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### **MS-4787: Abba Hillel Silver Papers, 1902-1989.**

Series I: General Correspondence, 1914-1969, undated.

Sub-series A: Alphabetical, 1914-1965, undated.

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Miners' Defense Committee, 1931-1932.





# Socialist Party of Ohio

SIDNEY YELLEN, SECRETARY

305 PROSPECT-FOURTH BUILDING

CLEVELAND, O.

*Main 9229*

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

NOAH MANDELKORN  
CHAIRMAN

JOSEPH MARTINEK  
MEYER WEINTRAUB  
HENRY KULLMAN  
MAX WOHL

November 20, 1931.

Abba Hillel Silver,  
The Temple,  
1855 Ansel Rd.,  
Cleveland, Ohio.

Dear Rabbi:

Enclosed find general letter for your approval and, if in your judgement it is considered the right appeal we shall then send it out to people who are able to contribute even now.

We do not know in which official capacity you are to act; treasurer or chairman. Kindly advise us as soon as you return the letter.

The members of the committee are: Mrs. Davidove, Dr. Shumacher. Miss. Segworth of the industrial department of the Y. W. C. A. and Dr. Biddle of Western Reserve University.

We may suggest to elect you as Chairman and Treasurer and have the return address of your office as the place where checks should be sent.

It is needless to tell you that the money is needed now and we should make an effort to raise our share without further delay.

Sincerely your,

*Sidney Yellen*  
Secretary

SY:SS



## GENERAL DEFENSE COMMITTEE

555 WEST LAKE STREET

CHICAGO, ILL.

HERBERT MAHLER  
SECRETARYTELEPHONE  
STATE 2783RELEASED ON RECEIPT  
November 23, 1931.

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## GENERAL DEFENSE WINS BURNETT'S FREEDOM

By John A. Gahan

MT. STERLING, KY., Nov. 21.---William Burnett, striking miner of the Harlan County coal fields, is free tonight after seven months and four days of imprisonment at the Harlan and local county jails in the shadow of the electric chair. Deliberating for eight hours, a jury in Judge Prewitt's Montgomery Circuit Court brought in a verdict of "Not Guilty", clearing the defendant of the murder of Deputy Sheriff Jesse Pace, one of High Sheriff Blair's Harlan County terrorists who was killed at Evarts on the afternoon of April 17th last while engaged in an effort to kill Burnett.

All through the dark November afternoon Burnett sat in the courtroom with his wife and counsel, with friends coming up to bid him good cheer and the judge pacing about the room, while newspaper men representing the Associated Press, United Press, the Louisville Courier-Journal, the Knoxville News-Sentinel, the Lexington Herald and the Chicago Tribune sat around smoking and speculating on the outcome.

Confident throughout of an acquittal verdict, Burnett showed no sign of strain, smiling and laughing, as is very natural to this giant of the Kentucky mountains where the Insull-Peabody-Mellon coal interests have long been engaged in beggaring a proud people and striving to stamp from them the last vestige of manhood expressed in union organization.

Around four o'clock Judge Prewitt called the jury in and said he would excuse them for supper and that they could decide whether they wanted to deliberate on Sunday, through the night or wait until seven o'clock Monday morning. They asked him to let them go until seven the same evening. In two hours the courthouse bell began tolling, which is the way that the citizenry are notified of court coming in session. People began running toward the courthouse from all directions.

The jury told the court that they wanted to go right ahead toward a verdict. In five minutes they were back, at 6:15, announcing "Not Guilty" as their decision. Most of those present, inside the railing and in the seats on the outside, crowded forward to shake Burnett's hand and tell him how glad they were that he was free. Among these was the writer who is covering the Harlan miners' murder cases for the General Defense Committee Press Service, Industrialist, Il Proletario, Industrial Solidarity, the Industrial Worker and other labor papers.

Burnett said he wanted first to tell the "boys in jail" that he was free. He referred to Jim Reynolds and Otto (Happy Jack) Mills who are in the Montgomery County Jail under indictment for murder among the forty and more charged with killing deputies at Evarts on May 5th. A happy scene in the little stone and steel structure took place. Then Burnett went with the writer to the Montgomery Hotel where he and his wife posed for newspaper photographers who have been here since the trial started and gave an interview to the gathered news writers.

As Burnett and his wife, Florence, sat in the hotel lobby the newspapermen asked him if he wished to make a statement. Burnett gave them the following:

"In the hour of my acquittal of the murder of Deputy Jesse Pace, I want to say that the International Labor Defense did nothing for me, but the General Defense Committee, retaining Captain Ben B. Golden and W. B. White, won the case for me. I



RELEASED ON RECEIPT  
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The Burnetts planned to stay for the present in Mt. Sterling, as Mrs. Burnett is a witness in the William Hightower murder case. She will bring the two Burnett youngsters, boys of 12 and 15, here. Burnett is eager to see his sons. On the streets of this little city, joy was general when the verdict became known, sentiment having been almost entirely for the prisoner.

#### MINERS' SECRETARY NOW ON TRIAL

W. B. Jones, who was Secretary of the Evarts local U.M.W. of A. was selected by the prosecution as the next Harlan Miner to be tried for murder. His trial is now on. W. B. Jones has been a member of the United Mine Workers of America for 29 years and served in various capacities.

He was one of the leading spirits in rebuilding the Miners Union in Harlan County. When the militia was called in following the killing of gunmen on May 5th, Jones, together with W. M. Hightower and several town officials at Evarts, was placed in jail and charged with murder. After being imprisoned for 5 months, he was released on bail furnished by the United Mine Workers and toured the eastern states under the auspices of the General Defense Committee in an effort to rally support for the Kentucky Cases.

#### PROSECUTION ATTEMPTED TRICKERY FAILS

The prosecution attempted to have all the miners at Mt. Sterling tried on a new indictment which charged conspiracy and would have resulted in group trials. This unfair tactic was thwarted by the General Defense attorneys and Judge Prewitt ruled that the miners were entitled to individual trials.

Until Monday morning when court convened the prosecution refused to state which defendant would be tried. This made it necessary for the defense to transport to Mt. Sterling from Harlan County, 150 miles away, all the witnesses. More than 200 witnesses were brought to Mt. Sterling and must be maintained until they testify. Thousands of dollars will be required for their upkeep. It would require thousands of dollars more to return them to Evarts and then bring them back to Mt. Sterling again.

Such grossly unfair tactics used by the state officials in an effort to deprive the miners of a proper defense calls for universal condemnation. The prosecutors seek to exhaust the defense funds and so make it impossible for the men, who are to be tried later this month, to have witnesses who will testify to their innocence.

Workers! Friends of the Workers! Answer this deliberate attempt to prevent the Harlan Miners from securing a fair trial with action on your part that will give every one of the prisoners a fair chance to be acquitted.

Thousands of dollars will be needed to maintain the witnesses at Mt. Sterling. In your organizations, in your unions take this question on the floor of your meetings and vote a substantial donation for the Kentucky Miners. Donate yourself individually, get others to donate! Help the General Defense Committee to defend the other Harlan Miners as successfully as it defended Bill Burnett, who was acquitted!

Rush funds immediately to the General Defense Committee, 555 West Lake Street, Chicago, Illinois.

(Editors: Appeal for funds. Help save the Harlan Miners! The General Defense treasury is exhausted by prosecution's trickery!)





# Socialist Party of Ohio

SIDNEY YELLEN, SECRETARY

305 PROSPECT-FOURTH BUILDING

CLEVELAND, O.

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

NOAH MANDELKORN  
CHAIRMAN

JOSEPH MARTINEK  
MEYER WEINTRAUB  
HENRY KULLMAN  
MAX WOHL

November 24, 1931.

Abba Hillel Silver,  
The Temple,  
1855 Ansel Rd.,  
Cleveland, Ohio.

Dear Rabbi:

One of the indicted miners was acquitted and now others are on trial for their lives. Should we remain indifference when the help is needed the result of the conspiracy to send them to the electric-chair might be very painful.

The enclosed press-service release sent by the General Defense Committee may add to the information you already have in order to stimulate our sympathies toward the suffering miners.

May we hope for your cooperation in our effort to raise some money here and help free those who are surely innocent as the case of William Barnett has proven?

Fraternally yours,

*Sidney Yellen.*  
Secretary.



We believe that there is no imperative need for additional information about the malicious treatment the miner in Harlan county, Kentucky, receive from the toughs and sluggers that the mine-barons imported as soon as a strike was declared in the mine field. But in order to have a precise conception of the conditions that led to the strike and of the conditions that are prevalent there now, we must share with you some of the late revelations which will depict the lawlessness in Northern Kentucky.

It was early last spring that the mine-barons ordered a third cut in wages. The miners, whose wages were already so low that they were continually indebted to the company for overcharged rent, groceries, medical-fees and other necessities, are forced to work for 75 cents per day. The officials of the United Mine Workers Union of America pleaded with the administration of the mine industry and petitioned for a revision of the new wage-scale, but all their pleading and even the direct appeal of the miners were of no avail; the order was issued and that order is law now. The miners were left with no alternative but to resort to the only weapon left; they decided to leave the mines and strike.

As soon as the strike was declared, the mine companies ordered the immediate importations of strike-breakers and for their protection the company agents recruited toughs from various places; from cities where the underworld is much stronger and is more powerful than the legal agents for the enforcement of law and order.

And not only were the toughs given a free hand, they were also deputized and are made the enforcers of law and order in the mine regions in Harlan county. Hell broke loose there--men and women and even miners' children were beaten. Many were shot by the hoodlums who invaded the homes of the miners to terrorize them into submission. Safety of life and security of freedom is no more known in Harlan county. Relief work among the miners is impaired--in some places practically suppressed--and any expression of sympathy is sufficient ground for indictment under the Criminal Syndicalist Law.

Today there are 43 indicted for murder in the first degree and 65 are charged with criminal syndicalism.

The prosecution asked and received a transfer of venue in order to deprive the defense of having a great number of witnesses at the trial. The trials will take place about two hundred miles from Harlan county and it will require thousands of dollars to transfer, feed and house the witnesses.

The General Defense Committee which is endorsed by well known men; such men as Norman Thomas, Dr. Laidler, Chase and others are gravely concerned in obtaining a fair and impartial trial for these miner.



In this city a group of people is interested in preventing the repetition of a miscarriage of justice, which had many times disgraced these United States. Money is needed to employ able attorneys, to transfer and feed the witnesses. We are appealing to you for help. Let us hope that your contribution will be forwarded to our office as soon as possible, because money is needed NOW.

The Enclosed envelope should be used to forward you check.  
Make checks payable to and an official receipt  
will be mailed.





RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER,  
CHAIRMAN  
HENRY M. BUSCH,  
TREASURER  
MISS FRIEDA SIEGWARTH  
DR. SHUMACHER  
LOUISE DAVIDOVE  
THEODORE NEWCOMB  
SIDNEY YELLEN

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## MINERS' DEFENSE COMMITTEE

ROOM 605 CLEVELAND COLLEGE

CLEVELAND, O.

March 1st,  
1932

Dear Friend,

About three weeks ago the Miner's Defense Committee sent you a letter announcing a conference to which you were cordially invited to come as a delegate. We have sent letters to all organizations and individuals whom we know are interested in the cause of justice. There is no more flagrant example of great injustice being perpetrated in United States today than in Harlan, Kentucky. There is no greater oppression and exploitation committed than that upon the miners. Immediate aid and immediate protest is needed to fight the gunmen tactics of the coal barons.

We have been fortunate to secure F. H. Cedarwall, of the National General Defense Committee, an inspiring speaker for this conference. We therefore decided to hold a mass meeting in connection with this conference. Sidney Yellen, State Secretary of The Socialist Party, will also address this meeting.

To make this mass meeting a success your fullest cooperation is needed. Notify members of the organizations to which you belong of this meeting and bring your friends. Remember the time is this Saturday evening, March 5th at 8:00 o'clock. The mass meeting will be held at International Ladies' Garment Workers' Headquarters at 1766 East 12th Street.

With sincerest hopes for the immediate relief of these oppressed miners.

Truly yours,

*Abba Hillel Silver*  
Chairman



RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER,  
CHAIRMAN  
HENRY M. BUSCH,  
TREASURER  
MISS FRIEDA SIEGWARTH  
DR. SHUMACHER  
LOUISE DAVIDOVE  
THEODORE NEWCOMB  
SIDNEY YELLEN

MINERS' DEFENSE COMMITTEE

ROOM 605 CLEVELAND COLLEGE

CLEVELAND, O.

April 15, 1932

Dear Sir,

This is just to remind you  
of the Concert-Lecture to be  
held for the miners Tuesday,  
April 19<sup>th</sup>.

The meeting will start at  
8:00 P. M. Could you please  
arrange to be there a few  
minutes earlier.

Sincerely yours,  
Rose Friedman