Lessons of the Miners Strike

The Battle of the Mines has reached a temporary lull. John L. Lewis has again done a yeoman's job for the capitalists whose interests he serves by sending the miners back to work empty-handed. But the fight of the miners must go on, because the capitalist system will not permit it to cease.

Since the signing of the Krug-Lewis agreement in June, the real values of the mines have decreased, rather than increased. Despite the nominal 34 hour week, actual hours worked in August were only 42% per week. The government did not do anything to introduce safety provisions. The "Royalty" fund has acted as a speed-up instrument, rather than as a benefit to the miners.

The future perspective for the miner is even more bleak. Coal used to supply 75% of the energy in the U. S. today it only supplies 40%. Introduction of labor-saving machinery has been progressively offset by the insistence that the manual labor required to mine a ton of coal tell by 25%. Since 1923 the introduction of loading, cleaning and cutting machines has cut down operating costs and has more than offset the cost of machinery.

Security of the coal miner is thus exceedingly slim. He remembers all too well the $14.47 wage in 1935 and the $25.88 average weekly wage in 1939. He knows that he must protect himself against the barren days ahead.

WAGES AND PRICES

The capitalist press brazened like donkeys about the "high wages" of the miners, but actually the hourly wages of the miner from 1935 to 1939 has gone down by 40%; in the same period the price of coal of the mine doubled.

Faced with these conditions Lewis was forced to take some action. His declaration that the contract with the government is ended brought on a strike which in a month or two would have paralyzed the American economy, and seriously endangered the world. The capitalist press and government officials were in the process of riding him off the ledge of a greater collapse.

Bamber-Cyrus Eaton, director of the C. O. railroad, and spokesmen of the mining interests (those playing the principal role in the Krug-Lewis settlement), called upon the operators to make an immediate settlement. According to Time magazine, "he was...vehemently sure that if the strike was not broken the nation would be, thrown into the lap of Communism." Harry Moses of the Big Steel trust (which owns a large portion of the mines) also was willing to talk turkey, and it is rumored that the Northern coal operators and Lewis had already reached an agreement calling for 48 hour's pay for the 40 hour week.

This would have represented about half of the Lewis' original demand for a $5.00 an hour boost.

Only the Southern operators balked at this agreement. Behind them stood the power of the capitalist state. Truman and his cohorts wanted to make an example of the coal miners, in preparation for more bitter battles to come. The U. S. mining industry has been under $3 per hour wage rate. Other large unions will follow suit. Truman decided to crack labor's skull. The Goldsborough Intention, prohibiting workmen from striking, helped them to keep up the "ever rising cost of living and save a few dollars (if that is possible) for the rainy days ahead, they must gain a wage increase now. The miners around this locality have to travel from twenty to forty miles round trip to work every day. This is due to some mines nearby which have been worked out and the shortage of housing near the mines.

We have just gone thru an election campaign in which capitalist politicians waxed eloquent about such false issues as the need for "free enterprise" and less government interference. However, the capitalist class and its Charley McCarthy's (Republican and Democratic Parties) are now bumbling the middle class studying and devising new methods for paralyzing labor's resistance to the attack on its living standards. A threat which was used as a threat to the railroad strike last summer will be served up again with new modifications by the next Congress. The New Case Bill will in effect be the Krug-Lewis Bill. The planned procedure will be as follows: (1) Negotiation between the union and the boss (2) Negotiations failing, a mediation board will be set up (especially for coal, steel, auto, etc.) During mediation a "cooling off" period (run around) would be required (3) If mediation fails, arbitration boards would be set up with decision-making powers and this time killing procedures and boards.

This rigmarole would mean that workers would have to wait 90 days before taking strike action and would be considered "legal". If the workers would refuse to wait for the bosses' courts and boards to make decisions, and go out on strike, the government would declare the strike "illegal" and would openly and brazenly bust the strike by the use of state and national troops.

"MONOPOLY" LAWS

Realizing the tremendous power of industry-wide strikes and collective bargaining, the Congress will attempt to find a formula for introducing bargaining on a local rather than industry-wide basis. It may be that anti-monopoly and collective bargaining laws in basic industries. This precedent has already been established in the coal strike where the state of Virginia tried to outlaw the UMW as a trust that "sells membership."

Not even the closed shop for which labor has fought tenaciously for the last 50 years will escape attack. Realizing the importance of this issue Congress may proceed cautiously. Meanwhile 3 states have passed legislation banning the closed shop (Nebraska, Arizona, and South Dakota). Considering that in 1945 about 40% of all eligible industrial workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements and 45% of them were working in closed or union shops it (anti-shop movement) is a blow which is being prepared against the strategic positions which labor has won.

John L. Lewis' popularity has waned in the same way as the strikes. He has a few admirers among the younger miners who haven't learned of the role he plays as the "agent of capitalism within the ranks of workers."

THE FIGHTING WORKER

Organ Revolutionary Workers League, U. S.

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STRIKE ACTION CAN BEAT CONGRESS

REPORT FROM THE MINE AREA

Harrin, Ill., Dec. 15, 1946—Here in the coal fields of Southern Illinois one sees and sees the mighty drama that is being played by one of the most militant sections of the American working class, the miners.

The capitalist voice of press and radio is constantly spewing forth the picture of an overpaid worker who is living on easy street and doesn't need a wage increase.

Well, to burst this beautiful dream bubble, all a person has to do is to look around a mining town and see what conditions are really like. It must be remembered that Harrin has infinitely better conditions than the coal fields of Kentucky and West Virginia. The majority of homes here have been loaned slip-board shack affairs and rent from $25.00 to $40.00 per month. The housing shortage is so acute in this city as it is in large cities.

Also, the price of food is much higher here than in Chicago. Single miners spend from $3.00 to $4.00 per day for food in the town's restaurant. "Workmen's lunch" of small steak and potatoes cost $1.15.

DYING INDUSTRY

Today, due to modern machinery, loaders, cutters, one-third the number of miners produce more coal than was mined in the early twenties. These workers are in a dying industry with the possibility of all and other forms of fuels replacing coal almost entirely.

The miners have learned through years of militant struggles, that the only time for wage increases is when you're still working and on the job. When a depression or business slump occurs, the miners are one of the first of basic industrial workers to be laid off, or to suffer a shortening of the work week. They realize therefore that if they are to keep up with the ever rising cost of living and save a few dollars (if that is possible) for the rainy days ahead, they must gain a wage increase now.

The miners around this locality have to travel from twenty to forty miles round trip to work every day. This is due to some mines nearby which have been worked out and the shortage of housing near the mines.

No miners consulted.

Faced with such a situation Lewis pulled the chestnuts out of the fire for his capitalist friends. He is just as opposed to Communism as are Eaton and Moses. He called off the (Continued on Page 2)
LETTER from WARD’S
DEAR EDITOR:

It is several years now since the vicious bonus system has been done away with at the Mailine and Addressing Department here at Montgomery Ward. However, speedup, which is the object of every bonus system, still exists here. The company maintains a disguised bonus system which is every bit as bad as the previous one. Only it is a little more camouflaged and therefore a little more difficult to expose.

Under the prevailing system number ratings are given each girl. These rates are based on many factors but we are given in order: (1) amount of production of stencils, (2) years of service; (3) accuracy. It goes without saying that the first factor overshadows all the rest.

I have been trying to determine the method by which the company uses in computing the amount of work done by the girls it is impossible to reach the standards which they set as a prerequisite for a wage increase. For instance, a stencil is used on 3 labels, and another is used on 2 labels; the counting device or the addressing machine will count 1 (per 3) and 1 (per 2). Therefore, the same old machine who used to make stencils and coal (and he paid only for the coal) we are doing a lot of work for which we aren’t being paid.

On the question of wages—the terrific increases in the cost of living have already wiped out the meager increases which were given last August (which were long overdue when they were granted).

Judging by the comparatively slow Christmas and New Years “rush” in business the Company may begin laying off help soon. Already there is talk of laying off the least efficient employees. In my opinion this is the strategic moment for carrying on a militant fight against Sewall Avery for a 6 hour day and a 25% increase over existing wages, and against the disguised speed-up system. Unfortunately our Union, Locals 20 & 21, is doing nothing to consolidate our ranks. We don’t know anything of what’s going on.

—A.

MINER’S STRIKE
(Continued from Page 1)

strike without consulting a single coal miner. He rallied it off with a single gallop. It may be that behind the scenes Lewis has a “decoy” cooking: „which will prove his forecast: But such deals do not solve the problems of the miner—worker, anymore than the May agreement solve anything basic.

Continuation of the coal strike could have occurred only under a class struggle and revolutionary leadership. It was a simple question of fighting against the capitalist government or of yielding to it. The answer to Truman and Goldsborough lay in:

1.—Spreading the strike, instead of permitting hundreds of thousands in steel, railroads, etc., to be locked out.

2.—Organizing workers defense groups and councils of elected delegates from factories, to defend Labor’s right to strike.

The policy of Lewis and of Murrow and Gompers, which was the very foundation of all opposition to the above. These fine gentlemen spouted sweet words about “fighting”, but confined their stenographs to pure legal shenanigans in the court rooms. They refused to spread the strike—the only means that would have smashed the foul injunction of Judge Goldsborough. They refused to organize united action of any sort, except in court.

The fear of these labor skitters is perhaps best illustrated in Chicago where the President of the Chicago Federation of Labor refused to permit a vote to be taken to commend William Green for his support of the miners, on the grounds that “he might put us in contempt of court”.

LEWIS MISLEADERSHIP

The miners’ strike demanded that there be no turning backward, that the struggle with the capitalist class be joined and spread. Lewis and the rest of the labor leaders permitted the government to knock down one labor union at a time—very much like the German trade unionists permitted their government to do in 1930-32.

It must be obvious even to a child that the miners can solve nothing with the blustering and phoniness leadership of Lewis. In the coming days of depression his service to capitalism will be even greater than at present. The coal miners need a militant leadership of the Alec Hewitt, George Vorayze, National Miners Union type.

Without the organization of progressive groups in every mining town in the country the coal miners will be led to more and greater defeats.

The miners’ problems can not be solved, in the last analysis, by mere economic gains, because this is a dying industry in a decaying system. The mining industry is being replaced by electric, oil, and other substitutes. Ghost towns in the mining country can only be eliminated by the destruction of the capitalist system itself.

R.W.L. PAMPHLETS

WORKERS REVOLUTION OR WARS FOREVER
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Chicago Teachers Face Uphill Fight

Local 1, the Chicago section of the American Federation of Teachers, has finally bestirred itself from its long lethargy to ask for a 40% boost in wages for the shamefully underpaid schoolteachers.

The new-found "militancy" of Arthur Wels and his Local 1 leadership is purely malevolent, however. The increase for lowest paid newly assigned teachers, unionized for only 21%. The 40% request is only for teachers with ten years seniority. Substitute teachers, who are kept out of permanent assignments by the politically corrupt school board, aren’t even being diplified by discussion, even though there are 2,000 such unfortunates in the city.

To show its subservience to the auditing Kelly machine, Local 1 is asking for a "higher pegged levy"—an increase in the property tax of homeowners. Anyone with an iota of sense knows that there isn’t nearly enough of an increase in such a tax in an election year (Mayoral elections take place in April). The Mayor is thus given a convenient "out". After all how can anyone ask such a Kelly philistine to tax poor people that own own homes?

Funds are Available

Local 1 could, of course, tell Mayor Kelly to go scotch for additional funds. He can cut out the terrific waste and perching that goes on in city government, where many capitalist politicians are holding down three jobs (at a total expenditure sometimes of 10 minutes per day). He can also cut down expenses for red squads, for Captain Barnes and his anti-labor squad, and for any other such squads.

The fact that Local 1 doesn’t point these things out indicates that it doesn’t want to embarrass the good Mayor. The results of such a policy, however, is a very meager raise for badly paid teachers.

The namy-pamny leadership of Local 1 is a disgrace to the Labor movement. Although it claims 8,000 members, Local 1 has no real education campaign, and no real participation of the rank and file. It doesn’t call any membership meetings; its business is taken care of by a house of delegates instead of by almost 50 teachers. The functioning of this system is very poor, and the rank and file is pathetically unorganized.

In addition Local 1 pays allegiance to the no-strike policy of the International Union. It confines itself to mere gathering of statistics for the strike committee and for behind the scenes maneuvers.

Since the defeat of Kermit Eby’s progressive group pressure against the Local 1 leadership has been increased, of the rank and file, particularly the young teachers, must however, soon break through and be instrumental in organizing new progressive forces within Local 1.

C O N G R E S S

(Continued from Page 1)

The Case Bill in addition to all its other unscrupulous qualities will attempt to make unscrupulous liability for “breach of contract”. This would enable labor-busting employers to drag unions into court and exhaust them financially. This is a return to the precedent established in the Dambury Hatters Case in which the hatters union was sued for $250,000. The union treasury was turned over to the bosses and the homes of 140 union members were sold to pay the balance.

STUDY FOREIGN LAWS

Congressional Committees are busily at work studying legislation of other countries. It would be no exaggeration to assume that by now the capitalist politicians are experts on the anti-labor legislation which was perfected by Ger-

man, Italian and Japanese imperialism.

The next Congress will reach a new high in anti-labor legislation. The motor achievements established by the labor movement are now being challenged as never before. The labor movement will do well to remember that its gains can only be preserved down to it on a silver plate.

Labor has no rights. At least none which aren’t challenged every day. Labor will only preserve its gains by using the same methods it used to win them.

Labor must never give up its independent fight against the bosses at the place where it earns its livelihood. The 8 hour day, the 40 hour week, (with the security of a minimum wage), improved working conditions and pay, free education, are merely by-products of labor’s unceasing fight against the boss class. Thus an attack on labor of the used and strike weapons is a blow against the source from which all labor’s gains spring. The answer to the labor-busting must be an even more vigorous series of strikes and demonstrations to the point of production, supplemented by powerful defense squads and coordinated thru workers councils of delegates from every factory unit.
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WHY WE MUST OVERTHROW CAPITALISM

The present period shows that even the most militant union and the most militant worker can gain no security under capitalism. Despite all the promises of peace and plenty during the war, the average worker got home wages in manufacturing industries were cut by 4.5% from August 1943 to August 1946, because of shortened hours and reclassification of workers downward—this despite on average hourly raise of 14c. The cut was much deeper, when you consider taxes that we now pay, which we didn’t prior to the war, and the enormous raise in the cost of living—about 55% in food costs alone in the last five months.

Whichever the worker gains by his fighting he is forced to give back thru higher prices, state taxes, unemployment and other means. The capitalist state sees to it that we remain constantly the underdogs. Business this year will earn after taxes, more than ever in its history—20% more than last year. Labor, however, is having its living standards cut deeply.

Everyone of importance in the capitalist world is freely predicting a depression. The old capitalist cycle of crises, depression, hunger, and war is already under way. The unemployed mainstream will soon join the ranks. The government meanwhile keeps us as underdogs because it can use armed police and armed forces to kill revolutionaries or to enslave us.

We can’t solve our problems under this system. We can only solve it by overthrowing the system. We must fight for economic demands at the point of production, but such strikes—to be victorious in this period—will have to be converted into political strikes against the capitalist government. We will have to defend ourselves with our own weapons of defense, workers defense guards. We will have to organize our workers unity, as the capitalists are united—into workers councils, with true workers democracy. We will have to counter capitalist terror with our own forcefull defense.

We will have to destroy every vestige of the capitalist state and its armed forces before we can even hope of achieving security. We will have to establish production for use under a worker’s council government, rather than the present brutal production for profit under a robber’s government. And above all we will have to build our own Marxian Party to give guidance and leadership to all these efforts.

Only Revolution can end capitalist insecurity and its way.

Join the Revolutionary Workers League and help build a Marxian Party.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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DECEMBER
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ONLY REVOLUTION CAN BRING PEACE
LABOR BOARD THROTTLES UNION

Chicago, December 15, 1946. — A popular myth circulated by the liberals is that the Wagner Act and its National Labor Relations Board are the major weapons in the labor struggle. Other labor which has helped organize millions of workers.

The stupidity of this assertion, however, is adequately illustrated here in Chicago where the State Street Council has been able to use the LABOR Board's anti-labor drive to protect the big department stores.

- In December 1945, 2,000 organized department store workers left the CIO and joined the AFL Building Service Union. A burner uncovered in Chicago International had stymied the CIO International for close to five years. Wage rates at the Fair and Boston Stores — organized in 1940 — remained at a relatively low level because Goldblatt's, Sears, Carson's, Mandel's, and most of Field's were unionized.

The new Building Service Local put four organizers to work, mimeographed dozens of thousands of leaflets, and actually had hundreds of members joining its ranks — particularly from Mandel's and Goldblatt's.

"SECRET WEAPON"

The campaign looked like an assured success. When Mandel's fired 225 or 30 workers for Union activity, the Board held that it couldn't do anything about it because "there wasn't enough proof." Some of those discharged had been working for five and ten years. One worker, for his job was eliminated altogether; the next day another Union worker (discharged by Goldblatt's for Union activity) went to Mandel's and was given the job that was "eliminated."

The terror by Colonial Mandel had its effect. At least 80% of the Mandel store is in favor of Unionism, but few of them sign up because they know they can get no protection from the Labor Board unless they date to date and 221 has refused to use the strike weapon to whittle Colonial Mandel down to Union site.

At Goldblatt's the Labor Board, anti-Union weapon has been used in another manner. Six months ago Local 221 filed for an election for the State Street store of Goldblatt's. It presented far more than the required number of cards. The Company, however, delayed matters for over two months by refusing to show the U. S. government its payroll, so that the Union's membership cards could be compared with it.

After all this stalling, the Labor Board suddenly discovered that another Union—the AFL Retail Clerks—was in the picture. The Clerks, who have only an insignificant minority, naturally refused to agree to an election, as did Goldblatt's. This time filed a complaint case (a charge that Goldblatt's had discriminated against it by firing one of its members) and with concurrence of the Labor Board has thus kept the Goldblatt's case out of election. The Board has ruled that no election can be held until after the "C" case is disposed of—which will probably be at least another 6 or 8 months.

DIVISION OF LABOR

Thus the Labor Board acts as a perfect cover for the State Street capitalists. It offers absolutely no protection whatsoever for workers who are fired for "Union activity" and on the other hand, its 'machinery' can be used to stop workers from gaining collective bargaining rights for a long period. The Company is prohibited by law from bargaining with either Union when two Unions are involved in any organization campaign. It is possible for the Company to fire "out" by claiming that it would like to bargain with a Union, but the law prohibits it.

The answer on State Street, as elsewhere, of course, is to disregard the machinery of the "co-ordinated strike"—machinery is always rigged against the workingman (no matter how sweet it is made to smell for the liberals). The only effective weapon is SHUT GOLDBLATT'S DOORS. Local 221 wouldn't find that hard, since the Goldblatt's warehouse is organized into an AFL Teamster Union, which would no doubt support the strike; and the "truck-drivers of GB" are in the Teamsters. Shutting off its line of deliveries would paralyze the GB empire of ten large stores and force this so-called "liberal" management to its knees.

U. S. "DEMOCRACY" REACHES JAPAN

The government's direct role of strike-breaking in the struggle with the miners is not just a tactic being used here in America. The policy of "crushing the workers" is the policy used by the ruling class throughout the world. In occupied Japan strikes that "jeopardized occupation" have been forbidden by a directive of MacArthur.

In reporting the speech of Welfare Minister, Yoshishige Kuroda, before the House of Peers, the New York Times on November 29th said: "Mr. Kuroda, answering questions from the floor, said the government would actively oppose strikes that had political motives. While the government will continue to support what the Minister described as 'a healthy union movement' even strikes with economic aims will be opposed if they conflict with the public interest. Mr. Kuroda declared."

It is significant that this speech was made on the eve of the threatened walk-out of electrical workers in Japan. The strike would cut off all power supplies between noon and 3 a.m.

Ever since the American occupation troops moved into Japan, the country has been sporadically. At first, there have come to realize that they have no more, if not less, economic security under American occupation than they previously had. The lesson is being learned by the working class throughout the world but has not one aim —to hold the workers in subjection.

NEW STRIKE FORM

To counteract their impoverished conditions, the Japanese workers are attacking their rulers by the use of their strike weapon. They have conducted what they call "production control" strikes, in which the workers run the plant but withhold the profits from the company until it gives in to the workers' demands.

But after the strike is settled, the profits are turned back to the company. If the Japanese workers can efficiently run these plants, why must they turn them back to their "legal" owners? Wouldn't it be simpler to seize the plants and run them in the interest of the country? In that way the Japanese workers could use the profits of the business to purchase food that is so badly needed. It is estimated that the country can only support 60,000,000 by 1955 and it has been calculated that the country can only support 80,000,000. Why must, 20 million people be starved to death when there is no reason why the men who are capable of running the country on the basis of production for use —which could support the larger population.

STRIKE VICTORY AT SIVYER STEEL

That a Union contract is merely as strong as the membership, was recently illustrated in the Chicago Sivyer Steel Strike led by the millworkers of Local 599, UWAW. The personnel director at Sivyer Steel in Chicago, Charles Reynolds is a former ward of the penitentiary at Brownsville Texas. He is accused of shooting three employees of Local 599 who has chosen a Negro as the Local President. He and other top management officials took the attitude that they could interpret the Union contract to suit themselves.

The Company decided on its own book that it didn't have to discuss grievances concerning piece-work wages and time-studies. It refused to post notices for Job openings on the bulletin board. Instead of offering, it pays jobs to those with highest seniority it advertised in various foreign language papers for new workers. The Company refused to pay "downing": the first piece of new Company work lost: because his machine was broken down or there was some other company—caused "stoppage of his work."

"ILLEGAL STRIKE"

Sivyer men got a little tired of this kind of treatment and pounded the picket line. The Company denounced it as an "illegal" strike, and the International refused to authorize it. But the railroad brotherhoods, the AFL Teamsters, and the 400 workers at the plant, all refused to cross the picket line. That Local 599 has three and a half weeks of this treatment, the Sivyer Steel Company finally sent its President Martin Flandes, in from Milwaukee and he conceded to the strikers.

Local 599 is in the unfortunate position that internal UWAW politics has separated it from its brothers and sisters in Local 575 Milwaukee, who also work for Sivyer. The Milwaukee Local supported Thomas in the last UWAW convention. Since then, however, there has been a change in Local 599's leadership, but regional director Murray has asked the MARL representative Bishop, have done all they could to keep the two locals from functioning together. Last week the Milwaukee Local was on strike for two weeks and received no support from the Chicago workers, "due to the internal UWAW fight.

The new Chicago Local leadership, however, is taking all measures to remedy the situation, so that by united action in both cities a better wage pattern for all Sivyer workers can be gained.

Such cooperation will obviously be an important step toward the establishment of a national foundry wage scale and contract, and toward the elimination of piece-work and other abuses in the foundry industry.

The strike itself illustrated that despite a no-strike clause in the contract and despite an unfriendly attitude by the International leadership, the Company is powerless when the men are united and have a FIGHTING PROGRAM. The Company had to publicly announce that while its contract provides that it can fire workers for breaching the contract. It was powerless to do so in this case.

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