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HARD-COAL TALKS TO START

1948
Washington, D. C., May 26. -- The United Mine Workers of America and the representatives of the anthracite operators will sit down in Philadelphia tomorrow (Thursday) to work out a new hard coal wage agreement.

The present agreement, which expires by notification July 10, covers approximately 80,000 anthracite miners in 225 mines in eight Eastern Pennsylvania counties. They belong to 225 local unions in three districts of the UMWA.

Of special importance on the agenda of negotiations will be matters pertaining to the Anthracite Health and Welfare Fund.

There are many more accidents in the hard coal fields in comparison to the number of miners working than there are in the bituminous mines. Last year, according to the U. S. Bureau of Mines, 175 mine workers were killed and 12,500 were injured in the anthracite region.

Since the UMWA anthracite Health and Welfare Fund was established in 1946, the Fund has paid out 2,006 death claims of \$1,000 each. Death claims average 1,200 a year. The Fund also is paying out 5,147 disability benefits monthly and is examining at present 1,500 applications.

In the little-known silicosis project, the Fund has sent 163 silicotic miners to Philadelphia hospitals for treatment.

Mr. Thomas Kennedy, vice president of the UMWA, is chairman of the Fund. Mr. Kennedy, former lieutenant-governor of Pennsylvania, went to work in the anthracite mines in his home town of Lansford, Carbon County, Penna., at the age of 11 years. He was the oldest of eight children of a coal miner's family.

Representing the miners at the conference will be: Mr. John L. Lewis, President of the UMWA; Mr. Kennedy; Mr. John Owens, secretary-treasurer, and a scale committee composed of 35 officers and miners from UMWA Districts 1, 7 and 9 in Schuylkill, Dauphin, Northumberland, Carbon, Luzerne, Sullivan and Susquehanna counties of Pennsylvania - the nation's hard-coal area.

The conference will begin with a joint miners-operators luncheon in the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, Philadelphia.

Following the luncheon the conference will be organized formally with the election of a permanent chairman, traditionally an operator representative, and a secretary, who is expected to be John Boylan, who is also secretary of the Anthracite Board of Conciliation and former president of UMWA District No. 1.

The Anthracite Board of Conciliation, organized in 1903, is the oldest continuously operating labor-management conciliation body in the United States.

During the first afternoon of the anthracite conference, again following historical precedent established in 1903, the UMWA and operators will issue a joint statement.

The anthracite industry, unionized early in the century by the late John Mitchell, former UMWA president, differs in many respects from the bituminous (soft coal) industry, whose contract negotiations began last week in Washington. Hence problems peculiar to the anthracite industry will be an issue.

The hard coal wage scale is also different from that of the bituminous workers.

Inside workers (those who go down into the mines) have a seven-hour day. Company miners average \$11.10 a day at present and company laborers, \$10.53. However, most anthracite is produced by contract miners working on a piece-work basis and averaging about \$13 a day. Piece work scales vary with individual mines depending upon conditions encountered. Consideration miners (contract miners who encounter abnormal conditions) usually receive an average of \$11.97 for a seven-hour day.

The minimum surface labor rate for seven hours averages \$9.41. Higher rates both inside and outside the mine are paid for special skills and abilities.

The present wage agreement specifies that the contract may be reopened by 10 days' notice from either the UMWA or the operators. However, the Taft-Hartley Act caused confusion and a departure from established procedure and the conference had to be called 60 days in advance of the expiration date, July 10. The conference was originally called for May 20, but was postponed until tomorrow by mutual agreement.

The chief companies with which the UMWA will deal at the conference, who represent 85 percent of the anthracite production, are:

Glen Alden Coal Company, the Hudson Coal Company, Lehigh Valley Coal Company, Lehigh Navigation Coal Company, Susquehanna Collieries Company, the Pittston Company and Jeddo-Highland Coal Company. Independent mining companies account for the other 15 percent of production.

Anthracite coal miners have averaged 260 days work a year since the war.