

TOM MOONEY, HERO OF LABOR, SPEAKS

By JAY LOVESTONE

To meet Mooney, to chat with him, to exchange ideas and experiences with him, to get his attitude towards things as they are and as they should be, I consider the privilege of a revolutionist's lifetime.

My several visits with Tom in the County Jail of San Francisco, my all too few moments with him in the recess periods during his present court hearings for a writ of habeas corpus, I treasure for their inspiration and instruction—landmarks in more than twenty years of activity in the labor movement.

It didn't take more than a moment for me to feel as close to him as if I had known him for many years. It was more than a common cause and identical loyalties which bridged gaps in such lightning fashion. It was the man, the giant of courage and confidence, with black flashing eyes, shining with a vision of labor tomorrow and burning with determination to fight for labor today.

Twenty years of continuous dungeon life have not broken his body or his spirit. The broad shoulders, the big heart, and the alert, keen mind convince you of that in a flash. This may surprise one—and rightly so. But frankly what was to me the most welcome surprise of all was Tom's mind, his intelligence, his keenness and variety of interest, the extent of his keeping up with the kaleidoscopic changes in the American and world labor movements, in the entire complicated international situation.

Labor's Finest

Yes, in some respects I had to change estimates quickly. I found Mooney to be even more than a symbol of what is finest and best in American labor's aspirations and struggles. I thought to myself as I looked at this hard-hitting, straight-shooting, militant leader of labor, real revolutionist, how puny and asinine are some of our present day leaders, who talk so much about heroes of bourgeois struggles in the history of our country but forget the inspiring battles which have given us the figure of a Tom Mooney. I found in Tom a man of real substance as well. He is a veritable dynamo of energy, the guiding mind and hand in his own defense over two decades.

Indeed, it is a tribute to the American working class to have such sons as Tom Mooney and Warren K. Billings! And what irony of fate, what a scathing indictment of that most costly of frauds, American democracy. What an ineradicable black mark against the United States as it is today and as it has been that California—world-famed as "God's own country"—should imprison, should doom to a living death, these two bravest of the brave amongst our many proletarian heroes!

It is my opinion that all American labor should not only take pride but should also rejoice in having fighters like Tom in its ranks. I marvelled particularly at the fact that 20 years citizenship in a California dungeon, did not embitter either Tom or Warren. Rather their determination has been steeled and their courage has become utterly unbreakable. These fighters do not know what moaning means. They have not become egocentric. Despite two decades in prison, Tom and Warren have not looked inwardly, have not turned their attention as such, have always directed their attention and interests to the outside world, to the class struggle being waged outside, to the class conflict for participation in which they have been kept inside.

In talking with Tom, one is immediately impressed with his fine

WITH EUGENE V. DEBS ON THE "RED SPECIAL"



During the famous 1908 presidential campaign Tom and John Mooney, seated in front, to the right of the drum, were called the

"Jimmy Higginsses" of the Red Special. Included in this picture are Eugene V. Debs, right below the "r" of Presidential, with a

baby in his arms, and Big Bill Haywood, under the first "i" in Socialist.

sense of humor and modesty. Most vividly impressed upon my mind is the following remark of Tom, as I was asking him a question.

"Jay, what finesse I lack in the head, I most certainly make up for in the heart, which is thoroughly proletarian, through and through."

Here are some of the most important questions we discussed to which Tom made replies:

For a United Labor Ticket

Q. Now, Tom, you know of course that our organization, the Communist Party (Opposition) has thought that it would be in the best interests of labor to have the various working class parties, trade unions, and other labor organizations, get together and set up a United Labor ticket with you as the standard bearer. We consider working class unity against capitalist reaction, against the ruling class as a whole operating through the Republican and Democratic Parties, as the burning need of the 1936 presidential campaign. Tell me frankly what do you think of our idea?

A. "I greatly admire your courage in making such a proposal. But on account of factional differences I doubt seriously if it will get the same favorable reception it should get from all quarters, because of these differences. The merits of the proposal will be lost sight of. I fear that the politicians in all of the other political parties will oppose it on general principles. I am not one of their very own. I refuse now as in the past to be made use of by any faction. But I will give my whole-hearted support and endorsement to any fight for such a united front and I will gladly lend my name to such a worthy purpose to promote working class solidarity. It should make me very happy to serve in such an honorable and exalted post. I wish you success in the undertaking. I have long ago urged this means of furthering our case.

"If there is a genuine, whole-hearted desire on the part of all of these groups or even a great majority of them for such action, I shall be only too happy to be of service to the working class for such an honorable capacity. I have never hesitated, and never shall, to give the best there is in me for the cause which has kept me in prison for the past twenty years. However, I shall continue to hold myself aloof from factional ties in the hope of someday being able to be of still greater service to the working class as a possible means of serving as a rallying point for all workingclass groups.

But if there is any considerable unity among the various working class groups for such an action at this time, as I stated before, I am eager anxious, and shall be happy to serve the working class and you may rest assured that it has been my great desire to have this very thing done, not only nationally, but state and locally. In fact, this one issue alone was largely responsible for the suspension of my monthly paper, thirteen years ago. I wrote an editorial myself in San Quentin advocating this very thing to be done in every election as a purely working class weapon of defense.

Need of Political Consciousness

"I hope that your proposition will be accepted by all of the respective working class groups in the same spirit in which you make it and that a genuine, wholesome response meets your proposal.

"Never was there a greater reason for unity than at the present time. There could not possibly be a better issue than the Mooney case to serve as a rallying point. All that you say is true, I have never openly or politically antagonized any faction. I have been very sympathetic towards all groups. I have received the genuine, whole-hearted support of all the different working class organizations, both politically and economically.

Since these remarks were made to me, both the Socialist and Communist Parties have held their conventions and have nominated Thomas and Browder as their respective and competing candidates for President. Since I have had this discussion with Tom, quite a number of labor organizations throughout the country have endorsed the idea of Mooney heading a United Labor ticket as the symbol of working class militancy and unity.

Q. Well, Tom, would I be correct in saying that you are for the labor movement running its political prisoners as candidates for public office?

A. "Yes. This proposal is in line with an age old working class weapon to run persecuted and political prisoners as candidates for public office. I can cite the case of Andre Marty, elected to 218 public offices in the country of France, during the course of four years of incarceration on a twenty years' sentence for mutiny in the French navy on the Black Sea squadron that was ordered to fire upon the city of Odessa after the revolution. Marty organized the fleet against such an outrageous injustice and the entire rebellious

crew was arrested and some twenty of them were convicted."

A Class-Conscious Worker

Here Tom appeared to me fearless, defiant, wrapped in a smile of confidence. I could easily see why the employing class would put such a man on its eternal blacklist, why it would hate and fear him. It was obvious to me that Mooney wasn't the kind of a fellow given to high falutin' oratory. To cheap or slick lawyer talk. He's the kind of a fellow that says what he feels and thinks. As I was looking him over, I could not but think of him as the product of Ludlow, Calumet, Homestead, Danbury, Herrin, Nashua and such other struggles—all rolled into one.

Q. Now, Tom, you know that in some sections of particularly the radical labor movement, there's a general idea that you've been sort of never interested in the political struggles of the workers, that you've had sort of a strictly syndicalist approach to things, that you have been and still are a trade unionist pure and simple with no vision of the class struggle as a whole. What have you got to say about this? What's in this notion?

A. "Yes. I have been and will continue to be a devoted militant trade unionist. But I was also in the Socialist Party for years before I was framed up. I was with Gene Debs on the 'Red Special'. Debs toured the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific and returned, touching every major city of any importance in the United States above the Mason-Dixon line. He spoke in hundreds of smaller communities from five to thirty minutes on that tour of the 'Red Special'. He averaged eight speeches a day from the latter part of August to the second day of November. In every large city, the largest hall was required to pack in the audience. And there were always overflow meetings held outside and everyone of these meetings was held in large cities in the evening. Admission of at least 25c per person was charged. Reserved seats in some of the larger places were as high as 50c and 75c each. On top of this, collections were taken up—netting hundreds of dollars; and thousands of pieces of literature were sold in these meetings. This was when the standard of the American worker was, from the point of view of the daily wage, about half of what it is at the present time.

"If you look at the photograph of the 'Red Special'—the Socialist Presidential special train and the

crew that accompanied that train in the campaign of 1908 all over the country with Gene Debs as the standard bearer, you will see Tom Mooney as the "Jimmy Higgins" on that train."

"And here you have a photograph of the delegates to the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, taken in September 1910. You will find me there."

Industrial Unionism

Q. I am sure, Tom, that you have been following the recent big events in the American Trade Union movement. I have in mind, for instance, the decision made by the last A.F.L. convention against membership in the National Civic Federation. I'm thinking about the great historical struggle for industrial unionism. As a veteran in the labor movement you must recall rather vividly bitter fights in the labor movement over these very questions years ago. Have you played any part in these struggles?

A. "Let me call your attention to two resolutions that I introduced to International Molder's Union Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in September, 1912. Identical, parallel resolutions were introduced in the recent convention of the A. F. of L. at Atlantic City, N. J., by John Lewis. I have reference to resolutions that forced Matthew Woll out of the Civic Federation and caused John L. Lewis to resign from the Executive Council of the A. F. of L. because of his advocacy of industrial unions as against craft unions. I was a delegate to the International Molders' convention at Milwaukee in 1912."

Mooney has a very vivid memory for labor struggles. He was leader of the left-wing in the San Francisco Central Trades Council for years. In 1911 he was the candidate for sheriff on the Socialist Party ticket in San Francisco.

Q. As a labor leader with many years of experience in the political and trade union movement of the working class, what do you think we fellows outside should place the most emphasis on in our work?

A. "All of our friends in this country and throughout the world should be devoted and dedicated to the idea of actually winning the organized workers to our banner. Ten organized workers are a more effective potent force in the determination of things than a thousand unorganized. One hundred men organized in key positions can be more effective as fighters than a million unorganized."

Q. In this respect, let me fling another one at you Tom. You've heard lots about the United Front, I assume. How do you stand on that?

A. "I tried to make a broad United Front appeal to all working class organizations all through these twenty years in prison. And I hope in some small measure, the sacrifices that I have made, if they can be called so, will count in swinging a balance of power to the creation of a real effort in bringing some sort of understanding and unity among the workingclass groups in this country. I shall dedicate my life to that task. I've explained before the futility of dissipating our energies in attacking one another, instead of uniting on some common ground and fighting for the common general good of the working class.

"I have one concern and one only; the unity of all the working class elements to make a grand fight in defense of their rights and to ultimately establish their complete freedom as workers. I will sacrifice most anything to accomplish that end."

Q. Do you know, Comrade Mooney, that there are all kinds of
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An Interview with Tom Mooney

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reports as to you being a member of one or another or a third political organization of labor? Would I embarrass you, if I asked you to clear this up for me?

A. "I am not a member of any political group. I have been a member and am a member of the International Molders Union continuously for 34 years."

Unity For Freedom !

Q. And what do you think we of the Communist Party (Opposition) should be doing to hasten to a successful conclusion the noble fight you and Warren have been making for your freedom? I am especially anxious to know what's to be done as we approach the twentieth anniversary of your imprisonment as victims of one of the most infamous frame-ups in the notorious, anti-labor history of what is paraded as American democracy.

A. "The Mooney case would certainly be activated if I had about one-half dozen men, scattered all over the United States, putting the same energy and initiative into the fight that you have been putting in. It is mighty fine to know that there are fellows like you on the outside trying to push into action the many elements that can be a force and factor in bringing about our liberation, if they will get into the harness and pull together."

"On the 26th day of July 1936 we will have completed twenty solid years in California's prisons, because of our loyalty, devotion and fidelity to the working class of this country. Would it not be possible for you to do everything humanly possible within your power to use that occasion to signalize attention to this case for the purpose of creating a fitting, worthwhile protest against this monstrous wrong? I urge you not to let this occasion pass without fittingly commemorating the sacrifice that has been in this fight by two militant workers and to seize this as a justification for an inspiring working class protest that cannot help but produce material results for both Billings and myself. Committees should be formed to bring about the necessary twentieth anniversary publicity, to memorialize our unjust imprisonment and protest against our continued incarceration. These Committees should visit the local press and secure every possible publicity, either thru the news or editorial columns of their papers. Meetings should be called and prominent speakers should be asked to express their sentiments on this matter in the most vigorous possible manner."

Q. You know Tom, convinced of your entire innocence one feels in your presence a certain guilt—a guilt of not having done enough to help in your fight which is our fight, a guilt as part of the whole labor movement—which in my opinion has fallen down on the job rather shamefully in so far as you and Billings are concerned. I feel that we have made many mistakes. Tell me, haven't you ever felt—even for a moment—discouraged as a result of these mistakes on our part?

A. "What you say concerning the labor movement's faults in the Mooney-Billings case is too true. No one realizes that more than I do. And no one has labored harder, more consistently and persistently for a score of years to correct that. But in spite of my humble efforts I must confess that I feel in a measure that I have failed to do the things I would like to have done. There are so many things that could have been done

The Story of the Mooney Case

UP TO 1916

Mooney and Billings, both members of A. F. of L. unions, active in strikes as militants in the San Francisco district. Mooney tried and acquitted on charge of having unlawful possession of dynamite. Billings at the age of 19, convicted of carrying explosives on a street car, and sent to prison for two years. Martin Swanson, a Pinkerton detective, active in both cases.

JULY, 1916

Mooney and Billings active in organizing employees of United Railroads. Swanson, employed by United Railroads, shadows Mooney. Swanson attempts to bribe Billings to implicate Mooney in dynamiting electric towers.

JULY 22, 1916

Bomb explodes among spectators of Preparedness Day Parade, killing 10 and wounding 40 persons. Swanson and District Attorney Fickert direct investigation toward Mooney and Billings.

JULY 26-27, 1916

Mooney, Billings, Mrs. Mooney, Israel Weinberg, a taxi driver, and Edward Nolan, president-elect of Machinists' Lodge 68, arrested and charged with the crime.

SEPTEMBER, 1916

Billings tried, found guilty of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to life imprisonment. He appeals.

JANUARY—FEBRUARY, 1917

Mooney tried, convicted of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to hang. Motion for new trial denied. He appeals.

APRIL, 1917

Oxman, star witness, exposed as attempting to secure perjured testimony while Mooney's appeal is before State Supreme Court.

Trial judge requests Attorney-General to have case returned for re-trial. Attorney General consents and so recommends to State Supreme Court.

Nolan released after nine months in jail; never brought to trial.

MAY, 1917

Oxman brought back to San Francisco, tried for attempting to secure perjured testimony, and acquitted after District Attorney Fickert employs attorney for his defense. Also white-washed by Grand Jury which Fickert controls.

SUMMER, 1917

World-wide labor agitation with Mooney facing death culminates in demonstration before U. S. Embassy in Russia. President Wilson then forced to appoint Mediation Commission to investigate.

JULY, 1917

Mrs. Mooney tried and acquitted.

SEPTEMBER, 1917

Appellate Court affirms Billings' conviction. His appeal for a hearing by the Supreme Court denied.

OCTOBER, 1917

Weinberg tried and acquitted.

OCTOBER 30, 1917

Mooney asks Governor Stephens for pardon.

JANUARY, 1918

Wilson's Mediation Commission reports Mooney did not have a fair trial. The Commission says: "When Oxman was discredited, the verdict against Mooney was discredited." The President urges the governor to grant Mooney a new trial.

MARCH 1, 1918

California Supreme Court affirms Mooney's conviction, ruling it cannot review perjury revealed after the trial. It holds that the governor alone can remedy the alleged injustice.

SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1918

J. B. Densmore, U. S. Director General of Employment, secretly investigate case, later exposing by a dictograph record frame-ups engineered by District Attorney Fickert.

NOVEMBER, 1918

Wilson sends two telegrams to the governor urging him to act in Mooney case. Governor commutes Mooney's sentence to life imprisonment.

FEBRUARY 7, 1921

John McDonald the second chief witness against Mooney confesses perjury.

1921-26

Mooney's attorneys and friends work quietly to amass evidence in support of pardon plea.

if some one was inclined to want to take the initiative and go after things in a dynamic way. From this I don't want you to get the idea that I am discouraged, for that I have never been. I shall keep the banner of the working class flying until the end, regardless of whether it is in here or out there with you on the firing line."

No Surrender!

It was now close to bed time—that is to Tom's having to be locked in, in his living tomb. As we shook hands and bade each other good-bye, I felt inscribed indelibly in every thought and feeling of mine the thrill of having met and learned to know one of the finest fighters and noblest figures in the ranks of the international labor movement. I left Tom with my determination strengthened manifold to do my all to help mobilize labor's ranks to fight for the speediest, complete freedom of Mooney and Billings. Were it not for the immeasurable loyalty and

devotion of these two militant union men to their class, to the proletariat, they would never have been sent to prison. They never would have been framed up. And today, they could go out of jail at a moment's notice, if only they were prepared to accept a parole. However, nothing has been further and nothing is further from the intentions and plans of Tom and Warren than this. In their twenty years of imprisonment, in their incessant struggle for their complete vindication, Mooney and Billings have fought not for themselves as individuals but for their class as a class—against all frame-ups and terror of the employing class.

As more lights were being dimmed, and I was on my way out, I turned to grasp warmly and firmly the hands of Tom and Warren and to say: So long comrades, hope to see you in New York soon. We need you, we want you and we will have you free!