</sup> One bill, designed for the immediate repeal of the lease law, came to a vote, but it was defeated in the House of Representatives, fifty-nine to twenty-three.<sup>10</sup>

Attempts to diminish the evils produced by the system met with repeated failure and the only mitigating expression of sympathy to the miners and to other opponents of the lease law was embodied in a House resolution which stated: "It is the sense of this body that the convicts in the penitentiary should never be leased again."<sup>11</sup> This was a feeble gesture that was received with great scorn. As for the miners' industrial grievances, the legislature enacted a law compelling all industries to pay their employees in lawful United States currency at regular intervals.<sup>12</sup> This was nullified, however, the following year by the state supreme court, which held that a similar law passed in 1887 had been declared unconstitutional in that it might in certain cases result in imprisonment for debt.<sup>13</sup>

Failing to render any relief to the miners, the legislature enacted laws insuring the continuance of the system by providing ample appropriations for the state militia, and by empowering the governor to use the militia in suppressing all "insurrections, mobs . . . whether existing or imminent", which in his opinion would be "too formidable for the local county authorities".<sup>14</sup> The act was limited in duration until the next General Assembly and was, therefore, especially designed to suppress the revolting miners. Additional acts were passed authorizing, first, the governor to command all necessary posses to suppress the revolters; and, second, the courts to order the imprisonment of such law violators for terms of from one to seven years in the penitentiary.<sup>15</sup> Governor Buchanan was commended by the Senate for his "promptness, energy,

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, September 10, 1891.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, September 4, 1891.

<sup>10</sup>*House Journal*, 1891 (Extra), 108-109.

<sup>11</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, September 6, 1891.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, September 16, 1891; *Acts*, 1891 (Extra), ch. 5, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>*State v. Paint Rock Coal and Coke Co.*, in *Reports of Cases in the Supreme Court of Tennessee* [Pickle, VIII] (Nashville, 1893), 81-84.

<sup>14</sup>*Acts*, 1891 (Extra), ch. 7, p. 21, ch. 27, p. 93, ch. 8, pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 1891 (Extra), ch. 13, p. 22.

firmness, and untiring efforts to restore law and order at Coal Creek and Briceville".<sup>16</sup>

The legislators in adjourning received the gubernatorial "Thanks" and departed homeward, disagreeing among themselves as to the reasons for their failure to redress the situation, for which purpose they had been called into session.<sup>17</sup> The legislators were described by the press of the state as being "self-convicted of ignorance, stupidity, inability, and blind partisanship", and as being "utterly unfitted for the discharge of the responsible duties of law-makers".<sup>18</sup> As usual, in Tennessee, the legislature of 1891 was overwhelmingly Democratic, with 105 Democrats and only twenty-seven Republicans.<sup>19</sup> The Alliance platform plank favoring a repeal of the lease law had little effect on the fifty-four Alliancemen in the legislature. The seventy-six farmer legislators regardless of party affiliations favored the lease system's continuance since it reduced taxes; the Republicans blamed the Democrats for its continuance; and the Democrats denounced the various factions within their party for the lack of action. Failure to realize the necessity for immediate action on the question was perhaps the reason for this legislative default. The result, naturally, was accepted with ill grace by the miners and by the opponents of the lease system in general.<sup>20</sup>

The action of the state board of prison inspectors in removing the convicts from the Tennessee Coal Company mine during the summer of 1891, due to the failure of the lessees to comply with regulations regarding mining conditions, incited an unrealized hope that the removal might be permanent. The mining conditions were atrocious: defective ventilation; insufficient drainage; horrible sanitation; only one entrance to the mine; and no protective inspection of the mine prior to work. The convicts were inadequately fed and forced to work and sleep in the same clothing.<sup>21</sup> The lessees and the coal mine operators set about immediately to remedy conditions and within a few weeks the convicts were returned to the mine. The board had acted only in the interest of the convicts, hence the removal had little effect upon the free, but still unemployed, coal miners.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 1891 (Extra), Senate resolutions, 113.

<sup>17</sup>Knoxville Journal, September 22, 1891.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, September 20, 1891.

<sup>19</sup>Charles Austin Miller, *The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1890), 246-247.

<sup>20</sup>Knoxville Journal, September 20, 22, 1891 (editorial reprinted from Memphis Commercial); Knoxville Tribune, September 22, 1891 (reprinted from Nashville Herald); Knoxville Tribune, September 25, 1891 (reprinted from Nashville Banner).

<sup>21</sup>Second Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1893, in *Appendix to Senate Journal, 1893* (Nashville, 1893), 190-200; Knoxville Journal, August 12, 14, 1891.

<sup>22</sup>Senate Journal, 1893, appendix, report of commissioner of labor, 210-220.

All other attempts for relief having failed, the miners sought to obtain redress through the courts. In September, a justice of the peace was smuggled into the Tennessee Coal Company's mine and William Warren, a convict, was induced to sign papers applying for a *habeas corpus* proceeding on the ground that he was being held illegally in the mine.<sup>23</sup> The lower court in Knoxville declared that the convict was being held in an illegal prison, since it was not under the control of the prison authorities, and that he should therefore be returned to the penitentiary in Nashville.<sup>24</sup> On appeal, the state supreme court reversed the judgment and remanded the prisoner to the mine on the basis of the lease law of 1889, which permitted the employment of convicts anywhere in the state under the control of a state-appointed warden and in accordance with the rules of the board of prison inspectors.<sup>25</sup>

The miners had patiently waited throughout the summer and early fall for relief, only to find that the state legislature could not agree upon a disposition of the penitentiary system; that the board of prison inspectors offered no permanent relief; and that the judiciary had declared legal the employment of convicts in the mines. The public apprehensively awaited the reaction on the part of the miners. The reply was in the form of a revolt, which the miners termed an "extra session" of their own.

On October 28, 1891, the miners' committee, which had toured the state, had labored during the meeting of the legislature, and had brought a case into the courts in the interest of the miners, made its report to the main body of miners. It reviewed the proceedings of the legislature and of the courts in their complete failure to accomplish any redress of grievances. It expressed gratitude to the labor unions of the state, which had so generously assisted it both morally and financially, and to the press of the state for its expressed good will. In conclusion, the committee gave its parting advice:

As the state has so willed it, and is prepared to enforce its will with the bayonet and Gatling gun, that you peaceably give up your work, your homes and sweet memories that around you cling, and, like Hagar, be driven out with your helpless ones apparently by the power that should shelter and protect you; driven out by the dictation of the penitentiary ring which has now indeed, been proven stronger than the state, and may you as Hagar did, find a protection in a Divine Providence, for surely you can find none elsewhere; with sorrow too deep to express, we ring down the curtain on the last act in the Briceville drama by tendering to you our resignations.<sup>26</sup>

The conservative miners were immediately overthrown by the more radical group, which at once adopted extreme policies.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 220-230.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>25</sup>State, *ex rel.*, v. Jack, in *Reports of Cases in the Supreme Court of Tennessee* [Pickle, VI] (Nashville, 1892), 614-618.

<sup>26</sup>Knoxville Journal, October 29, 1891.

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Presentiment of another revolt had existed since the adjournment of the legislature. During the fall the convict stockade officials had demanded, but had been refused, additional guards.<sup>27</sup> After several secret meetings the miners were ready to act. About nine o'clock on the evening of October 31, lights were sighted from the hill tops surrounding the Tennessee Coal Mine; shortly afterwards the miners filed up to the stockade and demanded the release of the convicts. After a conference the officials turned over the convicts to the miners, who told them to "get out of here." The 163 convicts scattered over the valley, casting off their "stripes" and putting on other clothing, for which the store of Captain John Chumley was raided. The miners set fire to the stockade and to the other buildings, leaving only the chimneys standing.<sup>28</sup>

Later in the evening the miners released in the same manner 120 convicts at the Knoxville Iron Mine. The stockade there was not demolished as the warden's wife was seriously ill in the adjoining house, but the two guardhouses and the office were fired. After liberating the convicts, the miners faded away into the night, their respective individualities lost. During the next few days the miners remained silent, while the citizens of Coal Creek wondered at the great secrecy with which the militant movement had been made. The prevailing comment was, "We've done the job; now what is the Governor going to do about it?"<sup>29</sup>

Governor Buchanan was informed of the outbreak by the assistant commissioner of labor, Charles Alleman, and by a released colored convict, Richard Hunter, who telegraphed the following message: "Me and sixteen of us who was working at Briceville was turned loose last night by the miners. They burned up everything there. We are loose together at Clinton. What shall I do?"<sup>30</sup> Although this incident was somewhat amusing, the situation presented a "knotty problem" in that the convicts were so widely dispersed and the miners mob so scattered that arrests were impossible. The law provided a punishment, but where to find, and how to convict, the principals presented an almost impossible task.

Thus the matter stood until Sunday night, November 2, when the citizens of Oliver Springs, across the county from Coal Creek, were completely surprised by the liberation of 200 of the "Toughest of the tough" at the Cumberland Mine. About midnight a band of horsemen rode silently up to the convict stockade and demanded admittance. The miners, being refused admittance, battered the door down with a sledge hammer, quickly released the convicts, and commanded them to leave the

<sup>27</sup>*Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the superintendent of prisons, 190.

<sup>28</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, November 2, 1891.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1891.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 1891; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the commissioner of labor, 226-228, 237-238.



county. The miners, ignoring the pleas of the coal mine officials as not being given in good faith, applied the torch to the buildings. In the light of the lurid flames could be seen the silent miners, their task completed, riding away into the blackness of the night with their identities unknown and their destinations uncertain. No shots were fired, no one was hurt, and the eviction was so silently performed that few of the villagers were aware of it until the following morning.<sup>31</sup>

The lessees repeated their indignation over the governor's inactivity by refusing to pay for the services of the convicts and by demanding damages from the state. The Tennessee Coal Mine resumed work with free labor and expressed the hope that the convicts had at last been permanently removed.<sup>32</sup> The lessees and state officials joined in blaming the revolt upon the state prison board for not having employed more than seven guards at the Briceville mine. This neglect, they asserted, was a "fatal over-sight and a piece of grotesque absurdity. . . . It was a standing invitation to the dissatisfied miners to release the convicts."<sup>33</sup> The *Knoxville Tribune* voiced a severe criticism of the miners' sympathizers for their short-sightedness and failure to see the far reaching damage of the Briceville affair. "Laboring men," it said, "may look for dull times", for "lawlessness jeopardizes business and mobs drive away business."<sup>34</sup> The *Knoxville Journal*, while not so severely critical of the miners, described the affair as an "appalling situation", which was an "extreme humiliation and profound discouragement to all lovers of law and order. Whatever the sympathies and feelings of the public might be, the laws of the land had to be upheld or the liberties of the people would be gone." It further stated that "in the summer the miners had the sympathies of nine-tenths of the people of the state. . . . Now nine-tenths of the people will unite to see obedience enforced". The *Journal*, however, held that such trouble could be expected when the "state abdicated to the lessees of her convicts".<sup>35</sup> The *Chattanooga Republican* replied to the miners' critics by stating:

They are not ruffians and . . . cut-throats. Rather call the legislature robbers, for the law which imposed convicts on the citizens of Anderson county has robbed honest working men of employment, has driven them from their homes and has robbed the farmers of Anderson county of a home market for their products. Rather call the legislature inhuman because they refused to listen to the appeals of the miners; and when they asked for the right to labor and earn bread for their families, received in answer the contemptuous reply: "We not only make it a crime for you to interfere with state convicts, but we send more convicts into your midst to show you that the power of the state is supreme."<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, November 2, 4, 1891.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 4, 1891.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, November 2, 4, 1891.

<sup>34</sup>*Knoxville Tribune*, November 5, 1891.

<sup>35</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, November 3, 4, 1891.

<sup>36</sup>Clinton [Tennessee] *Gazette*, November, 1891 (reprinted from *Chattanooga Republican*).

The action of the miners was "lawless and unjustifiable", according to the *Clinton Gazette*, but it was caused by the "shameful convict lease system", by the failure of the legislature to abolish the "inhuman system", and by the fact that the attempt of the miners to secure a peaceable adjustment of the difficulties had been "practically ignored".<sup>37</sup>

While the state press was discussing the situation and the state government trying to decide upon a course of action, peace and prosperity had descended upon the entire valley from Coal Creek to Briceville. About 1,000 miners were happily employed at the mines, working full time in order to fill the orders which had accumulated during the revolt. The iron-clad contract had been abolished and the miners were allowed a check weighman. The miners had no apparent fear of the consequences of the recent events as they regarded their lawlessness as "right and proper", because it had relieved them of the curse that had blighted their homes for many years.<sup>38</sup> The coal mine operators were employing all of the available free labor and signified their intention of using only free labor in the future if arrangements could be made with the lessees to modify, or break, the existing contracts.<sup>39</sup>

The third coal miners' insurrection placed Governor Buchanan in a quandary, and it appeared as though he might be unable to cope with the situation. The miners mob had released the convicts and had demolished the stockades. The members had been masked, had done their work at night, and had departed with their identities unrevealed. The citizens of the community had either seen no one or had quickly forgot what they knew. Great efforts were put forth to recapture the liberated convicts, but the task was very difficult since many had escaped into other states. The governor sought to place the blame for the revolts upon Sheriff Rufus Rutherford of Anderson county and in a letter reprimanded the latter for not having informed him of the imminent danger of the revolt and also for not arresting the guilty parties. The sheriff replied that he had informed the governor of the situation prior to the revolt and that he had done all within his power to capture the guilty parties, but that the secrecy with which the revolvers had worked made their apprehension difficult.<sup>40</sup> After considerable delay Governor Buchanan ordered the branch prisons reenforced at the state's expense. He also issued two proclamations, in which he offered a reward of \$5,000 for the arrest and conviction of the leader of the Briceville revolt with \$50 for each assistant and also the sum of \$25 for the return of each released convict.<sup>40</sup> Identical rewards were offered for the capture of the rioters at the Cum-

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, November, 1891.

<sup>38</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, November 4, 6, 8, 16, 1891.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, November 8, 1891.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, November 5, 6, 7, 9, 15, 1891; *Clinton Gazette*, November, 1891.

berland Mine revolt.<sup>41</sup> Needless to remark, the \$5,000 was never collected, and later the governor reduced the \$25 reward to \$5.<sup>42</sup>

The third insurrection, with its radical leadership, its destructiveness, and its lawlessness, completely severed the popular sympathy and support of the public from the miners. No longer did the press commiserate with the miners; instead, their lawlessness was violently denounced. For example, the Nashville *American* spoke of the situation as follows: "It is no longer a question of expense; the question is, shall Tennessee allow a gang of thieves, robbers, ruffians, and outlaws to trample with impunity upon the law. The money spent to put the convict stripes on these criminals and vindicate the law will be a profitable investment."<sup>43</sup>

Governor Buchanan's inactivity in not having the revolted apprehended and in not carrying out the lease contract aroused additional and greater condemnation. He was characterized as a good man, determined and obstinate, but wholly unable to reach a definite decision on the question. The real cause of the delay was the inability of the governor and the lessees to come to an agreement as to the return of the convicts.<sup>44</sup> Finally, about the middle of December, the governor announced that the convicts would be replaced in the mine stockades at Briceville, Oliver Springs, and Coal Creek, with a civil and military guard of 175 men, the latter to be paid jointly by the state and by the lessees.<sup>45</sup>

A state military force under General Keller Anderson assembled in Nashville and on December 31 left with 200 convicts for Coal Creek, where the convicts were placed in the Knoxville Iron Mine stockade. Fort Anderson was erected on a hill, later known as Militia Hill, next to the Knoxville Iron Mine.<sup>46</sup> The militia dug two lines of trenches around the top of the hill and placed a Gatling gun on a point overlooking the valley. Opposite Militia Hill is the much higher Walden's Ridge, which at this point has a break in the range through which the little Coal Creek threads its way. These three mountain tops comprise a triangular formation, within which the miners and soldiers fought during the summer of 1892.

Ostensibly, the militia was not to guard the convicts, but to preserve law and order in the valley; the miners, however, indignantly termed its coming an "invasion into a peaceful valley where there was no disturbance".<sup>47</sup> It was apparent that if the convicts were returned without the

<sup>41</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, November 1, 2, 1891.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, November 3, 4, 1891.

<sup>43</sup>Clinton *Gazette*, November, 1891 (reprinted from Nashville *American*).

<sup>44</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, November 5, 7, 8, 29, 30, December 15, 1891.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, January 2, 1892.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, January 3, 1892.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, January 3, 1892.

militia, the miners would again expel them from the valley and Governor Buchanan could ill afford the humiliation of another convict release. The editor of the *Knoxville Journal* commented on the situation as follows: "He cannot afford to blunder again, and if he can the state of Tennessee cannot. She is not strong enough to again be made the laughing stock in the eyes of the world".<sup>48</sup>

The convicts were not, however, returned to the Tennessee Coal Company's mine, since its stockade had been burned during the uprising, since the houses were all rented by free miners, and since the company no longer desired to employ convict labor. A lengthy dispute ensued between the company and the lessees, which was finally adjusted by the governor, who upheld the Tennessee Coal Company and refused to allow the lessees to return the convicts to that mine.<sup>49</sup> The Big Mountain Coal Company, which owned the Cumberland Mine at Oliver Springs, also refused to reemploy the convicts. The Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Company, lessees of the state's convicts, however, purchased all property of the Big Mountain Coal Company and at that time the convicts were returned there with a military guard under Captain W. H. Brown.<sup>50</sup>

The third revolt of the coal miners resulted in the permanent removal of the convicts from competition with free labor at the Tennessee Coal Mine and in the establishment of the first permanent military camp in Tennessee by the state militia for the purpose of maintaining law and order, while the convicts remained as a "thorn in the flesh" to the free miners at the Knoxville Iron Mine and the Big Mountain Coal Mine.

Rampant lawlessness, widespread destruction, the coming of additional soldiers, bloodshed, and wholesale arrests and indictments with few convictions characterized the fourth and final revolt in the coal miners' insurrections. The chronic dissatisfaction of the miners at being compelled to compete with convict labor was intensified by the fact that as work grew slack during the summer the free miners were only part time employed, while the convicts were employed constantly. This situation was aggravated by the indignities forced upon the miners by the "standing army" at Coal Creek. Previous revolts against the "inhuman convict lease system" were mild as compared with the volcanic uprising of August, 1892. Preceding revolts had not resulted in a complete redress of miners' grievances, but the miners had escaped punishment for their rioting, which emboldened them to believe that the state would not prose-

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, November 30, 1891.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, January 1, 2, 5, 1892; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the commissioner of labor, 231-233.

<sup>50</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, January 21, 29, 1892; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the commissioner of labor, 143-144, report of the adjutant-general, 15.

cute them and that with a few bold strokes they might be able to annihilate the hated system.

The revolts of 1892 began in Grundy county, in Middle Tennessee, at the mines of the Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Company, the lessees of the state convicts. Feeling between the company officials and the miners had been harmonious up to July of 1892 and the miners had not revolted the previous year along with the Anderson county miners since they were contented with existing conditions. In July, however, the miners were cut to half time, while the 360 convicts worked continuously. The miners began holding secret meetings and discussing plans for a wholesale removal of the convicts. The lessees and branch prison officials expressed great uneasiness and requested reenforcements. On August 10, the superintendent of prisons, E. B. Wade, held several conferences at Tracy City, at which time it was decided that the miners had abandoned their proposed plan. After Wade had departed for Inman, however, a miners committee approached Superintendent Natharst of the Tracy City mines and requested additional work. His reply that such would be available within thirty days was not acceptable to the miners, who immediately decided to free the convicts. About nine o'clock that morning the miners appeared at the convict stockade, overcame the guards, removed the valuables, and applied the torch to the buildings. The miners next proceeded to the mines, where they took possession of the convicts, placed them on a train, and sent them to Nashville. On the way the convicts disconnected one car from the train and thirteen made a break for liberty; of these six were never recaptured.<sup>51</sup>

The miners then proceeded to the Inman Mine, where the guards were overpowered. Then the convicts were removed and forwarded to Nashville. Because the stockade was located underneath the railroad bridge which carried the coal from the mine, it was torn down, rather than burned.<sup>52</sup>

The two new outbreaks incited renewed action by and statements from the lessees, the press, and the state officials. The lessees declared that they were wholly unable to employ the convicts so long as they had no assistance from the state and that they were willing to surrender the lease contract and to allow the state to make such disposition of the convicts as it deemed best.<sup>53</sup> The press loudly and widely berated Governor Buchanan for his inability to control the situation. The *Knoxville Journal* stated that:

Two hundred men are guilty of arson . . . the law has been outrageously violated. . . . What is to be done? . . . Are the courts of the state powerless?

<sup>51</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, August 14, 1892; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the superintendent of prisons, 20; *Annual Cyclopedia*, 1892, pp. 725-726.

<sup>52</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, August 16, 1892.

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Has the Governor of the state no authority, or if he has, has he no power to enforce it? . . . Poor Tennessee, a grand state and a grand people; but the victims of mediocrity and imbecility. . . .<sup>54</sup>

The governor declared that he could do nothing until the stockades were rebuilt. He berated the legislators for not having abrogated the lease system entirely. A few days later, however, he issued a joint statement with the prison board to the effect that the contract with the lessees could be declared forfeit because (1) the contract had not been complied with; (2) the lessees were willing to surrender the contract; (3) the lessees refused to pay expenses of maintaining the released convicts at Nashville; (4) the lessees owed the state \$97,000; and (5) the lessees refused to pay expenses of returning the convicts to Tracy City and to Inman.<sup>55</sup> The governor, however, was not given the opportunity to carry out his intentions, for the miners in Anderson county renewed their rebellion and by the time they were subdued he had changed his mind.

The attacks at Tracy City and at Inman were among the factors which incited renewed revolts in Anderson county, although the latter had been the scene of a rumbling volcano since the return of the convicts with the militia in January, 1892. Resentment had been kindled by the replacement of the miners by convicts, by the presence of the militia and the Gatling gun, and by other humiliations which had been pressed upon the miners and other citizens of the vicinity. The militia was composed of inexperienced young men who considered their work as a "lark",<sup>56</sup> and whose reputations were not "savory". Earlier in the year, while a group of soldiers were having their pictures taken, revealing their bravery in guarding a convict, a gun had gone off and the helpless convict had been killed. The poor convict had failed safely to run the "hazardous gauntlet of the attitudinizing military guard".<sup>57</sup> The soldiers were frequently tried for desertion, for drunkenness, for carrying pistols, and for disturbance of the peace. Many of these were pardoned by the governor.<sup>58</sup> The unprovoked hanging of a young miner, named Drummond, by the pompous Lieutenant Perry Fytte and his command was the event which finally expunged any desire of peace from the minds of the miners.<sup>59</sup>

On the morning of August 15, Captain Ferris, at the Oliver Springs stockade, discovered about 100 miners approaching the convict quarters. When the miners demanded the release of the convicts, the guards re-

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, August 15, 1892.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, August 17, 1892.

<sup>56</sup>*Knoxville Tribune*, January 27, 1892 (reprinted from *Nashville Banner*); *Knoxville Journal*, January 16, 1892.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, January 27, 1892.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, March 3, 1892.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, August 9, 1892. The statement is based in part upon the author's interviews with miners and with Mr. G. W. Ford, state commissioner of labor at the time of the revolt.

plied, "Come and get us". Thus for the first time in the history of the convict warfare, the guards had not been bluffed, but the reply evoked volleys of firing, which continued for about half an hour, after which the miners raised a flag of truce and were permitted to withdraw with their wounded. In leaving, the leader of the miners shouted that they would obtain reinforcements and return.<sup>60</sup> Immediately, Governor Buchanan was apprised of the situation and General Cator Woolford with the third regiment, composed of Knoxville and Chattanooga militiamen, was ordered to the scene. Major Chandler and his men from Knoxville arrived at the mine late that afternoon and assisted in preparing for an expected resumption of the fight.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, miners from the entire surrounding territory gathered in Coal Creek, where they commandeered two freight trains and ordered the engineers to move on to Oliver Springs under "Shot-gun orders". There for two hours the miners massed into formation, being constantly augmented by additional aid coming in bands of from fifty to 100, until at last the march on the stockade, four miles distant, was started. On the way, the miners met and captured Sergeant Lee Huddleston, who was on his way to Oliver Springs to direct the Chattanooga recruits. Upon arriving at the stockade, a committee conferred with the warden and presented a proposition, whereby the convicts were to be returned to Nashville and the guards, militiamen, and company property left unmolested. The warden, realizing the futility of resistance, capitulated, and the guards and militiamen were marched out between two banked lines of miners, who deprived them of their guns and ammunition. After the convicts were removed and sent to Oliver Springs under guard, the stockade and blockhouses were completely destroyed by fire. The miners then returned to Oliver Springs, where the convicts were loaded on freight cars and started for Knoxville, while the miners followed in their commandeered trains to Coal Creek. Meanwhile, the Knoxville militiamen had started the long, dusty walk home. Later, they were picked up by a train and so brought to Knoxville.<sup>62</sup>

The third regiment had proceeded from Chattanooga to Harriman several hours prior to the Oliver Springs revolt. Despite orders to proceed and the fact that a train was available to provide transportation, Colonel Woolford did not leave until after the capitulation; then he was instructed to reach Fort Anderson, if possible. Deciding that such was impossible, he left immediately for Knoxville.<sup>63</sup>

When news of this outbreak reached him, Governor Buchanan, who had been nervously pacing the capitol floor, simply ordered that the con-

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, August 17, 1892.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, August 17, 1892; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the adjutant-general, 6-7.

<sup>62</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, August 18, 1892.

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victs be brought to Nashville. He replied to the miners' ultimatum to remove the soldiers from Fort Anderson, or take the consequences, by saying, "Be orderly, be quiet . . . satisfactory arrangements will be made."<sup>64</sup> The infuriated miners sent their ultimatum a second time, which the governor ignored, except to order the second and third regiments, and several county posses, under General Carnes to proceed to Coal Creek. The sheriff of Anderson county, the only official to answer, stated that he was powerless to act.<sup>65</sup> Upon the urgent recommendation of various state officials, Governor Buchanan advised the miners that he was coming to Knoxville to adjust matters, but his departure was prevented by an attack of "nervous prostration", caused by "worry". Therefore, the governor telegraphed Joseph J. Ivins that he was "seriously ill" and could not come, but that he wanted the miners to realize that if they would be "patient a few days I have no doubt matters can be satisfactorily arranged according to law".<sup>66</sup>

The governor's message was received with divided opinion by the miners. Many thought that it was a device to forestall an attack upon the fort until reenforcements could be mustered. Despite the advice of the conservatives, who cautioned delay, the miners, now under radical leadership, entrenched themselves on Walden's Ridge, where they fired away at the militia during the day and then drifted back to their homes at night for food and supplies. Pickets were posted and preparations made for a long siege. About 1,000 miners banded themselves together under a secret oath not to divulge any information regarding their organization, even under the greatest of "pain and suffering, prison, whipping, or death".<sup>67</sup> Several attacks were made on Fort Anderson, but all were repulsed. When it was rumored that a storm attack was to be made on the fort, some of the conservative miners went to the fort and requested Colonel Anderson to accompany them to Coal Creek to discuss a settlement. Anderson had long been a boon companion of many of the conservative leaders, so he complied with their request. In Coal Creek, he became drunk and was protected from the radical miners by the conservatives until the arrival of General Carnes.<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, the state was mobilizing its forces to suppress the revolt. While General Carnes was organizing his large army at Chattanooga, a detachment under Major Carpenter left Knoxville enroute to Fort Anderson by way of Clinton and the mountain road over Walden's Ridge. A lack of geographical knowledge of the route and a heavy rainfall de-

<sup>64</sup>Knoxville Journal, August 18, 1892.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1892.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., August 18, 1892.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1892.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., August 19, 1892; Senate Journal, 1893, appendix, report of the commissioner of labor, 228-234. Some of the facts were ascertained by the writer from interviews with living participants.



layed its progress across the bad mountain road. Just after sun-up the detachment was surprised by a shout "Surround them, boys". Fancying themselves surrounded, the militiamen, led by Major Carpenter, successfully fought their way to the top of the ridge, but not without the loss of two men, who were instantly killed. In fact, however, the "surrounding" miners' force consisted only of three or four pickets. Being without supplies, the soldiers were compelled to retreat to Clinton. Halfway the distance, Major Carpenter, who had boasted that "when the old war horse gets out to Coal Creek and gives the war whoop, the miners will hunt their hole", became so exhausted that he had to be carried in a wagon the rest of the way. At Clinton the detachment was ordered back to Knoxville, since General Carnes had already reached Coal Creek and had the situation under control.<sup>69</sup>

General Carnes with 500 soldiers had proceeded directly by special train to Clinton, where he had been advised to take the mountain road into Coal Creek, inasmuch as the miners had reportedly dynamited a railroad bridge and were waiting in ambush to attack the militia.<sup>70</sup> After wading for several hours through mud, pulling a heavy gun carriage, the army found that it had taken the wrong road and was still five miles from its objective; the general ordered the train brought up to that point, whereupon the entire army was entrained and shortly afterwards reached Coal Creek. Carnes demanded the surrender of the village, which was obtained without difficulty, for the miners, awed by the shedding of blood in the Walden's Ridge fight and by the arrival of such a large force of soldiers, quickly dispersed into the mountains to find hideouts.<sup>71</sup>

General Carnes proceeded to place under arrest as many miners and citizens as possible in Coal Creek and surrounding territory and to hold them in railroad cars, the school house, and even the Methodist church until preliminary hearings could be held.<sup>72</sup> The state's commissioner of

<sup>69</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, August 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 1892. Some days later fifty Knoxville citizens returned to the "Fatal Rock", as it became known, and brought the bodies of John Walthall and "Bunch" Givens to Knoxville on a special train. Walthall's body was later taken to Dublin, Virginia, for burial, while Givens was buried near Maryville, Tennessee. Resolutions, flowers, and financial assistance for the families were extended by the citizens of Knoxville.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, August 18, 20, 23, 1892.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, August 21, 25, 27, 1892; *Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of Brigadier General Carnes, 28-34. Colonel Woolford, having been defeated in a brief skirmish with the miners, joined General Carnes at Knapps Summit.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 28-34. The fighting ended with the arrival of the militia, so the sheriff's posses were released, along with a large number of the militiamen, who had pressing business at home. The insurrection had aroused the martial spirit over the state and 2,500 men were reported ready to move on Coal Creek. None were called except a Knoxville posse under Sheriff Holloway, which assisted in the arrest of the miners. Ammunition was sent to Coal Creek from Nashville and from the federal arsenal at Indianapolis. The work of arresting the miners progressed slowly as many had "left the country". One of the leaders of the revolt was assisted by an old doctor, who gave him a long-tailed coat, a silk hat, and a box of harmless sugar pills. With this outfit the miner made his way out of the state, posing as an old country doctor.

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labor, G. W. Ford, who was "objectionable" to General Carnes and who had been accused of complicity in the revolts, was imprisoned along with the others. General J. C. J. Williams and state Attorney General Pickle served as counsel for Ford and at the hearing produced evidence that Ford had advised peaceful negotiations rather than unlawful outbreaks and that Ford's life "was in danger every minute that he was in the creek" because he was a representative of the state government. Justice of the Peace Kincaid acquitted Ford of any complicity in the revolt.<sup>73</sup> The supposed miners' leader, D. B. Monroe, was arrested on August 23, and, despite the testimony of Colonel Anderson that Monroe had been a conservative force among the miners and had at one time saved his, Anderson's, life from the radicals, Squire Kincaid remanded him to jail to await trial.<sup>74</sup> Several hundred miners and citizens were found guilty of conspiracy with the mob and of releasing convicts, and these were brought before the Anderson county grand jury, preliminary to the session of the circuit court in the latter part of September.<sup>75</sup> The grand jury investigated all of these cases, after being specifically charged by Judge Hicks that the law authorized the leasing of convicts; that it was a felony to interfere with their labor; that Governor Buchanan had the right to send the militia to Coal Creek; and that if any one had been murdered, the entire mob could be charged with murder. Approximately 300 persons were indicted for conspiracy, for carrying arms, or for murder, and these cases were remanded to the next term of court.<sup>76</sup>

In the trial of D. B. Monroe the prosecution sought to prove that he had been the leader of the mob, had directed its activities, and had signed passes as "D. B. Monroe, Chief"; while the defense maintained that he had been a peacemaker, had tried to maintain law and order, had protected the life of Colonel Anderson from the radicals, and at no time had incited the miners to revolt. The jury disagreed as to a verdict (ten for acquittal and two for conviction), and the case was remanded to the next term of court. Monroe was not convicted until the summer of 1893, when, found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and interfering with convict labor, he was sentenced to seven years in the penitentiary.<sup>77</sup> Only one other man, S. A. Moore, a Baptist minister, was given a prison sentence, and it for only one year, for participation in the revolt.<sup>78</sup> Regardless of the guilt or innocence of D. B. Monroe, it is extremely doubtful that he would have been sentenced to the penitentiary if he had been a native of Coal Creek. Some one had to be named as a scapegoat and

<sup>73</sup>Knoxville *Journal*, August 21, 23, 25, 27, September 1, 1892.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, August 25, 26, 29, 1892.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, August 25, 26, 29, 1892.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, October 2, 1892.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, October 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 1892; Anderson county circuit court records, May, 1892-October, 1893; *House Journal*, 1895, appendix, report of the penitentiary, 30-35.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 1895, pp. 30-35.

convicted, so it was natural that the jury would be less lenient on an "outsider".

The decisions rendered in the 300 or more indictments against persons accused of implication in the uprising were both numerous and ridiculous. The state militia had departed before the summer of 1893, hence the court and juries were not intimidated by the soldiers as they had been previously. The intention of the court seems to have been to stop the outbreaks by a long series of indictments and then later to release the individuals as rapidly as court procedure would allow. Some cases were dropped since the sheriff could not find the accused; others were disposed of by *nolle prosequi* proceedings, in some cases if the defendant would pay the costs, in others with the county and state paying the costs.<sup>79</sup> Only a few participants were fined, or given short jail sentences. The revolvers at Tracy City and Inman were also acquitted of any guilt in connection with the revolts. This judicial farce was due to the overwhelming sympathy of the citizenry and of the courts with the miners in their difficulties and to the state's policy of retaining the militia in the community just to maintain the hated convict lease system. If the militia had remained in Anderson county after 1892, there might have been a different story to relate.

The expense of the insurrection, including the expenditures of the militia, the judicial proceedings, and the losses sustained by the individuals and companies, amounted to a sum in excess of \$400,000.<sup>80</sup> After considerable discussion as to the possibility of abolishing the lease contract and of the advisability of returning the convicts to the branch prisons, it was finally decided that, since the state would not entertain any proposition regarding a voluntary surrender of the contract and since the lessees did not welcome the results of a contract forfeiture, the convicts should be returned to the mines at the earliest practicable moment. The stockades were rebuilt and the convicts, accompanied by the militia, returned in the fall of 1892 to the mines, where they remained until the abolition of the lease system in 1896.<sup>81</sup>

The fourth and final revolt of the miners against the convict lease system ended with the farcical attempt of the courts to convict the rioters, and with the increased military guard stationed at the various branch prisons, ostensibly to maintain law and order, but in reality to keep the state convicts in the mines. The miners remained quiet after the final revolt in August, 1892, awaiting the outcome of the election of that year

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 1895, pp. 30-35.

<sup>80</sup>*Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the state comptroller, 19, report of the adjutant-general, 7.

<sup>81</sup>*Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1897, p. 756; *Knoxville Journal*, August 18, 23, 24, 25, September 1, 1892.

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The gubernatorial campaign of 1892 presented issues for consideration other than that of the convict lease system. In 1890, a division of the Democratic party, the Farmers' Alliance, had defeated the Bourbon or regular Democrats, and had won for its candidate the Democratic nomination. Afterwards, by careful maneuvering and by conciliation of the Bourbons, the group had elevated the nominee, J. B. Buchanan, to the governor's chair. This defeat had roused the Bourbons from their lethargy and by 1892 they were prepared to train all their batteries upon the Alliance and especially upon its leader, J. B. Buchanan. In spite of the union of the Farmers' Alliance with the People's party and the consequent nomination of J. B. Buchanan for governor, the Bourbon Democrats later were able so to build up their forces that they returned to power in 1892 by electing Peter Turney as governor. This study is concerned with the political phases of the gubernatorial campaign of 1892 only in so far as they reveal the influence of the coal miners' revolts and presage the overthrow of the convict lease system.

Because of the coal miners' revolts and of the laborers' obvious dissatisfaction with the convict lease system, it was early discerned that labor would have an important influence upon the state election of 1892. All of the parties were wise enough to express approval of the abolition of the lease system. The Farmers' Alliance, joined by a group from the People's party, in convention adopted typical labor demands, including the abolition of the lease system and the erection of a new penitentiary.<sup>82</sup> The candidacy of J. B. Buchanan was not favored by the state labor interests, since he had approved the continuance of the lease system and since he had voted against the child labor law.<sup>83</sup> Due to the miners' revolts, however, Buchanan's attitude had changed and he announced that he favored the abolition of the lease system in 1896, that is, upon the expiration of the lease contract. Buchanan was more favorable to the miners and laborers than was his opponent for the Democratic nomination, the Bourbon Democrat, Peter Turney.<sup>84</sup> The latter had incurred the enmity of the laboring classes while serving as chief justice of the state supreme court, when he had declared that leasing of the convicts was legal and that the coal mine operators could suspend mine operations if the checkweighman was not satisfactory. Prior to the state Democratic convention, Buchanan, realizing the futility of working for the Democratic nomination, withdrew and, in August, during the final revolt

<sup>82</sup>Joseph A. Sharp, *The Farmers' Alliance and Tennessee Politics, 1890-1892* (master's thesis in typescript in University of Tennessee Library), 172-173; *Knoxville Journal*, March 1, 1892.

<sup>83</sup>Sharp, *op. cit.*, 189-191; *Knoxville Journal*, August 16, 1892.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, August 16, 1892.

of the coal miners, published his announcement as an independent candidate for governor. Both Turney, who won the Democratic nomination, and Buchanan announced platforms favoring, among other things, the abolition of the lease system at the earliest practicable date, but opposing such abolition until a better plan could be suggested which would not increase the tax load of the state.<sup>85</sup>

East Tennessee, the Republican stronghold in the state, did not support either Buchanan or Turney for governor. The general attitude of disgust toward Buchanan is reflected in an editorial in the *Knoxville Journal* on August 19, 1892:

Sometime in the future, some one may allude to the years of the last decade of the nineteenth century, when there was a vacancy in the office of Governor of Tennessee and J. B. Buchanan was drawing the salary. He made himself a lasting name, for indecision, imbecility and general incompetency to discharge the duties of his high office.<sup>86</sup>

The Democratic *Knoxville Tribune* referred to Buchanan as the "best possible definition of everything that a Governor ought not to be. . . . From plague, pestilence and famine, from murder and from sudden death, and above all, from such Governors, Good Lord, deliver us".<sup>87</sup> Peter Turney was opposed by East Tennesseans because of his association with the so-called corporation or big business group. East Tennessee supported the Republican nominee for governor, George W. Winstead, a Dresden lawyer, who, along with the Republican platform, denounced the Democratic state government, "which fostered and protected the iniquitous convict lease system," described as a "speculation in blood and muscles" with an enormous "destructive influence upon free labor".<sup>88</sup> With reference to the convict lease system, Winstead declared that "Whatever the wisdom of the next legislature may suggest as the proper solution of the convict lease question, the lease system is wrong, eternally wrong, and must be abolished without delay". Thus all of the three chief candidates favored the abolition of the lease system as soon as practicable. From the first of the campaign, however, Buchanan stood little chance of reelection; and the Republican candidate also had to bow to the triumph of the Bourbon Democrats. The total vote was as follows: Turney, 126,348; Winstead, 100,577; and Buchanan, 29,918.<sup>89</sup>

Joined with the political parties in advocating the abolition of the convict lease system was the almost unanimous opinion of the public, the press, and state and municipal officials. Nashvillians heartily denounced the horrors of convict labor during the summer of 1892, when some Nashville officials contracted for convicts to construct some new sewers.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, August 16, 1892.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, August 19, 1892.

<sup>87</sup>*Knoxville Tribune*, August 24, 1892.

<sup>88</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, August 24, 1892.

<sup>89</sup>Election figures are from the office of the secretary of state of Tennessee, cited by Sharp, *op. cit.*, 205.

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The city council passed an ordinance, imposing a fine of fifty dollars for every day that the convicts worked. The lessees worked the convicts, were arrested, and were fined. The supreme court, in passing on the appealed case, held that such employment of convicts was illegal.<sup>90</sup> A continuous stream of newspaper articles denounced the lease system and demanded its overthrow.<sup>91</sup>

The General Assembly of Tennessee convened in regular session in January, 1893, and heard retiring Governor Buchanan urge the immediate abolition of the lease system; the erection of a modern penitentiary; and the acquisition of coal lands, where the convicts might work. The incoming governor, Peter Turney, recommended the abolition of the convict lease system in view of the recent troubles in Anderson county. These recommendations were substantiated by the prison officials' reports. The penitentiary officials insisted that radical changes be made in the system of penitentiary management. The superintendent of prisons, the state warden, and the prison physician emphasized the absolute necessity of a new penitentiary and the removal of the convicts from the mines, where they were in constant danger of being released by the irate miners.<sup>92</sup> Confronted with this disturbing information, the legislature appointed a special joint committee, which investigated the situation and which made a lengthy report, in which it "scored the penitentiary management from start to finish".<sup>93</sup> The committee pointed out that the convicts did not have night-clothes, pillows, or socks; that they were covered with running sores; that they had little or no medical attention; that they were fed on three or four cents per day per convict; and that brutal and degrading vices prevailed among the convicts at most of the branch prisons. The latter were described as nothing but "hell on earth". The zest with which the committee investigated the situation can be accounted for by its desire to discredit the preceding administration and because of the overwhelming public condemnation of the lease system. This was not a white-washing report, nor had it been a perfunctory investigation. The *Knoxville Journal*, summarizing the committee report, stated in an editorial:

The mind fails to imagine any situation more awful, than that of the poor wretches, miserable outcasts, confined in prison for reformatory reasons. Insufficiently clothed and fed, confined in coal banks by day and pestholes by night, infested with vermin, days of wretchedness and nights devoid of hope, exposed to deadly and contagious venereal diseases, practicing unutterable abominations upon each other, subject to scourgings for failure to do the daily task or infractions of discipline . . . what more awfully deplorable state of affairs can the human mind imagine?<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, April 14, 27, October 30, 1892.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, August 21, 27, 1892; *Clinton Gazette*, January 12, 1892.

<sup>92</sup>*Senate Journal*, 1893, appendix, report of the penitentiary, 3, 5, 19, 65. Besides the financial loss, the prison officials were unable to recapture 150 of the released convicts.

<sup>93</sup>*Knoxville Journal*, March 9, 10, 1893.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, March 9, 10, 1893.

The committee's report received the immediate attention of the legislature and plans for the repeal of the lease law and for the instituting of a new system of prison management were discussed at great length. All the legislators were agreed that the change was necessary, but as to the most economical method of accomplishing the change, they found it difficult to decide. Finally, a penitentiary bill was passed, and signed by Governor Turney on April 4, 1893.<sup>95</sup> The act provided for the erection of a new penitentiary and for the abolition of the convict lease system. The new prison was to accommodate 1,500 and was to be constructed on the most modern plan. Coal lands were to be purchased, whereon some of the remaining convicts might be employed at the expiration of the lease contract in mining coal for the use of state institutions. The act provided for the appointment of a penitentiary committee, which was to carry out the provisions of the act.<sup>96</sup>

The penitentiary committee was appointed by the governor and proceeded to purchase coal land near Brushy Mountain, to visit and to study modern penal institutions, and to assist in drawing up the plans for the new prison. After the work of construction was begun, rumors of fraud became so insistent that Governor Turney requested the legislature to investigate the matter. This, in turn, resulted in the resignations of the committee members. An extra session of the legislature convened in the spring of 1895 and approved plans to complete the stockades at the state's coal mine, where the majority of the convicts were to be employed at the expiration of the lease contract in January, 1896. The rest of the convicts could be utilized in the erection of the new penitentiary. The penitentiary was completed in the fall of 1897, and by 1898 all of the convicts were located either there or at the state-owned Brushy Mountain mine stockade.<sup>97</sup>

In Tennessee, convict competition with free labor in the mine disappeared with the expiration of the lease contract in 1896. The miners remained peaceful after the final revolt in August, 1892, with the exception of a small outbreak at Tracy City in the spring of 1893, which was not serious and which was quickly settled. The act repealing the lease law and providing for its complete abolition in 1896 was satisfactory to the miners. Finally, in January, 1896, the convicts were permanently removed from competition with the free miners, not by the "shot-gun" method, but because the public had demanded it and the legislature had

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, January 12, 1893.

<sup>96</sup>*Acts*, 1893, ch. 77, pp. 96-105.

<sup>97</sup>Report of the penitentiary purchasing and building committee (in state capitol, Nashville); *House Journal*, 1895 (Extra), governor's message, 3-4, 6, 8; *Acts*, 1895 (Extra), ch. 7, pp. 606-614; *Senate Journal*, 1895 (Extra), report of penitentiary committee, 873-875. These citations are contained in H. G. Stunck, *The Construction of the Penitentiary, 1893-1898*, delivered as a report in a history seminar at the University of Tennessee.

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provided for its legal termination. F. P. Clute, state commissioner of labor, wrote in 1896:

The convict lease system in Tennessee, so far as it pertains to mining, is a thing of the past; all convicts have been removed from Tracy City and Coal Creek; their places will be filled by free miners. The long sought for event in the history of mining in this state occurred January 1, 1896, at the expiration of the lease with the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company.<sup>88</sup>

In 1897, Governor Peter Turney reviewed penitentiary management during the preceding years with this conclusion:

The state really made no money, but rather lost by leasing of convicts on account of riots, outbreaks and invasions. The prisoners were not so well cared for as now and they must continue to be under the regime. . . . In the short time since the termination of the lease, the contrast between the mental, physical, and sanitary condition of the prisoners, then and now, is so great as to make it certain that the present policy is a true one; and humanity demands its continuation. A return to the leasing law would be, after the experience we have had, cruel in the extreme.<sup>89</sup>

Thus the curtain fell upon the stirring events of the coal miners' insurrections, incited by the desire of the miners to strike a death blow at the unfair convict competition. These insurrections succeeded in bringing the necessary influence to bear upon the citizenry of the state, both private and official, and resulted in the overthrow by legislative action of Tennessee's iniquitous convict lease system.

<sup>88</sup>F. P. Clute, *Fifth Annual Report of Bureau of Labor Statistics and Mines* (Nashville, 1896), 7-8.

<sup>89</sup>*Senate Journal, 1897*, appendix, governor's message, 18.