The Miners' Convention

By Wm. Z. Foster

MORE than any other important recent gathering of Organized Labor, the convention of the United Mine Workers of America, held in Indianapolis, Jan. 22-Feb. 2nd, brought into sharp relief the various tendencies now manifesting themselves in the American labor movement. As emphasized by that convention, some of them were: the generally precarious condition of the union as against the employers, the complete intellectual bankruptcy and utter planlessness of the union bureaucracy, the profound discontent of the rank and file at the betrayal and mismanagement of the union, the desperate and unscrupulous efforts of the bureaucrats to maintain themselves in power even if thereby the union be destroyed, the disappearance of the Socialist Party as a factor in the labor movement, and the emergence of the Communists as the real leaders of the revolutionary and progressive forces among the organized workers. Militants will do well to study and take to heart the lessons of the Miners' Convention.

Manifestly the convention was bound to produce a deep and bitter struggle between the reactionary Lewis administration and the progressive forces among the rank and file. The immediate causes were legion. The policies of Lewis have proved a dismal failure. For several years past the union has been gradually slipping in the face of the rapid extension of the non-union territory, the great growth of unemployment, the increase in the militancy and power of the employers, and the ever-greater interference by the Government. This weakening of the union has caused a profound discontent among the coal diggers, which has been enormously increased by Lewis' ruthless repression of all efforts to establish progressive policies in the union, as evidenced by his crimes in Kansas, Nova Scotia, Pennsylvania and elsewhere. A big fight was certain.

The Battle Begins

Hardly had the convention opened when Lewis started an offense against the progressive forces calculated to disorganize their ranks and to catch them unprepared. On the second day of the convention he jammed through many of the most important matters that had to be dealt with. Such a course was unprecedented, for the custom has always been to dilly-dally along for several days and then speed up at the finish. But, realizing the danger of the situation, Lewis seized time by the forelock and quickly cleared away many of the fighting points. This manoeuvre succeeded to some extent, because the militants, despite their best efforts, had not yet fully united themselves.

The first fight began on the report of Vice-President Murray, which bitterly condemned Thomas Myerough and others connected with the Progressive Miners. A variety of charges were leveled against these militants, ranging from their being "reds" to being agents of the employers. Heavy resistance developed against Murray's report, however, and when the vote was taken it was clearly lost. But Lewis declared it carried, nevertheless, thus giving the first indication of the arbitrary disregard of democratic procedure which was going to disgrace this convention throughout its sessions.

Following this first victory, Lewis quickly defeated several other progressive measures, with but little effective resistance from the militants. One of these was the demand for the recognition of Soviet Russia. The proposition adopted hypocritically concealed the Russian people the right of self-determination and then demanded that their government, before being recognized, must live up to its "honorable obligations," and also cease propaganda activities in this country. It was purely and simply the plan of Secretary of State Hughes. The once progressive Miners' Union, by such a resolution, becomes not only the defender of capitalism, but also the de facto collector of Wall Street. Fast upon the heels of the disgraceful Russian resolution, came another equally bad on the matter of the Labor Party. It started out by endorsing the principle of a labor party and wound up by stabbing it to the heart. The key sentence was, "We realize that the formation of a labor party has passed the visionary stage and can
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be made a reality, but in doing so we should not incur the enmity of those of the already well-defined class of enemies of labor and their friends." That is, the Labor Party may be admired as an ideal, but the Gompers policy must be followed as a practical matter. No affiliation should be had with any party. After thus hastening the movement in this country, the resolution ironically extended greetings to the British Labor Party for its great victory. Then came a whitewash of the administration, condemning betrayal of the miners in the Connelsville region in the great strike of 1922. For his treachery in that affair, Lewis was fulsomely praised by the resolutionadoption.

The progressives were unable to stop this headlong offensive of Lewis. Many reasons conspired to make them helpless before one thing they were not yet well organized—all the foregoing propositions having been adopted on the second day of the convention. Then they were demoralized somewhat by their defeat on Murray's report. In addition, it was almost impossible to tell what business was before the house. There were 700 resolutions to be acted upon. These were printed in five volumes, sent to the delegates until the Resolutions Committee actually began to report. This Committee would lump together 30 or 40 resolutions and submit a substitute for them all. It is said that a majority of these substitutes had but to gather their contents as best they could from the official reading. Often this was purposely garbled so that the delegates could not hear what was coming to the house. All this made it almost impossible to tell what was going on. Moreover, the resolutions were so hypocritically framed that many of the delegates believed they would all be approved. Finally, Lewis would cram them through, often ignoring a dozen or two delegates on the floor demanding the right to speak.

Nova Scotia Assassinated

On the crucial second day of the convention, Lewis put across a scathing denunciation of the Nova Scotia miners and an endorsement of their attitude against them. It was one of the most brutal things done in the whole convention. He accused the Nova Scotia miners of having unerringly taken a 37% cut in wages, of working while the great 1922 strike was on, of repudiating a legitimate contract, and of committing an unlawful strike. He also accused them of being affiliated with the R. I. L. U., although it is well-known that the British Union on Lewis' de- fended a year ago. After firing this barrage of lies, he rushed the matter to a vote without any debate, ruthlessly denying even the Nova Scotia delegates the right to say a word in their own behalf. This arbitrary action provoked great discontent among the delegates. The Progressive Miners promptly circulated a delegation of delegates twice as large as the one largely attended. The result was such an agitation, that two days later, the machine forces themselves to reopen the Nova Scotia question. It dragged out full day of bitter debate, but finally the administration carried its point by the use of red hystera and a flood of lies and misrepresentations.

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sive resolution would destroy their machine, at least temporarily, wired all the officials in the surrounding coal fields to come in to be present at the convention. It was said that $1,000,000 was spent for telegrams for this purpose. Incoming trains were packed with those who responded. When the bitter debate of the administration announced the result, $2263 for and 2106 against, or a majority of 137 in favor of its proposition. The count of the Progressive Miners showed an administration majority of only 72. This close result proved the defeat of the administration. The incident shows how the progressives challenged the validity of the roll call and demanded that a committee be appointed toweed out all the illegal votes. But this was arbitrarily ruled out of order.

In this great fight an important part was that the big Illinois delegation, casting about 950 votes, voted 10 to 1 against the administration, notwithstanding that President Parrington voted with Lewis. An interesting feature was the moving of the previous question by Del. Watt of Illinois. When the debate had run on a long while, Watt denounced Lewis and gave it to him, believing that he would deliver a revolutionary speech that might be later used to prejudice the delegates. But Watts cleverly moved the previous question, and Lewis, who cried out loudly that he was denied free speech. He had been holding back waiting to close the debate with one of his usual red-baiting speeches, but Watt beat him to it, to the amusement of the whole convention.

Slaughter:
The big fight on the appointive power issue had the effect of infusing the rebellious rank and file with courage to attack the machine, and of making Lewis proceed to still more desperate means to balk the will of the majority. The next real clash came upon the question of convention representation. As things now stand, a delegate may have as many as five votes. This plays directly and powerfully into the hands of the machine. The plan of the Progressive Miners was to limit each delegate to one vote. The committee reported non-concurrence. But when the voice vote was taken, the chorus of "No's" was echoed by the "Yea's," and Lewis brazenly called the report adopted, however. Then a division was called for, and about 600 voted for the report and 1200 against it. Lewis follow- ing this, as a desperate plan, declared the report carried. Bitter protests were raised and a roll call was demanded. It required 670 delegates to secure this. About 1000 stood up. But Lewis said there were only 667, or 3 less than necessary. At this a storm of indignation broke out. It lasted called a recess of the session, or from 3 till 5 o'clock. The delegates worked and stormed and protested. They marched and sang and whispered. The whole floor of the convention was a sea of indignation, provoked by Lewis and his gang held the elevated platforms. It was agreed to call the roll in order for the rest of the day, but the machine, not to be outdone, inserted a lot of business in the minutes that was supposed to have been transacted while the turmoil was conducted; a significant manifestation of the seething revolt against the autocracy and corruption of the Lewis administration.

Mr. Davis Speaks

The convention was undoubtedly the most re- actionary held by the miners in 20 years. Its re- actionary character was well illustrated in connec- tion with the address delivered by James J. Davis, Secretary of Labor. This flier, in spite of a heavy advance vote, was invited to speak before the convention. The Progressive Miners thereupon got out a circular condemning him for his action in opposition to the convention and calling Samuel Gompers in denunciation of Davis. Also the Daily Worker, which enjoyed great popularity at the convention and was read by at least half of a third of a third of a third of a third of the delegates, showed the latter, by dint of completely misrepresented his registration of aliens plan, by playing up his trade union record, and with the militant help of the Lewis machine managed to get by and to have a resolution adopted condemning the circular issued against him. The U. M. W. A. have certainly fallen upon evil days when a man who has a labor government's whole effect of inhibiting the rebellious rank and file with courage to attack the machine, and of making Lewis proceed to still more desperate means to balk the will of the majority. The next real clash came upon the question of convention representation. As things now stand, a delegate may have as many as five votes. This plays directly and powerfully into the hands of the machine. The plan of the Progressive Miners was to limit each delegate to one vote. The committee reported non-concurrence. But when the voice vote was taken, the chorus of "No's" was echoed by the "Yea's," and Lewis brazenly called the report adopted, however. Then a division was called for, and about 600 voted for the report and 1200 against it. Lewis follow- ing this, as a desperate plan, declared the report carried. Bitter protests were raised and a roll call was demanded. It required 670 delegates to secure this. About 1000 stood up. But Lewis said there were only 667, or 3 less than necessary. At this a storm of indignation broke out. It lasted called a recess of the session, or from 3 till 5 o'clock. The delegates worked and stormed and protested. They marched and sang and whispered. The whole floor of the convention was a sea of indignation, provoked by Lewis and his gang held the elevated platforms. It was agreed to call the roll in order for the rest of the day, but the machine, not to be outdone, inserted a lot of business in the minutes that was supposed to have been transacted while the turmoil was conducted; a significant manifestation of the seething revolt against the autocracy and corruption of the Lewis administration.

The Steam Roller

Another manifestation of reaction was the stand taken by Davis as a leader regarding the Ku Klux Klan. Although the reactionary Port- land convention of the A. F. of L. had flatly con- demned the Ku Klux Klan, Davis and his officials lent it aid and support. The constitution of the U. M. W. A. provides that no one can be a member of that organization who belongs to the Ku Klux Klan. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body. Davis and his friends ignored this and continued to give support to this body.
and work now with redoubled energy to make the May 30th convention a great representative gathering of working men and farmers.

The leaders of the C. P. P. A. will never lead a real movement unless the Labor Party.

They will not take a single step in that direction, unless they are driven to it by the organized pressure of the rank and file. Those who talk about abandoning the May 30th convention in favor of the July Conference of the C. P. P. A. on the grounds that this will facilitate the forming of a bigger party there, are simply proposing to eliminate from the field the one mighty factor which might compel the July Conference to take decisive action. The real movement for a Farmers-Labor Party comes from below, from the rank and file. At the May 30th Conference this rank and file movement will be united into a compact national body, ready for a national fight.

If all the forces standing for a class party of workers and exploited farmers will throw their strength into the May 30th convention the body thus formed can carry on against the C. P. P. A. with the alinement: either we join forces with us for a farmer-labor ticket or we will go along.

A successful convention on May 30th at St. Paul is a certain guarantee that a Farmer-Labor Party will be in the field for the 1924 election, either by its independent action or by its pressure on the July Conference. The failure of the May 30th Convention, or its postponement or abandonment would open the door wide for a colossal betrayal of the whole movement by the double-crossing agrarian barons who control the Cleveland Conference. The action of the C. P. P. A. at the St. Louis Convention is not an argument against the May 30th convention but a new argument for it.

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friehren the Klaasen and by smashing their enemies the "red," the administration committee proposed that the ban be lifted from the Klan and that a general clause be introduced forbidding membership in organizations hostile to the American principles of government. If adopted, the latter clause could then be used against the Workers' Party and all other revolutionary bodies. Immediately the committee reported, the progressives fired into its recommendations. And they did so effectively that the report was overwhelmingly defeated and the constitution left to stand as before. It was such a clear cut victory for the Progressive Miners that not even Lewis, with all his autocratic methods, could rob them of it.

Wages, Hours, Agreements

The report of the scale committee brought out the weakness of the Miners' Union and the utter bankruptcy of the ruling bureaucracy. In his report, President Lewis himself indicated the seriousness of the situation when he said: "Notwithstanding the fact that early figures of 1923 production reveal the fact that some $45,000,000 tons of bituminous coal were produced, it is safe to say that the industry worked on an average of not more than 150 days. This is a startling situation and indicates that the bituminous industry has invested, man power, development, equipment, and an adequate car supply for approximately 160 days. Such a situation is unheard of from every moral and economic standpoint and constitutes a crying need for adjustment."

What Lewis might have added is that about half of bituminous production comes from non-union mines, which rules the bargaining power of the U. M. W. A.

To offset this critical situation, Lewis' scale committee proposed nothing but a policy of necessity. This amounted to forcing the miners to work three shifts of iron and zinc trade, and the miners to work hours and hours to the committee with instructions to get the best agreement possible on the basis of no reduction in wages. Moreover, the union must be left to have the contract in the Central Competitive District, which determines conditions in all union fields, runs four years instead of one. This was a clear admission of weakness; an effort to secure by long-term agreement what the union too weak to take by yearly struggles. The Progressives tried to amend the report to include a specific demand for the six-hour day, but their amendments were ruled out of order. The report was finally adopted in the face of heavy opposition, and the U. M. W. A. took another step backward.

HOWAT BETRAYED AGAIN

All through the convention, as the resentment against the administration became more openly expressed and better organized, it grew more and more manifest that the supreme struggle between the forces of progress and reaction would come over the case of Alexander Howat. Lewis has said, and others have repeated, that in this matter he would be confronted with a hostile majority so huge that he could not possibly ignore it and continue the convention. Nor did he. Instead the club judges were blankly turned away, blackjacks which his supporters were said to have purchased at local stores when the fight was hot.

All he could do was to clear up all other business and, postponing the Howat case to the very last, adjourn the convention in the face of the turmoil that was bound to ensue upon the announcement of a decision against him. So he made a stand and fought to the end, fencing off all efforts to bring up Howat's case, and completing all other matters.

Finally, when absolutely everything else had been disposed of, the grievance committee reported on the two major matters in hand, the cases of Thomas Myerson and Alexander Howat. Myerson's case was railroaded quickly by referring it back to the International Executive Board for final decision. Howat's case was moved to the Howat's. It was handled almost as stupidly. The grievance committee simply reported that the matter had been taken care of in previous conventions so it was not properly before this one. A roar of indignation went up at this cold-blooded assassination of Howat. Denying Howat the floor, Lewis put the report to a vote. It was lost overwhelmingly, but Lewis declared it adopted. He ignored all demands for a roll call, and in the midst of pandemonium declared the convention adjourned. Thus was added another disgraceful chapter to this famous case, the most shameful in the history of the world's labor movement.

To Impeach Lewis

But the Progressives were not caught napping. They had figured out exactly what Lewis would do and were fully prepared for it. During the day they had issued a circular to the delegates warning them not to be stampeded but to keep their seats until Howat had secured a fair count. And as soon as Lewis adjourned the convention, they called it to order again. The matter that the delegates were still in the hall. Howat addressed them. The assembled body of delegates, who, according to the registration taken, totaled 1,187, or a substantial majority of the convention, ignored his demand for reinstatement.

They then adopted a resolution demanding the impeachment of Lewis for violating the constitution on several specific points, both by the constitution and by his refusal to give Howat a fair trial according to the laws of the union. A resolution was also adopted demanding the immediate abolition of the mines, the six-hour day, the five day week, immediate unemployment relief from the coal operators, and a delegation to Congress to demand passage of the measure to accomplish the end.

To impeach Lewis will require the calling of a special convention. Five districts are entitled to call one. The aim of the Progressives is to get five such districts to demand a convention. Thus the Howat case takes a new and still more important turn. It will finally be the undoing of Lewis. All that is necessary is to register the mass and militant sentiment for Howat. This must eventually happen. Howat will prove to be the Nemesis of Lewis and Lewisianism.

Significance of the Situation

One of the most important lessons to be drawn from this historic convention is that in the Miners' Union, as in all unions in the American labor movement, the task of leading the progressive forces devolves entirely upon the revolutionary organizations, the Trade Union Educational League and the Progressive Miners' International Committee. Outside of these organized left-wingers there is absolutely nothing else that has anything whatever of a progressive character to offer. The issue was when the U. M. W. A. was prac-

fically a Socialist union, most of its prominent officials being at the same time active members of the Socialist Party. But now the S. P. is as dead as a door nail in the Miners' Union. Not a trace of it as an organization appears to be seen at the Indianapolis convention. And practically all of its old-time militants have either sold out to the corrupt machine or have quit the organization in disgust. Thus an unparalleled opportunity for progressive leadership is opening to the movement. It has no competition whatever in this respect.

Although much has already been done to consolidate the rebellious rank and file miners under the leadership of the left-wing, still the surface has hardly been scratched. Against the convention the revolt was lumbering and blind. On the larger political issues, the revolutionaries lacked the control to swing behind them the masses of delegates. Likewise upon the finer parliamentary maneuvers their efforts were not enough to make the club judges yield. It was only on the big burning trade issues, when the fight was plain and simple, that they were able to wield even a fraction of their power. In the two years that will elapse before the next convention this condition must be changed. The revolutionary militants must secure such definite leadership of the masses of miners that they will be able to carry through the sustained and disciplined fight, both in the convention and elsewhere, necessary to defeat the Lewis machine. This can be done and it will be done. The revolt against Lewisianism is at hand. All that is necessary is to push it hard and do it. The left-wing must be fought promptly and effectively, and the Miners' Union will be menaced with destruction.