

Minneapolis Teamsters Strike: 75th Anniversary

February 7 tour to mark 75th anniversary of pivotal coal yards strike

By Iric Nathanson

MINNEAPOLIS — The Great Depression still held this country in its grip during the brutal winter of 1934, but the *Minneapolis Labor Review* had some good news to report. “Coal Drivers’ Whirlwind Strike Wins Recognition of Organization,” the *Labor Review* declared on the front page of its February 16, 1934 issue.

“With a dash and unity that electrified the city, Coal Drivers of Minneapolis last week after a whirlwind strike of two days and a half won recognition of the union,” this paper went on to tell its readers 75 years ago. “It was a short sharp but effective engagement with employers who had steadfastly maintained that their employees were not organized, and it sent shivers up the back of the Citizens Alliance bosses as they witnessed the power of labor militantly organized.”

Strike organizers strategically delayed the strike during a January thaw, when coal orders dropped. But, when bitter cold returned and coal orders jumped, they quickly took all of the city’s 62 coal yards out on strike — 700 workers.

The brief February strike, organized by Teamsters Local 574, laid the foundation for further job actions that summer that would change the course of labor history in Minneapolis, the series of strikes known today as the 1934 Teamsters strike.

Now, in 2009, a group of labor activists are marking the 75th anniversary of the 1934 Teamsters strike with a February 7 bus tour visiting sites associated with the walk out by the coal yard workers.

The tour, sponsored by the *Minneapolis*

Labor Review, will be led by David Riehle, a local labor historian and union activist, who is helping organize a series of events this year commemorating the 1934 Teamsters strike.

“The coal drivers job action, as brief as it was, gave Local 574 the momentum it needed to launch major strikes that summer that would make this city a national center of union activism,” Riehle said. “The bitter Teamsters strike of 1934, which culminated in street violence in the city’s market district, broke the hold of the anti-union Citizens Alliance which had thwarted union organizing in this city for decades.”

“While the coal yards of the 1930s have disappeared, we will be visiting their sites to get a better understanding of the events that occurred there at the height of the Great Depression,” Riehle said.

The tour will visit the site of the Central Labor Union’s 1934 headquarters on First Avenue North, along with former coal yard sites on NE Harrison Street, West Broadway, East 24th Street and Lyndale Avenue.

The Minnesota Transportation Museum will supply a reconditioned 1954 Twin Cities Lines bus for the free two-hour tour. The Saturday, February 7 tour will leave from the United Labor Centre, 312 Central Ave., Minneapolis, at 1:00 p.m.

To reserve a seat on the tour bus, call the *Minneapolis Labor Review* at 612-379-4725. See page 3 for more information.

Iric Nathanson is completing a history of Minneapolis in the 20th century, to be published by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Tour sites of 1934 coal yards strike Saturday, February 7 1:00-3:00 p.m.

To reserve seat on tour bus, call 612-379-4725

Minneapolis Community Education will offer February 10 class on 1934 Teamsters strike

MINNEAPOLIS — Learn more about the 1934 Minneapolis Teamsters strike at a one-night class offered by the Minneapolis Public Schools community education program: “Milestones: 1934 Truckers’ Strike.”

The class, taught by local historian Iric Nathanson, will be Tuesday, February 10, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. at Roosevelt High School, 4029 28th Ave. So., Minneapolis.

The cost is \$5.

Online registration is available (search by instructor name or for course number 150003 at www.mplscommunityed.com).

For more information, contact the Roosevelt Community Education office at 612-668-4828.

Class instructor Iric Nathanson has written and lectured about local history for the last 20 years. He is completing a book on the history of Minneapolis in the 20th century.

Events

February 7: Tour will explore history and sites of Teamsters’ 1934 Minneapolis coal yard strike

MINNEAPOLIS — 2009 marks the 75th anniversary of the Minneapolis Teamsters strike of 1934, a struggle that broke the power of the business-backed Citizens Alliance and made Minneapolis a union town.

What we now call the Teamsters strike was actually a series of three strikes — the first beginning February 7, 1934, when 700 striking workers shut down 65 of the city’s 67 coal yards.

Join a bus tour Saturday, February 7 exploring sites significant to the coal yards strike — exactly 75 years to the day later.

Local labor historian Dave Riehle will lead the tour, which will travel in a 1954

Twin Cities Lines bus restored by the Minnesota Transportation Museum. The tour will visit sites in downtown and south Minneapolis.

Meet the tour bus at the parking lot at the United Labor Centre, 312 Central Ave., Minneapolis. The tour will run from 1:00-3:00 p.m. To reserve a spot on the bus, contact the *Minneapolis Labor Review* at 612-379-4725.

The tour is free but donations will be requested to help pay for the bus.

The tour is the first of several events this year that will commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Teamsters strike.

See story, page 4.

Coal Drivers and Yard Workers

STRIKE MASS MEETING

Sun., Feb. 4, 3 P.M.

Trade Union Halls, 614 First Ave. N.

The Strike Has Been Forced Upon Us!

Come to hear the issue discussed and to enroll in support of the strike

If you are one of the few who have not yet joined in the fight to improve conditions in the coal industry, drop your shovel, climb off your truck and join with your fellow workers in the first real struggle to win a decent living in the coal yards.

Our union has presented reasonable demands to the employers. Their only answer has been

Postponement! Evasion!! Delay!!!
and finally a refusal to deal with our elected spokesmen.

Do not be deceived by the miserably small wage increases promised by some of the employers. This is a bribe to create a division in our ranks.

Organization is our lawful right! An organized fight for a living wage for ourselves and families is our duty!

BOND RANKS!

All Coal Workers Into the Struggle!

Join Local Union No. 574 — General Drivers and Helpers
(The Coal Drivers and Yard Workers Organization)

Flyer promoting a rally three days before the start of the 1934 coal yards strike.

For more resources about the 1934 Teamsters strike, visit www.minneapolisunions.org