

EDITORIAL

ON THE COAL SITUATION.

By DANIEL DE LEON

HALIFAX, N.S., despatches in Montreal exchanges concerning the coal trade in Canada and the United States furnish the first tangible information to make clear the muddle in which the officials of the United Mine Workers Union find themselves, and also to furnish a basis from which to conjecture the likelihood, or unlikelihood of a strike.

As is well known, the national convention of the U.M.W.U. at Indianapolis met and adjourned leaving in the air the palpitating question of the contract about to expire in the anthracite fields. Conferences subsequently held with the anthracite mine owners adjourned without result, whereupon a convention of anthracite miners is now in session in Scranton, and there the question of to strike or not to strike is trembling in the scales.

At this stage the Halifax despatches come in, and unintentionally throw light across the path.

The despatches give detailed information concerning the bituminous fields. In the mines belonging to the Pocahontas Consolidated Collieries Company, located in Virginia and especially West Virginia, the full force of 600 men has been reduced to one-third. This is a sample of the situation in the bituminous mines. This fact has not been made public in American papers, leastwise has it been mentioned by the officers of the U.M.W.U. The fact is of prime importance. Coupling the fact with the additional one published from Halifax to the effect that the bituminous mine owners are throwing out "hungry eyes all around," the outcome of the "muddle" in the U.M.W.U. becomes pretty clear. It spells S-t-r-i-k-e.

If the bituminous mines were at all flourishing there might be a doubt as to whether the bituminous mine owners would care to force their lieutenants among the anthracite operatives to stop work at the expiration of the contract. Now that it

appears the bituminous mines are virtually at a standstill, with “hungry eyes” in the heads of their owners, it becomes obvious that these must be anxious for conditions that, by reducing the output of coal, through its virtual stoppage in the anthracite fields, will cause the demand for soft coal to rise. The hard coal mine owners have been complaining that the U.M.W.U. is run in the interest of the soft coal mine owners. The terrible pressure these soft coal mine owners are now found to be laboring under can not fail to be imparted to their labor lieutenants, with the final consequence that an anthracite strike will in all likelihood follow.

The year 1909 stands a good chance to see repeated the spectacle of one branch of the U.M.W.U. going on strike obedient to the requirements of the employers of the men in another branch of the same Union. The year 1909 stands a good chance of seeing repeated the economic phenomenon of 1902, when the bituminous mine owners made money hand over fist by virtue of the strike of the anthracite men, whom the bituminous capitalists supported in their strike by checking-off the strike assessments from their own employes. What remains to be seen is whether the so-called Socialist party will in 1909 pronounce, as it did in 1902, the leaders of the duped men on strike “champions of Labor,” who are “nobly waging the class struggle.”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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