

EDITORIAL NOTES

A WELCOME REVERSAL

Experience is a costly teacher, but an effective one. Having suffered the full consequences of the "stay at work" policy during Schlesinger's strike maneuvers, the Left wing in the needle trades is striving to avoid a similar debacle in the Amalgamated. The Rank and File Committee in the Hillman Union—the Left wing group dominated by the party—has issued a statement on the stoppage announced by the Amalgamated. The statement describes the stoppage as a stratagem to put over a deal between the Hillman bureaucracy and the bosses against the members of the union. It advises the clothing workers to "turn the stoppage into a real struggle of all clothing workers for better conditions in the shops."

On both these points the statement of the Rank and File Committee is surely correct. It shows beyond all doubt that the Left wing militants in the needle trades have learned something from the bludgeoning they have endured as a result of the treacherous policy imposed upon them in recent times by the Centrist bureaucrats.

During the Schlesinger strike, the Left wing it will be remembered, had a different policy. At that time the Stalinists said, and not without a certain justification as is the case now in the Amalgamated, that the strike was a fake. And from this they drew the conclusion that the Left wing militants should stay at work while the Right wing workers went out. By this policy, which they enforced against all protests, they deprived the Left wing of all possibility to influence the masses of workers in the streets. They gave the reactionaries a powerful weapon which they used to the full against the Left wing. If Schlesinger were to give credit where credit is due for the present entrenchment of the Right wing union he would have to make heavy acknowledgments to the "stay at work" slogan of the Communist party.

The Opposition hammered this slogan and advised, instead, that the Left wing militants go out with the rest and steer the movement into the path of struggle. The advice was without avail them. An experiment was necessary to expose the complete emptiness of the Centrist policy. The experience was bitter but not entirely in vain. Nobody would dare to tell the needle trades workers to repeat that sorry performance.

We can only welcome the reversal of tactics in this respect. The policy of the party in the needle trades today, despite many changes, is yet by no means fully correct. But we can be thankful that the suicidal slogan of "stay at work" while the Right wing workers are on the street, is no more. This is progress painfully achieved but all the surer for it. It is another demonstration that the policy of the Opposition can make its way, even if after ruinous delays, when experience has reinforced and confirmed its correctness. But that is just the power of the Marxist platform of the Left Opposition: it stands up under the test of events.

AGAIN THE UNION SQUARE MEETING

For us the defense of class war prisoners is a class question. We proceed from the point of view that they are hostages held by the class enemy. They are not the private property of any organization, party, group, sect or faction. Regardless of their individual views they are entitled to the solidarity and support of the workers as a class, and especially of all the advanced and conscious elements. However we may be divided on this or that question of principle we should present a united front to the class enemy in defense of every persecuted worker, whoever he may be. It is from this standpoint that we protested in a recent issue of the Militant against the conduct of the I. W. W. in the Union Square meeting for the Centralia prisoners.

The July 21 issue of Solidarity returns to the discussion only to demonstrate anew the sectarian point of view and to justify the objections we have brought against it. We are now informed, in an article by Jack Kenney that the meeting "was not called as a 'united front' meeting . . . it was called by the General Defense and Invitations were sent to organizations and groups asking them to send speakers." That is no answer to the point of our objection. The question of auspices is more or less a formality in such a case. It is the organizations invited and represented on the platform which determine the character of the meeting.

If it was not even intended to be a united front, as the author states, it only makes matters worse and shows up a narrow-minded conception which is far removed from the idea of a class defense of persecuted and imprisoned militants. It was a united front, all right, but a very peculiar one—a united front without the Communist party. Why was it excluded? This is the question we raised. It has not been answered, because it cannot be answered on the ground of the real interests of the class war prisoners.

Kenney found it necessary to defend the presence of the "yellow socialists" who were invited to the meeting. We did not object to that; we protested against a friendly solidarity with them as against the Communists. The article in Solidarity justifies this reactionary policy with the statement: "We at least

know where the 'yellow socialists' stand." Is that really so? Then you must know that they—that is the leaders—have stood on the side of the prosecuting attorney in the case of every Left wing militant in the needle trades sent to jail or prison in recent years. If you know where they stand, your management of the Union Square meeting is all the more indefensible, and our criticism of it is all the more justified.

The article in Solidarity includes a defense of the "anarchist wind bag". Kenney overlooks no questions except the most important one. He says: "Perhaps his remarks about Russia are objected to." Of course they are objected to. He adds: "If so, then wherein did he misrepresent the situation in Russia?" Well, we could answer that question at great length and have done so more than once. But allow us to answer the question here with another question: If you think it was quite in order for the Anarchist to air his views on Russia at the Union Square meeting, did you expect comrade Swaback to devote his speech to a refutation? In that case you should have advertised a public free-for-all debate on the principle disputes in the labor movement. Such a discussion, announced for what it is, would have a value and the Communist League would no doubt participate. But the staging of this debate under the guise of a defense meeting for the Centralia men is out of place. The class war prisoners are entitled to more respect and consideration than that.

FIELD ORGANIZERS OF THE OPPOSITION

Among the signs of consolidation of the Communist League and the development of its activities, the appearance of voluntary organizers in the field is not the least significant. The emergence of capable and self-sacrificing forces who carry the message into new fields is an unerring mark of vitality in our movement. For several weeks comrades (Clarke and Stamm have been doing pioneer work as field organizers in the Cleveland territory and we have every reason for the confidence that the firm basis is being laid for the establishment of a functioning branch of the League.

For us such an achievement will have a great importance. Every new oppositionist counts, and is worth effort to gain; the formation of a new branch is an achievement which our entire organization can justly celebrate. Our numbers are few but solid. They are strong in ideas and by them will prevail. Every accession of new forces educated in the Marxist doctrines of our movement and inspired with its unconquerable spirit, hastens on the day. Those who make it possible by patient work of propaganda and organization in the field will be highly regarded by every Oppositionist.

The field work of the comrades in Cleveland, of great value in itself, has an even greater significance as an example. By deliberately picking out the field of operations in agreement with the National Committee, travelling without railroad fare and maintaining themselves in the field on their own resources, with only nominal assistance from the organization, they are showing how a movement which has no money can have organizers, if it has the men. We shall see more of this in the near future, if we are not greatly mistaken. The young revolutionists, trained in the school of the Opposition will be fired with the ambition to work for the movement and will do it at all cost. The path of the pioneer organizers at Cleveland will be followed by tens and scores as our movement grows, takes root and becomes the movement of the workers' vanguard, as it inevitably will.

In this way the bona-fide type of professional revolutionist will grow up, receive his training and prove his worth in the hard school of experience and come to leadership of the party and the class. In the best days of the I. W. W. and to a lesser extent in the Socialist party, the movement was recruited and kept alive in no small degree by the "voluntary organizers" who took it upon themselves—without definite pay or guarantees—to carry the propaganda to the masses. Today's movement, on higher ground and on a firmer foundation, will measure its growth in no small degree by the number of such organizers it enlists.

Professional revolutionists we must have, for the leadership of the revolutionary movement is a full-time occupation. But by that term we do not think of the satisfied official who weighs every service to the movement and exacts pay in a sort of business relationship. We think rather of the militant who devotes his activities entirely to the movement and takes his chances. Every step toward the creation of such a cadre represents progress. —J. P. C.

THE MILITANT

Vol. IV, No. 17, August 1, 1931

Published weekly by the Communist League of America (Opposition) at 84 East 10th Street, N. Y.

Editorial Board
 Martin Abern James P. Cannon
 Max Shachtman Maurice Spector
 Arne Swaback

Subscription rate: \$2.00 per year; foreign \$2.50. Five cents per copy. Bundle rates, 3 cents per copy

The soft coal industry is especially worth studying at this time because of the militant strike movement in a number of fields, because of its fundamental importance to industry and because it illustrates many of the features of industrial decay under capitalism, and points a way which will be trodden by more and more industries as time goes on.

Where Coal Comes From

The earliest recorded soft coal workings in this country were in Virginia, in 1750. Since then it has been discovered in over thirty different states in this country, but most of the coal west of the Mississippi is too low in grade to have more than a local importance. Over 90 percent of the coal produced in the United States comes from nine states, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky and Alabama in the Eastern or Appalachian field, Illinois and Indiana in the Middle Western field and Colorado in the Rocky Mountain field. The quality of the coal mined, or its "rank", varies widely, and with it varies the commercial value, which determines the distance to which it can be shipped in competition with other fuels. The highest grade coal is that from some of the West Virginia fields, particularly the "smokeless" Pocahontas and New River coals, considered the finest in the world except possibly the British Admiralty coals. The quality is determined by a high percentage of fixed carbon in relation to volatile matter, low moisture and ash content and low percentage of impurities, the worst of which is sulphur.

The cost of mining depends in large part on the thickness of the coal deposit or seam, the presence or degree of slate, "bony coal", and other solid impurities, the extent of mechanization, the flatness and continuity or on the other hand steep pitch and broken-up geology of the deposit. The combination of differing commercial value of coal produced and differing costs of production has resulted in substantial differences in the ability of the various fields to compete with each other.

Shift of Coal Fields

In practice, this has resulted in a shifting of the market away from certain fields and towards others. The fields which have been losing out in competition have resulted in violent efforts to cut wages in an effort to maintain profits; the others have cut wages in the effort to maintain their competitive superiority. The result to date has been a clear-cut and increasing superiority of the West Virginia and Kentucky fields to the detriment of Illinois and Indiana while Pennsylvania has largely held its own as indicated by the following figures. (See table above).

"The West Virginia operators," according to an engineering expert, "might be quite properly termed the pirates of the coal trade, standing ready at all times to descend on any fat prize that may appear on the horizon. Let a shortage of fuel appear in the Northwest or in New England and the West Virginia producers will soon be on the job with their high-grade coals gobbling up the main plums, much to the chagrin of the Illinois or Pennsylvania producers as the case may be. For the Ohio mines, handicapped by somewhat inferior coals and union scales, they have an indifference bordering on contempt; in times of a full market the West Virginia mines have only to reduce their wage scales, a matter the miners are not liable to protest when work is slack, and they can put their high-grade coals down in the heart of the Ohio mining districts cheaper than the local mines can produce it themselves".

Key Position of West Va.

The West Virginia fields therefore occupy a key position in the industry, from a labor point of view as well as from that of the operator. Control of these fields is indispensable in view of their ability to throw enormous tonnages on the market when strikes are on in other fields; on the other hand, a free rein to unionize Illinois and Indiana is worthless for a national union if purchased at the expense of "hands off West Virginia and Kentucky".

The latest figures show that this superiority has been intensified since the depression: in the week ended July 4, 1931 a total of 5,961,000 tons of soft coal was mined in the United States, against an average of 11,208,000 per week in July 1923, a falling off of 46 percent. Illinois and Indiana fell off 54 and 60 percent respectively, and Pennsylvania 57 percent, while the decline in West Virginia amounted to less than 11 percent in the Southern field and less than 28 percent for the state as a whole, and Kentucky production declined only 26 percent.

The shifting of markets within the soft coal industry has taken place against a background of absolute and relative decline in the demand for coal. For many years up to 1918, the consumption of coal in the United States increased at the rate of 16,800,000 tons per annum. In 1917 the consumption (including exports, which amount to 3-4 percent of the total in normal years) totalled 553,000,000 tons; this figure was not reached again until 1926, when the British coal strike stimulated exports and brought total sales to 567,000,000 tons; in 1928, at the peak of "prosperity", total demand was 537,000,000, and last year indications are that the sales were 465,000,000 tons.

The average annual consumption per capita from 1912 to 1914 was 8,946 pounds of soft coal; the average for the years 1926-1928 was 8,608 pounds, and last

BEHIND THE MINERS STRIKE

Economic Decay in Soft Coal

	1924	1929
Total Coal Produced	484,000,000 tons	533,000,000
Pennsylvania	130,600,000	142,400,000
West Virginia	101,700,000	138,000,000
Illinois	68,300,000	60,100,000
Kentucky	45,100,000	60,600,000
Ohio	30,500,000	23,700,000
Indiana	21,500,000	18,000,000
Alabama	19,100,000	17,700,000
Virginia	10,700,000	13,100,000
Colorado	10,400,000	10,400,000

year was about 7,314 pounds.

Reason For Market Loss

The basic reason for the loss of markets has been the displacement of coal by other forms of energy supply, notably water power for the generation of electricity, fuel oil and natural gas, and second, increasing efficiency in the utilization of coal by the railroads, who took 21 1/2 percent of the domestic consumption of coal last year by the electric utility companies, who took 9 1/2 percent, and by other large industrial consumers.

Of the total energy from all sources, used in the U. S. in 1913, coal, hard and soft, supplied 84.4 percent, oil and gas 7.1 percent, and water power 4.2 percent, by 1928 the latest year for which U. S. Bureau of Mines data are available, the proportion contributed by coal was 67.5 percent, by oil and gas 18.2 percent, and by water power 8.9 percent. Indicating increased efficiency of use, as recently as 1920 the average electrical company throughout the United States burned 3 pounds of coal under its boilers to produce a kilowatt-hour of current supply—by 1929 the figure had declined to 1.9 pounds, and the best practice in the country was 7-10ths of a pound, indicating the extent of the possible further losses. In 1929 the average railroad consumed 174 pounds of coal in carrying 1000 tons (including freight, locomotive and tender) a distance of one mile; by 1929 the average figure was down to 125 pounds. Similarly, in 1917 the steel mills consumed an average of 3,524 pounds of coking coal in making a ton of pig iron; now they need less than 3,000 pounds, a decline of over 15 percent.

In the definition of "economic old age" given in a previous article in this series, two outstanding features were the low rate of profit and the tendency toward concentration and mechanization. According to a compilation by the National

City Bank twenty-eight coal mining companies, with a combined capitalization around \$600,000,000, earned net profits of 1.6 percent on their capital and surplus in 1929 and 1.3 percent in 1930. To the extent that these figures are representative, they indicate one reason for the bitterness which has marked labor struggles in the coal mines for a "diminishing ration" of profits on the operator's side.

Financial Concentration

The tendency toward financial concentration in the coal industry will be clear from the following data. In 1920 there were 6277 recognized commercial soft coal producers; by 1930 there were only 4,612. The mortalities were severest in the class of mines producing from 10,000 to 50,000 tons a year, of whom 51 percent disappeared in these ten years; the mines producing 50-100,000 and 100-200,000 ton, a year were also hard hit. On the other hand, the class producing 500,000 tons a year and over actually increased, both in numbers and in output. This class was responsible for 29.2 percent of the total output in 1895, for 48.3 percent in 1905, 47.8 percent in 1920 when there was a temporary boom in coal encouraging the small mine, and 59.8 percent in 1929. With the present hard times in the industry, the proportion of the output controlled by the big mines must be still larger.

This means that the miner in his struggles is facing a financially stronger unit, on the average, than in the past and the necessity for national organization is even more pressing than hitherto.

The proportion of coal mined "mechanically", that is, by the use of mechanical loaders and conveyors underground, has increased rapidly. From 21,000,000 tons in 1928 the output of mechanically mined coal increased to 37,900,000 tons in 1929 and 40,800,000 tons last year, an increase during a year of crisis

of 23.7 percent. The tendency was most pronounced in Illinois where an additional tonnage of 4,550,000 tons was mechanically mined in 1930 over 1929, an increase of 24.9 percent; in Pennsylvania the increase was 2,800,000 tons or 66.2 percent, in Alabama 1,100,000 tons, or 120.6 percent.

Mechanization of Mines

These figures do not include the 20,000,000 tons loaded by power shovels in strip mines which involve mechanization on an even larger scale. In strip pits, the coal lies close to the surface, and the earth covering or "overburden" is stripped off with shovels and the coal exposed in open pits, which are then worked by steam or electric shovels. The cost of a 15-yard shovel of the latest type with caterpillar treads, completely installed, is half a million dollars. The average production per man per day, which is about 4 3/4 tons for the entire industry, averaged 13 tons per man per day in strip operations in 1928, against 5.1 tons per day per man in 1914, when the average for the entire industry was 3.61 tons.

It is not a coincidence that some of the bitterest struggles of the miners have been in the most highly mechanized operations, where the owner's stake was highest and his financial strength corresponding. The Wildwood mine of the Butler Consolidated Coal Co. the first mine in the United States completely laid out from the beginning for mechanized operation, has been the scene of some of the hardest fighting in the present strike in the western Pennsylvania fields. The fighting around Herrin, Illinois, in the 1922 strike, centered around a strip mining operation of the Southern Illinois Coal Company.

The coal operator today faces a narrowing market under the whip of competitive economic pressure to maintain or enlarge his profits to acquire a financial base for the increasing mechanization which is being installed throughout the industry. He will put up a terrific resistance to the maintenance of decent living standards by the miners. The miners will need every advantage of organization and leadership to make good their counter-resistance, and carry the struggle further from defensive to offensive economic lines and ultimately out of the economic field into the broadest political demands.

—B. J. FIELD.

Bucharin and the Permanent Revolution

At the beginning of 1918, Bucharin wrote in a pamphlet devoted to the October revolution:

"The fall of the imperialist regime was prepared by all the preceding history of the revolution. But this fall, and the victory of the proletariat supported by the poor peasantry, a victory which at one blow opened up immense horizons throughout the world, is not yet the beginning of an organic epoch . . . Before the Russian proletariat is posed more acutely than ever before, the problem of the world revolution. All the relations that have developed in Europe lead towards this inevitable end. Thus the permanent revolution in Russia is converted into a European revolution of the proletariat." ("From the Fall of Czarism to the Fall of the Bourgeoisie" by N. Bucharin, page 78. Our emphasis.)

The pamphlet concluded with the following words:

"Into the powder magazine of blood-stained old Europe has been thrown the torch of the Russian socialist revolution. It has not died. It lives. It expands. It will inevitably fuse with the great victorious uprisings of the world proletariat." (Ibid, page 144.)

How far removed from the theory of socialism in one country was Bucharin at that time!

Everyone knows that Bucharin was the principal, and in reality, the only

theoretician of all the campaigns against Trotskyism which were summed up in the struggle against the permanent revolution. But earlier, when the lava of the revolutionary overthrow had not yet had time to grow cool, Bucharin, as we see, could find no other characterization of the revolution than the definition against which, a few years later, he had to fight so mercilessly.

The pamphlet by Bucharin appeared in "Priloby", the publishing house of the Central Committee of the party. Not only did nobody declare this pamphlet heretical, but on the contrary, everyone saw in it the official and indisputable expression of the views of the party Central Committee.

In this way the pamphlet was reprinted many times in the course of the following years, and together with another one devoted to the February revolution, under the joint title "From the Collapse of Czarism to the Fall of the Bourgeoisie", it was translated into German, French, English and other languages.

In 1923, the pamphlet—probably for the last time—was printed by the Kharkov Party Publishing House "Proletarii", and in the preface to it was expressed the conviction that the pamphlet has "an enormous importance" not only for the new members of the party, for the Youth etc., but also "for the old

Bolshevik guard of the illegal period of our party".

That Bucharin is not endowed with any particular firmness in his opinions, is well enough known. But it is not a question of Bucharin. If one is to lend credence to the legend, created for the first time in the Fall of 1924, that between Lenin's conception of the revolution and Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution there existed an unbridgeable chasm, and that the old party generation was educated in the understanding of the irreconcilability of these two theories, then how could Bucharin at the beginning of 1918 propagate with complete impunity this theory, which he called the theory of the permanent revolution? Why did nobody—absolutely nobody—in the party come forward against Bucharin? How and why did the publishing house of the party Central Committee issue the pamphlet? How and why did Lenin keep quiet? How and why did the Comintern publish the pamphlet by Bucharin, defending the permanent revolution, into various languages? How and why did Bucharin's pamphlet retain the title of party manual almost up to the death of Lenin? How and why was the pamphlet reprinted in 1923 in Kharkov, future center of Stalinist fanaticism and warmly recommended to the party youth as well as to the old Bolshevik guard?

Bucharin's pamphlet is distinguished from his subsequent writings and in general from all the latest Stalinist historiography not only in the characterization of the revolution but also of its leaders. Here, for example, is what it says on page 131 of the Kharkov edition:

"The central point of political life becomes . . . not the pitiful Soviet of the republic, but the future congress of the All-Russian revolution. In the center of this work of mobilization stood the Petersburg Soviet which demonstratively elected to its presidency, comrade Leon Trotsky, the most brilliant tribune of the proletarian insurrection."

Further on, on page 138:

"On October 25, Trotsky, the brilliant and valiant tribune of the revolution, the indefatigable and ardent agitator, the apostle of the revolution, declared the name of the Revolutionary Military Committee to the Petersburg Soviet, amid thunderous applause from those present, that the 'provisional government no longer exists'. And as living proof of this fact, Lenin appeared, greeted with a stormy ovation, liberated from illegality by the new revolution."

In 1923-1924, the flood of the so-called discussion against Trotskyism was let loose. It destroyed much of what had been built up by the October revolution, it submerged the papers, libraries and reading-rooms, and under its slime and dirt was buried an innumerable quantity of documents relating to the greatest epoch in the development of the party and of the revolution. Now these documents must be dragged out bit by bit in order to reconstruct that which was.

The Permanent Revolution in Lenin's Time

In 1921, there appeared in English one of the many editions of an old work of Trotsky: "A Review and Some Perspectives", which contains the most complete exposition of the theory of the permanent revolution.

The English edition is accompanied by a preface by the author dated "March 12, 1919, Kremlin", written for the Russian edition of the brochure which came out in 1919. Between this Russian edition and the English edition of 1919, a number of others appeared in various languages. In the preface of 1919, the author speaks of those differences which at one time separated him from Bolshevism in this question. Among other things, the preface says:

"Therefore, once having won power, the proletariat cannot limit itself to bourgeois democracy. It must adopt the tactics of permanent revolution i. e., to destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum program of social democracy, to introduce more and more radical social reforms and to look for direct and immediate support in the West European revolution. This position is developed in this brochure, originally written in 1904-1906", etc.

"To destroy the barriers between the minimum and maximum program"—this is precisely the formula of the growing over of the bourgeois revolution into the socialist revolution. The premises for such a development are the conquest of power by the proletariat which, by the

logic of the situation is compelled "to introduce more and more radical social reforms" . . .

Now who published this brochure? The publisher did not find it at all necessary to conceal his criminal name. On the cover is printed: "Published by the Communist International, Moscow—1921". On the back page of the brochure it says "Printing Shop of the Comintern". Zinoviev was chairman of the Comintern, Bucharin worked there full time, the edition could not go by without them seeing it, all the more so because it was the only one. The Russian edition could not go by unnoticed by the Central Committee of the party—especially when it was published by it—or by Lenin especially.

One is constrained to ask again how, in the greatest and most burning question, not only the Central Committee but also the Comintern were able to distribute a brochure entirely devoted to the defense and to the interpretation of the theory of the permanent revolution, in which, moreover, in a preface especially written for the new edition, the author affirmed that the march of events had approved his theory? Is it possible that up until 1924 there were at the head of the Bolshevik party only blind men, ignoramuses and, still worse, Mensheviks or counter-revolutionists? Let somebody answer this question—one of hundreds, of thousands like it.