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RESCUE WORK DURING A MINE DISASTER. ANOTHER "RISK OF CAPITAL"

THE FIGHTING MINERS

ON September 9th, 600 miners arrived in Pittsburgh from the coal fields throughout the United States. Delegates determined to build a militant national miners union came from West Virginia, Kentucky, Colorado, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Ohio.

Yet, before the Convention even opened, one hundred and twenty five militant coal miners were arrested. Many were beaten up and slugged by Lewis gangsters and the police. The police authorities and the sheriff declared that they would not permit any gathering of the coal miners. But despite the combination of the coal operators, the reactionary Lewis machine of the wrecked U. M. W. A., and the police, the new National Miners' Union was formed.

Delegates from local unions throughout the country, delegates from unorganized territory, delegates representing the Save-The-Union Committee forces, on the morning of September 9th, came into the hall of the Labor Lyceum at 35 Miller St., to open their convention. Thugs and gangsters hired by the Lewis machine attempted to break down the doors in order to disrupt the convention, but they were met by the resistance of the delegate miners. The Lewis gangsters provoked the fight. Clubs, stones, blackjacks, knives and other weapons were used against the delegates. Stones flew in through the windows of the hall. The supporters of the National Miners

By

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Union Convention on the outside defended themselves with great courage. Some of the delegates were seriously injured. Anthony Calemeri was beset by what are reputed to be officials of the reactionary United Mine Workers officialdom. They slugged and kicked Calemeri to such an extent that he was taken unconscious to the Passavant Hospital. The writer visited Calemeri, only to find that Calemeri's condition was so serious that he had lost his memory completely. Others, badly injured, were taken to the hospitals and treated. The disrupters and gangsters were meanwhile receiving plenty from the delegates, and undoubtedly had the battle continued a little longer, the delegates would have routed them completely and they would have proceeded to organize their convention at the Labor Lyceum. But after about a half hour of fighting in the street, the police arrived with their patrols, began to club and smash in every direction, and quite noticeably took the side of the Lewis gangsters against the miners. I, with others, was witness to this struggle and battle in the street, and the miners were finishing the job when the police ar-

rived and intervened. Twenty-two of the miners, including Freeman Thompson of Illinois and Tony Minerich of Pennsylvania were arrested and lodged in jail with charges of rioting placed against them. Their "crime" was that they desired to hold a convention to form a genuine national miners union.

During the course of the day, the hotels at which the delegates were staying, were invaded by Lewis thugs and police. The police proceeded to arrest every miner they could put their hands on, and charged them with riot! Lewis stool-pigeons pointed out the miners to the police. One of the delegates, Charles Fulp, a Negro delegate from McDonald, Pennsylvania, was beaten by the gangsters and police. Yet he was arrested on a charge of assaulting an officer!

A total of 125 arrests took place. International Labor Defense took steps immediately to secure the release of the arrested delegates; counsel was immediately engaged.

But despite the attempts to suppress the convention, it was only a little more than three hours after the struggle before the Labor Lyceum in Pittsburgh, that over 300 delegated miners assembled at the Workers Home at East Pittsburgh and opened their convention with a great enthusiasm and determination to build a union that would act on a militant basis, ready to fight to better the conditions of the coal miners. On the night of Sunday, September 9th I addressed the convention and declared that International Labor Defense would give the fullest support to the arrested miners, and expressed the hope that a successful union would be built. The convention enthusiastically received the report, that the efforts of International Labor Defense would secure the release of many of the arrested, in order that they might be able to attend the convention the next morning.

The convention at East Pittsburgh took up the necessary problems confronting the new union, such as working agreements, unemployment, organization of the unorganized, rationalization of the industry and at the first session which was adjourned only at midnight, elected national officers among whom were John Watt of Illinois, president; Pat Toohey, secretary; Wm. Boyce, a Negro from Indiana, vice-president; and other officers.

At the hearing of the arrested miners and the few Lewis thugs who were accidentally picked up by the police, the Court Magistrate proceeded to make a denunciation of those who were trying to build the new union. He indicated quite thoroughly and plainly that he was in sympathy with the Lewis machine and the operators. He made continual threats throughout the (Continued on page 218)



THE FIGHTING MINERS

(Continued from page 204) hearing to turn over the miners to the Federal Department, to the Grand Jury and so forth. I was particularly interested, while listening to the court hearing, to note also the strong note of fear of the police lackeys of the bosses, at those who were determined at all costs to build a fighting union of their class against the operators. The Lewis thugs were immediately released. The attorney for the Lewis machine was present, but he did not have to say a word, for matters had already been previously arranged for their release.

A number of delegates to the convention were immediately released and then a re-hearing was given the remainder of the arrested delegates. During the course of the hearing about 100 were released outright, since there was absolutely no foundation for holding any of them at all. Quite the contrary, it was clear that the police department, the Lewis machine and operators had done everything that they could to prevent the holding of the convention, but to their great chagrin had been unsuccessful. They had been outwitted by the strategy of the miners. However, the police were determined to get somebody and so they plastered fines ranging from five dollars to twenty-five dollars on a number of the miners, among whom were Freeman Thompson, Tony Minerich, Rorbt. Matuseck, Andy Plechaty and others. International Labor Defense, in this instance paid the fines rather than appeal the cases, since the important thing was that these miners who had come to organize a union, should have the opportunity to return to the convention and to participate in the proceedings. On the night of September the 10th, all but three were released, and on the following day, the three remaining delegates were discharged.

A delegation of liberals, ministers, lawyers, professors, etc., visited the Director of Public Safety of Pittsburgh and made a demand that the new union have the fullest opportunity to hold their convention, and to see that there was no interference with it. As a result of all the publicity and the failure of the police to make any headway against the miners, the Superintendent was forced to declare that such a meeting could be held and could not be interfered with. Nevertheless, the police with the silent consent of the 'higher ups' were making all the difficulties possible for the men who had been released from prison. Attempts were made to get them out of town immediately, but we were determined that this should not be done and it was finally acknowledged that the miners could stay just as long as they pleased in order to carry on their work. Still, police harassed the miners at every turn.

Despite the terrific struggle around the Labor Lyceum on the morning of the convention, despite police terror and suppres-

sion and every other form of intimidation that could be employed, the miners formed a new National Miners' Union.

Now a new union is formed. There was no other choice before the militant, class-conscious miners in the face of the continued betrayals of Lewis. The sell-out of union conditions and the combination of the operators, John L. Lewis and the government forces had finally succeeded in wrecking the old union that had been built through many years of struggle on the part of the rank and file.

Eighteen months ago the miners entered the struggle to maintain their conditions, to better them and to hold before them the militant, fighting traditions of the old United Mine Workers Union.

While Lewis and his machine were comfortable, warm and well-fed and lived and acted like the bosses' tools they were, the rank and file put up an heroic battle against the operators. They faced starvation and eviction. They faced the Government forces of oppression,—the police, the gangsters, injunctions, beatings, murders, break-up of meetings, wholesale arrests. Want and starvation for a long period were relieved mainly by the work of the National Miners Relief Committee, under the excellent direction of Alfred Wagenknecht, Relief Director. Defense for the persecuted miners was provided continually by International Labor Defense. The fight continued everywhere in spite of the Lewis machine. The rank and file carried on, determined to win the strike. But these three forces of the operators, Lewis machine and government agencies, arrayed openly and secretly against the miners, finally brought the old union to ruin.

The left wing, the forces organized in the Save-the-Union Committee, endeavored to maintain the traditions, the fighting spirit, the solidarity of the miners and fought for and lead the rank and file in this bitter class struggle for 18 long months. It was these left-wingers, who now came together to form a new National Miners Union, who met the main forces of the onslaught of the operators, the Lewis thugs and the police.

Now the miners begin anew to build a fighting union. They carry on their work with the best of the old traditions of the old union, but they have learned bitter truths. Lessons learned in the harsh battle against the brutal and extreme exploitation of capitalism. They know that they will continue to meet with resistance from what remains of John L. Lewis's machine, from the operators, and the agencies of the government. But anyone who witnessed the proceedings of this convention of militant miners will know that they will not quit. They are united, they are determined, *they have a clear working class policy of struggle against the employers.* Therefore the new union will grow and win.

These miners recognize that all new movements in behalf of the workers have met with resistance and that such struggles have taken their victims. They too know of Mooney and Billings and of the Centralia prisoners and of all other struggles where working class leaders have fallen victims.

Nevertheless, they are determined to go on. They have formed a union, they propose to make it grow, they propose to organize the unorganized, they propose to build a fighting union on the basis of class struggle and against class collaboration, and to unite with all the workers for the struggle against capitalism and its eventual overthrow.

International Labor Defense greets the new and vigorous National Miners Union.

GREETINGS

Thru "Our Labor Defender" to all class war prisoners and all comrades in the I.L.D.

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