

Eyes Towards Pittsburgh!

By Arne Swabeck

A terrific contest, fighting off cossacks, jailings, treachery and starvation. A once powerful union completely crumbling but with rapidly sprouting seeds of a new and better organization, born out of struggle and nourished by glorious examples of real proletarian heroism. Such is the picture brought to me by striking militant miners from the Pennsylvania and Ohio coal fields.

Sixteen months of strike is quite a record even for coal miners who know how to fight. And the Pennsylvania and Ohio miners have shown their mettle in mass picketing activities against heavy odds. While their spirit is not broken, the ravages of battle are plainly visible. These miners got caught between the giant squeezers of the "open shop" coal operators and the Lewis machine; both bent upon their destruction.

Here is how it works at present. The coal operators are opening up more mines under "open shop" conditions and on the 1917 scale or less. Lewis and his helpers, the district presidents Fagan and Hall, refuse to call the strike off but secretly consent to their supporters going back to work—scabbing. Due to complete absence of a policy of strike activities, lack of adequate relief; due to complete betrayal, terrorism and starvation, many good union men, a dismal, hopeless situation staring them in the face have been compelled to return to take up work in the "open shop" mines.

The Lewis machine in some instances maintains picketing but strictly in accordance with provisions of injunctions issued by judges owned and controlled by the operators. The result of such picketing was explained by one of the militant miners from the Allegheny Valley section in District No. 5. Up in his territory one of the strong Lewis supporters had charge of a picket line of eight men, all paid regularly by the district office for their duty. The man in charge thought he was doing pretty well with his faithful eight. While one month ago there were only 25 men scabbing in the mine, now, he admitted,

there were about 450. This is quite a general method. The paid pickets become the local machine, holding the fort for Lewis and Fagan. But to the strike the effect is a disastrous one.

Strike relief is being paid by the Lewis machine now and then, collected from the heavy assessments upon the union members at work; but now only as a method to help break the strike. Many locals staunchly

certed attempt to rob them of their treasures and halls owned by the local unions. The Lewis henchmen, utilizing the clause in the constitution, framed by them, of properties reverting to the parent organization, have hurried just a little bit more with charter revocations so as to lay hands these properties. That such expulsions were not carried out according to the constitution did not matter to them.

From Sub District No. 5 in Ohio, reorganized by the militants, the progressive president Robert Matussek reported many such attempts, some frustrated and some halls lost. "In one instance," he said, "I appeared in the squire's court as the attorney for the miners. The squire refused to recognize me, so I said, 'You, Mr. Squire, will have to be our attorney and we will hold you responsible for fighting our case right,' but he also refused this and and finally admitted me. Well", continued Matussek, "the squire was with the ma-

chine and we lost the hall but we could not pay high attorney fees anyway and we are appealing the case."

That the Lewis machine is bent upon selling out these strikers to the allied coal operators is becoming increasingly clear to them. Also among miners in the nearby unorganized territories is this recognized. Many reports are made from there that they will be willing to come out—but under the new union and new leadership.

The operators already count upon the sell-out as completed. On July first the Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Company cut the wages of loaders from 65 c. to 58 c. a ton and cutters from 12 c. to 11 c. a ton.

This is but further laying the basis for real organization of the unorganized miners. And while many good union miners have been compelled by the treachery of the Lewis policies to return to work they all turn their face with hope toward the formation of the new coal miners union at the national convention in Pittsburgh September 9 to 11.

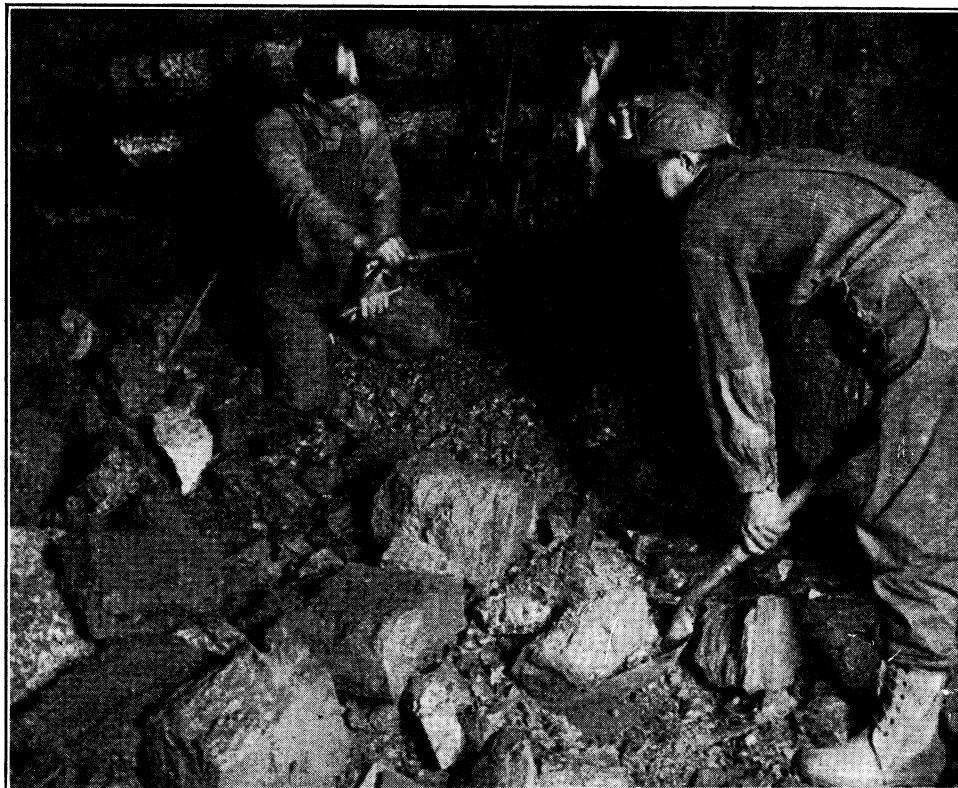


Photo Workers Health Bureau

DIGGING BLACK GOLD FOR THE PROFITS OF AMERICAN COAL BARONS

supporting the movement for the new union have long ago been eliminated from such relief benefits. At present when the members of a local union become particularly dissatisfied with the situation and outspoken for the new union the machine agents will come in and pay as high as \$5.00 per family. This is big money for a miner facing starvation. If they will promise to cease making demands for strike activities and lay off from the new union movement they may get a second ration, possibly a third, but that is invariably the end as meanwhile dissatisfaction becomes strong elsewhere and bribing becomes necessary there.

Naturally under such conditions the National Miners Relief Committee has come to occupy a place of a real friend of solidarity to these miners because it gives relief for strikers and not bribes for treason.

Great are the odds these embattled miners have been facing all along. And yet whenever they have sternly set their faces against the operators' attacks they have felt a new thrust in their backs from the Lewis machine. Recently they have met a con-