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KENTUCKY

MINERS  
FIGHT

WORKERS  
INTERNATIONAL  
RELIEF



# Kentucky Miners Fight

by

HARRY GANNES

This minin' town I live in is a sad and lonely place;  
This minin' town I live in is a sad and lonely place;  
For pity and starvation is pictured on every face.  
Everybody hungry and ragged, no slippers on their feet;  
Everybody hungry and ragged, no slippers on their feet;  
All a-goin' round from place to place, bummin' for a little food  
to eat.

—The Hungry Miners' Blues.

Published by

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL RELIEF



1932

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## The Strike Is On!

Responding to the strike call the second week of January, 1932, saw ten thousand miners and their families in Bell and Harlan Counties out on strike. Strike sentiment spread rapidly to the Tennessee coal fields.

The coal operators, desperate in the face of the largest strike in Kentucky, resorted to a furious terror campaign. More gun thugs were hired and arrests and imprisonment of union and relief organization followed in an attempt to smash the strike.

On January 4, the fourth day of the strike, the sheriff's gun thug forces swooped down upon the offices of the National Miners Union and the Workers International Relief and arrested nine organizers and representatives in the office. The arrested included Clarina Michaelson, Norma Martin, and Margaret Fontaine, field representatives of the Workers International Relief; John Harvey and Vincent Kemenovitch of the National Miners Union, Vern Smith and Ann Barton, labor newspaper reporters and Julia Parker. All nine were charged with criminal syndicalism.

The striking miners answered the bosses' terror with mass demonstration when on two occasions the judge postponed the trial of the nine organizers when 5,000 miners filled the town to witness and protest the railroading of their representatives.

The coal operators especially directed their terror campaign against the relief apparatus of the strikers as was shown in the arrest of Charles Peters, distribution chairman of the Workers International Relief at Pineville, Ky. the second week of the strike.

The brutal kidnapping and flogging of Bill Duncan, Southern field organizer for the W.I.R. and Joe Weber, organizer for the National Miners Union, the end of the second week of the strike, was another example of the extent to which the coal operators are going in their desperate moves to try to break the miners' strike.

The Kentucky-Tennessee miners' strike is a most bitterly contested struggle and marks the beginning of struggle of the Southern workers under revolutionary trade union leadership against the ever worsening conditions the big corporations and bosses seek to impose upon them.

Everyone is called upon to support this strike with funds and food.



## KENTUCKY MINERS FIGHT

by HARRY GANNES

“THE dark and bloody ground” of Indian days in Kentucky is now the scene of a bitter struggle. The coal miners of Harlan and Bell Counties are fighting starvation and terrorism. Deep in the hills of Eastern Kentucky mighty corporations have brought hunger to whole towns and villages, to an entire mining population.

Of 18,000 miners in this area, four to five thousand are blacklisted, doomed to die of hunger, unless help comes from their fellow-workers in other parts of the country, unless they are able to break the death-grip the mine owners have on the rights of the workers. Whether at work or unemployed, whether blacklisted or “free to get a job,” the Kentucky miners face stark hunger.

### *The Fight Begins*

THE Kentucky miners are all of old American stock. Most of them are descended from the sturdy pioneers that wrested a hard livelihood from the rugged Kentucky mountains. Others come from Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Indiana. They have an independent, fighting spirit. Like the old Ken-

tucky frontiersmen, the coal miners who are under the yoke of the big corporations still retain their arms, old rusty rifles for the most part, relics of the day when their forefathers fought a daily battle to live. The miners are again fighting a battle to live, their chief enemy being the coal operators and the operators' ally, hunger.

In April, 1931, the miners in Evarts, Kentucky, marched in protest against their miserable lot. They were without real working class leadership. Their old forms of organization had broken down under conditions which were growing ever worse.

The march of the miners was taken as a signal of revolt by the coal operators. The operators knew the rebellion against hunger would spread. They knew that the miners would fight to the death their demands. They availed themselves of their old alliance with the underworld. They imported gunmen from all parts of the country.

The sheriffs, the judges and courts were willing tools in the scheme of the operators to beat back any show of resistance by the miners. The gunmen were deputized, made officials of the sheriff's office, with the right to kill, murder, dynamite—and received pay from both the coal operators and the county sheriff's office.

The terrorism which now hovers over every miner's shack was the coal operators' answer to the spontaneous movement against ever-decreasing wages. This terrorism is being smashed through by the organized efforts of the miners, through the building of a powerful militant union.

Behind the Harlan and Bell County authorities stand the big corporations which have drawn millions in profits out of the coal industry. The United States Coal and Coke Company, a subsidiary of Morgan's United States Steel Corporation, has mines in Lynch, Harlan County. The United States Steel Corporation in 1930 paid its stockholders \$72,000,000 in profits; in 1931 it had \$60,000,000 for dividends.

Henry Ford, whose profits in 1931 amounted to \$47,000,000.



has coal mines in Wallins Creek, Harlan County. These mines are run by the Fordson Coal Company.

The Peabody Coal Company controlled by the millionaire public utility magnate, Samuel Insull of Chicago, owns the Black Mountain Corporation, whose gunmen shot down miners in Evarts, Kentucky. This company paid its investors \$1,700,000 in 1930 while the Kentucky miners and their families were being starved, while hundreds of miners were being framed-up on murder charges for fighting against hunger.

There are other big mining companies in Harlan and Bell Counties. For years they have made heavy profits from their mines. They are organized in the powerful Harlan County Coal Operators Association whose word is law, and whose law is terror against the miners.

Though the Kentucky mines are owned by the most powerful groups and the richest persons in the world, the wages of the Kentucky coal diggers are the lowest, their lives the most miserable of any industrial group in the country.

### *A Machine Gun Procession*

NOT content with building up an armed force against the miners, the coal operators, under the leadership of the Harlan Coal Operators Association, ordered their "gun thugs," as the Harlan miners call them, to parade the main street of Evart in autos. Sticking out of the car windows were sub-machine guns and high-powered rifles. The thugs said nothing. Their rifle and machine gun muzzles did the speaking.

Daily this procession sought to terrorize the miners, to impress them with the insistence of the bosses that hunger and low wages had come to stay; that union organization must not strike new roots in Kentucky. Miners' homes were raided. Several miners were shot dead in their homes.

One day the gunmen entered Evarts. They fired into a group of miners, killing one. The miners returned the fire and three gunmen lay dead in the midst of the assassins' parade.

A howl of dismay and brutish revenge arose from the strongholds of the operators. The miners refused to accept murder along with starvation. Hun-

dreds of new gunmen were rushed into Harlan. Hundreds of miners were arrested, framed-up, indicted, charged with murder, terrorized. The courts in Harlan began to show their fangs. Judge D. C. (Baby-face) Jones, a tool of the operators, indicted miners on any charge from "confederating and banding," or criminal syndicalism to murder, at the mere assenting nod of the coal operators.

### *Civil War*

A STATE of civil war resulted. The miners throughout Kentucky were aroused to a fighting pitch. The issue was clear. The coal operators, following their policy of slashing wages, imposing worse and worse conditions on the miners, were determined to use every weapon, from their state machinery down, to crush the growing organization of the miners. The



*A Typical Group of Native American Miners*



miners were determined not to accept mass starvation.

Into this situation came the National Miners Union, the Workers International Relief, and the International Labor Defense. Scarcely a trace of the United Mine Workers of America had been left among the miners as the result of the new battles. The betrayals of the United Mine Workers of America were clear to the majority of the Kentucky miners. The National Miners Union, which was then leading a strike of 40,000 Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia miners, began to grow by leaps and bounds in Kentucky. Through its policy of mass organization, of rank and file leadership, of an uncompromising militant struggle for the right to organize and strike against starvation, the National Miners Union became the fighting organization of the Harlan and Bell County miners.

Of the 34 miners who faced trial on framed-up murder charges growing out of the Evarts battle, four were Negroes. The 3,000 Negro miners suffering along with their white brothers have been militant in fighting back. The terrorism of the Harlan County authorities, with the shooting down of miners black and white has its counterpart throughout the South where Negro workers and tenant farmers are lynched for daring to raise their voices and to act against starvation conditions.

The operators in Harlan began to blacklist active organizers. Already faced with hunger, the miners were plunged into utter starvation. The Workers International Relief began to organize soup kitchens, wells of energy for continuing the fight. Immediately all the fury of the coal operators and their gunmen was directed against the soup kitchens of the Workers International Relief.

To feed a starving miner fighting to build a union was a crime worse than murder in the eyes of the Harlan County Operators' Association. Hence, out of five Workers International Relief soup kitchens es-

tablished, three were blown to pieces by dynamite. At one, two miners were shot down in cold blood.

But the kitchens did not close down. The fight was just beginning. Hunger was spreading. Starvation diseases began to grip the entire population. Children, men and women were dying of hunger daily. With it all, the terrorism of the gun thugs likewise was growing.

### *"One Weapon—Strike"*

IN November, 1931, a group of nationally known writers chosen by the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, entered the coal fields of Eastern Kentucky to probe the truth of hunger and terrorism. This pamphlet offers part of the evidence gathered by that group about the heroism of the Kentucky miners who enter new struggles in the face of quick death by gunmen's bullets or slow, lingering death in the grip of hunger.

The investigating committee pointed out that the great mass of Kentucky miners are "hungry, penniless as they face disease, starvation and death. When these conditions become unendurable, the miners have but one weapon—strike."

Before we review conditions as told by the miners themselves in sworn statements before the writers' committee, we have the admission of mass starvation from sources which leave the mine owners without possibility of successful denial. The Knoxville *News-Sentinel* of November 17, 1931, tells of R. C. Browning, a Corbin lawyer who toured the Harlan coal fields. Browning wrote a letter to the governor of Kentucky, saying:

"I want to state that I went through Harlan County to Black Mountain (near Evarts) on October 21, and, if conditions have not improved since then, the women and children are suffering in that coal field for want of food and clothing, and I am confident that Mr. Dreiser's statements are true in part."



### *Red Cross—Strikebreaker!*

THEN Governor Flem D. Sampson of Kentucky sent a special commission to Harlan and Bell Counties in an effort to tone down the startling facts revealed by the miners themselves. This commission in its report, signed by Judge J. Smith Hays, chairman, and A. A. Bablitz, Lexington attorney, admitted that hunger and starvation were rampant. These patriotic Kentuckians, representatives of the exploiting class of Kentucky, were forced to declare:

“We were surprised to hear that an organization with the Red Cross as its banner, the emblem of the crucifixion and the blood of Christ, could turn a deaf ear or refuse to aid needy men, women and children.”

“Yes,” admitted the governor’s commission in substance, “there is hunger, and worse still, the Red Cross is helping to perpetuate hunger.” However, the governor failed to state the reason for his astonishing finding. The Red Cross helped the coal operators to blacklist the miners. It approved hunger, disease, starvation as weapons to fight the growth of a militant union. It condemned thousands of miners to death by starvation in order to preserve the profits of the wealthy coal operators.

President Hoover, who is the honorary head of the Red Cross, has repeatedly declared it is not the function of the Red Cross to feed starving workers, especially workers who dare to strike. Judge Barton Payne, national chairman of the Red Cross, has refused to feed either starving farmers or workers. The Red Cross raises \$9,000,000 a year on the plea that it “ministers to suffering humanity.” On July 1, 1931, the Red Cross could lay its hands on \$44,000,000, but in Kentucky the miners were not given even a handful of beans. The head of the Red Cross in Bell County, Herndon Evans, editor of the Pineville *Sun*, is a tool of the operators. He uses the organization to help break strikes and to further the hunger program of the national government.

### *Worse Than Slaves*

NO adequate picture of the starvation in the Kentucky coal fields will ever be given. The miners, their wives and children, who for years have lived among dying, undernourished comrades, will tell you of hunger, disease, misery, despair. But they will add, invariably: “You can never know how bad conditions *really* are.”

“I want to say,” declared Donaldson, a typical Kentucky coal miner, speaking at a mass meeting of 500 in Wallins Creek, Kentucky, on November 8, “that the miners are today worse off than slaves during slave time. . . . You go into the mines to slave for one dollar or eighty cents a day. You eat pinto beans and corn bread. You go to bed in a bag of rags, but the well bound criminal syndicalist law forbids you to speak. . . . The National Miners Union stands for the principles that our forefathers fought for. . . . Last winter was a cold winter and I want to say to you that during that winter I worked every day at such poor wages and could hardly buy food for my children, who had to go out without a bit of underwear. And then you say that this is a good country.” Many representatives of the mine owners were present at this meeting. They did not deny what Donaldson said.

### *A Miner’s Wife Speaks*

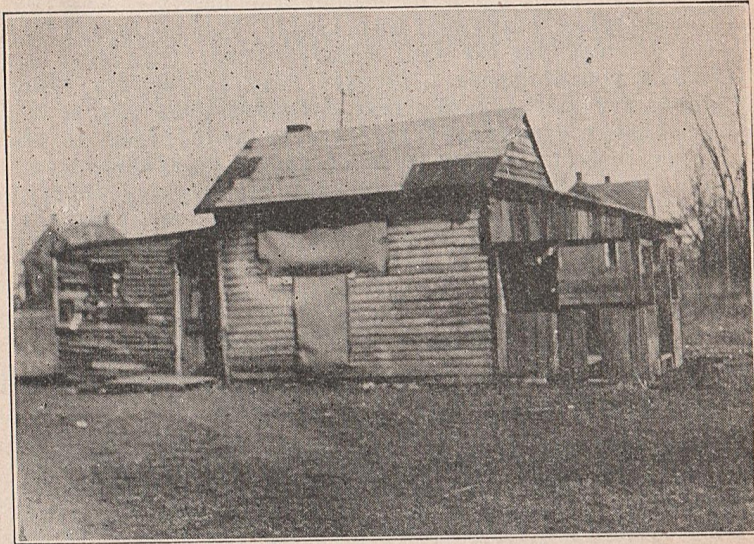
IN Straight Creek, Kentucky, Suzie Gates, the wife of a miner, spoke up. She said:

“We, the miners’ wives, have to go to the company stores to draw the scrip what their husbands made the day before. (Scrip is paper issued by the company instead of money. The miners are forced to spend it at the company store.) If they get any, they only get a small allowance. The biggest part is taken for carbide. They cannot get much to eat because they have to buy supplies. When we go to the company stores the prices are so high we cannot buy our groceries or anything. Our children go without lunch. Sometimes they have a little beans and corn bread, but without anything on it. No nourishing food. That is the reason we have flux. There are many cases of flux (a starvation disease which kills off the majority of its victims). We don’t even know how many. We have many deaths.”



### *Two Miles and Eighty Years*

**PINEVILLE**, Kentucky, is a small modern town run by the coal operators and rich landowners. Two miles beyond it lies Straight Creek. But this two-mile stretch of muddy road leads back eighty years into the past, reproducing conditions of the workers in England when the factory system was first introduced and lives were turned into profits. The dirty wooden huts of the coal camp are actually falling apart. The average cow barn is built more sturdily than nine-tenths of the shacks in Straight Creek.



*A Kentucky Miner's Hovel*

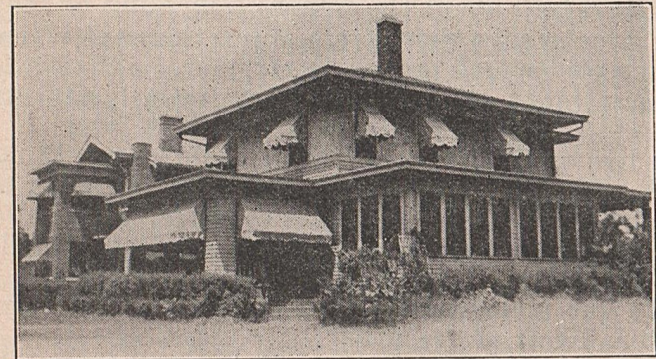
From a short distance away it is hard to see this mining village. The gray dirt, ground by trudging feet into a fine powder, blends with the houses and the gray appearance of the miners. Most of the houses are set flat on the ground. In many places the floor boards have worn out and the earth crops up into the rooms. Where the houses are built off the ground, the wind blows through broken boards.

Viewing these conditions with a military eye, a major of the Kentucky militia who accompanied the Committee "to report to the governor," summed them up as follows:

"If the army had control, or if there were a war situation here, we would condemn the whole camp as a plague spot and take immediate emergency measures."

Barefoot, ragged children drag themselves about. Most of them have or have had flux, a starvation disease which makes the intestines bleed. The doctors prescribe fancy medicines the miners cannot buy. The children die.

Stool pigeons, coal company officials and represen-



*A Mine-Owner's Manor*

tatives of the coal operators association looked surly and glum as the investigating committee of writers went from house to house, uncovering conditions that the coal bosses sought to keep secret even to the extent of shooting down two newspaper men sympathetic to the miners.

### *"Is That Little Girl Out of the Way?"*

**T**HE writers were asked to come into the house of Calloway Hobbs, a miner with a wife and five children. He had been out on strike under the leadership



of the National Miners Union. The strike had been won and there was a slight improvement in conditions. He told of the "cuts" made by the company amounting to as much as \$9 a month out of a monthly wage of \$25. For this the miners were supposed to get medical service and insurance. Hobbs told of an instance of the medical service given to the miners.

"My youngest little girl was sick. She had the flux. I notified the doctor at Pineville. He came four days later. 'There's nothing the matter with that little girl,' he said, and walked away. A few days later he accidentally paused by the house and saw the coffin on the doorstep. 'Oh,' he said, 'so that little girl is out of the way,' just like he felt she was in the way."

**H**OBBS told about the miners appealing to the Red Cross to save them from starvation, but when the Red Cross learned they were members of the National Miners Union, they refused them even a handful of beans.

"I live on damn little," Hobbs said, "even though I work. We have a few beans and a little lard. I draw about a dollar a day for seven people. The children never get milk. All the children had flux. This little girl here," he said, pointing to the child beside him, "ain't got no underwear on and she won't have all winter. None of us have."

He was asked what he and the children did for entertainment. "We ain't got no entertainment," he said. "These children don't know what a movie is. They never seen one. We had a phonograph that my son bought during the war time, but the records are all worn out."

Some of the miners suggested a visit two miles back into the hills. The best way to get there was along the railroad track. Here was the shack of Alex Napier.

Napier had been injured in the mine, a jagged hole being torn in his abdomen by a falling piece of coal. He did not dare ask the company for compensation, he said, because they would fire him. So he depended

on his sister to help feed him, his wife and four children.

It was late in the evening when the investigators visited Napier. The only light in the house came from the tiny coal grate. The single oil lamp in the house had been useless for months. They had to strike matches to see the holes in the floors. Napier said they wouldn't have any money even to bury him with, if he died from his injury, though the company took a "cut" for a burial fund out of his wages. His oldest son had been injured in a mine accident some time back and was not able to do hard work.

There was a dead silence among the group that left Napier's house. The Associated Press reporter, the National Guard officer, the stool pigeons looked ashamed to have these "radicals" and "Reds" view the depth of misery of these American miners in what they called "the proud state of Kentucky." The Associated Press reporter stuck to his silence and failed to mention a word about Straight Creek conditions in his dispatches.

The bosses and their press want to bury the truth about Calloway Hobbs, Alex Napier and the thousands of other miners and their families along with the little children they put into the hillsides every week.

Here are a few words from the statement of "Aunt" Mollie Jackson, who had nursed many of the miners and their children as they lay starving.

"The people in this county are destitute of anything that is really nourishing to the body. Even the babies have lost their lives. We have buried from four to seven a week all along during this warm weather. The little babies get stomach trouble from the beans and lard, and it is the only thing they get to eat if they eat at all. . . . Now pneumonia and flux are killing them off and when the cold weather comes it will be worse. My husband had pneumonia and now he can't work. I have to go to the soup kitchen and if they have anything I carry it back to my husband. The soup kitchen got slack and we are in real destitution now.





*One of the first organization meetings of the National Miners Union held in Evarts, Kentucky, last spring.*

"Just plainly speaking, the company is less interested in the miners than in their mules. They haven't got the sympathy for the men that people has got for livestock. These houses are not fit for pigs, and the company doesn't fix them. This winter, with the cold blowing in, and with the people undernourished, they will face terrible sickness. If I had a milk cow or horse, I certainly would be more interested now than the coal operators are in these people."

Dreiser interposed saying that the death of live stock means the loss of money to the owners, but the company is glad to get rid of a lot of troublesome miners who are preparing to strike.

### *Diet and Health*

THE Kentucky Health Department distributes to restaurants throughout the state an attractive poster on "Diet and Health." I saw one of them in a Pineville, Kentucky, restaurant, and it informed the readers (especially those who didn't need the information, because they were planked down in front of a substantial meal) that to maintain health they should eat plenty of green vegetables, fresh meat or chicken, drink plenty of milk, eat oranges or grapefruit, take sufficient rest and eat slowly. Milk and fresh vegetables, fresh meat, chicken and oranges! When a



miner's child in Harlan stops feeding at its undernourished mother's breast it seldom, if ever, sees milk again. Only to the Southern coal operators' government could it occur to paste up fancy posters with tantalizing pictures of green vegetables and fresh red meat among miners who count the beans they eat.

To work in the Harlan coal mines simply means you starve a little more slowly than when you are out of work or on strike. No miner in Harlan or Bell County, during the past two years, has been heard



*The National Guard—the Trump Card of the Operators*

to say that either he or his family had enough to eat.

### *“Roosian Reds”*

THE Kentucky coal miners are a gaunt bunch. The Southern ruling class and their typewriter harlots call them “picturesque,” and the thinner the miners get the more “picturesque” they are considered. It is only when the miners put up a heroic battle against starvation, a class fight against hunger, that they suddenly lose their designation as “picturesque” Americans. Ridiculous as it may sound, the Southern coal operators label these old Kentuckians, Vir-

ginians and Tennesseans who consider a resident of a Western Kentucky county a “distant furriner,” as “Roosian Reds,” “New York snake doctors,” or as “foreign Bolsheviks.” Wage cuts and unbearable conditions are making the term “Red” popular among the miners.

It is seldom that a Kentucky miner sees money. His wages are so low, the amount the company cuts out of his wage so high, that often after days of work the miners' wives are refused company scrip and the miners must go to work without any food in their buckets. While representatives of the coal operators listened in, never once denying the facts, nor publishing counter-statements in their press, the Harlan and Bell County miners risked death to come before the Dreiser Committee and relate their miserable lot. The following few instances, taken from the testimony of miners, can be duplicated by the thousands.

Caleb Powers, 42 years old, a miner for 25 years, has a wife and six children. He is a native of Kentucky. He said:

“They kept cutting wages until you couldn't make scarcely anything at all. If a man worked he done well to make \$40 or \$50 a month. I was working for the Birdie Coal Company at Wallins Creek. Some months ago I made as low as \$30 a month. Out of that I paid \$12 or \$15 rent a month. They cut you for hospital \$5 a month, for accident and for insurance and for burial. You hardly ever draw any money. You get scrip, and part of the time they have you in debt. I can never get enough saved up to buy clothes. We beg for our clothes. The prices in the company stores, where you are forced to buy with the scrip, is from ten to twenty per cent higher than other stores, so our dollar amounts to about eighty cents. I was fired because I attended a meeting of the National Miners Union. They charged me with criminal syndicalism. I don't know what it means. All my ancestors fought for this country. Now I am arrested for working for the National Miners Union and for collecting food for starving children.”

Charles Scalf started mining when he was nine years old; a native Kentuckian. He said:



"I get 35 cents a ton now and I make about \$30 a month; last month I made \$30.30. I have to work for that or starve. I was locked up and kept in jail for twenty days for working for the National Miners Union."

### *Three Days and a Dollar*

ONE miner's wife, who risked her husband's job to tell her story of starvation, related the following:

"My husband is a native Kentuckian. With our two children we live in a company town. My husband when he works, does not average a dollar a day. Where he is working now he receives only scrip. We are not living, just existing. I had one dollar in the last three days to live on, that is, my husband, myself and our two children." There was no self-pity in her voice. She had that fighting determination which is typical of the Kentucky miners and their plucky wives. "We lived on beans and bread," she continued. "We never get no dinner. We eat breakfast and then one more meal, if we can get it. I will tell you what my man eats when he works. I will tell you what I put in his pail to send him into the mine to do a hard day's work — and my man is a good coal digger and works hard. I put in his bucket today for him to go to work a little pumpkin, and what you folks call white bacon, that is, a little fat and bread. That is what he took for to eat. For breakfast he had water gravy (that is, water and some grease) and black bread. The children don't get no dinner unless we have bread.

"We don't get no clothes. This dress I got on was given to me and the shoes I have got were given to me. The coat I have on was bought six years ago. And my children are naked and can't go to school. They are running around without any shoes on their feet and no underwear."

This is the "home life" the American Legion is pledged to protect against the National Miners Union.

Dreiser asked her what entertainment the family had.

"My children don't know what the movies is," she said. "They don't know about no such things. They don't know what a radio is. For a while we got some food from the



*The Mine-Owners Want to Cut Wages*



Workers International Relief soup kitchen, but the company thugs closed that down.

"When my husband works our condition is no better. We get our money in scrip. The dollar is worth about seventy-five cents at the company store. For two whole days while my husband was working I couldn't even get the dollar in scrip. My husband was never arrested, but they were hot after him over at the soup kitchen when two miners were shot down.

"Right now I have no furniture. All four of us sleep on a bed Sister Jenkins gave me, and it has no mattress on it. My furniture was taken away when we were evicted after my husband was fired for joining the National Miners Union. We ain't got no chairs, but we sit on tin cans."

### *Hunger in West Virginia*

SUCH starvation conditions are not restricted to Harlan and Bell Counties alone, though this is the plague spot of the capitalist coal industry in the South. The New York *Times*, newspaper of the big Wall Street moneyed interests, sent an investigator to the West Virginia mine fields to "report" on conditions. The carefully edited story of the investigator of this boss newspaper cannot hide the fact that mass hunger is spreading among the miners in West Virginia, just as it has gripped Kentucky. A few of the admissions from this story follow:

"Miners in some sections are reduced to a standard of living comparable to that of 1893. Many work but two to four days a week and find their net earnings when they actually work, yield but eighty cents to a dollar a day. These earnings from part-time employment must suffice for the entire week so that the average available for bread and for clothing, school books and other necessary items is between thirty and sixty cents a day. Even those in the lowest depressed group who work six days a week have no more than seventy to eighty cents a day for food and clothing. . . .

"There is a great dearth of warm clothing and underwear. As in other coal fields, children go barefoot and remain home from school for lack of shoes and proper clothing. Many lack school books."

Hundreds of letters like the following have been received by the *Daily Worker* from Kentucky. This

letter, written by a coal miner's wife in Elcomb, Kentucky, tells in a brief but gripping way what thousands of miners' families face:

"Dear Friends:

"I have been a miner's wife for seventeen years. My husband has always been a hard working man and has always provided for his family. But for the past two years the wages in the mines have been so low that he could not support us.

"We have five children. We had to take them out of school last year when the weather got cold because they had no clothes. We can't send them to school now. They haven't any shoes or clothes to wear.

"We never have over two meals a day now. Sometimes we only have one. We haven't a thing fit to eat. We eat corn bread and water gravy. We haven't enough clothes to keep us warm. The hunger and cold make us miserable.

"I can hardly keep the girls from committing suicide, the way the fare is driving them to desperation. It looks like we can't live if we can't get relief. My husband is blacklisted because he joined the union.

"From a heartbroken coal miner's wife,

"Posha Moretz."

### *Hoover's Program*

THE struggle to enforce starvation in the Kentucky coal fields is part of the national program of the Hoover government, of the whole capitalist class of the United States. Over 12,000,000 workers are unemployed and when they demand relief their organizers are jailed, many are beaten. When the unemployed throughout the country sent 1,670 Hunger Marchers to Washington to demand Unemployment Insurance, and immediate cash relief for the winter, a whole army of gunmen, police and marines were mobilized against them. Their spokesmen were refused the right to present demands for Unemployment Insurance. No amount of force, however, was able to drown out the lusty demand. It went through the solid wall of police. It was heard throughout the country. The fight is now spreading throughout the country, the fight carried on by the Kentucky miners.



The drive against wages of the Kentucky miners is part of the program of the bosses everywhere to drive down the standard of living of the American workers in an effort to end the crisis by starving the workers—in an effort to save their profits at the expense of the workers. Wages in 1930 were cut \$12,000,000. On October 1, 1931, 1,000,000 steel workers had their wages cut; wages were slashed in almost every important industry. Now wages are being cut on the railroads. There is a continuous process of wage cutting effecting the entire American working class.

*Seek to Destroy W. I. R.*

**T**HE committee found that one of the main acts of terrorism of the Kentucky coal operators was the destruction of the Workers International Relief food kitchens. Why was this drive against the kitchens so ferocious? Why did they, in the words of the Dreiser report, "shoot and kill hungry men at relief kitchens and beat and terrorize their children and wives?" The answer is contained in the facts of the intensifying struggle. The kitchens established by the Workers International Relief were one of the main bulwarks in the organization of the National Miners Union in preparation for a strike which the miners felt was the only way to end hunger and terrorism. Hundreds of blacklisted miners, the best and most tried rank and file organizers, were being fed. The Workers International Relief kitchens were keeping up the fighting spirit of the miners.

Deserted and betrayed by the leaders of the United Mine Workers of America, the Kentucky miners called upon the National Miners Union, affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League, to send organizers into the Harlan field. Dan Slinger, Tom Myerscough and Caroline Drew were sent to help organize locals of the National Miners Union and Women's Auxiliaries, and to organize relief distribution. A reward of \$2,000 was promised the operators' thugs if they would get Slinger, dead or alive. Myerscough was

kidnapped, viciously beaten and taken for a ride to the Virginia state line. Caroline Drew, by assuming disguises, hiding out in the hills at night and secreted by the militant miners eventually brought about the opening of Workers International Relief kitchens to feed the blacklisted miners and their families.

Usually, the coal company deputized gunmen would come up to a soup kitchen at night and dynamite it. When they found the miners protecting these soup



*The Strike Is for Them*



kitchens they arrested them and charged them with "banding and confederating." On this charge they were kept in jail indefinitely.

### *Blood Spilled at a W. I. R. Kitchen*

THE most brutal attack against a food kitchen, in which two miners were shot dead in cold blood, occurred August 30, 1931. It was a dark night. A deputy sheriff's car (the miners call them a wagon-load of law) drove up to what was known as the Swimming Pool (W. I. R.) Relief Kitchen. The coal operators' gunman flashed his auto headlights on the door of the shack. Several miners came out to see who drove up. Deputy Sheriff Lee Fleener jumped out of the care, revolver in hand. "Who's there?" he yelled. "There are wimmin and children here," said Julius Baldwin, one of the miners. "To hell with them," replied Lee Fleener. Aiming his automatic at Baldwin, he shot him through the head. As Baldwin fell dead, Fleener shot at Joe Moore, another miner, killing him. He then shot at Jeff Baldwin, a brother of Julius Baldwin, wounding him in the shoulder.

Lee Fleener was cleared of all blame by Sheriff Blair and Commonwealth Attorney Brock. To this day he is employed as a killer for the coal operators, wearing a deputy's star. His main task is to seek to destroy the National Miners Union and the Workers International Relief.

This murder at a Workers International Relief kitchen was so brazen and deliberate an attempt to destroy an important organ of the miners' defensive force, that even the governor's investigating commission which followed the Dreiser Committee was forced to "deplore" it. *"The commissioners reached the conclusion," wrote the Knoxville (Tenn.) News Sentinel, "that the killing was an unjustifiable homicide. No indictments have been returned, but further inquiry by Harlan officials is promised."*

Though dynamited, and made the scenes of wholesale slaughter, the Workers International Relief food

stations did not close down. New ones are springing up as the miners renew their struggles, continue to build up the National Miners Union, and enter the mightiest struggle against hunger yet undertaken in the Kentucky coal fields.

In Wallins Creek the soup kitchen feeds about one hundred persons a day, about sixty per cent are children. The miners scour the country for a few scraps of food, which they bring to the relief kitchens. The miners' wives are in charge and do the cooking. But with more miners being blacklisted, with a strike struggle on, very little can be collected in the Kentucky fields. The food kitchens, which withstand the most ferocious terror of the coal operators' gunmen, the dynamite of the bosses, the wholesale threats, will succumb unless the workers everywhere come to their aid.

The Dreiser Committee, composed of the foremost writers in the United States, and later supported by a still wider group of famous novelists and writers when they were indicted for their exposure of hunger and terrorism in Kentucky, pointed out that the United Mine Workers of America was responsible, along with the coal operators, for the starvation of the miners. "The miners," declared the Dreiser Committee report, "poorly organized by the United Mine Workers of America (American Federation of Labor) and sold out by them, are now hungry, penniless, as they face disease, starvation and death."

The United Mine Workers of America which "sold out" the miners has the support of the local operators and the county authorities. Despite this, it does not exist as an organization among the miners. No amount of hunger or pressure from the capitalist forces can help the United Mine Workers of America to hoodwink the miners and to continue its scabbing policy. The National Miners Union is being built through struggle — and greater struggles are opening up now.

Relief work carried on by the Workers Internation-



al Relief is becoming a still greater target for the bosses. They have tried terror and still continue it. But it has not availed them in their efforts to destroy this vital arm of the workers' struggle. They are now pursuing a new tactic in the face of growing strike struggles. Since the Red Cross has been exposed as a strike-breaking organization, the coal operators are attempting to blind the workers by building up a fake relief organization of the nature of the Gifford Committee formed by President Hoover to starve 12,000,000 unemployed workers throughout the United States.

### *Poisoned Handouts*

UNDER the inspiration of the Harlan County Coal Operators Association a meeting was called in the Harlan Baptist Church on December 6, 1931, just one week before the National Miners Union was to open its first district convention in Pineville, Kentucky, to set the date for a general strike in the Harlan coal fields. The coal operators, who denied there were any starving miners in Kentucky, suddenly realized that there was a need for "relief." They called this meeting in order to organize against the miners' collecting relief in Harlan County for their strike. "Everyone who has employment should realize their good fortune," said the leading editorial in the Harlan *Daily Enterprise*, commenting on the coal operators' "relief" meeting. This was a warning to the miners not to strike. The meeting, said the *Daily Enterprise* further, "was the best answer that could be given to those who are clamoring on the outside about conditions in Harlan County. . . . It will show the people from the outside that this county is doing all possible to aid those who are unfortunate."

This is the action taken by the bosses on the eve of the strike! A new attack against the Workers International Relief, an attempt to organize the operators' forces in and around Harlan to block every attempt to support the strike locally by the collection of relief.

### *The Call to Strike*

ON December 13, 1931, the National Miners Union held its first district convention in Pineville, Kentucky. Seventy-two mines sent 263 delegates representing 17,000 miners. Preparations for the convention were made and carried out despite raids of the gun thugs and repeated threats. One of the active members of the union, MacSumner, was kidnapped.

The call for the convention, urging the miners to prepare for strike, declared:

"Our working conditions in Kentucky are growing from bad to worse. Our wages are the lowest in the coal industry. Most of us are working only two and three days a week without ever seeing cash. Our families are starving. Our children are dying of hunger. The coal operators are not satisfied even with these intolerable conditions. They continue to cut our wages, to worsen our conditions and to increase our starvation in order that they may pile up bigger profits."

By a unanimous and enthusiastic vote the miners decided to go out on strike January 1. They knew they would meet with all the resistance that the enraged coal operators could rally. Nevertheless, they were determined to mobilize all the Kentucky miners in a fight to end starvation.

At the convention one of the leading topics brought up in preparation for the strike was relief. Alfred Wagenknecht, secretary of the Workers International Relief, spoke on the problems of relief and the winning of the strike. He said that a nationwide campaign had been started to raise food, funds and clothing to help the Kentucky miners win their battle. The Workers International Relief had pledged its full support. Wagenknecht said that workers' organizations everywhere would be drawn into the task of collecting and dispatching relief. By unanimous vote, these miners, facing death from the hands of the coal operators' gunmen, or a lingering death for themselves and their families by slow starvation, decided to back the Workers International Relief in the drive for strike relief. They said, though they had the tre-



mendous task of building their union strike apparatus and building the organization structure of the National Miners Union, that they would collect help relief even in their poverty-stricken territory. They endorsed the call for strike relief led by the Workers International Relief.

### *What the W. I. R. Stands For*

THE Workers International Relief builds immense solidarity movements in all cities and industrial centers, in farming communities to aid the struggles of the working class. It calls for the united front of all workers, sympathizers and their organizations against the exploiters and betrayers of the working class. It acquaints the working class with the demands and struggles that any section of the working class engages in and organizes masses of workers in support of such struggles.

The W. I. R. organizes relief on the basis of working class solidarity, not capitalist charity. The necessity of building branches of the Workers International Relief is shown not only by the Harlan struggle, but as well by the many strikes in the past in which the Workers International Relief was a powerful ally of the workers. With the growing wage cut campaign directed against all workers, the resistance of the workers will increase. The workers cannot wait until the critical day of struggle to build their relief organization. It must be built now, every day, in every struggle.

Not only does the Workers International Relief raise strike relief — starting a special drive for the Kentucky mine strike — but it joins with the unemployed in their struggle for Unemployment Insurance.

The W. I. R. renders relief without discrimination as to party, nationality, religion or race and strives for complete unity of all workers against attacks of the bosses.

The W. I. R. organizes workers' children's camps where children of the unemployed and of strikers are

taken care of without charge and where children of the employed workers are taken care of at minimum rates.

The W. I. R. gives medical aid to workers injured at demonstrations. A medical unit of the W. I. R. traveled with the National Hunger Marchers to and from Washington.

Tent colonies were established by the W. I. R. in the Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia coal strike to defeat the coal operators' efforts to break the strike by wholesale evictions.

Besides, the W. I. R. organizes cultural activities through the Workers Theatres, Workers Film and Photo Groups, Workers Chorus, bands, orchestras, etc.

The main task before the Workers International Relief in Kentucky is collecting immediate relief, establishing mor ekitchens to win the strike against starvation.

The miners are now fighting for their very lives—against hunger that has left its visible mark on every man, woman and child in the coal camps of the Kentucky hills. They look to every worker and sympathizer in the United States to help them in their fight. The Kentucky miners are learning the meaning of working class solidarity. Help them face the gunmen of the coal operators. Help them with their fight—your fight—against starvation!







*This Is What The*  
**KENTUCKY  
MINERS**

*Are Facing in Their  
fight for bread.*

**YOU MUST  
HELP THEM**

Send all funds to:

**WORKERS  
INTERNATIONAL  
RELIEF**

16 WEST 21st STREET  
NEW YORK CITY

**Aid Their Fight  
With Food and  
Funds**



DATE DUE

DATE RETURNED