

states: NOW is the time!

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**“W**HY has the National Miners Union completely failed to organize and lead determined struggles of the coal miners against the capitalist offensive?” This question is

**Why the N.M.U.  
Has Failed**

asked by Tom Johnson, N.M.U. organizer, in a revealing article in the August issue of the *Communist*.

“The basic factor in the situation is the isolation of the union from the masses of the miners,” declares Mr. Johnson. “Our official unions lead a life of their own entirely separate and apart from the life of the masses. They are so engrossed in their own internal problems and the general campaigns and problems of the revolutionary movement

that they have no time to deal with the problems facing the miners with whom they are in contact."

Condemning the manner in which local meetings are conducted because of the general attitude "We are all close comrades here, there are no 'outsiders,' therefore why worry about such things as meetings that start on time with a regular order of business and are run with discipline according to parliamentary rules," Johnson points out that the miners do want a business-like organization, and declares that "we are only setting up barriers between us and the miners when we use this jargon of 'Agit-prop,' 'Org. Secretary'." If the miners are used to and want a president, vice-president and secretary-treasurer in their union, "why the devil not have them rather than Org. Secretaries, etc.," asks the writer.

Another weakness of the N.M.U., according to Johnson, is bureaucracy. "The present scandalous situation where we have on the National Board and on various District Boards as far as I know them, not one working miner, must be decisively changed." A principal cause of this weakness, thinks the writer, is "the top-heavy apparatus of paid functionaries." With an average of less than 500 members, asserts Johnson, "our union . . . supports in the principal districts . . . a total of 18 full-time functionaries."

These are excellent criticisms. But do they mean anything? Will the N.M.U. now proceed to correct itself? Or will another writer, a few months hence, come out in the *Communist* with the proud announcement that "We have made the same mistakes in Illinois that we made in Harlan."

After all, this business of self-criticism, no matter how good, gets tiresome after awhile. Confession of error is not an uncommon thing, nor is it a sign of very great wisdom. Let the N.M.U. demonstrate that it can profit by its errors, then, and not until then, will those sincerely interested in building a militant miners union in this country give serious consideration to the self-criticisms of such workers as Tom Johnson. However, recent actions of N.M.U. organizers in West Virginia do not lead one to believe that such time has yet come. We are still convinced that the N.M.U. is much more interested in beautiful and "revolutionary" self-criticisms than in building an honest, militant miners' union.

