

George Papcun is Convicted

By Max Shachtman



George Papcun

COAL, and the thick smoke of the steel mills are not the only black things in Pennsylvania. And no one, not even with the reckless enthusiasm of a local booster, has had the temerity ever to speak about it as "the fair state of Pennsylvania." For its politics make coal seem rosy by comparison; its police and constabulary take the color of their black uniforms as a symbol; and although Pennsylvania does not manufacture much brass, the brow of its justice is brazen and the smoke of Homestead and Bethlehem pales before the blackness of its rule.

The record of the rule of the coal and steel barons of Pennsylvania is not an enjoyable one for the workers within its boundaries. Underpaid, living in squalid misery, their children forced into the slave industries at an early age, their struggles for better conditions, yes, for the elementary things of life, have been mercilessly suppressed. The smallest local fight for wages or hours or union has had to face either the extra-legal armies of

gunmen and thugs or the very legal army of state constabulary, the Pennsylvania Cossacks. The rulers of Pennsylvania have tried to crush the militant spirit of the workers there with clubs and billies, or shoot it to pieces with Colts, Winchesters and Gatlings.

So it takes courage and determination and faith in the workers to be a fighter for labor in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania is famous for another thing: its strikes. Conditions of life, especially in the mining towns, and the bestial suppression drives the workers to frequent and spontaneous revolts. In many sections the union, the strong right arm of the workers, has been smashed by the continued onslaughts of the bosses and their tools. And when the miners strike they fight for union.

George Papcun's name is not known throughout the world. But among a big section of the miners of Pennsylvania he is known and liked very much. Papcun is very young and the best of his young years have been spent in the mines and the steel mills. At

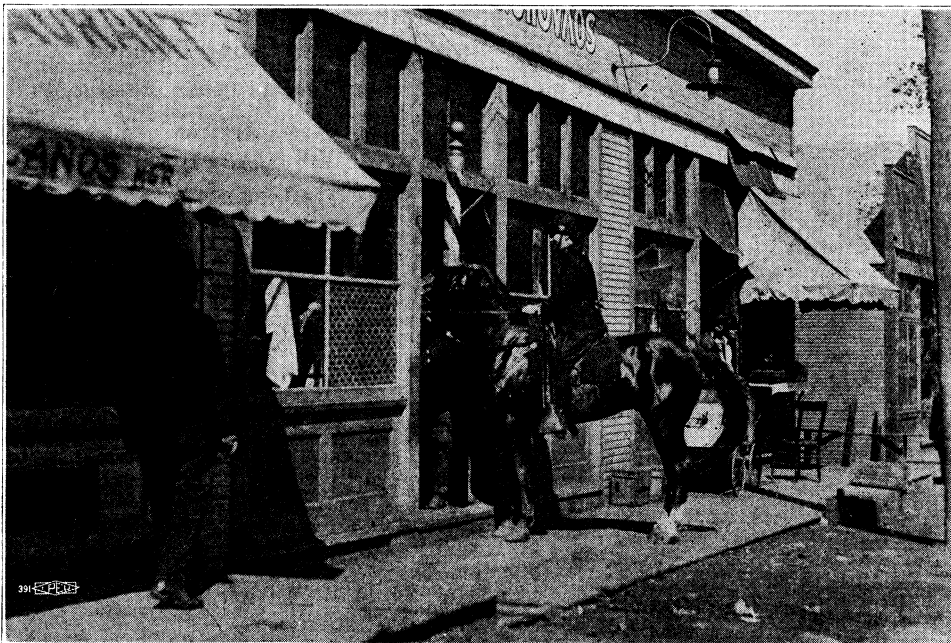
an age when many youngsters are learning the intricacies of advanced algebra, Papcun was made a strike organizer during the great miners' walk-out in 1922. Papcun has guts and a healthy hatred for the boss and his class. And the latter lose no love over him.

Last year there was one of the numerous spontaneous miners' strikes in Republic, Pennsylvania. Papcun went there from Pittsburgh and organized the fight, led the picket line, imparted his enthusiasm and militant spirit to the men.

A number of months later, Papcun left for Pittsburgh where he is an organizer for the Young Workers League, on the anniversary of the death of Lenin and spoke again in Republic. He used the occasion to draw lessons from the recent strike. He exhorted the audience of miners to join the ranks of the United Mine Workers of America. He told them to ignore the color of a worker's skin in the interests of the common struggle of labor against its exploiter.

Enough! In Pennsylvania, where, in pursuance of the doctrine of democracy votes for senatorial candidates are purchased like cattle—at so much per head—the speech of Papcun was sufficient basis for arrest and trial for violation of the Pennsylvania Anti-Sedition Act.

If the people of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania did not have a good case against Papcun, they at least had a number of willing witnesses. The corporal of the constabulary who arrested Papcun tried to bully him into answering a list of questions in writing. Papcun wisely declined. Not stumped, the ingenious



Pennsylvania Cossacks in Action in a Steel Town.

corporal filled in the answers himself, and submitted them as evidence which was listened to gravely by the jury, which was also not unwilling.

The corporal's place on the stand is taken by three stool-pigeons who are, in the lexicon of honest workers, four degrees lower than a scab. The first of this gentry shocked the jury by announcing dramatically that Papcun had told the miners that the workers needed a new government. The case might have ended then and there so far as the jury was concerned. Spy Number Two sounded a unique and rather contradictory note by informing all who cared to listen that Papcun was against the union. Spy Number Three, still smarting under the memory of his exposure by Papcun in the Miners' Union, expressed his moral indignation at the alleged advice given by Papcun to the miners on how to deal with obstreperous deputy sheriffs.

The preverse blackness of Papcun's character so thoroly settled by the prosecution, the testimony of the Bolshevism expert in E Minor, Harry J. Lennon of Pittsburgh, was superfluous. The judge even ruled out of evidence such old and reliable standbys as the Communist Manifesto, the Theses and Statutes of the Communist International, the A B C of Communism, and the advocacy of ruin, riot and rapine contained in a pamphlet on Amalgamation.

The jury convicted George Papcun of guilt on six of the counts in the orig-



A Typical Cossack Group.

inal indictment; and International Labor Defense, which was in charge of the case, is now taking an appeal to a higher court.

To put it mildly, the institution and disbursement of capitalist class justice is not an unmixed blessing for either side. Each blow received in a strike from the club of a Pennsylvania Cossack results in a bitter kind of education, it is true, but an education nevertheless. Each strike brutally suppressed is often the equal of a whole course in working class science. Each militant worker put into prison is an inspiration to other workers to renew the struggle for freedom with greater vigor. The Pennsylvania bourbons are sowing dragon's teeth when they try to bury a fighter for labor in their filthy prisons.

It is a foregone conclusion that they will not break the spirit of Papcun and of the Papcuns by other name, try though they will. Not only will the young and old workers draw the lines more firmly around him and hold him for the struggle in the interests of the class from which he comes, but the

black reaction by its own greed and bestiality will create the basis for more fighters.

The reactionaries know that the Papcuns are dangerous and in their stupid way they think that the danger can be isolated in a prison cell. And the Papcuns are dangerous—to the blood and iron rule of the bloated magnates who own Pennsylvania. Papcun was arrested and sentenced

because he saw it as his elementary duty to his class to help them in their battles for life and freedom. His crime was similar to the crime of the scores that are in prison today: he organized workers. And what was good reason for the bosses to arrest Papcun is even better reason for the workers to defend him.

BIRTH DATES OF CLASS WAR PRISONERS FOR SEPTEMBER.

G. J. Terrill—No. 38132, San Quentin, Cal.

Frank Godlasky—Box 911, Sioux Falls, S. Dak.

A. Bratland—No. 38363, San Quentin, Cal.

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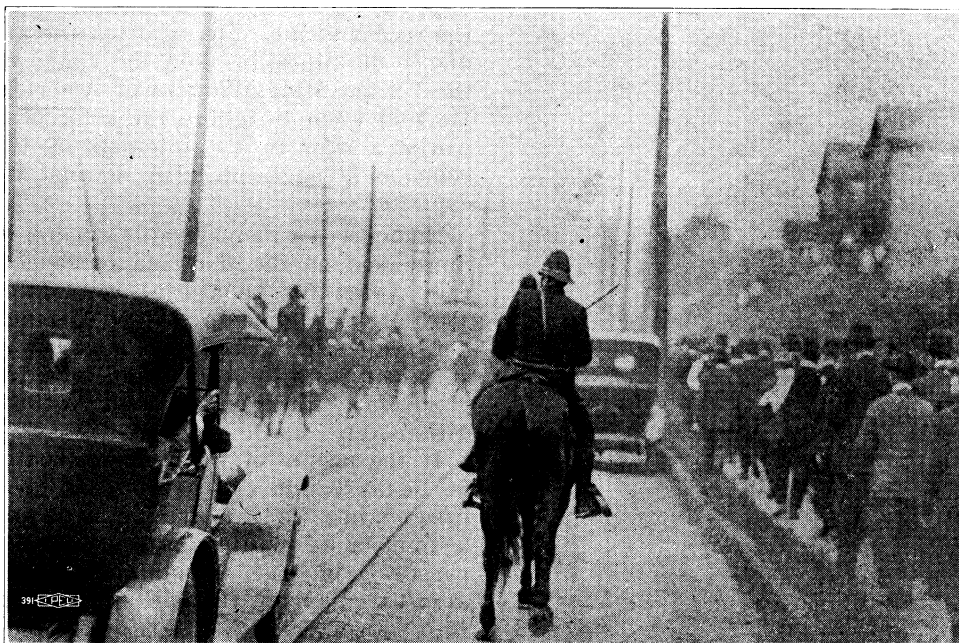
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Cossacks Breaking Up a Meeting of Workers.