

# Results of the Illinois Miners' Revolt

By ARNE SWABECK

The result of the miners' convention held at St. Louis on April 15 has already been characterized by us as another setback to the most recent rank and file revolt. It failed to materialize in the formation of a new union. But it does not for one moment invalidate the correctness of such a course.

For the miners there is still no other way out. The once proud United Mine Workers of America, in all of the soft coal producing territories, is shattered—its sorry remnants dragged into the gutter by the official leeches who still try to hang on to the graft from coal operators in reward for preventing union organization.

In the first instance, the failure to lay the foundation for a new union, now that this opportunity was available, must be charged to the Muste-Howat type of "progressives". But there were other important contributing causes. Some of them were hemming in the sweep of the movement itself prior to the convention. We must not forget that the coal miners are still suffering from the pressure of serious defeats of not so long ago and reverses in numerous local struggles to maintain a semblance of union conditions. In addition the fields are ravaged by unemployment. Through all of this, the miners have continually had the sinister and powerful force of the combined coal operators, corrupt union fakers, and state police arrayed against them.

While these factors in a sense should count heavily for a new union movement, their effects naturally require great determination, driving power, and organization to overcome. This driving power was by no means furnished and could not be furnished by the Musteite "progressives" who became the leading factor. Their lack of decisiveness and inability really to furnish a progressive program came particularly to a head at the convention when it faced the central issue.

## Serious Weaknesses Still Prevail

That the miners from the Illinois district would show considerable caution and move slowly despite their being thoroughly aroused by the treacherous Lewis-Fishwick sell-out agreement was to be expected. One need only remember the shattered expectations from their healthy revolt of one year ago which ended in the filthy harness of the so-called reorganized U. M. W. The Left wing of the National Miners' Union, directed by the Communist party bureaucrats, failed the miners then. This official Left wing failed the rank and file now. It even went to the extreme stupidity of asking the miners to boycott the St. Louis convention.

What is the status of the miners now after this convention? Their position, while a precarious one, is still rich in possibilities. Paradoxical as this may seem it is nevertheless true. And only boldness and decisiveness will make the latter factor weigh heaviest in the scale.

The St. Louis convention officially separated all of the miners locals represented there from the U. M. W. of Lewis, Walker, and Fishwick; but it failed to provide a national organization in its place. It thus failed really to provide the machinery of defensive and offensive for these miners. Surely this is a weak position to be in. It is one laying them just that much more open to attacks from the operators, the fakers, and the police. It is one also which in no way facilitates the organization of the unorganized fields. It can remain so only temporarily. But precisely in that lies its possibilities. We can therefore repeat: not only is there no other way out than the organization of a new national union, but this way out must be adopted as speedily as possible.

At the St. Louis convention the Musteite "progressives" seemed afraid of their own shadow. With a good delegation at hand, with a few scores of thousands of miners represented, they failed to provide them with an organization or even to lay the basis for such. Nevertheless a force is set into motion, and even for these "progressives" the die is cast. By the further conflict they have arrived at with the A. F. of L. officialdom, they are compelled to go a bit forward, even though with possible splits, or else, to step out. They will undoubtedly seek to establish themselves further as a definite factor in the mine fields. This is further evidenced by their plans for another convention this summer.

## Which Position Proved Correct?

A comparison of the position taken by each of the three Communist currents toward this revolt movement is illuminating, to say the least. Here where workers again groping for a way out; attempting to break from the terrible scourge of official corruption and treason with which the old union was infested. They had made a first seri-

ous attempt with the formation of the National Miners Union. This union became an isolated sect and remained impotent mainly due to the serious blunders of the party leadership. The Illinois miners made another attempt in the revolt of a year ago leading only to the disillusionment of the present Lewis-Fishwick agreement. Meanwhile the U. M. W. is practically wiped out except in the anthracite. And even there the scourge of official corruption and treason has been no less prevalent. Recently the striking miners at the Glen Alden mines and the Shamokin section of the lower anthracite, when appealing to Lewis for assistance, were denounced by him with the most brutal cynicism. The lesser officials could on that basis proceed to defend the mine owners' interests. In the unorganized fields of Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia soft coal regions, whatever is left of this union is notoriously known to be only the unorganized gangs of gunmen who seek to prevent union organization from coming into being.

## The Right Wing and the Center Make Their Position Clear

In this situation the Right wing current, the Lovestone group, proposes their solution as follows:

"Therefore, what is to be done? Only one thing! To organize now a new national union of coal miners would only increase the division and confusion in the rank of the workers.

"The fight therefore must be taken up in spite of all difficulties in the U. M. W. A. to organize a Left wing—to organize a rank and file opposition. That is the only solution." (Revolutionary Age, 4-25-1931.)

True to their position, the Right wing advocates going back to the Lewis union. This is condemnable not merely in view of the fact that this union is decaying and its remnants becoming utilized by corrupt officials as a means of preventing any struggles to better the conditions of the miners. That by itself is not the major consideration. No, by far of greater consequence is the fact that in face of the existing revolt such advocacy, when brought forward in the name of working class policies, brands the Lovestoneites for exactly what they are in this case: Definitely to the right of even the Musteite "progressives", the handle at which the capitalist forces and the old union bureaucrats pull to endeavor to prevent the revolt, to prevent the building of a militant union. Is there any difference in this from the rôle of the social reformists?

How did the Centrists square their position toward this revolt? We have reported their policy of boycott during the pre-convention period as expressed in leaflets issued by the N. M. U. This amounted in sum and substance to boycott of the movement itself. There followed the feeble attempt, at least formally, though not in reality, and too late to have any effect upon the convention, to make a 180 degree turn toward a correct position. It was contained in Foster's belated article in the *Daily Worker*, proposing that the miners attend the convention and form a united front with the N. M. U.

## The Position of the Left Opposition

From the very inception, only the Left had a correct revolutionary position. We stated immediately that the first step of the revolt must be complete separation from the reactionary capitalist lieutenants. We proposed to follow up directly with the organization of a new militant union as the only way out. We proposed further, as a means toward building one union of all coal miners, to work for an amalgamation of all the revolting sections with the N. M. U. We appealed to the party to accept a united front of the Communist vanguard to work for this correct policy.

In politics the logic of a correct position when applied brings its own definite conclusion: particularly so in revolutionary politics. And so also here. When confronted with the position taken by the Left, the party was compelled to make a change. And willy-nilly, despite all the Stalinist denunciations of us, in actual practice they could not reject our united front proposal. Delegate Dan Winnigan of Indiana, the only supporter of the official party views, and we assume, with the most honest intentions, became the first direct supporter for comrade Allard's motion at the St. Louis convention to "proceed and build a new union now." It would be well for party members and Communist workers to reflect deeply over this comparison of positions. Not only that, but also to draw the necessary conclusions.

For us it was an achievement of no small importance that delegates supporting

the Left Opposition views became the outstanding banner-bearers in the fight for a new militant union; that there were certain weakness in this fight we have already pointed out. Nevertheless these delegates succeeded in making clear their critical attitude to the Musteite "progressives". They made correct criticism of the party-directed N. M. U. while simultaneously maintaining a correct attitude for unity of action of the Communist vanguard.

## What of the Future?

The failure of the present revolt movement to crystallize as yet into a new national union will undoubtedly be taken advantage of by the coal operators jointly with the U. M. W. officials and backed up by the state police. They will endeavor if possible to crush this movement before it assumes "too" definite proportions. That the miners, however, will know how to fight back is already indicated in Indiana, in Kentucky, as well as in the anthracite Glen Alden and Shamokin Valley strikes.

As far as the reformists of the Muste school are concerned the following is well to bear in mind: At certain periods reformists are compelled to take a progressive direction. Inevitably they will again revert to reformism. One year ago the Musteites went into a combination with the Fishwick-Walker reactionaries. But the miners' revolt movement, when the forces become really unleashed, will develop much faster than the "progressiveism" of the Musteites and go beyond these narrow confines. Since the ultimate solution of the working class can be found only through revolutionary action, the reformists, when reverting to their natural position, be-

## Who Has the «Leopard's Spots»?

While reading the March Issue of the *Proletarian* the official organ of the Proletarian party, a little item directed at the Left Opposition of the C. P. caught the writer's attention. The article which is written up under the heading of "Party Notes" (Chicago) takes issue with certain statements made in the one and only article dealing with the Proletarian party that has appeared in the *Militant* up to the present date. The statement which drew most of the P. P. writer's fire was one which spoke of interest shown by some of the P. P. members in the fundamental questions raised by the Left Opposition and interpreted this as the healthiest sign of a ferment in the ranks of the P. P. that has been seen for years.

The statement is vigorously denied. According to the P. P. writer there is not even a ripple let alone a ferment in the calm waters of the P. P.

Probably the best proof that the article in the *Militant* was not far from correct is the indignant manner in which the P. P. writer denies its truth. Experience teaches that where there is so much smoke there is apt to be a bit of fire. But since the P. P. writer claims that the *Militant* was miles and miles from the truth we might ask why it was necessary to pass a motion that no P. P. member should discuss the question of Socialism in one country, the main tendencies in the C. I. and other disputed questions, with the Left Opposition members, shortly after the article appeared in the *Militant*? We understand that such a motion was passed (if it is not so we would be glad to be informed) and it strikes us that such a motion would be useless if no interest in these questions were being manifested by any of the P. P. members.

While the writer was neither the author of the article that appeared in the *Militant* nor the author's informer he can say without falsehood that in his limited contact with P. P. members (I would be the last to claim that it is extensive) not a few of them did show more than a passing interest in the disputed questions in the International Communist movement. Moreover, the answers to the questions put to him were not such as could be gleaned from reading the articles in the *Proletarian* dealing with "Trotskyism" which appeared under the signature of Stanley Novak.

## Question of Leopards

The P. P. article referred to us as being a "leopard" spotted in the same way as the old C. P. "leopard". This should entitle us to take at least one glance at the P. P. "leopard". One of the chief contentions of the P. P. against the C. P. has always been that the latter would not discuss questions of program with them. Early in the winter our Chicago group proposed an inter-group discussion with the P. P. on the question of "American program". The P. P. declined, giving as a reason pres-

come a distinct barrier. Thus the rôle of these "progressives" within and in relation to the movement: Yesterday in the camp of reaction, today "progressive", while tomorrow standing pat and then again reactionary. Hence this conclusion: this leadership must be replaced by the Left wing.

Victory for the coal miners can best be assured when they rely solely upon their own class forces. The next convention of the revolting elements planned for this summer can unquestionably become an important step on this road. But it would be quite clear that such an achievement is directly connected with and dependent upon the ability to strengthen the forces which really fight for a new militant union. The Miners' Educational Leagues now organized at several points in Illinois can become valuable instruments in this process.

It should be clear that these leagues should specifically be made the instruments of the Left wing. Ours is the task of imbuing them with the necessary spirit and clarity of purpose and to fully establish the Left wing leadership within them. In their activities these Leagues should by all means use every possible pressure toward the definite building of a new national union upon the local and district Policy Committees which are established by the St. Louis convention decision. The further policy of fighting for amalgamation with other revolting sections and with the National Miners Union remains as correct as before. We of the Left Opposition again propose a united front with the party for unity of the Communist vanguard in the struggle toward this goal.

There will be no genuine Left wing without the building of the Communist forces. In this sense we urge the Communist coal miners to build the Left Communist Opposition directly in the fields.

Several times comrade Oehler who, as a Marxist, is at least equal to the best they have, proposed to them that he be allowed to speak at their forum on the question of socialism in one country and several other important subjects. He was turned down flat while a number of college professors, trade union liberals and other nondescript speakers were accepted for speaking dates. We do not question the right of the P. P. to select whomever they choose as speakers but the attitude manifested by certain P. P. leaders in excluding comrade Oehler from speaking on these subjects is, we suggest, a little more than akin to the methods used by the American Stalinists.

Another incident that came to my mind took place at one of their forums. Novak who was the speaker delivered a lecture on the "five year plan." His lecture was very little different than the usual ballyhoo stuff put out by the Stalinists on the same subject. In the discussion the writer raised the question of socialism in one country and other basic questions written upon by comrade Trotsky. In the rebuttal Novak practically disposed of these questions by simply calling Trotsky a scoundrel. So far as I know not a single P. P. leader protested against this line of argument. However, a few rank and file members did tell me they not only considered the answers to my questions bad but the manner of answering them improper coming from this leading "anti-Trotsky theoretician."

Whether the leopard became spotted through close association with the Stalinists or was contaminated by a too ardent perusal of the Stalinist controlled *Inprecor* by one Don Stanislaus Novakinsky is of little importance. The examples set forth here bear the unmistakable earmarks of "the original sin" that the P. P. leaders frequently complain against.

We, of course, do not know if the P. P. at this time will see fit, at its forthcoming convention, to take a clear cut stand on the important questions before the International Communist movement and thereby align itself more closely ideologically with one of the three factions in the International (even if not organizationally), or whether it will merely procrastinate. But we sincerely hope the latter will not be the case. So far as the general characteristic of the P. P. are concerned the Chicago Left Opposition regards them in the main as an honest, sincere, hard-working group, although we do not agree with them on many questions. In our contact with them we have always been friendly, cordial, straightforward and above board just as we have been toward every other sincere working class group. We not only stand ready but will be more than glad to discuss questions important to the working class with them at all times. We have no doubt that such discussions will be mutually beneficial.

—JOHN MIHELIC.