
Report from Alfred Wagenknecht (DO#14) in Wilkes Barre, PA to the National Office of the WPA, June 4, 1923.

A document in the Comintern Archive, f. 515, op. 1, d. 187, ll. 59-60.

154 Lincoln Street
Wilkes Barre, Pa.
June 4, 1923

National Office
Workers Party

Comrades:—

Upon May 30th the progressive miners' conference for District 9 of the UMW occurred. The attendance was small. It was expected to have representatives present from District 7, but none came. In Districts 7 and 9 of the UMW our party membership is insignificant. In 7 we have no branch of the party. In 9 we have two small branches, one Lithuanian and one mixed. I addressed the conference of progressive miners held in District 9 on Decoration Day [Wednesday, May 30]. The program was received favorably, excepting that there were present three or four Lithuanian comrades who refuse to join the party and who objected strongly to the organization of a labor party. This conference took place in Minersville. A delegate to Pittsburgh was elected and it was hoped that sufficient money could be gathered to pay his expenses.

The party branch at Minersville consists of five or six families — about 11 members, all Lithuanians. Only one speaks English fluently enough to be understood. Since disbanding the language UMW locals in this region, and the organization of mixed language colliery locals, the influence of our comrades in the UMW has been lost. This influence must be regained by organizing caucuses of the progressives formerly

active in the language locals of the UMW. For this purpose a Lithuanian organizer is needed, and it is suggested that Comrade [Antonas] Bimba be sent to this region for some weeks.

From Minersville I went to Mahanoy city. Here I found a branch consisting of three Russians, two Ukrainians, and one English comrade. This branch pays dues to the Russian federation. The branch is not active. The secretary promised to make another attempt at calling the members together and holding meetings.

From Mahanoy City I returned to Wilkes Barre in time for the [Rose Pastor] Stokes meeting. Stokes did not appear and the comrades here are much put out over this. What is the explanation? A hall costing \$25 was rented, printing for an additional \$5 was gotten out, other minor expenses were incurred, and then the speaker fails to appear. The audience, many of whom were Jewish people, and of whom we might have received good support had the speaker come, were very disappointed.

Upon Thursday the District 1 progressive miners' conference took place. This conference was a success. Delegations from Olyphant, Dickson, Providence, Dunmore, Scranton, Pittston, Plymouth, Wilkes Barre, Plains, Nanticoke, Hanover, Macanaqua, Parsons were present. It was decided to send a delegate to Pittsburgh† and Comrade Dziengielewski of the Polish branch in Dickson was elected. A district committee to carry on the work among the progressive miners was named. Enough money was contributed to pay the delegate's expenses to Pittsburgh.

The campaign for the progressive slate in Dis-

†- The 1923 convention of the United Mine Workers was held in Pittsburgh on June 27. It was a riotous affair in which two members of the WPA, not delegates, were ejected from the hall and beaten up, and a third WPA delegate was expelled from the meeting.

trict 1 of the UMW is now two weeks before the election, assuming an organized form. That is, a little something is being done to advocate the election of the progressive slate in territory not overwhelmingly progressive. At a meeting of a subdistrict grievance committee, at which the whole progressive region about Wilkes Barre was represented, and which I attended, the delegates present decided to elect a committee of six, this committee to be employed under wages to visit local unions and shafts to propagate the election of the Cappellini slate. The announcement was made by one Italian brother that they would do the work thoroughly even if it meant broken heads. It must be understood that admission is not permitted Cappellini or his supporters into quite a few mining camps, that in many instances miners in those camps must be reached by inviting them to neighboring cities. This is especially true of the Scranton vicinity. But we have broken the ice and a good agitation is proceeding for the progressive slate. This will cause the loss of work by some of our adherents and party members, Dziengielewski of our Polish branch at Dickson City having already lost his job. As I stated in a previous letter, if we had a few hundred dollars on hand for special use to assist in the elections, much good could be accomplished. As matters stand I have one dollar in my pocket, having spent

my last money to make the progressive miners' conference of last Friday [June 1] a success.

Have learned from the secretary of the Wilkes Barre Central Labor Council that this body proposes to start a weekly labor paper. Have discussed this question with some of our sympathizers in the miners unions and an effort will be made to have adequate representation upon its staff. If the miners are expected to help support it, then they must have a voice in its management, is the decision.

On the other hand, the district convention went on record for a paper for the anthracite [hard coal] miners.

You will realize that we are handicapped by not having one English speaking WP member in the UMW in these three anthracite districts. If we are to accomplish anything here within a limited time, then we will have to have at least one comrade, member of the UMW, to take the field for us. Is it not possible to import someone from Illinois, someone who is a good speaker? Look into this.

Fraternally,

[Alfred Wagenknecht]
District 14

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

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