

# THE COMING MINERS' CONVENTION - - - By WM. Z. FOSTER

On Jan. 22nd the United Mine Workers will hold their Convention in Indianapolis. Once again the organized coal diggers of the United States and Canada will meet to legislate on the labor problems of their industry. It will be one of the most important conventions in recent years. Its outcome will be of the greatest consequence to the whole labor movement. The eyes of organized workers everywhere are turned toward it.

For many years the United Mine Workers were one of the most progressive organizations in the labor movement. They long led the revolt against the Gompers machine. Every progressive cause could depend upon them for support. This was in the hey-day of the strength of the Socialist Party. But in recent years the miners' organization has lost much of its militancy. Especially is this the case amongst the leadership which, for general incompetency, autocracy, and corruption, will now compare with any of the most reactionary unions in the A. F. of L. The real condition of the organization is that the rank and file are genuinely progressive, while the officialdom are reactionary to the last degree. It is an anomalous situation. Practically all the unions in the American Federation of Labor show a somewhat similar division of opinion between the officialdom and the rank and file, but in no case is this so marked as in that of the United Mine Workers of America.

As the years go by the collisions between the progressive rank and file and the reactionary officialdom grow

heavier and more intense. At the coming convention many of these fights will come to a head. One of the most important is the Howat case. That is a cancer in the heart of the Miners' Union. Howat was brutally and illegally expelled. All the intelligent rank and file members realize this and they are demanding a square deal for him. Throughout the whole organization Howat has been given a rousing reception by the rank and file wherever he has gone to make known his case. At the convention this sentiment in favor of him will surely register itself despite all that Lewis can do to prevent it. Another collision between the rank and file and the officialdom was had in District 26. The manoeuvres there of John L. Lewis in smashing the strike of the coal and steel workers at the behest of the British Empire Steel Corporation were among the worst exhibitions of treachery known in the history of the Miners' Union. Desperate efforts will be made to purge the organization of the disgrace and to rid it of the men guilty of such a crime.

Many other grievances will be aired by the rank and file. They see the organization falling to pieces and nothing being done by the officials to prevent it. They will demand a reckoning of the crooked leadership. In the past couple of years the wave of discontent in the thousands of locals has begun to develop the first rudiments of organization. These are to be found in the Progressive International Committee of the United Mine Workers of America. This is more than an or-

ganization; it is a cause. It is the one hope of the rank and file to have some say in the organization, the one means by which they will be able to turn it to their advantage and away from being merely an instrument for raising corrupt officials to power. The fight will be intensified by the fact that the bituminous agreement expires this spring and the fate of the miners' standards of living is in the balance, with the prospect of a great strike to defend them looming up.

The factors are present for a great rank and file revolt in the Miners' Union. Discontent is rife in every district. And upheaval is long overdue. The only way it has been prevented up till now is by the use of the iron fist by Lewis. The wave of discontent that is sweeping many unions manifests itself even more strongly in the United Mine Workers of America. In the Molders' Union the membership in the last convention, demanded a general revision of the policies of the organization. In the Maintenance of Way convention they went much further and swept out of office the whole reactionary gang of officials led by the unspeakable Grable. In the Miners' Union the discontent mounts still higher and Lewis will have the job of his life trying to choke it back at the coming convention. There will be a bitter struggle between the forces of progress and of reaction.

What happens at the Miners' Convention will be of the utmost importance to the whole labor movement. The workers are demoralized and helpless everywhere in the

unions. Craft unionism is discredited. A great renaissance is needed. This can come only through a great shattering blow dealt at the old bureaucratic machine. If the miners will take the lead in this movement at the next convention, workers in the other industries will be encouraged to follow. When the big revolt took place at the Maintenance of Way Workers' Convention a year ago, a quiver ran through the whole labor movement. But this organization was on its last legs and the revolt dissipated itself. If the miners take the bit in their teeth, as well they may at the Indianapolis Convention, the story will be a different one. The old reactionaries in the labor bureaucracy will find themselves confronted with a real struggle. On the other hand, if the Miners' Convention is a reactionary one, it will throw still more discouragement into the ranks of an already dangerously depressed labor movement. The coming Miners' Convention marks a turning point in the labor movement.

