

After the Miners' Strike

Operators and Reactionary Union Leaders vs. the Illinois Miners

By Joseph Angelo

The fighting tradition of the Illinois coal-miners is not dead; and the events of last December—the strike of the National Miners Union, despite many avoidable shortcomings and the court injunction squabble between Lewis vs. Fishwick with no bread in the homes of many miners—has made it more alive.

Of course, the strike of the National Miners Union has been defeated, by the combined efforts of the state government, the coal-operators and the Lewis-Fishwick machine. But, beneath the defeat the miners are stirring and this liable to flare up into a statewide struggle any day. The coal operators-Lewis-Fishwick machine, with the support of the state government are desperately fighting to crush this rising tide of militant feeling among the miners.

Labor Bosses As Operators' Tools

The reason for this is obvious. Capitalism cannot live as at present organized without longer hours, lower wages, speed-up systems, etc. And the coal-operators with the support of their agents, the Lewis-Fishwick machine, have not even concealed their true objectives. Today hundreds upon hundreds of militant miners that participated in the last National Miners Union strike are being fired from their jobs by the bosses, and their places filled with unemployed miners brought in special trains by the Lewis-Fishwick flunkies from mining camps where the mines have been closed down many years. But this does not solve the problem because these new miners soon realize that they are up against the same problem that their black-listed brothers were. They soon realize that one of the obstacles in their road to better conditions is the Lewis-Fishwick machine, which must be replaced before any gains can be made.

It is either Fishwick or Lewis that comes to the aid of the coal-operators whenever it is necessary, as for instance in an editorial of a recent issue of the Illinois Miner, where Fishwick wrote that after the contract of the Indiana miners expires next April 1st, the Illinois miners will not strike to support their brother miners in Indiana to renew their contract nor to fight for better working conditions. Fishwick here, as always, is not expressing the sentiments of the Illinois miners or helping the Indiana miners, on the contrary Fishwick here is the official mouthpiece of the coal-operators and by such action gives direct support to the coal-operators and stabs the Indiana miners in the back and at the same time tries to shatter the militancy of the Illinois miners.

And Lewis is not one whit better. Already while speculating on the outcome of the injunction trial, his henchmen, instead of organizing West Virginia and Kentucky are gathering hordes of unemployed miners and promising them that in case of a favorable decision, he will ship them into Illinois to replace those miners that refuse to accept his orders.

Although the trial to set aside the injunction began on December 18th, the judge has not yet rendered a decision, but the consensus among the miners is that Fishwick, because of the support of the majority of the coal-operators of Illinois and the state political administration will get a more favorable decision than Lewis. But Lewis, also, because of the support from certain influential coal-operators will be able to appeal the injunction to a higher court.

Trial Served Good Purpose

Regardless of the final outcome of the injunction trial, it has served a good purpose. It tore the false mask from both Lewis and Fishwick and showed that both of them are crooks, election swindlers, agents of the coal-operators, grafters and

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unfit to handle any affairs pertaining to the mine workers. The trial was like a match put to a cannon. It has awakened many miners and it marks the end of a rotten episode in the life of the coal-miners and the beginning of a period of growth of the National Miners Union. Both Lewis and Fishwick are playing hookey from the graveyard.

The National Miners Union is growing slowly from mining camp to mining camp while the Lewis-Fishwick company union is declining every day at an increasing speed. The miners are for the National Miners Union and the experience of a strike has had a tremendous effect in awakening the militancy of the miners. Whatever mistakes the National Miners Union made in the course of the last strike, the Stalin-Foster leadership is responsible and the members of the Communist Party must see that the mistakes are corrected. The policy of trying to side-track and lying about such militant and staunch fighters as John Watt of Springfield, Ed Morgan of Staunton, Fritz Bode of Taylorville and Luke Coffey

Prospects for New Struggles in New Bedford

New Bedford textile workers who made history in 1928 under the militant leadership of the National Textile Workers Union are again going into action. With almost half of the 30,000 textile workers of the city unemployed they are demanding immediate action to meet the critical situation.

Whether the N. T. W. U. will be able to meet the present tasks is difficult to determine at present. Two of the leaders of the struggle of two years ago, Eli Keller and Ellen Dawson, have been eliminated from the union on purely Communist Party lines while Raphael Pires, the editor of the Communist Party newspaper in the Portuguese language published in New Bedford has likewise been eliminated at the behest of the Stalinists. It is not necessary to defend Dawson, Keller, Pires and others for their support of the Right wing program of Lovestone. It is necessary to show that the Party's narrow faction game is being allowed to weaken the union struggle. Only those who believe in a certain interpretation of Communism, will be allowed to lead the New Bedford masses, says the official Communist Party. This is similar to decisions made in the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union and other organizations. Such a policy can only lead to chaos and defeat for the working masses. A struggle of the broad masses cannot be based at the present stage upon a faction of a political party, but upon all workers who want to fight under a militant banner.

Just as in 1928 when the N. T. W. U. had to fight on two fronts, that is against the mill owners and the United Textile Workers Union led by William Batty, so will its present organization drive which may lead to a new strike, also be fought on two fronts. Under such conditions, the broadest possible basis for support must be obtained and all sections of the working class be allowed to participate in the struggle.

The prospects for developing the National Textile Workers Union in New Bedford into a powerful organization are unusually bright. In fact, the actual dues-paying membership in that city is larger than in any other part of the country. It is no exaggeration to state that the only organized mass base of the union at present

of Belleville and trying to replace them with fiddlers from Chicago and preachers of the Latter Day Saints and Nazarene sects as was done in Taylorville, is not a correct policy with which to build the National Miners Union and must be corrected. These men have been in the forefront of all the great struggles of the Illinois miners for many years past and will continue to be, despite the childish attacks of the Stalin-Foster clique. Future events and pressure from below will prove that the present policy is incorrect.

Stalinists Retreat Partly

Under the blows of the Communist League (Opposition), the Stalin-Foster leadership has been forced to admit part of their mistakes and adopt a program of immediate demands, which should have been done before the strike. Yet, to adopt a program which reads, (Daily Worker 1-9-30) "that the miners must be imbued with the spirit of preparation for the coming general national movement of the miners, which will come next Fall." is not enough. Fishwick is afraid of the Indiana miners whose contract expires next April and that is why he is trying to prepare the minds of the miners of Illinois and Indiana against a militant struggle. The National Miners Union must make not only the Indiana strike but every strike an opportunity for launching demonstrations of national solidarity.

is in New Bedford. While in the South, the N. T. W. U. has many supporters, due to the semi-legal character of the work, the union does not function to any great extent. In most Southern towns it hardly functions at all. In New Bedford on the other hand, the work is carried on regularly, meetings are held and the union is a factor in the community. Although the United Textile Workers Union likewise has a strong branch in the city, the Left wing union fights it every inch of the way.

While the United Textile Workers Union membership in the main consists of the skilled workers, weavers, loom-fixers and spinners, the membership of the N. T. W. U. is composed mostly of the unskilled, such as warpers, spoolers, carders and speeder-tenders.

At present the two unions are divided on national lines—the highly skilled United Textile Workers being mostly English and French-Canadians while the members and supporters of the N. T. W. U. are in the main Portuguese and Polish.

If the present organization drive is to mean anything it must immediately break down the national barriers and have the English, French-Canadians, Portuguese and Polish workers unite in a common struggle. One of the greatest weaknesses of the 1928 strike from the point of view of the Left wing union, was the division on national lines. The inability of the N. T. W. U. to gain more than a score of supporters among the English and French-Canadian workers was one of the principal reasons why the Left wing was not more successful than it actually was. If the membership of the N. T. W. U. had been more varied in composition the sellout of the strike by the United Textile Workers Union in September 1928 may not have succeeded.

In brief: the present organization drive, which the N. T. W. U. says is leading up to a general strike, to be successful must be a broad movement, otherwise it will fail. All workers must participate and be given responsible positions. Let the Stalinist leadership forsake their factional game, which only discredits the Left wing and gives ammunition to Lovestone, and the New Bedford workers in 1930 will more than repeat their heroic struggle of two years ago. —FRANK BROMLEY

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