

Springfield and Indianapolis

By BEN GITLOW

ON March 10 there took place two conventions of the United Mine Workers of America. One was held in Indianapolis, the other in Springfield, Illinois. The Indianapolis convention was a John L. Lewis convention ruled from beginning to end by President John L. Lewis. The Springfield convention was called to oust Lewis, to adopt a new constitution for the United Mine Workers of America and to declare itself the legitimate United Mine Workers of America. The Springfield convention was dominated by the Fishwick-Farrington machine of the Illinois district, by John H. Walker, president of the Illinois Federation of Labor and to a lesser extent by progressives of the type of Hapgood and Brophy. The Socialists present like Adolph Germer and Oscar Ameringer were tied up completely with the Fishwick-Farrington machine.

There were present at Springfield about 450 delegates from the following mining territories: Ohio, Kansas, Kentucky, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Oklahoma, Missouri, Wyoming, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Alabama, Tennessee and Illinois. The Springfield convention, because it included the bulk of the Illinois and Kansas districts, represented the majority of bituminous miners in the United Mine Workers of America. The shortcoming of the Springfield convention, the lack of delegates from the Anthracite coal districts was the strength of the John L. Lewis Indianapolis convention. The collapsing edifice of John L. Lewis was propped up by the anthracite organizations.

As a result of these two conventions, held simultaneously, each one claiming to be legal, each one defying the other, there looms up a war in the UMW of A. It will have its reverberations in the A. F. of L. It will cause some reactions in the Socialist Party. It puts to the test the Communists as leaders of the left wing rank and file forces in the existing unions.

At the Springfield convention there was present a considerable rank and file delegation of distinct left wing tendencies. The fight against the seating of Frank Farrington, former president of the Illinois district, a corrupt reactionary official who left the union to go into the employ of the Peabody Coal Company for the "small" pay of \$25,000 a year,

brought this out. The vote to seat Farrington passed by 225 to 145.

The outstanding feature of the Springfield convention was its rank and file character tho the rank and file was decisively defeated by the Fishwick-Farrington-Walker-Socialist Party outfit. The *New York Sun* in its editorial of March 12, 1930 on the convention notes this fact as follows:

"More significant than any action taken by the insurgents at Springfield was the spirit of resentment and suspicion which animated that assemblage. . . . The delegates seemed so fearful they might be destroying the power of Lewis in order to raise another dictatorship in its stead that they were unwilling to grant any right of appointment to officers of their convention."

"... When Harry Fishwick of the Illinois District took it upon himself to call the convention to order, there were angry protests from the floor by those who wanted to know what right he had to call anybody to order."

"... Coming from bituminous coal fields in eleven states the 500 who assembled at Springfield were doggedly determined this should be a rank and file convention."

The Springfield convention, while it followed on the heels of the bitter war between the reactionary Lewis machine and the reactionary Illinois district machine of Farrington-Fishwick, cannot be explained by the simple analysis that it marked a stage in the fight between two corrupt reactionary trade union machines. This cannot explain the rank and file character of the convention and the masses of bituminous miners represented. The Springfield convention indicates a growing discontent in the ranks of the bituminous miners belonging to the UMW. The basis for this rank and file revolt lies in the intolerable economic conditions that prevail in the industry and in the role of the corrupt reactionary Lewis machine which has repeatedly betrayed the miners and continually serves as a most servile tool of the coal operators.

The Springfield convention marked a leftward development in the UMW. This leftward development, this growing revolt of the rank and file is today being utilized by a set of reactionary officials,

the Fishwicks and Farringtons, for their own purposes. The Hapgoods and the Brophys and the Howats, middle vacillating elements, represent the progressives which today go along with the movement but do not lead it. Such a movement needs the leadership it once had in the *Save the Miners Union* campaign. Such left wing leadership would consolidate the rank and file and would sweep aside the Fishwicks and Farringtons.

The Springfield Convention indicates a growing discontent in the ranks of the American Federation of Labor as well. The fight in the miners union is bound to be carried into the American Federation of Labor. John H. Walker, President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor, was elected secretary-treasurer of the new organization. This places the matter squarely before the Executive Council of the A. F. of L.

President Green in the initial stages has thrown his lot with the Lewis outfit. He spoke at the Indianapolis convention and turned down the invitation to address the Springfield convention. His speech, however, did not please Lewis who had one of his lieutenants try to force Green commit himself publicly against Walker and in favor of Lewis. In his speech Green uttered not one word of support for the person, John L. Lewis, as such. Lewis is forcing the hand of the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. by bringing Walker to trial before his International Executive Board in order to expel him from the union. An expelled member cannot be President of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. Lewis will demand of the Executive Council that this rule of the A. F. of L. be enforced.

If the new organization will not be recognized then there is the possibility that it will follow the course that was taken by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. This will make possible the creation of a new trade union center of the miners, railroad brotherhoods and the Amalgamated.

There are evidences that such a move is contemplated. If it materializes it will have far reaching effects in the labor movement. The Socialist Party bureaucrats are in two camps today. Some are lined up with the progressives, others are lined up with the Fishwick-

Farrington machine, as for example, Adolph Germer who defeated Powers Hapgood for the vice-presidency and Oscar Ameringer, who has always been a faithful servant of Fishwick and Farrington. Others support Matthew Woll, like the Socialist trade union bureaucrats in the needle trades. In the Amalgamated, Hillman is fighting this wing of the Socialist Party which in that organization is being led by Beckerman. Beckerman hopes to oust Hillman at the next convention of the Amalgamated.

The Hillman officialdom in the Amalgamated is supporting the Springfield organization. The future is therefore full of many important possibilities as a result of the Springfield convention.

But where is the left wing leadership in this movement? It is lacking. It has missed a wonderful opportunity to smash the reactionary forces and to consolidate the rank and file in a mighty movement. The National Miners Union pursued a sectarian policy which isolated it completely from these discontented and revolting miners. Its policy was to stay away from the convention, to ignore it. No attempt was made to organize a left wing to give it leadership and to take the leadership of the rank and file at Springfield. It followed the policy laid down for it by the National Board of the Trade Union Unity League which expressed itself in a number of declarations as follows (February 22, 1930, in *Labor Unity*):

"This is the latest scheme of those notorious tools of the coal operators to confuse the miners and to hamper the growth of the National Miners Union."

Springfield could have been used very effectively to lay the basis for the actual building of the National Miners Union, but to look upon it only as a scheme of the coal operators made this impossible.

Then again in the March 8 issue of *Labor Unity*:

"The main job of the miners is to smash the Fishwick-Farrington convention scheduled for March 10 in Springfield, Illinois."

"This convention is organized by and for the coal operators."

"It is a stool pigeon convention."

Imagine winning the rank and file at Springfield with a declaration that they are part of a stool pigeon convention!

Then the same declaration goes on further:

"The racketeer methods of Lewis were too raw for the coal industry—a basic industry of capitalism."

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TWO MINERS CONVENTIONS

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Imagine a left wing organization defending the morals of the coal barons against Lewis. The methods of Lewis were too raw for this marauding, robbing band of exploiters who control the coal industry. It is to laugh to think that they want a little more moral methods used by trade union officials and that is why they are organizing a "better and cleaner" union. To what heights of moral eloquence the present TUUL leaders go in their leftist pronouncements!

The failure at Springfield to defeat Fishwick and Farrington was due to the lack of left wing leadership, due to the fact that the "official" Communists have given up work in the existing unions.

The Fishwick-Farrington victory over the rank and file may soon result in the whole dissipation of this rank and file revolt. The election of Howat as president is being used to hide this fact. But such a dissipation will *not* mean a victory for the left wing, because with proper policies the left wing could have organized this revolt against reactionaries and misleaders and become the dominant factor in the coal industry.

The imperative need in the trade union movement is to revive activity on the part of the left wing in the existing unions—in other words to build the left wing.