The Progressive Miners’ Conference

By Wm. Z. Foster

In the development of the left wing in the American trade union movement two of the most important steps taken by the militants in the respective industries were the holding of the big national conferences in the railroad and clothing industries. But by far the most significant and promising move yet made was the conference of the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America in Pittsburgh, Pa., June 2-3. This great gathering, made up of approximately 200 delegates from 12 districts of the U. M. W. A., including far off Alberta and Nova Scotia, Canada, launched the left-wing movement definitely in the heart of the most powerful and strategic union in this country. Time will show that it was an epoch-making meeting, the effects of which will soon be apparent not only in the U. M. W. A. but the entire American labor movement.

The Progressives Organize

The United Mine Workers offers a splendid opportunity for militant activity. It is ripe for real progress. It is one union that has largely escaped the ravages of dual unionism. This is chiefly because it is industrial in form. The revolutionary elements have remained within its ranks and have carried on work there to a considerable extent. Consequently the membership, which is at least 60% foreign born, is quite generally infused with a progressive if not revolutionary spirit, more so than almost any other union. But if dual unionism did not actually pull the militants out of the U. M. W. A., it did prevent them from organizing effectively to fight the reactionaries. Because the revolutionary movement until recently knew nothing of organization among the conservative unions, the struggle for progress in the U. M. W. A. has been a desultory and unsystematic guerrilla warfare, mostly upon a local or district basis and usually upon minor issues. Confronted with such a blind and disjointed opposition, it has been easy for the reactionaries, by playing off one section against the other, to maintain themselves in power. The U. M. W. A., although possessing a genuinely progressive membership, is in the anomalous position, because the revolutionists are not organized, of being dominated by a typically reactionary officialdom.

It was to remedy this condition by giving the United Mine Workers policies and leadership in harmony with the wishes and interests of its radical rank and file that the militants began to organize upon an international scale, for Canada is comprised in the movement. The first important step was a small conference in Pittsburgh in February, at which the Progressive International Committee was formed upon a provisional basis. This Committee drafted a program covering the main features of the left-wing movement and sent it broadcast throughout the whole organization. The recent conference was the result of the Committee’s call for the militants to come together and to organize upon a definite basis.

The conference was opened in the Labor Lyceum by Chairman Guiler of the International Committee. Brother McKay, delegate from the Nova Scotia Miners, was elected to act as Chairman of the conference. Then Secretary Myerscough outlined the history of the Committee and dwelt especially upon his recent trip with Alexander Howat through the mining districts, relating how they were both barred from entering into Canada. After this the writer was called upon to say a few words. I pointed out the weakness of the militants at the present time and the only reason why the reactionaries could dominate such a progressive body as the miners was the fact that the revolutionary elements have lacked both a program and an effective organization. I stated that above all the conference must accomplish these two things: (1) work out a clear-cut program which would unite all the progressive causes in the various districts into one uniform movement, and (2) lay plans for the setting up of an organization capable of putting that program into effect, such an organization involving the formation of committees in all the districts, sub-districts, and local unions in the entire jurisdiction of the U. M. W. of A.

The Speech of Howat

Alexander Howat, who was next called upon to speak, made a splendid address. He heartily
The conference demanded that he either put his disruptive organization. Bros. Guiler, Ray and Myerscough were elected to fill the executive positions. Progressive National Bulletin was published in six languages as soon as possible and a wide circulation secured for it. The whole movement will be financed by voluntary contributions of Individuals and Organizations. Pledges of liberal support were given by the assembled delegates.

The Struggle Ahead

The first conference of the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America was a tremendous success. Everybody present recognized that. Now the big job begins to carry the message of progress to the broad rank and file. Although there were success, the reactionaries will not give up without a bitter fight. Already they are tightening their lines and he himself has condemned the movement, saying it was without
Electrical Workers, Unite!

By Jack Burton

There are well over 1,000,000 workers employed in connection with the electrical industry in the United States. In the employ of the commercial and private telephone companies, according to the Commercial Telegraphers Journal, November 1921, there are 350,000. More than 500,000 workers are engaged in operating the telephone and telegraph corporations. There are 200,000 employed in the electrical factories, principally the Bell and General Electric Companies, not included in the previous figures. There are 50,000 workers engaged in maintenance work in industrial establishments; and in addition are the electrical workers in the building industry, theatrical industry, and mining and steel industries. All sections of this great body of workers, scattered over many industries, are vitally interested in the problems affecting electrical workers as a whole.

The bringing together of the newly organized electrical workers is highly necessary if this great field is ever to be unionized. Why is it that today no effective work is being done to organize the workers of the Bell Company, the telegraph companies, the light and power plants, and the big electrical shops, when labor is so scarce and the industry is so busy and growing? Not only is there a need for an organization that will bring no order or discipline to the electrical field, but there is a need for a movement that will create a public sentiment in favor of unionizing electrical workers. This is the only way to get all the electrical workers organized and to prevent the same sort of thing from happening again. The only way to prevent electrical workers from being exploited by the employers is to organize them and to make them strong enough to stand up for their rights.

It is time that the electrical workers began to organize themselves. There is no system that brings out our potential power. The leaders of the electrical workers must take the initiative and start working together, at the same time that they are united in a close solidarity with the workers of other industries. This double solidarity—between all electrical workers of all industries, and between the electrical and other workers in the same industry—means the formation, through amalgamation and reorganization, of one union for all electrical workers, which is subdivided into industrial departments, and which is affiliated with the other unions in each industry.

There is no desire to interfere, in proposing to unite all electrical workers in this manner, with the development of industrial unions which include all workers in a particular industry. This double solidarity—between all electrical workers of all industries, and between the electrical and other workers in the same industry—means the formation, through amalgamation and reorganization, of one union for all electrical workers, which is subdivided into industrial departments, and which is affiliated with the other unions in each industry.

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The railroad workers are the first to take the initiative and to organize themselves. They have formed the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, which includes all railroad workers in the United States. This union has over 200,000 members, and it is the strongest organization in the country. The railroad workers have been able to organize themselves because they have a national program, and they have been able to carry it out. If the electrical workers are to be able to organize themselves, they must have a national program, and they must be able to carry it out.

The United Brotherhood of Electrical Workers will soon hold an International Convention. Every electrical worker should get busy and raise these issues in his local union. The convention should go on record for the establishment of industrial departments, for district councils, for a universal card and initiation fee, for organization of the unorganized, and for amalgamation with the other trades in the various industries. And then delegates should be elected who are pledged to fight for these vital and necessary measures. A united and militant campaign for these progressive proposals will put them into effect in our organization, and at the same time will bring out the fighting leadership which our union must have if it is to go forward. Against the "open shop" plans of the employers we must, on pain of destruction, recognize our forces and increase our power. These are the sentiments of those who labor, and they will unite the trick. Let every electrical worker get busy at once.

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