

The American Coal Miners

By J. LOUIS ENGBAHL

THE press reports told us briefly that affiliation with the Red Trade Union International was rejected by the United Mine Workers' Convention at Indianapolis, Ind., without discussion.

An effort was made to create the impression that this was another victory for reaction; another crushing defeat for progress.

This was the first time that real internationalism made itself felt in the gatherings of the American coal miners. The voice of the world fraternity of labor was heard all the way from Moscow to Indianapolis.

To be sure, that voice should have been louder. Better organization of insurgent forces should have forced the issue to debate on the floor of the convention. But the man who might have made himself heard, Alexander Howatt, spokesman for the coal miners of the southwest, had gone to serve a jail sentence at Pittsburgh, Kans., for violation of the industrial court law. No one came forward to fill the breach.

Suffering from an attack of conscience, the convention in its closing hours voted to send Howatt as its delegate to the next International Mining Congress to be held in England.

If Howatt gets out of jail in time, and journeys to England, he will hear much of the Red Trade Union International at the World Mining Congress. What effect will this new outlook have upon him? What message will he bring back?

Howatt was one of that numerous group of Socialists who swayed conventions, of the American coal miners before the war in support of "socialistic" and radical resolutions. This year he alone remained after the wave of war jingoism had swept the miners' union with its half million members.

Take for instance Illinois before the war. There was John H. Walker, Duncan McDonald, Adolph Germer, James Lord, Frank J. Hayes, not to mention a host of others. Practically every other state had a similar quota. What has become of them? Walker gravitates from the old parties to the Farmer-Labor Party. McDonald went over to the Farmer-Labor Party. Germer, following his role of Noske at the split of the National Socialist Party in Chicago, in 1919, decamped to New York, where he is an acting secretary of the S. P. Lord is Gompers' man as head of the A. F. of L. mining department. Hayes, most promising of all, who rose to be vice-president of the miners' international union before he was 30 years of age, was last heard from in a sanitarium. Thus has a once strong and promising leadership been dissipated.

Howatt, of Kansas, in the pre-war days, was one of the most quiet of the "reds."

I was talking to Howatt in the lobby of the English Hotel, at Indianapolis, during one of those pre-war conventions.

"Why, I didn't know you were a Socialist," broke in one of the more conservative delegates from the Pennsylvania anthracite regions.

"I've been a Socialist for years," replied Howatt. It was the same Howatt that I saw mingling with an audience of Kansas coal miners during the presidential campaign of 1912. He wasn't even one of the speakers.

During the war Howatt turned social patriot with the rest, and was part of that expedition sent to Europe to fight radical, anti-war sentiment in England, France and Italy. But, if I am not mistaken, he sickened of the antics of his fellow patriots, among whom were Spargo, Kopelin, Russell, and Bohn.

Howatt's fight in the miners' union since the ending of the war shows that he is practically all that is left of the pre-war radical leadership.

This does not mean that the American coal miner is less radical now than he was before the war. It does not mean that the mass of the membership is less progressive.

It merely means that the leadership failed the rank and file in the hour of crisis, as is always the case. It means that a new leadership must be brought into existence. This will inevitably develop.

This new leadership will grow out of the young members of the organization. The work to develop it, to mould it into a solid, smoothly working, powerful machine, must be started at once. It must be inspired by the principles and tactics of the Red Trade Union International.

I don't believe that the United Mine Workers has ever had an internal organization fighting for principle. The pre-war sallies of the radicals were haphazard affairs. Little attention was paid to the election of convention delegates, to the ideas that they would fight for.

The big fights, the stirring campaigns in the miners' union, were waged for the jobs, for places as international, district and sub-district officials. These officials are elected by referendum, and all the methods of Tammany Hall are brought into play in the struggle for victory.

While the importance of the election of the proper officials must not be minimized, greater emphasis should be placed on deciding the tactics and principles of the organization. This is up to the delegates elected to the international, district and sub-district conventions.

All members of the United Mine Workers in sympathy with the world struggle of the Red Trade Union International should be linked up immediately, from the anthracite mines of Pennsylvania across the nation, to the soft coal pits of the state of Washington. They should be united on definite policies, they should have trained spokesmen, backed by powerful support from a well educated rank and file.

This power, if properly organized, should make itself felt at the special convention to be held at Indianapolis in February, to take up the question of wage negotiations with the private owners of the nation's coal mines.

The activity or lack of activity NOW of the radicals in the miners' union decides what progress the workers organized in the American coal mining industry will make during the year 1922.

Labor Dictatorship Is Historical Necessity

By DONALD McLEOD

THE principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat is inextricably bound up with the Russian Revolution.

It is impossible honestly to accept and praise the Revolution without also accepting the principle which furnishes the only possible theoretical justification for the present form of the Soviet government.

The dictatorship of the proletariat has been criticised from two standpoints. Reformists simply reiterate the familiar bourgeois arguments in favor of "democracy," conveniently forgetting that all Marxist theory is based upon the promise that democracy is a fiction, so long as the economic domination of class by class persists.

The elements in the international Socialist movement, which shrink equally from reformism and revolution, generally contend that proletarian dictatorship, while it may be necessary in backward Russia, is both unnecessary and undesirable in more advanced countries, where the industrial workers, at the time of the revolution, may be expected to form a majority of the population.

Capitalist or Workers' Dictatorship?

Now, it is simply absurd to raise the issue of democracy versus dictatorship: for no true democracy exists to-day.

The various capitalist states are bourgeois dictatorships; Soviet Russia is a proletarian dictatorship.

The vital difference between Soviet Russia and the capitalist states is that the Soviet government is consciously preparing the way for the institution of genuine democracy, whereas the capitalist states, however far they may go on the road of social reform, can never become genuinely democratic.

For capitalism is rooted in two principles: perpetual inequality thru the inheritance of wealth and the exploitation of the weak by the strong.

If these two principles were abolished, capitalism would cease to exist.

If anyone doubts the essentially dictatorial character of the present capitalist regime in America he should read the story of the steel strike of 1919, as told in the Report of the Interchurch Commission, and in the books of William Z. Foster and Mary Heaton Vorse.

The steel strike could not, by the widest stretch of imagination, be interpreted as a movement against the American political state.

It was an effort to gain extremely modest industrial objectives, such as the eight-hour day, the right of collective bargaining, etc., by the use of peaceful and orthodox trade union methods of agitation and organization.

But the steel workers were treated as brutally as if they had announced the establishment of a Soviet government as the purpose of the strike.

All the so-called constitutional rights of free speech

and free assemblage were withheld from the strikers.

Public officials in the strike area acted openly as agents of the Steel Corporation, often arbitrarily offering strikers the choice between going to jail or going back to work.

Mobilize Against Workers

Whenever the existence of the capitalist state is threatened, whenever its prosperity is seriously endangered, it inevitably assumes the form of a bourgeois dictatorship.

England is perhaps the most liberal country in the world, so far as its normal domestic political and economic relations are concerned.

But, as soon as the transport and railway workers threatened to strike, not for any revolutionary purpose, but merely in order to assure a bare living wage to the striking miners, the government hurriedly mobilized troops, paraded tanks up and down the streets of London and thereby gave the treacherous leaders of the Triple Alliance an excellent excuse for betraying the striking miners and calling off the strike.

It is not only in periods of stress and crisis that the capitalist state may fairly be called a dictatorship. In normal times the power of the minority over the majority is safeguarded by an elaborate machinery of corruption and oppression.

The schools, the press, the churches, the theatres and movies, all the agencies of instruction and amusement are utilized by the bourgeoisie in order to instill the capitalist mentality into the masses.

If any teacher, preacher or editor is naive enough to believe in the validity of the bourgeois slogans, free thought, free speech, etc. he is certain to be very speedily reprimanded by his superiors and either silenced or expelled from his position.

Anyone who believes in the ballot as a possible instrument of liberation for the oppressed workers is still hugging the delusions of eighteenth and nineteenth century theorists who had no conception of the enormous power which large accumulations of capital would vest in the hands of a comparatively small number of wealthy men.

It is absurd to speak of free elections in a capitalist country. The ruling class exerts innumerable means of pressure upon the voters.

Here it is sufficient to mention one of the more obvious methods of coercion. At the time when the tariff was the chief issue between the two major parties in this country manufacturers would often force their workmen to vote the Republican ticket by threatening to close their plants if the Democrats were returned to power.

Whatever methods of coercion the Bolsheviks have employed they have not been accused of condemning workers of other parties to idleness and starvation.

But this is just what the capitalist ruling class can do, and has done; and under capitalist law there is no way to prevent an individual from exercising his sacred right of property ownership as he sees fit, even