

Governor Explains Why Federal Troops Were Brought to West Virginia—Six Thousand Deluded Men In Insurrection, Reason He Offers

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CHARLESTON, W. VA., Sept. 13.—There has been so much written and so much said of a controversial nature concerning the attempt of union miners to invade two of the counties of West Virginia to compel unionization of non-union coal mines, and there has appeared such a great amount of criticism of West Virginia in the Eastern press, based on misinformation, that I gladly avail myself of your invitation to make a statement concerning this movement and the necessity that existed for the calling of Federal troops.

As Governor of West Virginia I have not participated and am not interested in the program of the United Mine Workers of America in extending their organization into the non-union coal fields of West Virginia, and I have not participated and am not interested in the efforts of the coal operators in the non-union fields in opposing unionization. I am interested, however, both as an official and as a citizen in the maintenance of law and the preservation of order, and all the force at my command will be used to require those engaged in labor strife, whether operator or miner, union or non-union, to obey the laws of the state.

TROUBLE OF LONG STANDING

When I became Governor of West Virginia last March, six months ago, a coal strike was existing in Mingo County. It had originated in July, 1920, while my predecessor was in office, and twice prior to my inauguration he had been compelled to seek the assistance of Federal troops to restore order after assassinations, arson and various crimes had been committed. When I succeeded Governor Cornwell, the coal output of Mingo County was normal, although the mine workers' organization supported a number of tent colonies whose occupants have continued to draw relief from the miners' treasury. This condition still exists, although the operators in that county claim that they have an ample number of men to man their plants and point to the normal coal production as proof of their assertion.

Last May, two months after I had been inaugurated, the adult male residents of the tent colonies, aided by other persons living in their vicinity and in sympathy with them, crossed the Tag River and began an attack on several mining communities on the West Virginia side of the river. The firing, of course, came from the Kentucky side.

UNION OFFICIALS INDICTED

At that time, after the joint request of the Governor of Kentucky and myself, for Federal intervention had failed, I sent the state police force into that county to enforce a proclamation of martial law, which prevented unlawful assemblages, and later, when the troopers were reinforced with two companies of the enrolled militia of Mingo County, enabled the authorities to control the situation. At the time the act creating the national guard was not in effect, and it was necessary to create the enrolled militia under an old statute.

Since the issuance of the proclamation of martial law, crime has decreased in Mingo County more than 90 per cent, normal conditions are rapidly being restored, the courts have begun to function, and those who were indicted there a few days ago by a special grand jury of the circuit court are assured of a speedy trial. Among those who were indicted for murder, growing out of the May shooting, were C. F. Keeney and Fred Mooney, president and secretary of District 17 of the United Mine Workers of America.

It was the enforcement of martial law in Mingo County that was cited as a reason for the mobilization of the armed miners of Kanawha and Boone counties, who were later joined by armed bands from some of the mines in Raleigh and Fayette counties. It was announced that the objective of the march was to resist martial law in Mingo County.

The insurrectionists exhibited their antipathy toward law enforcement officers on August 12, near Sharples, Boone County, when an armed body of

60 men held up, disarmed and robbed two state policemen of their arms, equipment and horses, and under threats ordered them to leave Boone County. Four horses were stolen by the armed raiders.

Two days after this event, on Sunday, August 14, President Keeney of the district organization, addressed meetings of miners in Marion and Harrison counties and declared there were 500 armed men in Boone county for whom he declared that he would not be responsible or "attempt to predict what is going to happen there in the next week or so."

MOB ASSEMBLY AND MARCH

On the night of August 19, at Edwight, an attempt was made in that community to assassinate another state policeman. He was shot in the back by an armed body of men which left Edwight the following morning for Lens Creek, at which point the armed miners began to assemble for their march into Mingo County, traversing Logan County in reaching their objective.

These armed bodies continued to assemble on Lens Creek for several days, patrolling the roads, halting and using railroad trains, pillaging stores of arms, ammunition and supplies, and invading private homes in search of guns.

On the night of August 23, the armed assemblage had grown to such proportions (the number having increased to several thousand) that the officers of Kanawha County advised me they were unable to cope with the situation or disperse the insurgents, and on the following day I requested Federal troops when I was advised that the insurrectionists had started toward the Logan border. I felt that Federal troops were necessary because the national guard had not yet been reorganized under a law that had been effective for less than 30 days, and the state police were engaged in the enforcement of martial law in Mingo County and distributed at their stations in various parts of the state. My option was to ask for Federal troops or ask for citizen volunteers to repel the invasion. To save bloodshed I chose to ask the Federal Government for troops.

Instead of sending troops, the Secretary of War dispatched Federal officers to Charleston, who advised Messrs. Keeney, Mooney and other officers of the United Mine Workers that leadership carried responsibility, and firmly requested that they proceed forthwith to the vicinity of Madison and disperse the marching miners. With the exception of approximately 1,200 men gathered in the vicinity

of Blair and Sharples, the armed insurgents dispersed to their homes, and General H. H. Bandholtz returned to Washington.

On the night of August 27, Captain J. R. Brockus and a squad of state police, which had arrived in Logan County that day, started down Beech Creek toward Sharples to serve about 40 warrants which had been given the police by the sheriff of Logan County. Proceeding down Beech Creek, the police force encountered armed men patrolling the roads. The first patrol surrendered, but the second patrol answered the command of Captain Brockus to surrender with a volley of bullets. The fire was returned and three men were killed. The police then retired to Logan County and at my request did not renew their efforts to serve the warrants.

When they received reports of this encounter, the miners who had returned to their homes started another march toward Logan County. Automobiles by the score were commandeered by the armed miners and, with truckloads of ammunition, they again started for the Logan border.

LAW MUST BE ENFORCED

After I had sent the Adjutant General of West Virginia to Sharples and, at his command, the men had refused to disperse, on August 29 I renewed my request for Federal troops and, after a second investigation by Federal officers who visited the scene of conflict, my recommendations were approved by General Bandholtz, and the troops came. Fighting of the guerilla type had been in progress for several days before the troops arrived in Logan. Several hours after the arrival of the Federal troops, but before they had taken their places in the lines occupied by the state forces, the insurgents quit and part of them surrendered their arms. If all these guns had been surrendered, the danger of another uprising when the troops leave the field would have been dissipated.

As Governor of the State, it is one of my duties to insist upon the enforcement of law. Already I have asked and have been assured by the counties involved that there will be a full measure of punishment visited on those who were responsible for this disgraceful insurrection, which, though attended by fewer casualties than some of the press reports carried, is nothing less than treason against the state. Inasmuch as the proclamation of President Harding, commanding the insurgents to disperse before noon on September 1, became effective on that date, those who failed to disperse at that hour are guilty of

insurrection against the United States, and I have assurances from the Federal officers that they will co-operate in bringing the guilty to justice.

The State has been criticised by persons unfamiliar with the gravity of the situation because Federal troops were requested. West Virginia is not the only state that has requested Federal troops. There are numerous instances in recent years when they have been sent to other states, and they were sent without the measure of criticism that has been directed against this state. Why was the request made for Federal troops? Because 6,000 deluded men were in insurrection against the constituted authorities of a sovereign state in defiance of law at a time when the state was without a national guard and her quota of 200 police were engaged at other points in the enforcement of law.

CAUSES OF INSURRECTION

The question may be asked why the state was without a national guard. During the World War, the crack West Virginia National Guard was federalized and was mustered out of service after the termination of hostilities with Germany. The legislature did not meet in regular session again until 1921, and at this recent session the law reorganizing the national guard was enacted, but did not become effective until July 28, or less than 30 days before the insurrection began. I think my duty in the premises to ask for Federal troops was clear.

What were the basic causes of this revolution, this insurrection against the state, and then the Federal Government? Ostensibly it was organized as a protest against the enforcement of martial law in Mingo County where crime had been reduced 90 per cent, and to remove what Samuel Gompers, of the American Federation of Labor, and John L. Lewis and Philip Murray, president and vice-president of the United Mine Workers, and the district officers of the latter organization, termed the Baldwin-Feltz mine guards.

Regardless of the assertions of Gompers, Lewis and Murray, there were no Baldwin-Feltz or other mine guards in Mingo County when this insurrection occurred. The law was being enforced by duly constituted authorities of the county and state. I take it that these labor leaders and their lesser agents in ascribing the motive for the insurrection to be the removal of Baldwin-Feltz mine guards were seeking to defend those who had risen in arms against the State of West Virginia. The Baldwin-Feltz detective agency, which operates in the two Virginias, is not a popular organization. There

has never been a popular detective agency, and tons of propaganda have been circulated by the mine workers against this particular organization. But when Gompers, Lewis and Murray assert the cause of the revolt in West Virginia was to remove the mine guards of any description from Mingo County they are seeking to camouflage an insurrection that was directed against the constituted authorities of a state by making it appear that it was directed against something which did not exist.

In Logan County there are no operatives of the Baldwin-Feltz detective system employed, and there has not been for a period of ten years. There are numerous deputy sheriffs employed, clothed in official garb, but paid from private funds supplied by coal operators. They are legally constituted peace officers and, until the legislature makes prohibitive the payment of deputy sheriffs or special constables from private sources, the executive has no authority to order their removal. I am opposed to this policy of employing deputy sheriffs, as it is the duty of the state and county to provide protection for the lives and property of its citizens, and all officers should be responsible to the public and not feel under special obligation to any certain class or interest.

REBEL TO FORCE UNIONISM

Even if Mr. Gompers, Mr. Lewis and Mr. Murray are opposed to the employment of deputy sheriffs in Logan County, I cannot agree that they or their agents can violate the laws of this state and initiate a revolt against the constituted authorities of a county that is not violating the laws of the state in appointing deputy sheriffs for police protection.

Many crimes are charged by the leaders of the United Mine Workers against the so-called mine guard system that they have charged exists in Mingo and Logan counties, and doubtless many assaults have been made upon agitators and organizers and for which the transgressors should have been punished. But, even if it were true that innumerable crimes have been committed in Logan and Mingo counties by the so-called mine guards, these crimes were not committed against the union miners of Kanawha and Boone counties which furnished the larger number of insurrectionists. Therefore, it would seem, if this insurrection was directed against the mine guard system as claimed by Gompers and others, it was not initiated and was not evolved from the persons who would most likely suffer from tyranny and oppression, but came from neighboring counties, the inhabitants of which were not injured by the mine guard system.

It was not the elimination of the mine guard system that the leaders of the United Mine Workers sought to gain by this insurrection. It was an attempt on their part to force unionization of the Mingo and Logan coal fields, to shoot unionism into those districts if necessary.

The mines in these two counties are operated by non-union labor, and in order to secure employment the employes have accepted voluntary reductions in wages, as have employes in many other trades when they realized that war-time wages cannot be continued.

In the union mines of the state the officers of the United Mine Workers have refused and declined to permit the employes to accept reduced wages during the life of the contract which was made by the Government and which does not expire until April of next year. As a consequence, the union mines are idle much more than the non-union mines where the cost of production has been lessened, consequently lessening the cost of coal to the consumer. Except where physical conditions operate to their advantage, the union coal fields cannot compete in the present market with the non-union coal fields, and the officials of the United Mine Workers are familiar with this condition.

RIOTING A USELESS RESORT

Forty per cent of the bituminous coal produced in the country is produced from mines where non-union labor is employed. It is the natural desire

of the leaders of the United Mine Workers to insure to the union miners as steady employment as may be found in the non-union districts. Under the present wage scale they have found it an impossibility to lessen the tonnage from the non-union districts. Every citizen, however, who believes in law and order, will regret that the leaders of the union miners believed it necessary to resort to riot and insurrection to attempt to accomplish their purpose.

MUST PURGE LABOR'S RANKS

Personally, I have the highest regard for union labor. I know from personal observation that it has accomplished much for the wage-earner in many instances. It has brought him comfort and contentment that otherwise would not have been secured. But in West Virginia the miners' organization must be purged of radical and revolutionary leadership before it can expect to find a foot-hold among the contented miners in non-union districts. And the leaders of the labor movement in America, especially those who are in national authority among the United Mine Workers, must refrain from giving their support to lawless characters who happen temporarily to be in command of the destinies of their organization in the state. The national leaders of the United Mine Workers ought to be using their efforts to free the organization from radical control rather than encouraging their district leaders to continue insurrectionary tactics in defiance of law and order.