

Two Features of the Miners' Conference

By MARTIN ABERN

The Save-the-Union conference had many important features, but two of which are herein dealt with: One, the delegation from the Illinois district; and two, discussion on the Anthracite situation.

At this conference the delegation from Illinois, district 12, was represented by close to one hundred delegates.

Veteran Leaders.

The delegation was led by the old leaders among the Illinois miners, such as, John Watts, Tom Parry, Freeman Thompson, George Voyzey and others. They represented mature, seasoned fighters in the struggle of the United Mine Workers Union. They had been leaders in the famous "wild-cat strike" throughout Illinois in 1921, a militant leadership which refused to acquiesce in the moth-worm conservative traditions of the Farrington-Lewis machine; and they brought out the workers then in that strike, among other things, in behalf of Tom Mooney and Warren Billings.

The delegation from Illinois, in many ways, was the most substantial delegation at the Save-the-Union Conference, particularly when it is considered that they came from the distances of Southern and Central Illinois. This delegation gave solidity and substance to the conference which was attended by 1125 delegates altogether.

The conference was a demonstration to the Labor movement in general, as well as to the membership of the United Mine Workers, that the Save-the-Union movement was not merely an upstart movement, led by some "irresponsible youngsters, new leaders, etc."

Rather it showed that the old militant fighters of the type of Thompson, Watts, Perry, Slinger, were as one with the younger elements coming forward in the United Mine Workers of the type of Minerich, Hapgood, as well as the older types like Brophy in other districts, etc., and were uniting their energies and forces to carry out the elementary needs of the membership in the union.

Needs of Union.

These needs are: To restore the Union to the rank and file; to remove the Union control and domination from the traitors and crooks like Lewis and Cappelini and place it into the hands of honest, militant unionists; to fight for a national agreement; to develop and spread the strike into Illinois and unorganized territories in support of the Pennsylvania and Ohio Miners; to organize the unorganized;—in brief: To save the union for the rank and file.

The Illinois delegation from the outset took a prominent and leading part in the proceedings of the conference. It is not a matter of passing attention, but of quite some significance that the chairman of the conference was John Watts from the Illinois district. Watts is one of the old mine leaders among the progressive and militant forces in Illinois and has a record of struggle of many years against John L. Lewis and Farrington.

The Illinois delegation represented genuine progressives and left-wingers and not pseudo-progressives of the type of John Hindmarsh who play

"You Can Jail Us but You Can't Stop Mass Picketing"



Police "cosacks" who attempted to smash the mass picket line at Library, Pa., are shown above. "You can throw us into jail, but you can't stop us and you can't stop mass picketing," the courageous wives of the striking miners cried as the police charged. Tear bombs were the reply of the authorities to the resistance of the militant miners and their wives.

between the progressives and the Lewis forces.

This large delegation from Illinois made certain that a real fight will be made as the delegates return; that the scab mines in Illinois will be picketed en masse; that a 100 per cent strike in Illinois in support of the Pennsylvania and Ohio miners will be attained.

The Anthracite Issue.

The propaganda carried on by the forces of the Save-the-Union Committee for spreading the strike into organized and unorganized mine territories now at work, had its repercussions and effects at the Conference. This demand for the general strike of the coal fields to win the strike is correct agitation and propaganda and represents the best interests of the rank and file. That this demand of the progressive and mili-

tant forces for a general strike was echoed time and again by the delegates at the Save-the-Union Conference demonstrated fully that the delegates at this conference had a fundamental, sound and healthy outlook on the miners' needs.

During the course of the discussion on the organization of the unorganized, the question of tactics regarding striking other fields came up for discussion. The recommendation of the sub-committee was first to strike Illinois, Indiana and Kansas on April 1st, and then on the 16th the Westmoreland, Fayette, Somerset and Green counties, i.e., Pennsylvania unorganized territory, and use these as a base for spreading into other unorganized sections.

It was proposed also by delegates that a call be issued at once for a strike in the Anthracite. A discussion

for many hours took place. However, at this point the sound leadership and the understanding of the delegates came to the front. Everyone desired the general strike called. But in the Anthracite territory, where the Lewis-Cappelini machine still has some strength; where the Brennan opposition forces tend to dissipate and weaken a united action of the rank and file by playing between the Cappelini and Lewis machines; where the progressive and left-wingers supporting the program of the Save-the-Union Committee is not yet sufficiently strong—the delegation came to the conclusion that to issue a call now for an anthracite strike would be premature, unlikely to be widely successful, and would play into the hands of the Lewis-Cappelini oligarchy.

The resentment of the delegates at the division Lewis had created among the miners by a separate agreement in the Anthracite was strong. A healthy sentiment for a struggle was present, but the delegates realized that a strike now would have demonstrated unpreparedness of the progressive forces in that territory and finally accepted, virtually unanimously, the recommendation of the sub-committee to refer this question to the national committee to work out a program for drawing the anthracite into the strike as soon as possible to achieve success.

Significant Features.

This vehement discussion for a number of hours at the conference showed many significant features of great importance to the movement among the miners. The aims of the conference, as pointed out, first spoke generally for the issuance of the anthracite strike call, but sound leadership prevailed. This overwhelming vote and discussion on the question,

which was led by Brophy, Minerich, Toohey, Plecathy, Hapgood, etc., showed the following:

One, that the mass of the delegates had confidence in the integrity of the leadership of the Save-the-Union forces. Such confidence in the honesty of leadership is not obtained merely by words of the leaders, but by a demonstration of their abilities and activities in the struggle. This had evidently been shown to the satisfaction of the delegates.

Two, this discussion brought forward qualities of leadership both among the established leaders of the Save-the-Union forces, as well as among the new elements.

Three, it demonstrated the ability of the mass of delegates at the conference to reason and think out the concrete situation correctly, and not be swayed merely by their desires and emotional reactions. It proved conclusively that this Save-the-Union delegation was miles ahead, intellectually and in leadership, of any previous gathering of miners hitherto held.

Four, this discussion particularly prepared the delegates to return to their local unions and districts to go ahead militantly for carrying out the program of the conference, and particularly for spreading the miners' strike systematically and persistently in every field.

Problems of Delegates.

At the same time it must be pointed out that even this difficult situation at the conference might have been avoided by a greater clarification and preparation of the miners before the conference in regard to the miners' situation, especially in the anthracite territory. After all, it is too simple and easy to excuse these difficulties because we have been successful in passing through the crisis. The main problems yet remain before the miners.

The delegates must go back to the locals and districts and mobilize the membership to carry out the program; to carry out local elections to oust the reactionaries and put in militant and progressive forces on the Save-the-Union program; to prepare for district conferences for the struggle to kick the Lewis machine out of the union; and to take over the Miners' Union for the rank and file.

This conference demonstrated that our Party is sinking its roots more and more among the workers in the basic industries. With continued militant and organized leadership of the progressive and Party forces, our program and movement will win.

At the recent convention and plenums of our Party the perspective that the working class in America would be drawn very shortly into bitter struggles against capitalist oppression and intense exploitation and governmental persecution was drawn and accepted. This perspective has been fully justified and the successful conference of the Save-the-Union forces of the United Mine Workers of America, held in Pittsburgh, April 1st and 2d, bears witness that these struggles are developing the class consciousness and organization of the workers, under the direction of a militant left wing policy which receives its clearest expression in the policy and program of the Workers (Communist) Party.

BULL

Bull head, bull neck, bull shoulders,
Protector of the rich against the poor,
Harrasser of the unfortunate,
Treader on the downtrodden,
Smashing the heads of his victims:
The picket, the violator of the law, the
loiterer, the suspect.
Let them come singly or in small groups,
He is prepared with his billy and gat—
But what, oh what shall he do
When they come by the thousands?

—HENRY REICH, Jr.