

Starvation Stalks Through Coal Fields of Pennsylvania

By WM. Z. FOSTER.

Hundreds of thousands of miners and their families are actually starving in mining districts throughout the country. Month after month of joblessness, with no state unemployment relief, are having their inevitable consequences in the development of horrible famine conditions.

Unless relief is forthcoming the situation will be-fore long ap-proach that of the famine stricken districts of India and China.

It is an imperative task of our Party to arouse the workers of America to this terrible situation and to unite them, with the miners, for militant struggle against it.

Unemployment is now unprecedented in the mining

32,000 of the 60,000 miners are totally unemployed and the rest work only 3-4 days per month. Over 50 per cent of the mines in the South are completely shut down. In the anthracite districts 25000 are entirely unemployed, and the balance work half time. Through-out the middle bituminous districts 2 or 3 days a month is the rule for the miners.

To make matters worse huge wage cuts have been enforced everywhere, ranging from 25 per cent to 75 per cent. In West Virginia the miners receive 21 cents per ton instead of the former rate of 67 cents. In Kentucky similar rates prevail. In Ohio the total wages of the miners dropped from \$71,000,000 in 1929 to \$29,000,000 in 1930. Wages in western Pennsylvania may be judged by the pay envelope of a Westmoreland miner who reported to the Board of Miners Union that he recently got \$11.16 for 13 days' work. Besides the miners are mercilessly robbed on their weights. In many places mine cars which formerly held 2½ tons have now been enlarged to 5 tons, but are still counted at the old weight. Dead work, for which miners were often paid \$15 or more each two weeks, is now done free, etc.

The long continued unemployment (the crisis in the coal industry has been growing deeper for ten years past) and the wage cuts have led to a wholesale pauperization of the miners and their families. Con-



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ditions in the bituminous districts now beggar description. Men, women, and children are actually starving in great masses. There is next to nothing to eat. Babies are dying like flies for want of milk. Grown children cannot go to school for lack of food and clothes. Barefoot, they trudge about in the snow. The dread hunger disease, pellagra, is spreading throughout the bituminous sections.

The companies have no organized relief systems. Their motto is the brutal one of John L. Lewis that "300,000 miners must get out of the coal industry." In many places the miners are still allowed to remain in the decrepit company houses. This is because the mine companies, realizing that the crisis in the coal industry is chronic, have no more use for their surplus company houses than for their surplus miners. The company houses fall more and more into disrepair, the companies doing nothing to keep them up. Often without light and water, they barely shelter the famished workers from the wintry blasts. In the coke regions thousands of miners and other homeless workers sleep in the coke ovens trying to find warmth and shelter. In such desperate conditions live great armies of miners and their families while useless capitalist parasites spend millions of dollars for "coming out parties" for their daughters, trips to Europe, etc.

Many miners, seeing their families starving are becoming desperate. Suicides are rapidly on the increase. Organized banditry is beginning. Hungry workers are organizing in small groups and stealing whatever food they can from the richer farmers of the country round about. A delegate to the recent meeting of our Miners' Union Board reported the following typical incident. One miner told another that he was going to an adjoining town to look for work. The second ridiculed him as wasting his time, and invited him to join the party he had organized to go and get a sheep. He joined. The workers are going into the company stores, demanding food, and if it is not given them, taking it by force.

Here is a typical incident: In a western Pennsylvania town a Negro woman a few days ago demanded food

from the company store for her starving children. It was refused her, so she snatched a loaf of bread. This was taken from her. Whereupon, ten minutes later her husband came, pistol in hand, and took, not one loaf but a dozen. Moreover, he dared the company hangers-on present, at the peril of their lives, to prevent him. The coal companies and local governments, realizing the growing hunger and militancy of the miners, are increasing their thug forces generally and, in southern Illinois and other bituminous, are placing special guards around freight cars loaded with food-stuffs.

Our Party, the TUUL unions, and various other workers' organizations, in a united front movement, have scheduled hunger marches in the local districts. There must be many more organized. The two Executive Boards of the TUUL Miners and Metal Workers' Unions have just issued a joint call for a militant struggle against mass starvation. The starving miners are ready for action. A wave of revolutionary spirit sweeps among them. Denied the opportunity to work and refused unemployment relief, they will not passively starve. They will seize food wherever they find it. Whole sections of the bituminous are on the verge of hunger riots.

The situation in the mining industry provides a test of our Party's ability to lead the masses in struggle. If we will this winter but give the miners a little organization and leadership they will bring forward the question of unemployment and unemployment relief so dramatically and drastically that the repercussion will be felt in every industry in the country. The mass political strike is a slogan of action in the mining industry. Every Party district in which there is coal territory should at once organize hunger marches in all important coal camps and towns. These should be connected with mass collection of signatures for our bill, the election of delegates to Washington, preparations for the great national unemployed demonstration on February 10th, and the organization of unemployed councils, the Miners' Union, and the Party. We never had a better opportunity to develop mass organization and struggle than now exists among the famished miners.