

# Alexander Howat Answers President John L. Lewis



Columbus, Kansas, November 4, 1921.

So the mine workers of the country may not be deceived by the many false statements that are issued from time to time by President Lewis and Van Bittner, I have decided to write a statement of facts so that the mine workers may know the truth.

First, I may say the action taken by President Lewis in suspending the autonomy of our district, without the least justification for doing so, is the most cowardly and dastardly outrage that has ever been perpetrated against the Labor Movement in the history of the country. Such action by Lewis at this time should brand him as a traitor to the cause of labor.

Lewis tries to justify the action he has taken by saying the Joint Wage Agreement is being violated with impunity, and the laws of the organization transgressed, and because the Dean and Reliance Mines were still idle, he found it necessary to suspend our District, and declare all the officials removed from office. He also says he will not permit the operators to impose new conditions on the men at the Dean and Reliance Mines. If Lewis was sincere when he made that statement, then it is strange to say the least, that up until this time, neither he or any of his representatives have accepted the offer contained in my letter to Dalrymple and Steele, Board Members from District 21 and 25. The letter was written to the two Board Members after they had instructed me to order the men to return to work at the Dean Strip Mine.

The letter follows:

Mr. William Dalrymple,  
Mr. Andrew Steele,  
International Board Members, District 21 and 25,  
U. M. W. of A.

Wick Hotel,

Pittsburg, Kansas.

Dear Sirs and Brothers:

In answer to the communication I received from you, I desire to say that we are prepared now, as we have from the beginning of the trouble at the Dean Strip Mine, to have the members of our organization who are employed at that mine, to return to work under the same custom and conditions as prevailed in the past.

We requested the superintendent of the Dean Coal Company at the beginning of this trouble to put the mine in operation under the same custom that has prevailed there for many years, and he refused to do so.

It has always been understood and agreed by the representatives of the miners and operators of District 14, that neither side could change the custom or conditions at the mines in this district unless it was agreed by both sides that such changes would be made. In this case the company has arbitrarily insisted on imposing new conditions on the members of our organization, without the least justification for doing so, or without taking it up, as provided by contract.

I also desire to call your attention to the fact that I went to the mine and tried to take this question up with the superintendent of the company, in accordance with the provisions of our contract, but he deliberately walked away and left me, and refused to discuss the question in dispute. This action on the part of the superintendent is a clear and deliberate violation of the contract. He should have taken the question up with me, and if we were unable to reach an agreement then the case should

have been written up and referred to the commissioner of the operators and myself for adjustment. The action of the superintendent, however, in walking away and leaving me, without any justification for so doing, and refusing to take the question up with me, precluded the possibility of the question in dispute being written up and referred to the commissioner and myself, as per contract.

I also desire to make it clear at this time that there has been no strike called at the Dean Mine by any member of the executive board. The real facts of the case are that practically all of the men employed at the Dean Mine, were laid off by the company, and the company is entirely responsible for the mine being idle.

As I have already stated, we are prepared now, as we have been at all times, to have the Dean Mine resume operation, under the same custom and conditions that has prevailed at the mine for several years. We are not trying to impose any new conditions on the Dean Coal Company and we do not propose to have the Dean Coal Company or any other coal company, or anyone else to impose any new conditions on the mine workers of this District, if it is in our power to prevent it. We are willing to comply with the contract, and we are going to insist on the Dean Coal Company doing the same.

So you may understand my position, I desire to make it clear that, as far as I am concerned, the Dean Coal Company will not be permitted to impose any new conditions on the members of our organization. The Mine Workers of District 14, have fought and suffered and struggled for years in trying to improve and better their conditions, and I do not propose to agree that the suffering and struggles of the past shall be in vain. For me to agree that the Dean Coal Company shall have a right to take away from the men employed there, any established custom or conditions, or to agree that they can impose any new conditions on the men there, would, of course, mean that all other coal corporations in the district could do the same with their employees, and this would mean to put the miners back to the old situation that prevailed in this district before we had an organization. The Dean Coal Company looks just the same as other coal companies in this district, and my position is, when the mine resumes operation, it must be on the same custom and conditions as prevailed in the past, and as far as I am concerned, I shall not agree to give this company any special privileges such as they are asking in this case.

This is my position in connection with the trouble at the Dean Mine. However, I am going to call a meeting of our executive board at which time the entire question will be submitted to them for their further consideration. When they act on this question, I will advise you as to whether or not they endorse the position I have taken regarding this matter.

Yours very truly,  
ALEXANDER HOWAT,  
President District 14.

The above letter was written in April, 1921. Neither Dalrymple or Steele ever made any reply to my letter. Later on, when the Reliance Mine was shut down, no investigation was made by any member of the International Executive Board. The officials of the miners and operators of District 14, were called to Indianapolis and appeared before the Board, and made a statement of the case, and the international officials took the word of the operators, against that of the duly elected officers of District 14, and this is one of the cases, on the mere statement of the Coal Operators, that President Lewis felt it necessary to suspend our District, and tell us that we were no longer the officials of the District.

We made the same offer at the Reliance Mine, as at the Dean Mine, to instruct the men to return to work under the old

conditions. I made that statement to the International Executive Board, but it was of no avail. They refused to accept it.

There is no use in Lewis and Peck trying to dodge the real issue in connection with this question any longer, by using one subterfuge after another, as a pretext to try and justify themselves in the cruel and cowardly action they have taken in stabbing twelve thousand mine workers in the back. The mine workers will readily understand, when Lewis and Peck and the coal operators say now that they do not want to establish any new conditions, and at the same time refuse to accept the offer we have made on so many occasions, to have the men return to work under the old conditions, that the officials of District 14 have done all that could be done, and all that we are expected to do under the contract. The mine workers of the country will also understand, if President Lewis and the coal operators are trying to impose any new conditions on the men employed at the Dean and Reliance Mines, that such action would be a violation of the award made by the commission, appointed by former President Wilson, during the miners' general strike, two years ago, and, of course, would be a violation of our contract, and again, if President Lewis and the operators continue to refuse to accept our offer to have the men return to work under the old conditions that prevailed before these two mines were shut down, then such action on their part, is also in violation of the award of the commission, and of the contract. It should therefore, be clear to anyone, no matter from what standpoint you care to analyze this question, that I, along with other officials of District 14, have done our full duty and fulfilled all of our obligations under the contract, in order to try and have the two mines that are involved in this controversy, resume operation. Of course, Lewis will deny this, and continue to try and confuse the real issue, with the hope that the mine workers of the country may be deceived and fail to understand the real facts in connection with the dastardly outrage that he has committed against the mine workers of District 14.

Neither Lewis, nor any man who represents him, can deny this fact, that when these two mines resume operations, now or later on, it must be either under new conditions or the old conditions that prevailed in the past. President Lewis says he does not want the men to return to work under any new conditions, that he will not permit it, and yet he has steadfastly refused to agree to the offer made by the officials of District 14, since the time these two mines were first thrown idle, namely, to have the mines resume operation under the old conditions. This cannot be denied, as my letter to Dalrymple and Steele, two members of the International Executive Board, speaks for itself.

I also made it clear in the International Convention that our position from the beginning of the fight had been to have the men return to work under the same conditions that have always prevailed. The offer made by the officials of our District was rejected with contempt, and without the least degree of consideration by President Lewis.

The fact that neither Dalrymple or Steele made any reply to my letter, where a question of such great importance was involved, shows how little consideration we received at their hands.

The question that I desire now to call to the attention of the mine workers of this country, is this, when President Lewis and the coal operators say now that they do not want, and will not permit any new conditions, and will not agree with us to resume operation under the old conditions, then I ask, in the name of justice to the Mine Workers of District 14, what do they want, and on what terms and conditions are we expected to advise these men to return to work, if not under the old conditions? President Lewis cannot side step this question any longer, and he cannot continue to hoodwink and deceive the miners, as he has been doing, and he is not going to be permitted to bluff his

way through this fight, even if he is, for the time being, International President of the Miners' Union, and regardless of anything that may be done now at the two mines involved in the present controversy, President Lewis and the coal operators must admit, that they are trying to force new conditions on the members of our Union who were employed at the Dean and Reliance Mines. If this is denied, and they still contend that they do not want any new conditions, then they must admit that the position taken by the officials of District 14, is correct now, and was correct in the first place, by instructing the men to return to work under the old conditions, and whether they admit it or not, I am quite sure the mine workers of the country will fully understand, with the explanation I have made, which is a clear statement of facts, that our position is correct, and that we have carried out the contract, and have done all that we are obliged to do, and all that honorable men would be expected to do, in order to have these two mines resume operation, in accordance with the provisions of our Joint Agreement. We can do no more. Our position is the same today that it was the first day the fight began. We say now, as we said then, and in making this statement, I speak for every member of our Executive Board who has stood with me in this fight, that we will suffer expulsion from office, and from the organization, before we shall agree to surrender the rights of any members of our Union, or our principles as men.

Van Bittner says this is the miners' contract. Yes, that is true, and we intend to see that neither Lewis or the operators take any part of it away from them. Lewis is beginning to understand now that he has undertaken a bigger task than he anticipated, when he suspended our District and tried to lash the Kansas miners back to the mines, as if they were that many slaves.

The coal operators in Kansas did all they could to secure the enactment of the Industrial Court Law, in order to try and chain the miners to their jobs. Consequently, if they are put out of the coal business this winter, as a result of lining up with President Lewis and Governor Allen, and his Industrial Court, they can blame themselves.

The mine workers of District 14 are at the present time engaged in one of the most remarkable fights in the history of the nation, striking in protest against the enforcement of a law that was in itself created to stop strikes. A so-called law that is an outrage on the people of our State; a law that is a disgrace to the State of Kansas. This so-called law is another blot on American history, and an insult to every man and woman who believes in the principles of Liberty and Justice, and when the Kansas Legislature, at the instigation of Governor Allen, passed the Industrial Court Law, they struck a blow at our rights as Union men, and our constitutional rights as Free American Citizens, and the principles of liberty and justice were trampled under their feet without the least degree of consideration, but Governor Allen, the politician, and his Industrial Court have failed, just as John Lewis and his court, and the coal operators have failed, and the mine workers of District 14, are demonstrating now, not only to Governor Allen and the people of Kansas, but to the people of the entire country, that the day has passed and gone, never to return, when a few scheming politicians, and unscrupulous corporation lawyers, can chain the workers to their jobs like slaves.

The time is here when the law makers of the nation must make laws that will give justice to the poor as well as to the rich; justice to the man and woman who toil, as well as to those who never work, and the law makers should keep in mind, if they expect the people to respect the laws, they must make laws to respect the people. The mine workers of District 14, have proven that the industrial court is a miserable failure. Instead of stopping strikes, it creates strikes, and the fact that Lewis

and Peck and Van Bittner want the mine workers of our district to comply with the Industrial Court Law until such time as it may be declared unconstitutional, makes no difference. The mine workers of District 14 never will comply with the so-called Industrial Court Law, and John L. Lewis and Governor Allen may as well know that now, as later on. Jail or no jail, sink or swim, win or lose, we are going to make no surrender. We intend to go on and on, with the full knowledge that our cause is right and just, and continue to fight this law to a finish, or until such time as it is wiped from the statutes of this state, and buried so deep it will never be resurrected again.

The Kansas miners are making a noble and heroic struggle. All the power of our own international organization is being used against us. President Lewis had all the funds tied up that we had in our District treasury. In addition to the fight that is being made against us by President Lewis, we also have the state against us, and the coal operators as well. This is a real fight in which the Kansas miners are now engaged, and the Kansas miners are real fighters. There are tremendous odds against them, but this does not deter them in the least. The mine workers of our District, of course, cannot fight this battle alone. This is the fight of the working class, and if the organized workers of the country are with us, then you may rest assured, when we get done with this fight, that Governor Allen will never again tell the people of this country anything about an "Industrial Court Law" in Kansas.

To the mine workers of the country, I respectfully request you to read carefully this statement of facts that I am submitting to you for your consideration. If after reading it, you are still of the opinion that we are wrong, then, I want you to stand with President Lewis. If, on the other hand, you think we are right, and that we have done our duty in trying to have the Dean and Reliance Mines resume operation under the old custom and conditions that prevailed in the past, in accordance with the award made by the commission appointed by former President Wilson, then I ask you in the name of justice to an outraged membership, if you believe we are right and that President Lewis and the coal operators are wrong, in refusing to accept our offer to have these two mines resume operation under the old conditions, then I ask you to stand with us, and the mine workers of District 14, and compel President Lewis, tyrant that he is, to respect our rights under the contract and constitution, and deal out to the mine workers of our District, that degree of justice that they are so much entitled to.

You will of course understand, the District was suspended, and all the officials of the District declared removed from office, by President Lewis and the International Executive Board, as a result of the controversy in connection with the Dean and Reliance Mines, and not as a result of the other mines in the District being idle as they are at this time.

I call this to your attention so you may have a clear understanding as to why the autonomy of our District was suspended, and all official positions declared vacant.

I desire at this time to impress on the organized workers of the nation, and more especially the mine workers, that the action taken by President Lewis, against our membership, was entirely uncalled for, and in my opinion, the most cowardly and dastardly outrage that has ever been committed against the labor movement, in the history of America.

The fight that is being made by the mine workers of our District to maintain the rights of free labor; the sacrifice that is being made by them to establish on the soil of Kansas, the principles of free men and free women, will be written in the pages of history, and will stand as a beacon light, streaming its golden rays down the pathway of justice, shining the light in the road that leads to emancipation of the toiling masses of the nation.

The fight that they are making today, against the so-called "Industrial Court Law," of Kansas, will be an inspiration to the generations that are yet to come, and will prove to the world, what can be accomplished when the workers stand together. Shall they win or shall they lose? This depends on the organized workers of the country.

I therefore, appeal to every man who believes in the principles of liberty and justice, to stand with us in this fight, and give to the mine workers of our District, your moral and financial support, in the great struggle in which they are now engaged to establish the principles of free men.

Yours very truly,

ALEXANDER HOWAT.

President District 14.