
THE MINERS' CONVENTION

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I

THE most dramatic action of the United Mine Workers convention was the decision to disaffiliate from the C.I.O. Only if we bear in mind the significance of this act, the causes that led to it and the objectives that John L. Lewis hopes to achieve thereby, shall we be able fully to appreciate all the other acts and decisions of this convention. We shall also be able to see beneath the demagogic phrases through which Lewis hopes to conceal from the miners, the labor movement, and the whole country, his true position on the war and all questions affecting the prosecution of the war.

There can be no question about the fact that the 500,000 members of the U.M.W.A. are loyal Americans supporting the war effort and the policies of President Roosevelt. The miners who, rich in a tradition of militancy, have played such a vital role in all of labor's struggles in the past and in the great advance of the working class, in the organization of the unorganized through the formation and growth of the C.I.O., are today no less devoted to the principles and policies

of the C.I.O. than before. And yet the Cincinnati convention of the U.M.W.A. was anything but a win-the-war convention. Its main orientation was anti-Roosevelt. It attempted to set up new obstacles to labor's unification—essential to winning the war. How such a situation was made possible we must fully fix in our minds, if we wish to know what is to be done to block John L. Lewis's plan to weaken the war effort, disrupt the labor movement, and strengthen the forces of reaction in the country.

The very fact that Lewis was compelled to conceal from the miners his true position on the war and most other questions is proof that the miners are ready and willing to do all in their power to win the war. This necessity on the part of Lewis to maneuver and hide his true position also shows the possibility of defeating him, once his position is unmasked and the miners are given leadership which will inspire them with the necessary confidence that they can overcome the strong and vicious Lewis machine.

It is by no mere accident that Lewis chose as the first act of the convention the disaffiliation from the C.I.O. To be sure, this act, which

took place on the second day of the convention, was preceded by Lewis's defensive plea on the opening day that he was being slandered by those who charged him with having a position opposed to the war. But this could not conceal the fact that it was the attitude toward the war that was the main difference between Lewis and the C.I.O. leadership, and that the act of disaffiliation set the stage for all other decisions taken subsequently.

Lewis tried hard to make it appear that the U.M.W.A. disaffiliation from the C.I.O. was a result of a conspiracy against him personally and against the U.M.W.A. on the part of the C.I.O. leadership. He gave purely technical and organizational reasons for this step. He charged the C.I.O. leadership with failure to pay its "debts" to the U.M.W.A. He charged that the C.I.O. was interfering with the organizational campaigns of the U.M.W.A.-District 50, that it failed to give the miners full support in their wage dispute with the captive mine operators, that it refused to work for A.F. of L.-C.I.O. unity. But the very fact that Lewis was compelled to spend so much time in defending himself as a supporter of the war was evidence enough that it was this issue that was the real cause for the difference between him and the C.I.O. leadership. And this also explains why Lewis, having been decisively defeated and isolated within the C.I.O., now decides to leave the C.I.O. and carry on a fight against it from the outside.

John L. Lewis could find no arguments to defend his position on the war. All he could do was to prove that the miners are patriotic Americans, something which no one ever doubted. He pointed to the fact that more than 60,000 miners are in the armed services of the United States, that the miners bought 40 million dollars' worth of war bonds, that they contributed one million dollars to the war relief agencies. He could point to no acts on his part or that of the official leadership of the U.M.W.A. in support of the President's policies. And he remained silent on his associations with the America First outfit or on his infamous statement jointly with fourteen other America First Republicans headed by Hoover, Landon and Dawes, condemning the British-Soviet alliance after Hitler's invasion of the U.S.S.R., condemning American lend-lease aid to the U.S.S.R., and charging that the "Anglo-Russian alliance has dissipated that illusion" of this being "a world conflict between tyranny and freedom."

Not with one word did Lewis repudiate this position. Not with one word did he disassociate himself from the appeasers and defeatists. And for only one reason—that this is still his true position, despite the fact that he is now compelled, like the Hoovers and Lindberghs, to pay lip service to the war, while doing nothing to help win it, while doing plenty to hinder it and only waiting for the opportune moment to join Hoover in his negotiated-peace-with-Hitler plans.

Here was the U.M.W.A. conven-

tion meeting at one of the most critical moments in the history of the world and of our country, at a time when all our people are watching with the greatest anxiety and hope the Battle of Stalingrad, that epic struggle the like of which the world has never known and upon the outcome of which so much depends—and yet Lewis remains silent. The workers of our country and the people generally are pleading for the immediate opening of the Second Front. But Lewis says not a word. Why? Because, like all appeasers and defeatists, he is opposed to the Second Front. And why not? After all, to Lewis this is not a struggle between freedom and tyranny. International labor solidarity? Lewis, like Hutcheson, will have nothing to do with the Soviet trade unions. But even Lewis, knowing the true feelings of the miners, did not dare to oppose the convention going on record in favor of “aid to Russia, Britain and China.”

The powerful U.M.W.A., had it followed the policies of the C.I.O. instead of the defeatist policies of Lewis, could have given a tremendous impetus to the whole of the war effort. Had the convention given true expression to the inner feelings and desires of the miners it would have taken the lead in the fight for the opening of the Second Front, for the strengthening of the United Nations and the alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union. It would have become a powerful force for all-inclusive cooperation of the labor movements of all the United Nations. It would

have shown the way toward the solution of the many problems of war economy—increased production, the proper distribution and best utilization of manpower, it would have strengthened the fight against inflation, promoted the development of labor-management committees. It could have been a great force in the promotion of labor and national unity and for a struggle against all defeatist and appeaser elements who are sniping at the Roosevelt Administration and hindering the development of the offensive on the battle front and the all-out mobilization of the country for the war effort.

But it was the heavy hand of Lewis and his henchmen that prevented the miners from playing this role. Instead, the convention decided to isolate the miners from the rest of the labor movement. It engaged in sniping at the President. It gave encouragement to the most reactionary forces in the A. F. of L., headed by Hutcheson and Woll, to try to prevent the unification of the trade union movement. It gave encouragement to all the appeaser forces in the country in their effort to block the victory of the United Nations' struggle against the Axis.

This does not mean of course that the delegates to the U.M.W.A. convention knew that in supporting Lewis they were voting for these objectives of Lewis. The very fact that Lewis could not openly unfold his whole and true position tended to cloud before the miners the true meaning of the action they took on some of the most vital is-

sues, such as the disaffiliation from the C.I.O. Lewis could not and did not attack the war and pleaded his support. Many of the decisions of the convention such as aid to the Soviet Union, Britain and China, for the abolition of the poll tax, for the extension of the work week to six days as demanded by Secretary Ickes, opposition to the outrageous tax bill before Congress, the decision to postpone the demand for readjustment of wages to the time of the expiration of the agreement in April, among others, are good decisions and were made possible only by the fact that they expressed the overwhelming support of the rank and file of the miners, and even Lewis could not oppose them without completely exposing himself. On the other hand, the failure of the convention to condemn the Biddle decision on Harry Bridges, the postponement of freedom for the Indian people until after the war can in no sense be said to express the attitude of the mass of the miners. And certainly the convention's approval of Lewis's policy of opposition to granting autonomy to the nineteen U.M.W.A. Districts now under receivership by Lewis was in direct opposition not only to the membership of these districts that comprise the majority of the U.M.W.A. membership, but also to the great majority of the miners in all the other districts.

II

How was it that Lewis was able so to distort and defy the true will

of the U.M.W.A. membership? There is no doubt that the convention itself, one of the largest in the history of the U.M.W.A., was composed of a considerable number of hand-picked delegates, selected with the aid of intimidation on the part of the Lewis machine in the various districts and locals, who did not represent the wishes of their locals. It is also true, as is reported by some who were present at the convention, that the Lewis machine was able to intimidate many delegates, who came with mandates from their membership, to ignore their membership and support Lewis. The Lewis machine has had much experience in overriding the will of the membership and in "organizing" conventions. This cause for what happened at the convention should by no means be minimized. And yet it can not and does not offer a full explanation for what happened, for the ability of Lewis to dominate as he did the convention of more than 2,000 delegates. There were other reasons as well.

One of the most important of these reasons lies in the fact that the position of Lewis on the war is not fully clear to great sections of the miners. They did not agree with him or follow him when prior to the 1940 elections he praised Hoover and then through the Hoover connections came out in support of the Republican ticket. They did not agree with him and did not support him when he joined with the America Firsters. They did not agree with him when he joined with Hoover and Landon in

slandering the Soviet Union and in denying that the war against Hitler was a war against tyranny. But they do not yet see that, despite his lip service to the war after Pearl Harbor, he has not changed his former position. Let us suppose for one moment that Lewis would openly come out against the war. Is there any doubt that he would be repudiated by the miners and that he would never be able to face a convention of the U.M.W.A.? But since Lewis, like Hoover and the other America Firsters, conceals his true position, many miners, even though they had always opposed his isolationist position, do not see in him as yet an enemy of our country's war effort. They believe that he, like many others, was wrong before Pearl Harbor, but today is a loyal supporter of the war. *To expose the true position of Lewis on the war remains therefore the most important and most fundamental task. To unmask him before the miners is a condition for isolating and defeating him among the miners just as he was isolated and defeated in the C.I.O. as a whole.*

The fact that the miners, separated from the rest of the workers by the very nature of their place of work and their living in the mining towns, were unable to learn Lewis's true position helped Lewis to conceal his position. They did not learn his true position from the U.M.W.A. Journal, of course, and they had no recourse to other labor literature. Lewis had always seen to it that the C.I.O. News, for example, should never go to the min-

ers. Only through the *Daily Worker* and *The Worker* as well as through some of the foreign language progressive press did a small section of the miners get the full truth regarding Lewis's position and role. *One of the chief lessons from this is the necessity on the part of the C.I.O. unions in other industries to take special measures to reach the miners personally and with literature. Now more than ever, when the U.M.W.A. has disaffiliated from the C.I.O., is it necessary for the other C.I.O. unions and their membership to display the greatest solidarity toward the miners and develop all forms of united action with them.* This situation also emphasizes the necessity greatly to increase the number of readers of the *Worker* among the miners.

Another reason for the ability of the Lewis machine to control the convention and retain a strong influence among the miners, lies in the fact that the miners have made substantial gains in the last years in the growth of membership and in the improvement of their conditions. The ability of the U.M.W.A. in the past period to abolish the Southern wage differential and to win the closed shop in the captive mines—victories of the greatest importance—has no doubt contributed to the authority and influence of Lewis among the miners. Lewis tried to make the convention believe that he had won these gains despite the refusal of the C.I.O. leadership to support him. But the truth is that all the gains of the miners since 1933 were made not because of the "cleverness" or the

"connections" of Lewis, but only because of the support that the miners received from the whole labor movement, especially the unions affiliated to the C.I.O.; because the miners in the main had the support of a friendly attitude on the part of the President; and because of the readiness of the miners themselves to fight for their unions and for improved conditions. If it is true that the C.I.O. has benefited from the support of the miners—and it is absolutely true—and that the whole labor movement will never forget the support of the miners, it is equally true that the miners have benefited greatly from the struggles and the support of the workers in the other industries.

And only the continued solidarity of the miners, steel workers, auto workers, the workers in all of the C.I.O. unions and the entire labor movement can help maintain the gains of the miners and win for them new gains. This of course is also true for all other workers. And this is why the Lewis decision to disaffiliate from the C.I.O. and his attempts to hinder the unification of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. must be resisted by the miners no less than by the workers in all unions.

Still another reason for the ability of Lewis to control the convention lies in the fact that the miners wish to maintain the unity of their organization, at all costs. The miners still remember the time when their organization was disrupted. They still remember the time when they had no uniform national agreements, when they were compelled to work under open shop condi-

tions, or under separate district agreements in various parts of the country. Even those who are wise to Lewis gave him their support because they fear that Lewis would not stop at again disrupting the organization unless he had his way. The miners, perhaps more than the workers in any other industry, have learned from experience that they are powerless by themselves in each mine or locality, that only a strong national union can defend their interests.

One of the most important reasons that the miners, who are behind President Roosevelt and his war policies, still in large numbers support Lewis is the fact that the miners do not yet sufficiently realize the relationship between their economic position, the economic struggles and the broader political issues in general and the war in particular. The miners do not yet sufficiently realize, for example, that with Lewis's policies and methods they can not at present, under the conditions of war, maintain their economic gains. They do not yet fully understand that the development of a planned centralized war economy in general and its corresponding forms in the mines is essential to the whole country's war effort and to the well-being of the miners. That the struggle for maximum production of coal, the control of prices, democratic rationing, control of rents, etc., are all essential to the miners no less than to the whole labor movement and the entire country, and that Lewis's position on the war and his consequent attitude on these vital ques-

tions represent the greatest threat to the economic standards of the miners.

And, finally, Lewis was able to control the convention, carry through his attack on the C.I.O. and its leadership headed by President Murray, because there was no leadership at the convention to give expression to the will of the miners, to inspire them with confidence in the ability to meet and defeat Lewis. The whole policy of Lewis has been one of discouraging the development of leadership among the miners. No new leaders have been able to come forward. The undemocratic character of the organization has made it difficult for new leaders to arise, except perhaps local leaders. And even local leaders were discouraged. Unless such local leaders agreed to become "yes" men for Lewis they were politically beheaded and often also found themselves jobless. But the miners who opposed Lewis expected that those leaders identified with President Murray, who was most undemocratically removed by Lewis as Vice President of the U.M.W.A., would lead the fight against Lewis at this convention. The failure of many of these old leaders of the miners to make the fight, either by not attending the convention or by failing to make the fight at the convention even when they were present, could not but discourage the miners who came to the convention to make the fight.

The fact is that the miners' locals sent in hundreds of resolutions of a progressive character, resolutions calling for a Second Front

now, for international labor unity, the maintenance of relations with the C.I.O., and other issues. There were 96 resolutions demanding District autonomy. It is well known that a large portion of the delegates voted contrary to the instructions they received by their locals. Had the convention been provided with some leadership, the results on many vital questions would have been altogether different from what Lewis had planned.

In this connection it must also be emphasized that the Left forces among the miners, including the Communists, also failed to register their full influence at the U.M.W.A. convention itself as well as in the election of delegates to the convention. Had they been able to do this, the convention would have registered greater opposition on the autonomy issue, on the question of disaffiliation from the C.I.O., as well as on other issues. This situation clearly calls for much improved work by the Communists in the mining communities, a greater effort to increase the readers of the *Worker*, the sale of our literature and the recruiting of miners into the ranks of the Party.

III

What will be Lewis's course now after the U.M.W.A. convention? First, he will attempt to use the increased powers he put over for himself in the convention for the purpose of putting down any opposition to his policies. He will attempt to wipe out the last vestiges

of democracy within the U.M.W.A. and to rob the miners of any leadership opposed even mildly to his domination. Already the convention decided to "investigate" the head of District 5—Pat Fagan—undoubtedly for the purpose of removing him. Lewis has already laid the basis for the expulsion of all miners identified in any way with the C.I.O., including C.I.O. President Murray.

Secondly, he will try to use the decisions of the convention extending the jurisdiction of the U.M.W.A.—District 50 and the increased dues for the purpose of launching organization in new fields in direct conflict with the C.I.O. unions and in many cases, as for example in the construction field, also with the established A. F. of L. unions. He will not stop at raiding existing unions. He will, as he hinted at the convention of District 50, attempt to bring into his fold the so-called "independent" unions headed by Mathew Smith and the existing company unions. Thus he will try to establish a so-called "third labor center" for the purpose either of fighting both the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. or, if possible, of using it as a bargaining center with the Hutcheson-Woll wing of the A. F. of L., with the object of entering the A. F. of L. as a means of preventing the unity of the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. and for strengthening the reactionary tendencies in the A. F. of L. as represented by Hutcheson and Woll. There is some real hope that he will not succeed in this maneuver and that the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. will move closer together in the coming period as a

result of their joint activity and the resumption of the scheduled unity negotiations. Both the C.I.O. and the more responsible A.F. of L. leaders headed by Green have a great responsibility in this respect.

Thirdly, it can be expected that Lewis, while paying lip service to the war, will continue his anti-Roosevelt policies, hindering the war effort by attempting to place obstacles in the way of increased production, by trying to utilize every difficulty, every necessary adjustment to the war, as a basis of sharpening the relations of labor and the government. He is already making use of Trotskyites, Norman Thomas "Socialists," as well as Coughlinites and K.K.K. elements who, under the false cover of "defending the workers' interests," are doing all in their power to undermine the nation's war effort and disrupt national unity.

Fourth, he will lend his support to the reactionaries and appeasers in both of the major parties, the Hoovers and the Wheelers, with whom he is now associated, giving them support in the elections and in Congress for the purpose of undermining and weakening President Roosevelt's influence in the Democratic Party and Willkie's influence in the Republican Party. Lewis's strong effort to organize the farmers is not due merely to a desire to extend the strength of the U.M.W.A. organizationally. He has in mind, together with the Hoovers and Wheelers, the prevention of national unity behind the President in the war effort, the prevention of a United Nations' victory over

the Axis and a people's peace. His demagogic attempts to win the support of the Negro people by posing as their champion must also be seen in this light. This places the greatest responsibility upon the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L. in their work to win the Negro people, by fighting for equal opportunity for the Negro people in production, in the life of the unions and generally to win for the Negro people full equality in every phase of the economic, political, social and military life of our nation.

Thus it is clear that for the miners, for the whole labor movement and for the entire country, the position of Lewis represents a most serious threat. It must not be minimized or ignored. It must be met and defeated. And the Lewis threat to the labor movement, to the war effort, to national unity, can be defeated only by the miners in cooperation with the rest of the labor movement. The complete isolation and defeat of Lewis will not be an easy job and will not be accomplished in a day. But it is a task that must be undertaken without delay and carried forward with tenacity and persistence, until it is accomplished. In general what is to be done is already indicated by the above analysis as to the causes of Lewis's ability to maintain influence over the miners and the objectives that Lewis will try to achieve in the coming period.

In addition, however, the Left and progressive forces among the miners must understand that through agitation and propaganda alone they

will not be able to break the hold of Lewis among the miners or overcome all of the causes that made possible Lewis's domination of the U.M.W.A. convention. This will be accomplished above all *through the development of those policies and activities which will bring the largest number of miners into direct participation in the war effort.* In this connection, first and foremost, is the development of the program for planned and increased coal production, the development of the joint labor-management committees, the development of and support for all measures that will insure the maintenance of real wages of the miners through rent and price control, democratic rationing, etc. The prolongation of the workweek by itself, unaccompanied by planned production, will not be an answer to the problems that the miners face both as citizens wishing to contribute all in their power to the country's effort, or to maintain living standards essential to maximum production and the morale of the miners. With more than 60,000 miners at present in the armed services, with 75,000 miners already having left the mines for other war industries, the need for such a plan is evident. And it is precisely on these issues that the miners will be able to see the dangerous role that Lewis is playing in the hour of our country's greatest need and also the bankruptcy of the Lewis policy as far as defending the miners' economic standards is concerned with the old "trade union as usual" methods.

At the same time, the miners through their local unions individually and by regions, by themselves and jointly with other labor and people's groups must be stimulated to express and actively demonstrate their support for the war, for the policies of the President, for the Second Front, for the strengthening of the United Nations and of the U.S.-U.S.S.R. alliance, through the organization of war relief activities on behalf of the fighting peoples of the Soviet Union, China, Great Britain and the other United Nations. In this connection the existing people's organizations in the mining communities, such as the fraternal organizations, furnish the means through which the miners, their families, and other peoples in the community can carry forward many of the war activities.

The miners should resist every effort toward isolating them from the rest of the labor movement. Continuing their fraternal relations with the C.I.O. unions, improving their relations with the A. F. of L. workers, the miners can become a force not only to defeat Lewis's attempts to prevent labor unity, but to promote this unity. Especially should the miners make common cause with all other workers as well as other patriotic groups in the election campaigns, in the convening of legislative conferences for the purpose of influencing the state legislatures and Congress.

At the same time, the miners should resist every effort to rob them of their democratic rights. They should strive to make their great union, for whose unity they

must fight, a real democratic organization. They can find ways and means to register their opposition to Lewis in the coming U.M.W.A. elections, despite the fact that for most offices there are no opponents to the Lewis candidates. The miners should resist attempts to remove regularly elected officials, such as are being undertaken by Lewis in District 5. They should express their opposition to any move for the expulsion of those loyal members of the U.M.W.A. who are performing a great service to the miners as well as to the rest of the labor movement by their leading position in the C.I.O. and its affiliated organizations. Where the conditions are favorable, the miners should register their opposition to the harmful actions of the convention, especially the disaffiliation from the C.I.O. Lewis and the delegates received no mandate from the miners for this step. A referendum on this issue, if Lewis dared take it, would show that the majority of the miners would vote to remain within the C.I.O.

The labor movement as a whole also has great responsibilities in helping the miners in the struggle against Lewis. First, the labor movement must bear in mind that Lewis and the great U.M.W.A. with its half million members are not identical. The miners should not be held responsible for the deeds of Lewis. The labor movement must extend a helping hand in a spirit of solidarity to the miners in all their work. The miners must be aided in every way in their adjustment to the war economy, and their eco-

conomic standards defended by the whole labor movement.

The labor movement—both the C.I.O. and the A. F. of L.—can make the greatest contribution to the defeat of the Lewis policies by expanding the unity of action between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O. and by moving more rapidly toward organic unity. The repudiation of the anti-unity, pro-Hoover and anti-United Nations policies of the Hutchesons and Wolls within the A. F. of L. will at the same time be a blow against Lewis. By overcoming all jurisdictional struggles within the A. F. of L. and between the A. F. of L. and the C.I.O., by a united labor movement undertaking the organization of new millions among the unorganized, the disruptive plans of Lewis and his flirtations with the company unions, all of which represents a threat to the entire labor movement, can be quickly and decisively defeated. In any event, the C.I.O. unions should plan and organize anew the broadest campaign to organize the millions of workers now being brought into industry. They can bring millions of new members into the C.I.O., provided they understand how to approach the new workers in industry and take special measures to make it possible to draw in the millions of women and Negro workers who are needed and are available as one of the main factors in the democratic solution of the acute manpower problem.

Finally, the Communist organizations, not only in the mining areas, but generally, face a great respon-

sibility. The Party has the task of helping the entire labor movement understand the significance of this whole question and its responsibilities in relation to it. At the same time, if the Communist organizations in the mining communities work in the spirit of our party's policy—Everything to Win the War—if they understand how to face the problems concretely and boldly, if they help clarify the issues among the miners with the aid of the *Worker*, Party pamphlets, and especially the great contribution of Comrade Browder through his latest book, *Victory—And After*, they can perform a great service to the miners, to the labor movement and to our country. Recent experiences of our Party in the mining areas show that on the basis of such work our Party can play an important role in reaching and influencing the miners, who are anti-fascist to the core, and who can and must play a more vital part in the nation's victory drive. To accomplish this most effectively, our Party must strengthen its ranks and its work through the recruitment of miners, so that a stronger Party can be of even greater service in this all important task. We have a special contribution to make to win the miners to a fuller and more active participation in the war effort, for the Second Front, for labor unity. This task, which requires the unmasking of Lewis and defeating his policies, is a task, not only for the Communists, but for all labor, for all progressives, for all democratic Americans working for victory over Hitlerism.