



## NEWS RELEASE

• May 23, 2022 •

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### • Battle of Homestead Foundation hosts June 23 program on Pennsylvania's Depression-Era "Bootleg Coal Rebellion"

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**WHAT:** The Battle of Homestead Foundation presents author **Mitch Troutman** discussing his latest book "**The Bootleg Coal Rebellion: The Pennsylvania Miners Who Seized an Industry, 1925-1942**" (PM Press).

**WHEN:** Thursday, June 23, 2022 from 7:30-9:00 p.m. via Zoom

**WHERE:** Program is free but viewers must register at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)

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**HOMESTEAD, PENNSYLVANIA** — The usual aftermath of a bitterly-fought, early 1900s Pennsylvania labor conflict saw humbled workers fade into grudging compliance with corporate mandates.

That changed in the 1920s, as a widespread miner-led resistance movement known as The Bootleg Coal Rebellion took root in Central Pennsylvania coal country, a movement that laid the groundwork for later union success in the mining industry.

The story of miners uniting to create an alternative coal-producing economy is told in a new book by historian Mitch Troutman, [\*The Bootleg Coal Rebellion: The Pennsylvania Miners Who Seized an Industry, 1925-1942\*](#) (PM Press).

Troutman will be featured in a live online talk Thursday, June 23, 2022 at 7:30 p.m. presented by the **Battle of Homestead Foundation**. The program is free but viewers must register at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com).

After a post-World War I boom, Pennsylvania's anthracite coal industry collapsed in the early 1920s, throwing tens of thousands out of work. Unemployed miners resorted to digging their own coalholes, often on unused company property, and set up their own processing and trucking operations reaching as far as New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore.

Locally, bootleg mining collectives set up roadside stands and peddled bags of coal door-to-door to neighbors. According to a 1938 report commissioned by Pennsylvania Governor George Howard Earle, there were as many as 1,965 known bootleg holes operated by over 7,000 bootleg miners producing 2.4 million tons of coal per year amounting to nearly 10% of all anthracite coal sales in the U.S.

**Mitch Troutman is a direct descendent of bootleg coal miners.** “The bootleggers considered themselves empowered by human need to use unutilized private property as they wished,” he says. “It’s the centuries-old concept of “the commons”; if the owner is using it, okay, but if it is lying fallow while people starve, the people can go onto the land to produce their own food or coal.”

With the onset of World War II, coal companies reopened the mines, and the Bootleg Coal Rebellion tapered off as Pennsylvania’s independent miners achieved union representation with the United Mine Workers of America. But Troutman believes the episode holds several lessons for today’s worker rights efforts, especially the spirit of “organic organizing” that characterized the bootleg coal movement.

“When people anywhere find themselves abandoned by industry, many choose to take what they need at their own risk and by their own labor rather than flee or starve.” # # #

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**\*\*\* REVIEWS of *The Bootleg Coal Rebellion* \*\*\***

“Troutman is a gifted storyteller. Combining rich imagery and down-to-earth writing with prudent historical research, he shows us what working-class people are capable of when companies push them to the brink of starvation. Modern-day coal barons beware: this book will turn readers into renegades.”

— **Jamie Longazel**, author of *Undocumented Fears: Immigration and the Politics of Divide and Conquer in Hazleton, Pennsylvania*

“Using local newspapers and oral history interviews, historian Mitch Troutman tells the story of the miners as well as the women, children, storekeepers, truckers and priests who participated in the bootleg coal rebellion. Great read!”

— **Karol Kovalovich Weaver**, author of *Medical Caregiving and Identity in Pennsylvania’s Anthracite Region, 1880–2000*

“The most detailed account we have of coal bootlegging in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania in the Depression decade. It shows how unemployed miners took over unused mines, asserting and defending a right to mine and market the coal to support their families and writing a remarkable chapter in American labor history. We are in debt to Mitch Troutman for telling this remarkable story.”

— **Thomas Dublin**, author of *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century*

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\* **Mitch Troutman** is a writer, educator and organizer living in Pittsburgh, PA. He is a direct descendent of Pennsylvania bootleg coal miners, a co-founder of [Anthracite Unite](#) and a founding member of [Put People First! PA](#).

\* The [Battle of Homestead Foundation](#) is an educational nonprofit promoting Western Pennsylvania’s vibrant industrial and labor history starting with the 1892 Homestead Steel Strike and connecting with current labor issues involving economics, the environment, healthcare, racism and other social concerns.