

# Coal Miners Face Open Shop War

By I. AMTER.

CLEVELAND, Ohio, Aug. 16.—Several weeks ago, the Ohio coal operators met at Columbus, Ohio, and passed a resolution declaring that the situation in the coal mining industry is deplorable, and that something must be done to resume mining operations in Ohio. The coal companies—about 75 in number—organized the Ohio Coal Operators' Association and decided that the first step in the question of reopening the mines of Ohio, many of which have been idle for months and even years, was a "modification of the wage scale."

## Old Open Shop Excuse.

They pointed out that the competition of the non-union fields of West Virginia and Kentucky was robbing the state of Ohio of about \$150,000,000 annually, and that if this condition continued, the entire coal industry of Ohio would be ruined. What was to be done?

The mines of Ohio are unionized—that is to say they used to be. Many of the mines have closed down, many are working one, two and three days a week. Miners unable to stand the small wages, have left the state and are now working in the non-union fields or have gone into other industries.

## Operators for Scab Scale.

In spite of the fact that there is an overproduction of coal in this country and that the lower wages in the non-union fields coupled with the freight rate that West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky enjoy, makes it possible for the coal operators in those states practically to monopolize the market—together with the Pennsylvania bituminous coal operators—the Ohio coal operators recognized that the situation in Ohio was not hopeless for them provided they could compel the miners to accept the conditions of the 1917 scale.

In Ohio a union miner gets \$7.50; in West Virginia he gets \$5 or \$4 or even \$3. This is a glorious situation for the West Virginia coal operator, and the Ohio coal operators envy him. There was only one thing to be done, and that was to follow up the starving-out of the Ohio miner with the bait of opening the mines provided the United Mine Workers would consent to a reduction of the wage scale. Several times, according to the statement of the coal operators, they have tried to get conferences with the representatives of the U. M. W. A., but they were rejected. But they were not to be daunted.

## The Columbus Conspiracy.

On August 2, in the city of Columbus, they once more assembled and declared that they would resume operations in Ohio. They stated that if Ohio is removed from the central competitive fields, with which there is an agreement with the U. M. W. A., the states of Ohio, West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky will be able to control the entire market and supply enough coal for all America's needs. What does this mean?

It means that the Ohio coal operators are now bent upon destroying the U. M. W. A. organization in Ohio and putting Ohio mines on a non-union basis! Blandly and hypocritically they state that they are not against the union and suggest that the men may have a union and begin work.

## Want a Company Union.

But what kind of a union is suggested? A company union, which will deal directly with the coal companies. A fake union that will isolate the miners from the recognized organization, will keep them from fighting for better conditions, since they will not have the support of the other organized workers, and will be compelled to accept any demoralizing conditions owing to the starvation methods that the coal operators have employed in this state for more than two years.

## Open Shop Propaganda.

The coal operators have sent a letter to Lee Hall, president of the Ohio District of the U. M. W. A., notifying him that they want a conference with the mine officials on August 24 "to consider a scale of wages on which the idle mines of Ohio may be reopened."

There are illuminating statements in the Cincinnati Enquirer of August 2, which contains an article by William P. Helm, Jr. Thus, "The biggest piece of American industrial news since the war is now being written in the coal fields of Ohio. . . Ohio has finally thrown down the gauntlet to the United Mine Workers of America. . . . They (the operators) are preparing to take down the boards from their idle mines and dig coal, union or no union. . . . With Ohio gone there is no longer any central bargaining power to make national terms for union operators with the mine workers' union. . . . Until three weeks ago, the outlook for a strike (next April—I. A.) was so strong that another periodic cessation of work was regarded in the trade as almost certain at the beginning of the next coal year. That outlook has changed almost in a twinkling. The outlook now is for no strike, lower producing costs and an abundance of coal (Heavy type mine—I. A.) The operators state that there are three courses open. Among them is to ignore the Jacksonville agreement and open up the mines. The other is that 'a union might be formed. This has been considered as a way out.'"

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## What Must the Rank and File Do?

Facing the organized power of the Ohio coal operators, what must the Ohio miners do?

1. They must instruct their representatives, Lee Hall, the district and international officers, to the Ohio coal operators association to GO TO HELL. The miners want no representatives to confer with the coal operators. The operators are loudest in shrieking about the "sanctity of contracts," but when they please to abrogate the Jacksonville agreement, as they have done in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, they do so with perfect impunity. Witness the decision a few months ago, of the judge in Morgantown, West Virginia.

## Miners Must Fight.

2. The coal miners of the state of Ohio must prepare for war. The coal operators have declared that they will open the mines "union or no union." This challenge must be taken up, for it means the very life of the union.

Today the union in Ohio is weak. Many locals have been wiped out, others have been terribly weakened by the departure of members. Preparations for war mean self-organization, organization of the unorganized and other defensive and offensive measures. If the union does not prepare the membership, if it does not begin a vast campaign to line up the unorganized, if it does not immediately mobilize organized labor throughout the country to stand by the miners in the coming fight, the fight will be harder than it need be.

## Fighters Must Lead Fight.

3. John Brophy has stated in a Federated Press announcement of his candidacy for president, that the fight of the miners cannot be conducted on a local or district scale, but must be an organized international fight of all miners on this continent against the operators. This is absolutely clear. Who is to conduct this work. John Lewis and the rest of the reactionary officials, who have allowed the union to sink into insignificance; the unorganized fields of West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky to remain unorganized; the western Pennsylvania fields to be practically destroyed?

The present administration cannot be trusted to lead the fight. For are not the words of Helm significant? "The outlook (for a strike, I. A.) has changed almost in a twinkling. The outlook now is for no strike, lower producing costs and an abundance of coal." How do Helm and the coal operators know there is no possibility of a strike? Do they trust to the hunger of the miners, who will be impelled to accept any condition in order to get work? Or have they information about the position of the leadership of the U. M. W. A.? This would not be hard to obtain, for the facts of the present situation, with John Lewis and the reactionary regime responsible, are an open book to everybody.

## For a Progressive Administration.

The first condition for carrying on the fight is the cleaning out of the old administration and the putting in of left wingers and progressives—men with courage and vision who know what the union should be, the nature of the fight—a fight for the life of the union not only in Ohio, but throughout the country.

## Organize the Unorganized.

5. The organization of the unorganized must be pushed with all energy. The fight must be made a national fight, including every miner in the country. The shameful agreement made by Lewis for the anthracite must be thrown on the dumpheap as the coal operators have scotched the Jacksonville agreement in the bituminous fields. Tit for tat! If all the miners do not line up, there is likelihood of any fight being beaten, for the use of substitutes in the anthracite strike indicated that the country can get along without any particular fuel.

## A. F. of L. Must Help.

6. Preparation of a war chest is another primary condition. The strike of 500,000 or more coal miners will require a huge reserve. The anthracite miners have been at work for several months, but they went into debt during their strike. The bituminous miners have been without work for a long time or on half rations, and they have nothing to fall

back on. The coming convention of the American Federation of Labor must lay the foundation for the strike that needs must come.

## Fight Class Collaboration.

7. The coal miners must face the issue squarely. The Parker-Watson bill which became a law practically nullifying the possibility of a strike on the railroads, is to be the basis of a law to prevent strikes in the mining industry. The miners must realize that this bill will be presented at the next session of congress and will be made a law. They must be willing to defy a law of that kind, which in reality is unconstitutional if the constitution of the United States has any meaning at all, but which unquestionably will be declared valid and constitutional by the present supreme court of the United States.

## Fight Can Save the Union.

They must be prepared to defy and fight it; but only under courageous leadership. This will mean a repetition of 1922—but on a broader, vaster scale. The miners will be fighting for the life of the union. It will be the answer of the United Mine Workers, not merely to the Ohio operators, but to the coal interests of the country, and to the government.

Lee Hall must be instructed to answer the Ohio coal operators' association that on August 24, there will be NO representative of the United Mine Workers present at the proposed conference; that the alternative of "union or no union" will be answered by the U. M. W. A. with fight.

Even this challenge is not enough. Many of the members of the U. M. W. A. in Ohio district are willing to accept an offer of work, provided it appears to be continuous. It is perfectly clear that this offer is not made in sincerity, for there is no market for all the coal mined in this country and the chaos that exists in Great Britain prevails in the United States and will continue if there is not some regulation.

## Nationalization With Workers' Control

Government control, the coal operators will not accept without enforced nationalization; government control the miners cannot accept for that will mean militarization of the miners. Nationalization with workers' control is the only alternative guaranteeing to the public and the men a square meal. The membership of Ohio must be educated to an understanding of the situation—or as the Cleveland papers of August 13 state, "It is designed to give the union opportunity to reject the offer before the companies post a new scale at their mines offering the men work if they will accept a wage cut."

In other words, the coal operators expect the unions to reject the offer and then to get the men to work against union instructions, thus breaking up the union thru the men themselves.

The United Mine Workers in Ohio are in grave danger: only watchfulness, organization and action can save it! August 24 will be the opening day of the battle.

Five dollars will renew your sub for a year, if you send it in before August 15.

"Say it with your pen in the worker correspondent page of The DAILY WORKER."