

UNITED MINE WORKERS OF AMERICA
NEWS BUREAU
UMWA BUILDING
WASHINGTON 5, D.C.

Washington, D. C., June 15, 1948. — John L. Lewis at a press conference today made the following statement:

"Obviously you know that the operators walked out of the conference and terminated the negotiations. In doing so they took action which the Mine Workers were legally prohibited from doing. We did not possess that freedom of action under the injunction. It must be equally obvious to you that we have negotiated under great difficulty in this conference.

"It is the first time in our experience that we were ever legally mandated to continue to sit in a conference as long as the coal operators wished us to do so; the alternative, of course, being that they always had the right to charge us under the injunctive instrument of not bargaining in good faith. They were always free to make this accusation in the conference against which we had no defense.

"So the actuality of bargaining was completely destroyed by the injunctive instrument. The Mine Workers were disarmed while the operators sat in the conference with this legal club. They made the most of this legal club. In the very nature of things such a conference in free America was bound to fail. Negotiating under duress is distasteful to a free-born American. During the days of conferences we were only permitted to arrive at the operators' pleasure and to depart when weariness affected them, which is the most astounding type of collective bargaining conference. It will be recalled by the press that on June 9 we made a proposal to the operators, which meant in substance that after the vacation was over, on the sixth of July, our men would continue to work under the old scale, pending negotiation of a successor contract, with the understanding that any changes or improvements negotiated affecting wages or conditions of employment would be made retroactive to July 1, 1948, inclusive; provided that the operators will cause their trustee representative under the existing contract to permit forthwith the administrative activation of the 1947 Welfare Fund, and that the business of the fund and the disbursements of its monies be governed in all matters by the majority decision of any of its three trustees which was in accord with the contract and the law, as we understand the law.

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"By inaction they have declined that proposal, and that is the situation today. The conference is aborted by their departure. Our proposal meant that as for the remaining period of the contract and as affecting the monies already paid into the '47 fund to which they waived title and interest in the contract be left solely to the discretion of the trustees, while we proceeded with an attempt to negotiate a successor agreement. They made some suggestions and to accept them would have meant that the United Mine Workers would have abandoned to whatever fate might befall them: Over 40,873 disabled United Mine Workers' members who are now receiving benefits up to and through May 31. 77.1 per cent of those members are permanently disabled and will never work again and have no other source of income. It contemplated the abandonment of 16,038 widows of which number 2,245 were widows because their husbands were killed in mine accidents outright. The remainder of the widows' husbands having died because of injuries received in the mines and other ordinary illnesses or ailments which affect mankind. Those widows had 9,230 dependent children. 40,873 disabled miners had wives and dependent children totalling 61,399. The total number of persons dependent upon the welfare fund is 127,540.

"The Mine Workers pointed out continually during the conference that vast number of human beings were victims of the industry and that their lives had been used up by the coal operators and that the coal industry required that sacrifice of human flesh and the Mine Workers averred that they did not care to make a successor agreement, now or in the future that would abandon those people to die, either on their beds of pain or to become public paupers.

"The Mine Workers do not care to pay that price for the privilege of working in a coal mine. You will note that that number of beneficiaries amounts to this. That practically every miner working in this industry is related to one of these people who are no longer able to work, which makes for human equations that renders it impossible for the public or anyone else to expect that the coal miners of this country will abandon their sick and injured to die at the whim of the mercenary coal operators, and it is the definite position of the United Mine Workers that it will not make an agreement that contemplates this dastardly and brutal action. I doubt that scenes of human misery in the concentration camps of Germany exceed such a cold-blooded suggestion and contemplate with equanimity the callous gazing of human misery as expressed by the operators' attitude.

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"There has been no discussion of the details of the 1948 agreement. All press reports to the contrary notwithstanding. If after 11 months and nearly 12 under the old agreement we are unable to get the operators to honor that agreement, then there is little justification of our undertaking to negotiate another agreement without the guarantee for the honoring of both.

"Those are the main matters which have been made points of consideration by the Mine Workers' negotiators in this conference, and they run to the question of whether or not the men in the mining industry can be forced unwillingly to mine coal and abandon their loved ones or whether they can not be so forced.

"We have comparatively few men as we have called attention to before, who are capable of mining the country's coal, and our whole economy, the prosperity of our people, and our national and world prestige is predicated on keeping our economy functioning with an ample supply of this most precious commodity expressed in terms of modern civilized requirements. I again refer to the fact that we are the only nation in the civilized world capable of mining enough coal for our own requirements and have a supply for export to other nations.

"The time has gone by when the coal operators can attempt to brutalize the mine workers and reap their will upon them by such an arbitrary position and expect at the same time the aid of the government of the United States in beating these men back into the mines. Men who are beaten back as slaves in the coal mines are not good producers of coal, and the record of all history sustains that.

"So America should think about this problem, and public opinion should support the Mine Workers in insisting that an honorable agreement be negotiated as free men negotiate honorable agreements and that agreements which have already been negotiated should be carried out according to the letter of the bond.

"The operators have announced that under the injunction they are through with the Mine Workers until the whim again seizes them, at which time they will again command our presence. They appear to think that the Mine Workers are galley slaves who can be scourged to their dungeons at will. And I think that they are due for a wide awakening.

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"I call attention again to the opulence of the industry and the magnitude of their profits, -- that there is no question about the ability of the operators to pay a decent wage and maintain reasonable conditions, because the public pays the operators enough for their coal to enable them so to do. It is obvious that the operators have been trying to create a crisis and to secure an excuse to terminate and abandon the negotiations. Their reason for so doing is also obvious.

"They believe that they need only to stand off to one side to permit the government to move in, secure an injunction and to impose legal sanctions upon the men who mine coal and the union. In the past they have been reasonably successful with that policy. They hope to be successful again, and they see no reason for fighting the Mine workers themselves as long as they can stand aside and have the government, under the Taft-Hartley slave law, and at the expense of the taxpayers of this country, beat the coal miners into submission. That is their policy, the long and the short of it.

"I have frequently told the country that the key to this situation as far as the contract is concerned is held by two financial interests, represented by Messrs. Fairless and Humphrey, of Cleveland. Mr. Fairless, representing U.S. Steel with its great holdings in the coal industry and Mr. Humphrey, a steel man, partner of Mr. Weir in the independent steel producing business, controls a vast commercial tonnage in addition to the individual steel producers. Mr. George Love, agent of Mr. Humphrey, in this conference holds 84,616,748 tons. Mr. Harry Moses, agent of Mr. Fairless, sits in the conference and votes 59,459,967 tons. They are in alliance with Mr. Francis and Mr. Alexander of the Southern Coal Producers who have a total of 158,148,053 tons, which is largely commercial production.

Mr. Fairless and Mr. Humphrey demonstrated last year and it is now a matter of history that they could settle or refuse to settle. They negotiated the agreement last year with the United Mine workers of America. They elected to do so last year rather than fight. Apparently they have elected to fight in 1948 and not settle. They have the control.

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"Last year when they settled the country promptly followed in a few days. This year the country follows and adheres to their policy. If they settle tomorrow the country would settle in a few days. The public and the press seem to ignore those facts because Mr. Fairless and Mr. Humphrey now choose to hide behind their agents and false fronts in these conferences. Assuredly Mr. Moses and Mr. Love cannot vote until Mr. Fairless and Mr. Humphrey give permission. If the government wants a settlement, all the government has to do is to beg of Messrs. Fairless and Humphrey and their respective interests to please not bring a scourge on the nation.

"I point out that in these conferences during the past week no one has talked on the operators side on any matters of issue except Mr. O'Neill and Mr. Moses; Mr. O'Neill being made the mouthpiece of those respective interests. Mr. Thompson, who represents all the tonnage in the far west, has not made a single observation on the question of contract. Mr. Campbell of the Illinois operators and Mr. Howard of the Illinois strip industry, and Mr. Cartwright, pseudo-chairman of the operators conference — none of them have opened their mouths for fear of saying something which would displease Mr. Love or Mr. Moses.

"That is the kind of conference that has been going on. We are weary, of course. We are weary of being enjoined to stay and listen to them mumble. So there, gentlemen, is free collective bargaining in the United States of America under this abominable and oppressive slave labor law conceived by Mr. Taft and supported by the National Coal Association.

"And to top it off, if you please, while we were in session, Mr. Ebersole Gaines, president of National Coal Association, and president of New River Coal Operators Association, appeared before a congressional committee asking Congress to outlaw industry-wide collective bargaining.

Mr. Lewis then went on to say that Mr. Gaines did this in view of the fact that the Mine Workers have been forced to sit in these conferences under an injunction secured by the operators compelling the Mine Workers to bargain collectively with the whole industry, and permit the intrusion of the Southern Coal Producers Association in the conference. So they blow hot and cold and whistle in both directions, and we are under the injunction. And that with the most basic of American industries, that with the most precious of our national resources, that with the most skilled and productive miners in all the world — they play with destiny. And they do it with arrogance because they are opulent.

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