Coal Miners: Here and in Russia

By WILL HERBERG.

THE whole host of the international counter-revolution, beginning with the Czarist grand dukes and going all the way down to the yellow socialists and labor burocrats, are always ready to let the whole world know that the chief motive for their eagerness to evrthrow the Workers Government of Russia and to establish a "democratic" or a monarhist government in its place (take your choice!) is their anxiety for the fate of the workers and farmers of Russia. The Russian toilers, they lament, are ground down under of the heel of a little "clique" of professional Communists who fatten on their labor. The Russian workers are veritable slaves and ill treated slaves at that; their trade unions are nothing but shams; these organizations have no "independence," no power, no influence in bettering the lives of the toilers; in a word, the Russian workers are in a far worst position than the workers living under West European and American capitalism. Such is the burden of the song of the reactionaries and counter-revolutionists of every stripe.

Anybody that takes the trouble to compare even superficially the conditions of life, work, and development of the Russian wrokers and of the American workers—and the American workers are certainly the "best off" of any under capitalism today—will readily see the utter falsehood, hypocrisy, and poisonous malice of such charges. And no one is more ready to launch these venomous attacks against the Workers Republic than that gang of corrupt and yellow burocrats of the United Mine Workers Union with John Lewis at their head. Yet John L. Lewis and his henchmen might find something interesting and instructive in a brief comparison of the present situation of the miners in "Russia under the Communist Czars" and in "God's own country." Or at least if John Lewis can learn nothing, certainly the workers whom he and his like are continually stabbing in the back ought to find something significant in such an investigation. Let us see some of the things that might prove to be of interest.

Coal Miners in America.

In America the miners in the anthracite region are to-day engaged in a bitter struggle with the mining companies in order to maintain condition in which it will at least be possible for them to exist. They are fighting against a brutal reduction in wages; they are fighting for an increase in wages to enable them at least to go on living and slaving for the masters, to enable them to get the coarse food they must have and to keep their miserable shelters over the heads of their families. That is what they are fighting for. Now what are they up against in the struggle?

The Miners' Bitter Struggle.

The miners find themselves in the first place up against the gigantic anthracite industrial combine, one of the most centralized and most powerful capitalist combines in the country. The right hand of this mighty bosses' union is the government, federal and to a still greater extent the local government. You cannot tell any hard coal miner that the government is the "government of the people." He knows better. He sees the local authorities drawing pay from the coal barons in the most barefaced manner. He sees them breaking up meetings of the strikers and putting almost insurmountable hindrances in their way. He sees the local, the state, and the national authorities combined, some actively and some passively, in maintaining a veritable reign of terror in the strike area and crushing every move of the striking miners that the coal lords consider dangerous. The striking worker, and above all the anthracite miner to-day, knows how the government stands and whose government it is. He knows well enough that the government is the right hand of the coal operators.

The Yellow Union Burocracy.

The government is the right hand; and the left hand of the powerful anthracite owners combine is the official burocracy of the Miners Union. This the miners are now quickly learning. The official machine of the United Mine Workers of America, the union to which the miners pay dues and of which they have the right to expect protection to the very limit of its power and resources, has thruout the strike and before played the role of the most loyal defenders of the coal barons. The betrayal of these burocrats is reaching unheard of limits. We have the spectacle of Rinaldo Capellini, head of the organization of the striking miners, playing the role of a police agent and assisting the government powers—the bosses' right hand—in jailing the most militant fighters against the coal barons. But "assisting" doesn't describe it. Capellini has gone to the extent of thanking the government authorities for breaking up meetings of strikers and for jailing young striking miners. He is certain, he assures the government agents of the bosses who in many cases make the mining companies office their headquarters, that the state and local authorities are impartial (!!) in this conflict between the miners and the operators. Every miner knows what this means. It means that Capellini and his fellow burocrats are working hand in hand with the government and with the bosses. Are these yellow labor "leaders" anything else than the agents of the capitalist class among the workers, than the labor lieutenants of the bourgeoisie? Against this alliance of mine owners, labor fakers, and the power of the state government, with the federal government always ready to step in when "needed" the American miners must struggle for their most elementary rights, for a few more crusts of bread, for a few hours less of toil. This is the picture presented by America.

Coal Miners in Soviet Russia.

Let us now examine the other picture. Let us take a look at the miners in the Soviet Union, who according to Lewis, Capellini and his like, are now laboring under "an autocracy worse than that of the Czar's." Do the miners in Russia have to engage in a life and death battle against wage cuts? Hardly! On the contrary, altho there is a crisis in the mining industry as in every other country in the world, the Russian miners have just received a 25% increase in wages. And when we consider this we must remember another thing. The industries of Russia have, in the last ten years, gone thru a most trying period marked by wars, counter-revolution, blockade, sabotage, famine; all the resources of world imperialism were concentrated with the one purpose of destroying the economic basis of the rule of the toilers in Russia. World imperialism failed; but Russian industry was hard hit. And among the hardest hit of the Russian industries was the coal industry. Yet in spite of all this, the Russian miners have just received a substantial increase in wages. Was this increase received after a bitter struggle with the bosses or, perhaps, as a "gift" from the masters? No! This increase, as all other changes in the conditions of work of the Russian toilers, was determined upon jointly by the Russian unions and the Workers Government whose policy it is and has always been to raise wages and living conditions of the toilers in full proportion to the reconstruction development and of Russian industry. Quite a difference in the situation of the workers of "democratic" America and those of "undemocratic" Russia! But that is not all. For the rest we will let the Chicago Examiner speak which certainly has no excessive love for Communism. In commenting editorially it says:

. . . "Another thing that keeps the Russian miners quiet, or tends to do so, is the friendly attitude of the government in time of trouble. While a miner is in the hospital, where he is treated free, he receives 40 per cent of his wages, if he is a bachelor, and 75 per cent if he is married. He also, on acount of more severe condition, works six hours instead of the usual eight. There is a month's vacation with pay. That sort of sympathy has its effect."

This doesn't seem very much like America, does it?

Young Workers in Soviet Russia.

Or consider the position of the young workers. The young striking miners, brought up from earliest childhood to a life of the most grinding toil, ought to be interested in this, even if Mr. Lewis isn't. In Russia, in the land of the "ferocious" Bolsheviks who make Mr. Green president of the A. F. of L. and Mr. Lewis "view with alarm," child labor such as we known. Instead the workers' children have it in this country is a thing unare given the greatest advantage in matters of education, recreation, and development that the low available resources of the country permit. "Everything of the best for the child!" That this is the slogan of Russia under the Soviets even moderately honest bourgeois writers admit. Or take the young workers. For the young workers there are special regulations in the matter of wage, hours, working conditions, sanitation, etc. The five day week and the six hour day for young workers is a reality in the Soviet Union, while under special circumstances the hours are even less. In the dangerous industries young workers do not work at all. Moreover, the factories, the trade unions, and the workers government offers the greatest possibilities for the industrial and social education of the young workers, the widest facilities for the political enlightenment and the general development of the youth. The system of rabfacs ("workers faculties") designed to make the working youth the basis for the new generation of the educated, the "work schools," the factory schools, the special youth representatives and youth committees of the trade unions, the young workers clubs, the Young Leninists (children's organizations), and the Young Communist League are proof of this. In Russia the youth is not politically discriminated against. In Russia there are not, as in America, any discriminatory bars against the youth in the trade unions that result in turning the masses of young workers into unwilling scab reserves for the bosses to fight the older workers with. In Russia the youth is freely admitted into the unions and every union committee has a special youth representative on it. In Russia finally, the young worker is not faced with the "unescapable fate" of spending the rest of his years slaving for some boss who lives in idleness and luxury on his labor only to be thrown on the scrap heap when his usefulness to his master is at an end. In Russia, all toilers, young and old alike, are engaged, shoulder to shoulder, in the gigantic an inspiring task of laying the foundation of a new society where the insane brutalities of capitalism will be totally unknown and where the exploitation and oppression of man by man will have no place. These are the rough outlines of the picture presented by Russia.

Capitalist America or Soviet Russia.

Well, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Green, Mr. Capellini, which do you choose? Of course, you choose the former. You naturally would! You are a part of the whole capitalist system and you cannot deny the basis of your own existence. You are the agent of the bosses in the workers' organizations and you fight tooth and nail for the interests of the bosses. That is why you befoul the achievements of the Russian Workers Republic.

But you, young miners, and young workers generally, which prospect do you choose? The system that the mine owners, the capitalist government and Mr. Lewis' burocratic machine are fighting to perpetuate suits them a hundred percent. **But does it suit YOU?** Or does the system the revolutionary workers have set up in Russia suit you better? WHAT DO YOU SAY??

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