
Workers in Hancock, Michigan Organize Forces for Labor Rule; Will Go to St. Paul on June 17.

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Hancock, Michigan is a little town of about 7,000 inhabitants, situated on an island in the northern part of the state, surrounded by the waters of Lake Superior. It is in the heart of the copper country. Here are located the famous Calumet and Hecla copper properties that have enriched the Agassiz family of Boston, absentee owners. It was the scene of a great strike in 1910 which left a reign of terror in its wake that practically crushed every vestige of trade union organization and prevented any radical movement from lifting its head for several years. There are 25,000 people living within a radius of two miles of Hancock.

The copper industry in that region has seen its best days. On the train to Hancock were two copper mine owners who discussed new methods of operating their properties in order to make them pay. They were also discussing that necessary evil, labor. It appears that hundreds of Germans were imported from the Ruhr into the copper country. The copper magnates paid their transportation, which was to be worked out in the mines. It developed that these German miners were not dumbbells by any means and when they thought they had given enough of their bone and sinew to the boss in return for their transportation to this country, they betook themselves to more favorable quarters than the desolate copper region.

“Deport Them!”

The “perfidy” of these workers weighed heavily on the two fat plutes who grunted out their woes in

the smoker. “What the hell can be done about it?” inquired one of the other as he chewed a corpulent cigar.

“I will take the matter up with the Department of Labor at Washington,” replied his companion, “but Congress is so damn busy digging up scandals that it can do nothing constructive. But these birds that jumped on me forget that they can be deported.”

This observation seemed to offer balm to the wounded feelings of the mine owners, and they vented their wrath on the workers who toiled for them. They put them in many categories, some lazy, others dishonest, and last but not least came the Communists, who were “bad eggs” and made trouble just for the fun of it. When they got as far as the Communists, the two plutes looked quite ferocious and glared at a rather babbity salesman who was meekly puffing a cigarette in a corner of the smoker.

Some time ago the trade unionists of Hancock, tired of depending on the Republicans and Democrats for political salvation, decided to do something for themselves. They organized the Progressive Farmer-Labor Party. It was under the auspices of this organization that I was scheduled to speak on Sunday, April 20 [1924].

On my arrival in Hancock I was met at the station by a Finnish lawyer and an Irish barber. Between them they keep the town pretty well trimmed, and yet they both seemed to be very popular. The Finn — his name is John Kisdila — was chairman of the meeting. Since the big strike he has been a tack on the swivel

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chair of reaction, and his excellent physique, combined with his courage, has enabled him to stay in Hancock despite many threats to drive him out.

"I can't fight you all at once," he told the reactionaries, "but I will take you one at a time." He is still there and is kept busy explaining Karl Marx to as active a little group of rebels as you ever laid your eyes on.

About 150 workers attended the meeting. The exact figure is 145, but that includes the editor of the local capitalist sheet, Roger Sullivan. It might be well to inject here, as a certain labor leader would say, the information that to the writer's knowledge at least half of the audience was Irish. They were anxious to see what kind of a person the editor of *The Irish People* was, which was so vigorously denounced by Father Corcoran, the Catholic priest. *The Irish People* has a good circulation in Hancock, and among those who got a copy was a man named Sullivan, sexton of Father Corcoran's church. He was so enthusiastic about it that he showed it to Father Corcoran, who was not so crazy about it by any means. In fact, the reverend gentleman took the magazine to a Hibernian meeting and consigned the editor to eternal damnation, admitting, however, that Old Nick used good judgment in selecting his Irish henchman.

The audience listened very attentively to a speech exposing the capitalist parties and urging them to get in line with the great Farmer-Labor movement that was to hold its convention in St. Paul on June 17 [1924]. This was no River of Doubt, like the July 4 conference of the CPPA [Conference for Progressive Political Action], the speaker explained. The workers and farmers who were going to St. Paul meant business. They were going to organize a class party and lay the basis for a movement that would lead the exploited workers and farmers into a struggle against the capitalists for control of the country.

Excellent Results.

After the meeting was over, a large number waited to greet the speaker and to declare that they were strong for independent working class political action and for the St. Paul convention. The attacks of the local priest did not affect their enthusiasm for *The Irish People*, which has done good work in offsetting the pernicious propaganda of *The Irish World*, an Irish bourgeois Catholic paper, which is defending the oil pirate Doheny. It finds Doheny pure because the Pope honored his wife for her contributions to the Catholic church in Mexico. The church in Mexico, of course, was friendly to the oil barons and the willing tools of the counterrevolutionaries against the progressive forces.

Nationalism has a strong hold on the Irish workers and those who had denounced Doheny turned around and praised him after they saw a full-page eulogy of him in this Irish sheet, which, by the way, has a "radical" policy in Ireland and supports Eamon DeValera. The only antidote to this pernicious dope is *The Irish People*. The curses of the priest had no effect on those sturdy trade unionists, and every copy of *The Irish People* offered for sale at the meeting was disposed of.

There was real determination there to get down to brass tacks and do real work. In that stronghold of the Copper Trust, the workers had no other concern than to organize against the common enemy, the capitalist, and for their own emancipation through a Farmer-Labor Party as a first step.

The little branch of the Workers Party, with only eight members, is doing splendid work. Though small in numbers, they wield a big influence among the workers of Hancock. In handling the local situation they have displayed tact and good judgment, and as a result have secured the leadership of as promising a labor political movement as any locality can boast of.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

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