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## The Progressive Miners' Conference

By Wm. Z. Foster

**I**N the development of the left wing in the American trade union movement two of the most important steps taken by the militants in the respective industries were the holding of the big national conferences in the railroad and clothing industries. But by far the most significant and promising move yet made was the conference of the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America in Pittsburgh, Pa., June 2-3. This great gathering, made up of approximately 200 delegates from 12 districts of the U. M. W. A., including far off Alberta and Nova Scotia, Canada, launched the left-wing movement definitely in the heart of the most powerful and strategic union in this country. Time will show that it was an epoch-making meeting, the effects of which will soon be apparent not only in the U. M. W. A. but the entire American labor movement.

### The Progressives Organize

The United Mine Workers offers a splendid opportunity for militant activity. It is ripe for real progress. It is one union that has largely escaped the ravages of dual unionism. This is chiefly because it is industrial in form. The revolutionary elements have remained within its ranks and have carried on work there to a considerable extent. Consequently the membership, which is at least 60% foreign born, is quite generally infused with a progressive if not revolutionary spirit, more so than almost any other union. But if dual unionism did not actually pull the militants out of the U. M. W. A. it did prevent them from organizing effectively to fight the reactionaries. Because the revolutionary movement until recently knew nothing of organization among the conservative unions, the struggle for progress in the U. M. W. A. has been a desultory and unsystematic guerrilla warfare, mostly upon a local or district basis and usually upon minor issues. Confronted with such a blind and disjointed opposition, it has been easy for the reactionaries, by playing off one section against the other, to maintain themselves in power. The U. M. W. A., although possessing a genuinely progressive membership, is in the anomalous position, because the

revolutionists are not organized, of being dominated by a typically reactionary officialdom.

It was to remedy this condition by giving the United Mine Workers policies and leadership in harmony with the wishes and interests of its radical rank and file that the militants began to organize upon an international scale, for Canada is comprised in the movement. The first important step was a small conference in Pittsburgh in February, at which the Progressive International Committee was formed upon a provisional basis. This Committee drafted a program covering the main features of the left-wing movement and sent it broadcast throughout the whole organization. The recent conference was the result of the Committee's call for the militants to come together and to organize upon a definite basis.

The conference was opened in the Labor Lyceum by Chairman Guiler of the International Committee. Brother McKay, delegate from the Nova Scotia Miners, was elected to act as Chairman of the conference. Then Secretary Myerscough outlined the history of the Committee and dwelt especially upon his recent trip with Alexander Howat through the mining districts, relating how they were both barred from entering into Canada. After this the writer was called upon to say a few words. I pointed out the weakness of the militants at the present time and the only reason why the reactionaries could dominate such a progressive body as the miners was the fact that the revolutionary elements have lacked both a program and an effective organization. I stated that above all the conference must accomplish these two things: (1) work out a clear-cut program which would unite all the progressive causes in the various districts into one uniform movement, and (2) lay plans for the setting up of an organization capable of putting that program into effect, such an organization involving the formation of committees in all the districts, sub-districts, and local unions in the entire jurisdiction of the U. M. W. of A.

### The Speech of Howat

Alexander Howat, who was next called upon to speak, made a splendid address. He heartily

endorsed every plank of the progressive platform and stressed the necessity for compact and thorough organization of the militant elements everywhere. He declared the formation of the Labor Party to be a prime essential to future progress of the working class. He briefly outlined the Kansas situation, showing that he and Dorchy were expelled from the union and, although 21 months have passed, they had not yet had any charge preferred against them or been given a chance to defend themselves. They were brutally and illegally expelled while they were in jail fighting against the notorious Industrial Court Law. Howat declared that he was being victimized because he refused to become a cog in the corrupt administration and to do Lewis' bidding. He reasserted his determination to fight his way back into the union and said that sentiment for his reinstatement is already overwhelming among the rank and file. He declared that the Progressive movement now being launched was of historic importance and that it would result eventually in cleaning out the crooks and reactionaries not only of the Miners' Union but also of the whole American Labor movement. The conference adopted a strong resolution demanding Howat's and Dorchy's reinstatement.

#### Manley and Dorchy Speak

In the two days' session the conference did a tremendous amount of work. There were resolutions on many subjects dealing with nearly every phase of the militant cause. The Progressive Miners' Program was endorsed as a whole and separate resolutions were adopted touching upon most of its planks, such as nationalization of the coal mines, the formation of the Labor Party, the Howat case, industrial unionism through amalgamation, etc. A special resolution was adopted condemning the 12-hour day in the steel industry and another condemning the Ward Baking Trust for its war against the Bakers' Union. The criminal indifference of the union officials, as well as the Allegheny County officials, in the case of Fannie Sellins, the woman U. M. W. A. organizer who was murdered by steel trust gunmen in 1919, was sharply condemned. Although four years had elapsed practically nothing had been done to bring the murderers to justice. By a coincidence the long-delayed and much-sabotaged trial of the gunmen was scheduled to begin in Pittsburgh on the day following the adjournment of the conference. It, of course, resulted in an acquittal. The revolutionary miners of Nova Scotia were supported in their fight against persecution because of their stand in favor of the Red International of Labor Unions. A demand was formulated for a general international wage scale.

On the morning of the second day Organizer Manley arrived with a delegation from the anthracite fields. He spoke on the situation in these districts, detailing the fight being made by Capellini for President of District No. 1. Capellini, Manley declared, is a militant rank and filer. He was largely instrumental in building the organization from 12,000 to 70,000 members. The reactionary officials tried to get rid of him by ousting him from office and then offering him a job in another district. He refused to go and began his fight to defeat the present President Brennan. The Progressives are supporting him and if a fair count of the votes can be had he will be overwhelmingly elected. Manley stated that a district Progressive committee had been launched in District No. 1. He also outlined the recent difficulty over the reorganization of the "town" and "language" locals into colliery locals where, had it not been for the efforts of the militants, a split would have developed that might have cost the U. M. W. A. 40,000 members and ruined the organization in the anthracite districts.

After Manley, August Dorchy, expelled vice-President of the Kansas Miners, addressed the conference. He was elected as a delegate by a meeting of 1,700 Kansas miners, held despite the menaces of the carpet-bagger Lewis officials of the District. Dorchy supported the whole Progressive program and declared that the time has now come when the honest elements in the union must take charge. He said that in his experience it was hard to tell the difference between the union officials and the mine operators, either in their makeup or point of view. He declared that often the employers show more sympathy for the miners' cause than do the latter's own officials.

#### Conference Against Dual Unionism

The conference sharply condemned dual unionism. Where two years ago at such a meeting the sentiment would have been almost unanimous for a split, such a change of opinion has now taken place that at this conference not a single voice was raised for secession. The conference repudiated "all dual union attempts, whether these are brought about by the Lewis administration striving to drive Progressive elements out of the union, or whether they come from mistaken zealots who believe that the way to strengthen the labor movement is by destroying the old trade unions and starting the whole movement over again on a new basis." In this connection Delegate McDonald of Alberta explained how the Miners' Union in District No. 18 had been practically wrecked and thrown entirely into the hands of the reactionaries by the O. B. U. 1919 secession movement, and how, following the tactics of the T. U. E. L., the militants have returned

again and are now in a controlling position. Delegate from District No. 5 (Pittsburgh) told of the desperate efforts of the reactionaries to force them into a dual movement and how they had successfully defeated them.

In a ringing resolution the Lewis administration was condemned for betraying the striking miners of Somerset and Fayette Counties, Pennsylvania. In the great strike of last year these men, hitherto unorganized and holding the key to the whole situation, struck in splendid fashion. This won the national strike, in so far as it was won. But in the settlements Lewis left these workers entirely out of calculation, great numbers of them still being on strike after 14 months of struggle. One means used to betray them was to sign up operators for only those of their mines that were in recognized union territory, leaving them to operate their others "open shop." This crime was committed against Somerset and Fayette strikers alike and ruined their strike. The conference commended President Brophy of District No. 2 for refusing to be a party to such treachery, the settlement leaving out the Somerset miners in his District having been brought about over his protest by International President Lewis. The conference also demanded that the Fayette miners be given a charter and recognized as District No. 4. The miners of District No. 5 were commended for the splendid fight they made on behalf of the Fayette men.

#### Lewis' Dis-organizers Repudiated

The conference struck sharply at one of the worst abuses in the Miners' Union, the question of appointed organizers. The International President has the power to appoint organizers and he exercises it liberally. But instead of sending these men to such unorganized territory as Alabama, West Virginia, Colorado, Pennsylvania, etc., where they might be of some real service, he sends them into the various organized districts to play his politics against his enemies. In Illinois, a great district that is 100% organized, he has 50 of such "organizers" solely to fight his arch-enemy, Frank Farrington, President of District No. 12. In District No. 2 he has nine more. They make no effort whatever to help with the Somerset strike, but confine themselves solely to fighting President Brophy in the organized sections of the district. Delegates Hapgood, Foster, and others from District No. 2 outlined the shameful situation. The conference condemned Lewis for these methods and demanded that he either put his disruptive organizers under the control of Brophy or pull them out of the district altogether. As a final remedy for this evil, which is eating at the vitals of the whole organization, the conference proposed that

the appointing of organizers be stopped and that they be made elective by the rank and file.

The miners showed that they were in accord with the general militant movement by adopting a series of resolutions covering many of its phases. Recognition of Soviet Russia was heartily endorsed and demands were made upon the International Union to give this movement its full support. The work of the Friends of Soviet Russia and the Russian-American Industrial Corporation were also endorsed as tending to strengthen the first Workers' Republic. Mother Bloor spoke for the Labor Defense Council. This body was endorsed and a resolution was adopted pledging support to Tom Mooney, Warren K. Billings, Jacob Dolla, Sacco and Vanzetti, Kaplan, Schmidt, and McNamara, the I. W. W. prisoners, and political prisoners generally. The conference condemned the recent raid in which Fred. Merrick and many others were arrested in Pittsburgh and charged with sedition, it being recognized that these men were victimized for their work on behalf of the striking miners.

One of the great problems confronting the conference was to organize the Progressive forces throughout the union, and this was gone into fundamentally. The Illinois delegation submitted a proposition calling for the organization of Progressive committees in all the districts, sub-districts, and local unions. This was adopted, many districts reporting that they had already formed their committees. The International Committee was reconstructed to consist of a Chairman, vice-Chairman, and Secretary-Treasurer to be located in District No. 5 (Pittsburgh), and one national committeeman in each district of the whole organization. Bros. Guiler, Ray and Myerscough were elected to fill the executive positions. Provisions were made to put an organizer in the field as soon as possible to set up the committees in the various localities. In addition an international bulletin will be published in six languages as soon as possible and a wide circulation secured for it. The whole movement will be financed by voluntary contributions of individuals and organizations. Pledges of liberal support were given by the assembled delegates.

#### The Struggle Ahead

The first conference of the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America was a tremendous success. Everybody present recognized that. Now the big job is to carry the message of progress to the broad rank and file. Although this can and will be done successfully the reactionaries will not give up without a bitter fight. Already they are tightening up their lines. President Lewis himself has condemned the movement, saying it was without

the pale of the organization. The hand-picked Lewis officials now at the head of the Kansas miners has expelled several who took part in the Progressive conference that elected Dorchy a delegate to the Pittsburgh gathering. The Ohio District officials have denounced the movement in bitterest terms, calling it an attempt of the Communists to wreck the U. M. W. A. But by far the most unscrupulous thing that has been done was the contemptible frame-up against Alexander Howat. Everybody expected that something would be done to stop his great campaign for reinstatement, and guesses were that anything might be done to him, from murder to kidnapping.

Now the expected frame-up has come to pass and our old friend Aleck has been charged with committing an unnameable statutory offense.

But all such contemptible methods will come to naught. Frame-ups, expulsions, and terrorism cannot stop the progress of the great movement set afoot by the Pittsburgh conference. The progressive rank and file of the miners are sick to death of the corruption and treachery of their reactionary leaders. They are going to clean the organization from top to bottom. The first conference of the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America began a new era in the Miners' Union.

## Electrical Workers, Unite!

By Jack Burton

**T**HERE are well over 1,000,000 workers employed in connection with the electrical industry in the United States. In the employ of the commercial and private telegraph companies, according to the *Commercial Telegraphers Journal*, November 1921, there are 350,000. More than 500,000 workers are engaged in operating the telephone and telegraph corporations. There are 250,000 employed in the electrical factories, principally the Bell and General Electric Companies, not included in the previous figures. There are hundreds of thousands engaged in maintenance work in industrial establishments; and in addition are the electrical workers in the building industry, theatrical industry, and mining and steel industries. All sections of this great body of workers, scattered over many industries, are vitally interested in the problems affecting electrical workers as a whole.

The bringing together of the now organized electrical workers is highly necessary if this great field is ever to be unionized. Why is it that today no effective work is being done to organize the workers of the Bell Company, the telegraph companies, the light and power plants, and the big electrical shops, when labor is so scarce and the industry is busy and growing? Overnight a new industry has sprung up, outside the folds of labor organization, the radio industry. In two years over 4,000,000 radio sets have been installed, valued at something more than \$200,000,000. The Bell Company, in changing to the automatic system, is spending millions of dollars and working its factories night and day. Under the Federal Power Act—pet bill of the corporations—construction work on hydro- and super-power plants is being pushed. The time was never so favorable for the building up of a great and powerful union.

But little or nothing is being done. It is ques-

tionable if the officers now directing our union could have done a better job toward keeping the workers divided and unorganized if they had tried to do so.

In all the unions containing electrical workers, there is not more than 10% of the number that could and should be organized. This small minority that is in the unions is split up in an illogical and confusing manner that brings no order or strength into the situation. In addition to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, there are the Commercial Telegraphers, Railway Telegraphers, Railway Signalmen, Theatrical Stage Employees, Electrical Railways, Miners, Butcher Workmen, Engineers, Elevator Constructors, and others, which are in whole or in part composed of electrical workers. Inside the I. B. E. W. there is no system that brings out our potential power.

The biggest problem of organization is, how to get all the electrical workers organized and working together, at the same time that they are united in close solidarity with the other workers in their particular industry. This double solidarity—between all electrical workers of all industries, and between the electrical and other workers in the same industry—demands the formation, through amalgamation and reorganization, of one union for all electrical workers, which is subdivided into *industrial departments* affiliated to the other unions in each industry.

There is no desire to interfere, in proposing to unite all electrical workers in this manner, with the development of industrial unions which include the electrical workers in the different industries. Thus in the railroad industry, where the demand for amalgamation of all the railroad unions into one body covering the entire industry has won over the vast majority of the workers, the electrical workers would go along just the