

Framing the Zeigler Coal-Diggers

By MAX SHACHTMAN.

Zeigler, and the section of the country it is in, is divided into two camps. A man is either with the miners who are fighting for their rights, or else he is a Klansman, a company tool, or a cog in the reactionary union machine. And the indictment of twenty union miners in Zeigler is the result of the latest skirmish between the two camps: The forces of reaction are for the moment at the top.

The men in Zeigler know what it is to fight. They have faced machine guns and the private armies of the company which are recruited from the dregs of society; they were the one bright spot in the midst of a Ku Klux Klan-controlled county; they are to this day a brave force fighting corruption and treason in the union which they built. The Leiter mines in Zeigler were the last to be organized into the United Mine Workers of Illinois. They were organized in the face of the most

ruthless opposition on the part of Joe Leiter and his gangsters. The men still remember the spots where machine guns were mounted to mow them down, and where the searchlights shone to point them out to the gunmen and thugs who vainly held the mine against the union.

Now these men are in another fight. This time they face a united front of everything despicable and backward and reactionary in the life of the coal digger. The company which has robbed them of their wages, the Klan which tried to break up their union, the union machine which has betrayed them, which has power but no confidence, and the courts which are the tool of their enemies.

Everyone in Franklin County knows Henry Corbishly, the main defendant. They know of his participation in the famous campaigns which finally resulted in the union-

ization of the bitterly exploited Oklahoma miners. And they know that he is ready to fight for the miners at a moment's notice. That is why Henry Corbishly, and the men who have fought by his side, have been framed up in Zeigler.

Local No. 992, of which Corbishly was the president until he was ousted by the kept sub-district officials, reflected its progressive spirit in a progressive leadership. These officials demanded that their checkweighman be permitted to have the assistant, who is called for in the by-

kiddies, a little more comfort in the miserable company shacks they inhabit. And that is why they struck the mine in spontaneous mass when the checkweighman announced that he was unable to weigh coal any more under the system the company was enforcing and after they had refused to let his assistant enter the mine.

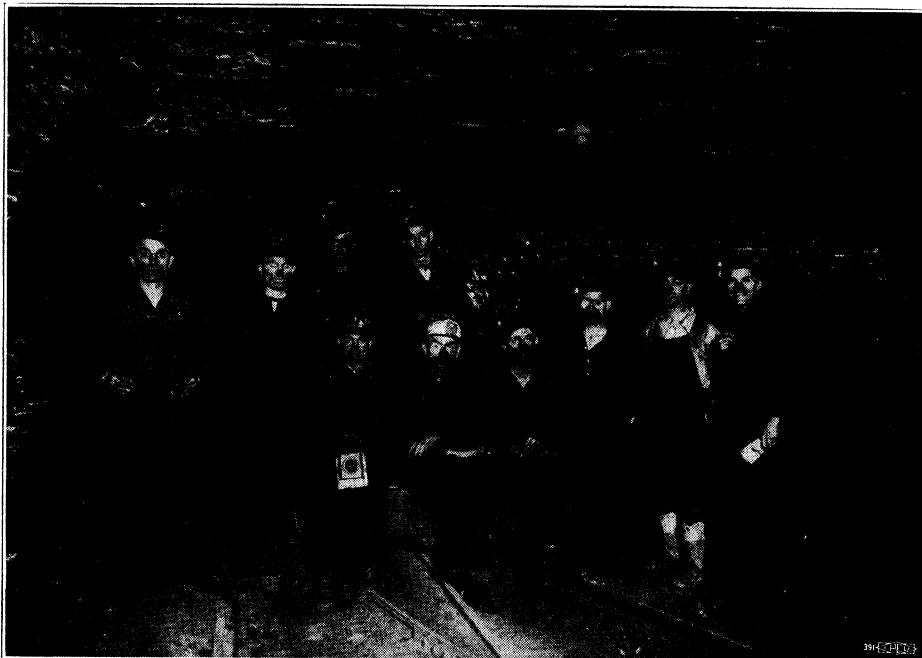
The rest of the story is a flash of labor history. Corbishly successfully urged them to return to work, while the sub-district officials adjusted their grievances with the company.

The sub-district officials, across the usual conference table where it is more convenient to be a good fellow with the company men than it is to fight for the miners, settled the dispute—by agreeing to all of the company's demands. A special union meeting is called. The enraged miners refused to accede to the officials' ukases. They politely decline to oust their local officers in whom they have confidence and the meeting is

adjourned in the face of Messrs. Lon Fox and Del Cobb et al. What happen then is thus told by an eyewitness:

A Klansman strikes the aged miner, Farthing, to the floor. His son comes to his aid and a general scrap begins. Mr. Cobb pulls a blackjack and attempts to convince those around him with this very "strong" argument. The miners end the dangerous argument with the same type of reasoning and Mr. Cobb, the vice-president of the sub-district, is soon the occupant of a hospital cot. Then, from the doorway, a discredited Klansman, Alec Hargis, fires the shot which killed Mike Sarovich and wounds one of the reactionaries.

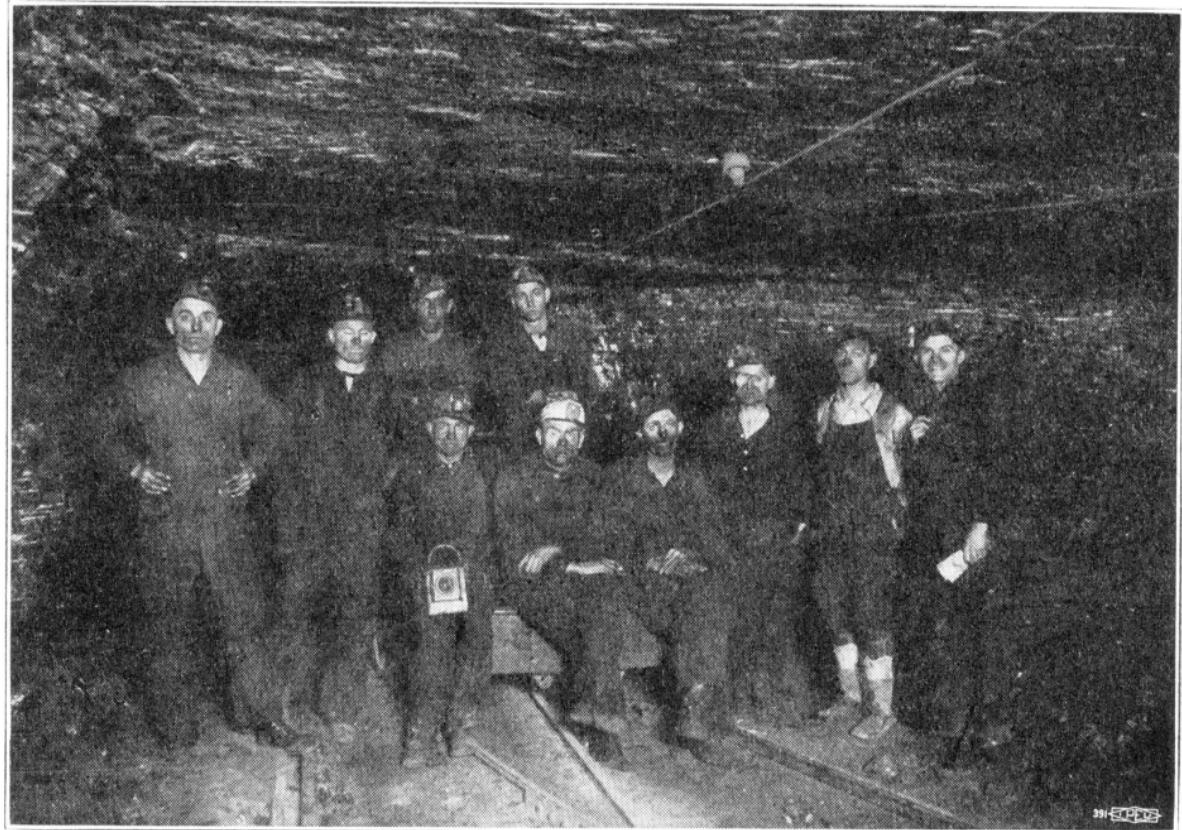
Is Hargis under trial for murder? Is Cobb held for assault with intent to murder? Not for a minute. The coroner's jury hands down a certificate of death in which Hargis is



Alex Hargis seated in the center. Dom Radison standing at the extreme right who declares he saw Hargis fire the shot that killed Mike Sarovich. Radison so testified at the coroner's inquest, also before the grand jury.

laws of the local, so that he might be able to get a just weight on the cars of coal which the men send up from the bowels of the earth. The weight of the cars, on the basis of which is estimated the wages to be obtained at the end of the week by the miners, were being constantly falsified by the company check boss, who saw to it that the cars were run over the scales so swiftly that the scale indicator never stopped at any one point for more than a fraction of a second. Arbitrarily he would call out: "Sixty, eighty, seventy," when the miners knew that their carloads weighed eighty, ninety and one hundred.

A correct weight, and a higher wage coming from it, means a little more comfort to the suffering miners who can hardly get steady work as it is. It means a little more food in the house, better clothes for the



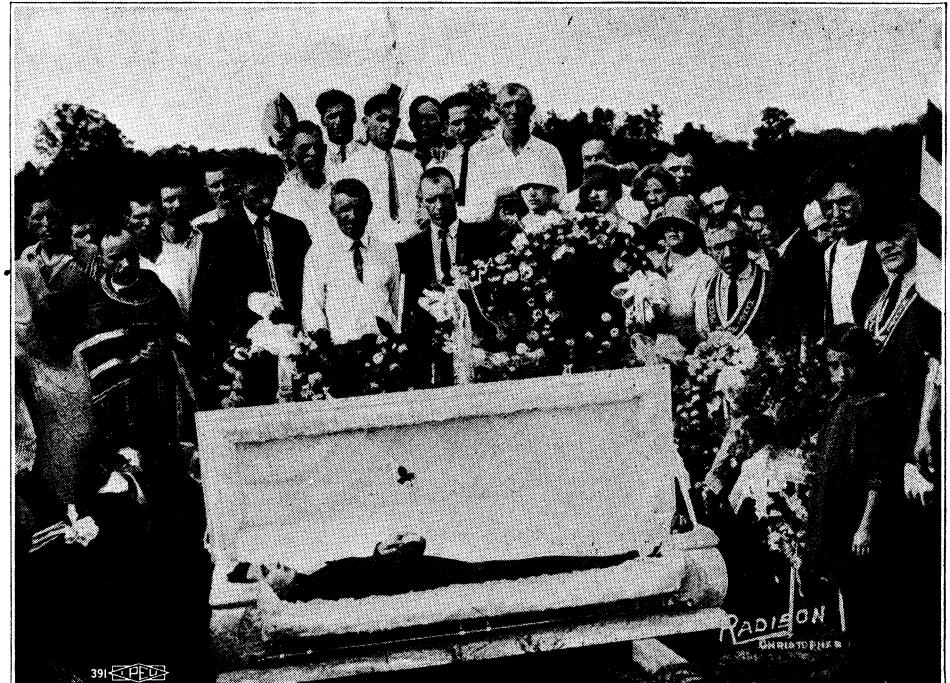
Alex Hargis seated in the center. Dom Radison standing at the extreme right who declares he saw Hargis fire the shot that killed Mike Sarovich. Radison so testified at the coroner's inquest, also before the grand jury.

charged with the murder. But for what reason has our admirable American juridical system a grand jury if not to listen to honest evidence against a foe of labor with the aloofness and deafness of a Buddhist idol?

Instead of Hargis, Frank Corbishly, a brother of the local president, who was far away from the fight when it was on, is indicted for the murder. Instead of Cobb being held, he swears out warrants against a score of men charging them with conspiracy and assault with the intent to murder.

Corbishly and three of the progressive leaders are suspended from the union for six months, with the proviso that they cannot hold union office for two years. Cobb and Fox, who were in truth beaten in the last union election by Corbishly and his friends, now rest easy with the knowledge that their sincerest and strongest opponents are out of the way. To make sure of it, the fat treasury which they hold under their thumbs, is put at the disposal of the state prosecution, which is very obligingly supplemented by lawyers who are paid by the United Mine Workers of America. The defendants thus have the consolation of knowing that it is not with the money of an outsider that they are being prosecuted, but with the money which they themselves sent into the coffers of the union.

There is not a man in that section of Illinois who will not tell you that this is a frame up; and those who are not men are just as likely as not to admit it when they are drunk. It is not a very clever frame up; it lacks the fine touches which usually



The Burial of Mike Sarovich.

accompany cases of this kind; it was worked out by men who are crude and unscrupulous.

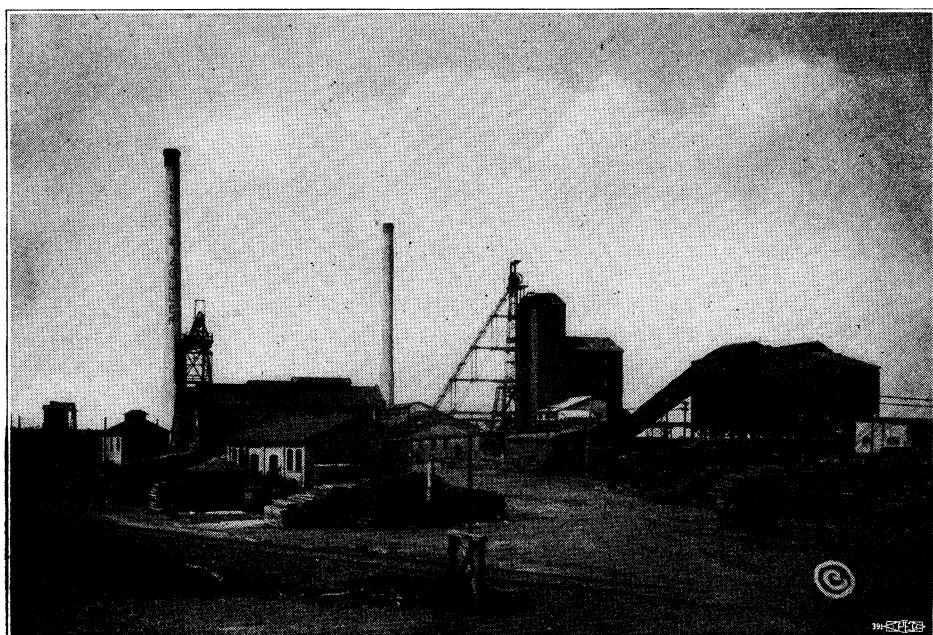
But crude things go in Zeigler. The other camp is powerful in that section of the country, and its means are almost unlimited. So it is not squeamish about fine points and delicate maneuvers. Crude or not they have every intention of railroading these twenty men to prison, and Frank Corbishly to the gallows. They are animated by their own desperation and such things as honor, truth, justice, and union solidarity are merely unimportant details which they have never known.

There is not a labor case known to history where there have not been

found men whose spine is a streak of greed, and who are ready to swear to the high heavens that white is black. Zeigler is no exception. There will be many such individuals at the disposal of the prosecution. The scores of witnesses for the defense they intend to counteract with spread eagle speeches about the stainless honor of the stars and stripes, the inviolability of the constitution and the fair name of Franklin County with special reference to the dirty foreigners and abominable Bolsheviks who are on trial for their liberty.

The trial which was postponed at the last session of court, opens on February 2, 1926. There have been cases heretofore in American labor history of workers on trial thru frame ups by the capitalist class and its legal institutions, frame ups against workers for exercising their right to personal and political opinions, free speech and assemblage. But this case is unique in that it involves the right of workers to hold opinions in their own labor organizations, their right to fight for honest policies for the union to follow in its bitter struggles with the employers and the nightgowned enemy, the K. K. K.

The Zeigler men have fought a lone fight for quite some time. They are ready to continue this fight so long as they are able. Noble courage and admirable persistence have characterized their efforts up till now. Their danger calls loudly to the rest of the American workers for swift and generous aid.



The Bell and Zoller Mine.