

FROM:
United Mine Workers of America
Press Bureau
Shoreham Hotel
Washington, D. C.

Washington, May 18. ¹⁹⁴⁸ -- John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America, today accused the Southern Coal Producers Association of trying to wreck coal industry wage negotiations.

Mr. Lewis, addressing the afternoon session of the 1948 Joint Bituminous Wage Conference in the Shoreham Hotel, spoke in favor of a UMWA-sponsored motion to seat in the conference only those operators who were signatories to the 1947 National Bituminous Coal Wage Agreement. The Southern Coal Producers Association walked out of 1947 negotiations and did not sign the agreement.

If the Southern Coal Producers Association, as such, were allowed to participate, the UMWA thus would be "separated twice from the managers of coal properties," Mr. Lewis pointed out.

The union president said that lack of responsibility and authority on the part of the operators increasingly has been the cause of troubled labor relations in the coal industry.

Mr. Lewis noted that the Southern Coal Producers Association was a "holding company," - "the plaything of a few men," and an organization that allegedly represented other coal producers' organizations and individual operators -- "presenting an attitude of destruction."

"If you get far enough away," Mr. Lewis said, "there is no responsibility."

Following Mr. Lewis' talk, Charles O'Neill, an operator representative on the conference credentials committee, moved a recess of the conference to 10 a.m. (EDST) tomorrow (Wednesday). The motion was seconded by Mr. Lewis and passed unanimously by the conference. The recess time was 3:30 p.m. No action was taken.

The issue arose originally over an operator-sponsored amendment to the union's motion to seat only signatories of the 1947 agreement. Mr. O'Neill moved the amendment which would have seated Joseph E. Moody of the Southern Coal Producers Association in the joint conference.

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John Owens, international secretary-treasurer of the UMWA, preceded Mr. Lewis in speaking in opposition to the seating of the Southern group.

"I do not know the gentleman who comes here with credentials from the Southern Coal Producers Association," Mr. Lewis told the conference.

Mr. Lewis said there were "no personal equations involved in this matter." He said the question was simply whether the Southern Coal Producers Association "as such has the right to participate in this joint convention." The UMWA president then quoted from the letter calling the present conference, and from the 1947 agreement, to emphasize that the Southern group was not a signatory to the agreement and had no right to participate in the conference.

The union president said the operator signatories of the 1947 agreement have "no right to designate another holding company as their agent."

Mr. Lewis then reviewed previous negotiations in which the Southern group took part. He charged that the Southern group invariably used its "veto" power to block agreement. All actions of the joint conference must be unanimously agreed upon.

Then, Mr. Lewis noted, when the UMWA met separately with the Southern group the group refused again to make any agreement with the union. As a result of these tactics, the UMWA recently has followed a policy of reaching agreement with the individual Southern operators and associations. These individual operators and associations are signatories of the 1947 agreement.

The policy of the Southern group is one of "harassment and confusion," Mr. Lewis charged. He said that in 1947 the Southern group used its "influence and propaganda" and "veto power" to try to prevent an agreement.

"And they are ready to do it now," the union president said. "They want to use their veto power so they can run the conference."

Mr. Lewis compared this use of the "veto" to the issue existing in the United Nations over the veto.

Charging that the Southern group was trying to force its way into the conference, Mr. Lewis warned: "If that is done there will be no conference."

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"Then the coal industry again will have failed to meet its obligations," the union president continued. "And I suppose the price of coal will be advanced and the Southern Coal Producers Association will say the cause is the 'arbitrary' actions of the United Mine Workers of America."

Referring to the 1947 agreement, Mr. Lewis said: "Maybe we were naive or unsophisticated in expecting that the agreement should be carried out."

Mr. Lewis said that "maybe when civilization gets away from the necessity of burning coal, civilization may then erect a monument to the coal industry..."

"And I suggest that the slogan on the monument may be: 'You know how it is,' " Mr. Lewis added. This brought laughter from the members of the joint conference.

In addition to the facts previously noted, Mr. Lewis said the Southern group had "waived its right to sit in the conference by suing the United Mine Workers of America...under the Taft Slave Law."

Mr. Lewis accused the Southern operators of turning over his personal correspondence to government attorneys who, he said, "are hungry as wolves for the blood of labor under the Slave Law."

Mr. Lewis emphasized that after the conference is formally organized by the signatories of the 1947 agreement, the Southern group may then have its chance to state its case to the joint conference and ask for admission as a party to the present negotiations.

He said the position of the operators in trying to get the Southern group seated was "spectacular and astounding" and ended his address with this statement: "The responsibility is yours, gentlemen."

Mr. Owens of the UMWA, in his report to the joint conference, noted that signatories to the 1947 agreement, as provided by the agreement, were the only ones invited to attend the present conference. A number of coal companies answered the call to the conference, he noted. He said the 1947 agreement was "specific" as to who should be represented in the present negotiations and as to the organization procedure of the present conference.

Mr. Owens said operators who answered the call to the conference represented 269,000,000 tons of annual coal production. He said the UMWA's

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position, because of the 1947 contract language, was that only the individual Southern companies and associations that signed the agreement could participate.

"We (UMWA members of the credentials committee) said that if Moody (of the Southern group) would bring signatures of representation from individual companies authorizing him to represent them, the UMWA would not refuse to meet with the Southern Coal Producers Association," Mr. Owens said.

"We think they are imposing themselves on this conference and that they have no right here," he added.

Mr. Owens bitterly assailed the Southern group for its tactics and pointed out that there is "no way a conference can properly vote on seating any strangers in the conference" until the conference is organized to conduct its business.

"Orderly procedure would be stifled by any other procedure," Mr. Owens charged.

"We ask that the contract be carried out and that the obligations of the operators be honored," Mr. Owens said.

"The Southern Coal Producers Association can come into this conference under ordinary procedure and present their arguments to the conference after it has been organized," the union secretary-treasurer pointed out.

"If you want to dishonor procedure and your contract, then you will have to stand responsible for your actions," Mr. Owens warned.

Mr. Owens said the Southern Coal Producers Association had no more right to participate in the conference than would a "hog growers association or a deep freeze operator."

Noting that coal represents the "life blood of American industry," Mr. Owens said: "We hope that this great collective bargaining session can function."

Speaking directly to the operators, Mr. Owens concluded: "It's now up to you as to whether you want to block orderly procedure for the first time in the history of these joint conferences."

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