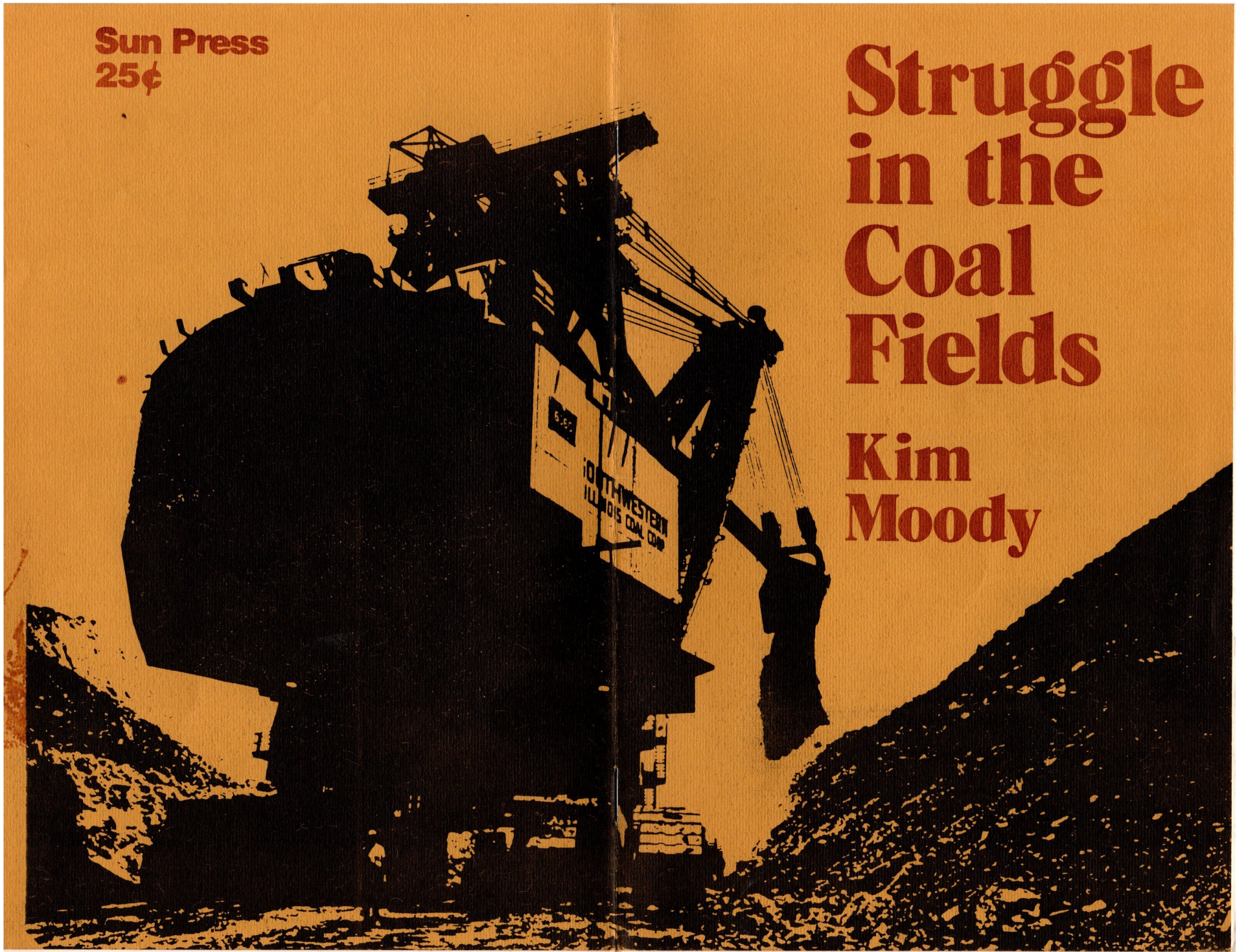
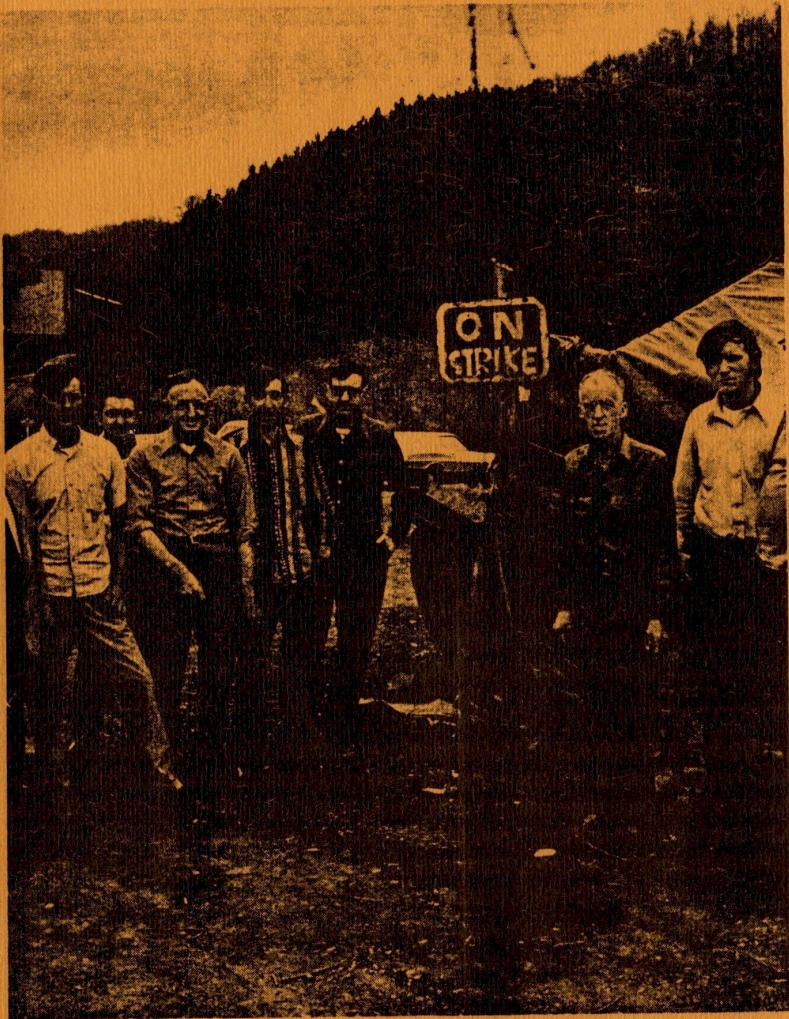


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Struggle in the Coal Fields

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On September 3, 1974, negotiations opened between the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA), the bargaining arm of the coal bosses. The old contract between the UMWA and the BCOA covers some 120,000 workers and expires on November 12. In spite of opening statements about avoiding a strike, most people on both sides expect one. The positions of capital and labor are "far apart," as they say. The pressures from the UMWA's ranks on the one hand, and big industry on the other, are strong.

Ever since the "oil crisis" revived the demand for coal, the smell of money has been strong in the nostrils of the coal operators. Since the early 1960's, when coal reached its low, production has grown considerably—from less than 400 million tons in 1961 to 590 million tons in 1973. Both private and government studies indicate that if coal production can triple in the next ten years, the US can be self-sufficient for its power resources. This kind of self-sufficiency just reeks of profits.

Indeed, the big coal users and the big oil companies knew what was coming, so they bought in. Today's coal operator is no marginal capitalist living on a hill overlooking the mining camp. It is the oil, steel, and utility giants of America that own over half of US coal production. These companies, as well as the independent coal companies—themselves no longer small local operations—want to cash in on what seems like an endless boom for the coal industry.

To triple coal production by 1985 would require an annual investment of from \$1.5 billion (Cornell University) to \$2 billion (Morgan Guaranty Trust). But the coal industry currently invests less than \$500 million. So, the coal owners reason, profits must be greatly increased. In fact, profits have increased. And to help things along, coal prices have nearly tripled since price controls were lifted in May 1974. But enough is never enough when it comes to profits, and the coal bosses see a number of barriers to the continued growth of profits.

BARRIERS TO PROFITS

Foremost among these barriers are the miners themselves. As a result of federal and state health and safety laws won by the miners, contractual clauses allowing work stoppages over safety, and just plain wildcats, worker productivity has dropped drastically in the past few years—28% since 1969. The bosses complain that health and safety standards prevent miners from working fast enough to suit their taste for profits. These laws and these contractual rights, the bosses argue, should be waived in the interest of patriotism so that America can become self-sufficient in energy resources.

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During the recent 13-month strike at the Brookside mine in Harlan, Kentucky, the company (Eastover Coal, a subsidiary of Duke Power) unsuccessfully demanded a no-strike pledge, reimbursement for any losses suffered as a result of a safety shutdown called by the union, and the right to promote on the basis of "qualification" rather than seniority. These demands were Eastover's attack on what the UMWA has managed to win on safety and working conditions. The Wall Street Journal assures us that "the coal industry itself will make similar demands" in the national negotiations between the UMWA and the BCOA.

In other words, the bosses want speed-up and lower labor costs and intend to resist union demands for **greater** safety and higher wages and benefits. From the employers' point of view, this is a fight over their very future.

There isn't much doubt the government will side with the employers. Ford will certainly retain the Nixon administration's commitment to "expand the use of coal in this country as a way to save on imports of petroleum." The Nixon administration had already taken on part of the burden of the coal bosses' expansion program. Government research and development funds for the coal industry rose from \$25 million a year in 1970 to \$138 million in 1974. A new law passed will provide \$371 million in 1975. That last amount is nearly as much as the total investment by the coal industry in 1970.

The future availability and price of coal is important to the entire capitalist class. Drastic rises in fuel and raw material prices in the last year and a half have threatened to eat away the windfall profits of 1974. Along with the recent treaty signed by the US and other major oil using countries, the development of coal is part of Ford's program for saving the US economy.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION

More directly relevant to UMWA-BCOA negotiations, however, is the likelihood of government intervention. It is always possible that Ford will step in with a Taft-Hartley injunction. Ford's political credibility at the moment, however, is pretty low. In spite of pleas and claims filed with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) by the coal operators, Ford kept his soiled hands off the five-day memorial strike called in August 1974 by the UMWA. The NLRB has also taken a hands-off attitude toward employer complaints over wildcats. The government is cautious because these days it is not sure anyone, let alone 80,000 angry miners, will listen to it. But an injunction may come if a coal strike starts closing down steel production and electrical power production, as it would after three weeks or so.

A more likely first step is high-powered federal mediation. It was Nixon's own labor lieutenant, W.J. Usery, who leaped into the Brookside strike to prevent a civil war in Harlan County. Usery fancies himself a sort of Kissinger of labor relations. He is everywhere. No doubt Ford will want Usery to apply his talent to the coal negotiations. In fact, it seems likely that the government sent Usery into the Brookside negotiations and allowed for a UMWA victory on most counts in order to soften the UMWA's attitude toward mediation and toward Usery himself. There can be no doubt, however, that Usery will not be siding with the union in the national negotiations. He will be there to do the bosses' dirty work.

The government and the other big capitalists realize that the UMWA

settlement will set the pace for those that follow. A big victory for the UMWA will inspire the longshoremens, aerospace workers and others with up-coming contract deadlines to fight for more.

Ford, the Congress, and the employers want the workers to pay for inflation just as much as the coal operators want the miners to pay for their future investment.

WHAT THE MINERS ARE FIGHTING FOR

The UMWA's bargaining demands were first drawn up at its Convention in December, 1973, and have been refined in a series of rank and file conferences held during 1974. It is a big, ambitious package of over 200 demands that would cost the coal industry a fortune and put the miners in pretty good shape.

Neither the ranks nor the leaders expect to win all of these demands or to win the full amount for those that are won. But among these demands are some that are of life and death importance to the miners.

Perhaps at the top of the list are those demands associated with health and safety. At a time when the bosses want to scrap the tougher parts of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and to limit the miners' right to walk out over unsafe conditions, the UMWA is demanding further control over safety-related working conditions.

The UMWA now has the right to walk off the job in cases of "imminent danger." But, of course, "imminent danger" may only be visible when it is too late—as with an explosion. The union is demanding the right to close down a mine when its own safety inspectors declare an "unacceptable hazard."

As the September 16 issue of the **UMWA Journal** points out, 800 miners have died since 1969, tens of thousands have been maimed, and nearly 3,000 men have died each year of Black Lung.

Under these kinds of conditions, the UMWA's demands for strict enforcement of the health and safety laws and for the right of the union to declare what is safe and what is not is nothing less than a matter of life and death.

One of the most popular demands is for paid sick days and disability benefits. It is incredible that in an industry as unhealthy as mining the union has never won paid sick days.

The UMWA is also demanding large increases and improvements in the welfare and pension plan. As it stands now, the monthly pension for bituminous coal miners is \$150. By the standards of other unions that is simply a scandal—another shameful part of the Lewis-Boyle heritage.

The pension comes out of a welfare fund which is financed by employer contributions on each ton of coal. Right now the contribution which backs up that lousy \$150 is 80c a ton. To double or triple the pension would mean nearly doubling or tripling the employer contribution. And that is something the bosses don't want at all.

The union is demanding the right to strike over "any grievance or dispute including discharges." This is in addition to their right to walk off the job automatically over unsafe conditions. It is important to the miners because the companies often abuse the seniority system in trying to advance favorites. Naturally, the companies also try to fire militants. A miner who walks out "too many" times over safety is regarded as a trouble maker. So the miners need the right to strike over any such issue.

Most workers in the US have lost this right. That is, many of the big

industrial unions, like the United Auto Workers and the Steel Workers, have given away the right to strike over grievances. Instead they have elaborate arbitration procedures which are slow and ineffective.

If the UMWA won the right to strike over grievances, it could set a trend for other unions. The ranks in other industries could use the UMWA as an example in their fight to regain the right to strike during the life of the contract.

As with everyone else, the miners have been hit hard by inflation. They will be asking for a substantial wage increase and, for the first time, a cost of living clause. Most miners don't view wages as the big issue this year, but that doesn't mean they will ratify any contract that offers only peanuts.

THE MINERS' FIGHT IS THE FIGHT OF ALL WORKERS

The significance of the miners' fight for other workers is greater than its likely impact on other wage settlements or even on the price of fuel. The 1974 contract will be the first one bargained by the reform leadership that took over the UMWA in December 1972 on the crest of a rank and file movement.

For rank and file workers in other industries, this fight can be one more proof that the ranks can assert their power, throw out a rotten bureaucracy, and maintain control over a new leadership. For the bosses this is a challenge, for the workers an opportunity, a hope for the future of rank and file movements in other industries.

The capitalist press and the liberal "friends" of labor will see this as a test of the new leaders themselves. But the importance of the 1974 contract fight is not how talented Arnold Miller, Harry Patrick, and Mike Trbovich are—or even whether they are as militant as they say they are.

The new UMWA leadership of Arnold Miller has its roots in the ranks, but it lives in the world of the labor bureaucracy. This new leadership associates with union officials like Leonard Woodcock of the Auto Workers and I.W. ("No-strike") Abel of the Steel Workers. Woodcock and Abel are no better than the former UMWA leader Tony Boyle, whom Miller replaced.

Unfortunately, there are indications that Miller and other UMWA leaders have picked up some of the bad habits of characters like Woodcock.

The new UMWA leaders did give financial support to the Brookside strikers in Harlan, Kentucky. But when the Brookside mine first went out in July 1973, Miller made them remove picket lines from other mines owned by the Duke Power Co. It was nearly a year before the UMWA called out another mine, Highsplint, or organized serious mass action to support Brookside.

Miller has said he will fight for the demands drawn up at the UMWA's Convention in December 1973. At the same time, he indicated that the UMWA considered the three-year, 35% total package deal made by I.W. Abel of the Steel Workers in 1974 a good total to work with. But the UMWA's pension demands alone would require a 300% increase in company contributions per ton of coal to the pension fund.

Miller, Patrick, and Trbovich initiated some important reforms in union structure. They lowered their own salaries—though they are still much higher than the best paid coal miner. They sacked Boyle's goons and flunkies. But, on the other hand, they have replaced them with a lot of college graduates with no first-hand knowledge of the mines and no roots

in the working class movement. Nor has Miller carried through on his promise to move the union's headquarters back to the coal fields.

The Miller leadership has not established an entrenched bureaucracy like that of most other unions. Nor have the new UMWA leaders built themselves a strong political machine with which to control the ranks.

Whatever their intentions in these matters, the ranks have made such steps impossible. Regardless of their personal outlooks or opinions the UMWA leaders have little power independent of the coal miners themselves. Any sort of attempt to foist the same old "responsible" (that is sell-out) labor leadership on the miners would not wash.

The reason for this lies in the history of the UMWA in the past few years and in the way that Miller and the others came to power.

MASS ACTION DEFEATED THE BOYLE BUREAUCRACY

The usual liberal accounts of how the Miners for Democracy formed and defeated the old Boyle machine begin with Jock Yablonski's campaign in 1969, the vote fraud, Yablonski's murder, and all the court cases and legal action that followed. But the movement that shattered Boyle's machine began before Yablonski challenged Boyle.

Tony Boyle was John L. Lewis' hand-picked successor. Lewis left Boyle not only the UMWA bureaucracy and a well-oiled political machine to run it with, but a policy of betrayal that cost thousands of miners their jobs and hundreds their lives.

It was Lewis, in the 1940's, who let the mine owners automate the mines. This policy reduced the number of UMWA members from 500,000 to 200,000.

The same policy encouraged the bigger coal companies, as well as the oil, power, steel, and other metal giants, to buy up weaker companies and concentrate coal production in fewer hands. In the 1950's and 60's the UMWA stood by while smaller mines in eastern Kentucky (such as Brookside) kicked out the union.

Lewis and then Boyle let health and safety conditions decline. The new machines stirred up more dust and made Black Lung even more widespread than before. When a mine explosion in Farmington, W. Va., killed 78 miners in November 1968, Boyle just said, "As long as we mine coal there is always this inherent danger of explosion." He went on to praise the safety record of the company that owned the Farmington mine, Consolidation Coal, a division of Continental Oil.

In the face of deadly working conditions, growing unemployment, and a corrupt union leadership, the miners began taking matters into their own hands.

One of the first strikes conducted without and against the Boyle leadership occurred back in 1965. A small mine in Moundsville, W. Va. was struck because of unsafe conditions. The strike leaders, some of whom were local officers, were fired. The entire mine went out. Flying pickets were sent out and within a week the strike had spread to three states. Boyle tried to stop this movement but couldn't.

In 1967 60,000 coal miners in five states wildcatted. Again Boyle just couldn't get the miners back to work. In 1968, 10,000 miners struck in Pennsylvania in support of a group of miners who were trying to organize two mines owned by the Solar Fuel Co.

Alongside these strike movements grew the Black Lung movement. Beginning in West Virginia, where Arnold Miller was active, Black Lung

Associations grew up in the coal fields throughout Appalachia.

While the Black Lung Associations fought for legislation to protect them from this killer disease and compensate them when they got it, Boyle expressed satisfaction over existing health and safety laws.

In 1969, 40,000 West Virginia miners walked out to demand Black Lung legislation in that state. Boyle could not prevent the walkout. Coal miners no longer listened to him.

If anyone needed proof, it came again in 1971. When the contract expired and no agreement had been reached, Boyle had no choice but to follow the UMWA's traditional policy of "no contract, no work." But when Boyle reached an agreement and told the miners to go back to work, tens of thousands of miners kept on striking. Their leaders, one of whom was Harry Patrick, said they would not return to work until they knew what was in the agreement, and until the Cost of Living Council approved it.

Even before this it was obvious to the miners, the government and the bosses alike that Tony Boyle had no authority in the coal fields and no control in his union. For all the high-priced machinery he and Lewis had built, for all the goons at his disposal, and in spite of an army of flashy business agents, Boyle could not deliver labor peace to the bosses any more than he could deliver health and safety to the ranks.

Mass strikes and growing resistance on the job to rotten health and safety conditions meant a decline in productivity in the coal industry. Productivity began falling in the late 1960's and is still falling. As we mentioned earlier, productivity fell by 28% between 1969 and 1974. Boyle's inability to control the ranks was costing the coal bosses a lot of money.

A union bureaucracy is able to exist because the ranks tolerate it and the bosses need it. The bosses depend on labor bureaucrats, some corrupt, some "responsible," to enforce those aspects of the contract that mean continued production. When a labor official can't do that anymore, he is as useless to the bosses as to the ranks. That's what happened to Boyle.

The murder of Jock Yablonski was not the opening of an offensive against a rank and file opposition. It was a last act of desperation by a bureaucracy that had already lost its effectiveness.

The court cases and Labor Department intervention that eventually led to an honest election in 1972 came about because no one had any use for Boyle. Usually, the Labor Department and the National Labor Relations Board defend top union officials as a matter of policy. Court cases around these sorts of issues, election frauds, have been known to drag on for years. But these legal actions were backed up by a movement that appeared to be "out of control." The government and the bosses were not going to risk further mass strike movements to defend a broken and useless bureaucrat.

The seldom published secret behind the victory of the Miners for Democracy was mass action by the miners. But even mass action cannot win an election and come to rule a union unless it is organized.

A MOVEMENT GETS ORGANIZED

The various strike and protest movements among the miners that broke Boyle's power came together behind the Miners for Democracy (MFD). While the actual membership of MFD may never have been massive, its members were mostly activists from these movements. Miller was a Black Lung activist, Patrick led wildcats in West Virginia during the 1971

contract fight, Trbovich had been an early supporter of Yablonski. Other MFD leaders like Lou Antal and Karl Kafton were known militants and oppositionists.

The MFD's election campaign in 1972-73 was not some election slate slapped together to replace one set of bureaucrats with another. Whatever the limitations of its leaders, the MFD represented a mass, fighting movement.

It is that fact, above all else, that has prevented the formation of a new bureaucracy, the setting up of a machine, or a move toward sell-out. The leadership that took power in the UMWA in 1972 has had to honor most of its election promises because the ranks can render them as useless as they did Boyle—only much faster.

THE RANKS PREPARE

In 1974, the corporate coal giants are not facing Miller, Patrick, and Trbovich. They are facing 120,000 coal miners who are not about to let any leadership get in their way.

The UMWA ranks have already demonstrated this fact to the bosses and, by implication, to their own leaders. Being used to mass direct action, the West Virginia miners walked out in the spring of 1974 over gasoline shortages. Officially, the UMWA leaders told them to return to work. The miners didn't return to work, and the UMWA leaders were smart enough not to press their luck.

Even the District elections have tended to show the independence of rank and file MFD supporters. In District 31, a staunch MFD district in West Virginia, the Miller candidate was defeated. The victor was a former Boyle man, but was popular and known as a genuine fighter. More typical was simply a lot of initiative by local militants. That is, MFD rank and file militants didn't wait for an okay from Miller, they just went about fighting to gain control of their districts. One example of this was District 20 in Alabama, formerly a Boyle stronghold. In that district black and white miners who had been among the small group supporting MFD put forth their own candidates, winning some important offices.

One of the most important fights leading up to the contract expiration was the strike at the Brookside mine in Harlan County, Kentucky.

REHEARSAL AT BROOKSIDE

Brookside, like many mines in eastern Kentucky, was one of those abandoned by the UMWA in the 1960's. With the cooperation of Boyle, the Brookside management kicked out the UMWA leaders in 1964-5. Around 1969, a Duke Power subsidiary, Eastover Coal, bought Brookside and other mines in that area. They brought in the Southern Labor Union, a scab outfit always ready to do the coal bosses' dirty work.

In 1970, the workers at Brookside voted to go UMWA, but the company wasn't interested in bargaining with the UMW. With no support from the Boyle leadership and little UMWA organization in eastern Kentucky, Brookside was isolated. After the MFD won the election, however, the Brookside workers got anxious to fight. In July 1973 they struck.

The UMWA leadership prevented the spreading of that strike to other Duke-Eastover mines, but it did provide financial support in the form of a \$100-a-week strike fund especially raised for this strike. The courts, fully in the control of the coal corporations, tried to limit picketing at Brookside.

Once again, it was rank and file working class people who showed how to win a fight. Only this time it wasn't the members of the UMWA, it was their wives. The miners' wives, supported by pensioners and unemployed miners, took charge of the picket lines in the fall of 1973 and drove back the scabs. Since then, the women of Brookside have organized themselves into the Brookside Women's Club. Even since the settlement at Brookside, the women have said they will stay organized.

The women at Brookside showed that there are ways to get around court injunctions and other tactics used by the bosses and the government. They showed that women and other workers can join in the fight and win.

Later on in the strike, Eastover COal began to turn to violence. First they used the state troopers. But the persistence of the miners, the women, and other supporters forced the state of Kentucky to withdraw the troopers.

Failing official violence, Eastover tried to use goons. When the strike spread to Eastover's Highsplint mine in August, the company armed its thugs—not just with pistols, but with automatic weapons. The miners too were armed. They beat back the attempt to intimidate the pickets.

At Brookside, UMWA member Lawrence Jones was shot in a skirmish with an Eastover foreman. Lawrence Jones' murder was a tragedy. But the policy of resistance by the miners was the right one. They didn't back down and they won.

They didn't win simply because they fought back, however. They won because the UMWA leadership finally gave in to rank and file pressure for mass action. The five-day memorial strike and the mass demonstration in Harlan on August 22 made it clear to the bosses and the government that the UMWA was serious about eastern Kentucky. The death of Lawrence Jones, two days later, clinched it. The UMWA was ready to fight and the ranks were mad.

That is when federal mediator W.J. Usery showed up—hat in hand—prepared to make Duke Power and Eastover settle. Too much was at stake for one or two mines to cause a mass upheaval.

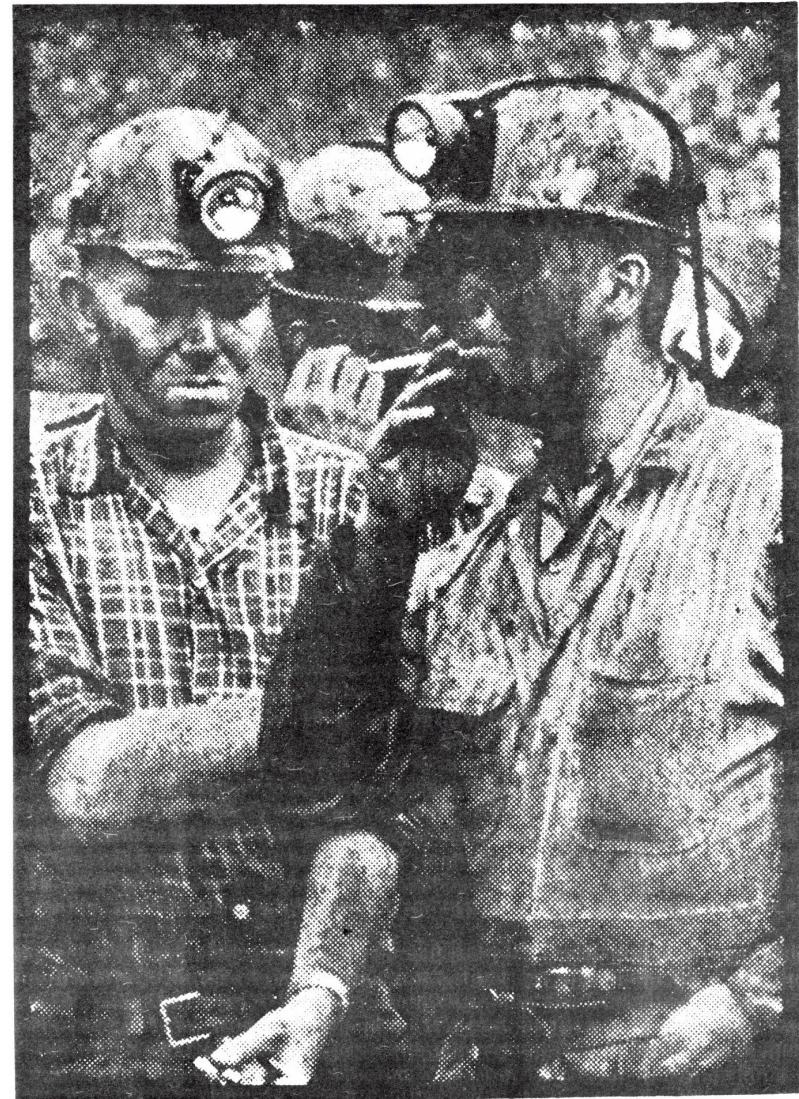
THE MINERS CAN WIN IN 1974

The miners can win in the 1974 contract fight, even though resistance from the bosses and government will be strong. But it will take the kind of militant and imaginative tactics used by the miners and women at Brookside and Highsplint. A cautious, go-slow policy will not convince the coal-owning corporations that the price of resistance is too high.

As we have pointed out, however, the miners are not just facing their own bosses. They are facing, directly and indirectly, the biggest corporate giants in America and, most likely, the government too. A decisive victory will require the support of rank and file workers and their unions in other industries.

The UMWA has no strike fund. In a baffling move at the 1973 Convention, the delegates voted down a proposal from the leadership to establish a strike fund. The union has urged its members to save up for a long strike, but it is clear that in these days of inflation the average miner could not possibly save enough to outlast the bosses.

The UMWA will need money to run a strike, and the ranks will need money to live on. Workers throughout US industry can help the miners by getting their unions, local and international, to give both moral and financial support in the event of a long UMWA strike in November 1974.



A miners' strike will be in the interest of all workers, as we have pointed out. For some workers the link with miners is even more direct. Many of the biggest coal bosses are the big steel and metal corporations, whose workers are organized by the United Steel Workers. The miners will be fighting the steel workers' bosses.

Solidarity and support from the Steel Workers can help convince the bosses that this fight is serious. Solidarity from steel workers is also important because a coal strike of more than three weeks may very well close down the entire steel industry. Steel workers will be laid off, and the bosses will try to build up working class hostility to the miners' strike. Resolutions of support and financial contributions from Steel Worker locals can help prevent that.

But most important of all, we repeat, is the fact that this fight will be seen by the entire American capitalist class as a test of strength between themselves and a union rank and file that still appears to be "out of control." For this reason alone, the future of every trade unionist in the US is at stake in this fight. If the rest of us ignore the miners, we will be hurting our own future.

THE FUTURE OF THE UMWA

No single contract fight ever resolves the problems faced by workers and their unions under capitalism. And so it is with the miners and the UMWA.

For one thing, there is the very question of the power of the UMWA; that is, the ability of the UMWA to shut down the coal industry in the years to come. It would be tragic for a victory in 1974 to be turned around a few years later. But that danger is real.

The coal industry wants to expand. But that expansion is not going to take place in the areas now organized by the UMWA—Appalachia and the lower Midwest. Nor is it going to take the form of pit mining.

The coal bosses plan to expand by opening up strip mining on a vast scale in the West. The UMWA estimates that already some 24 million tons of coal are mined in Western, non-union surface mines. Nationally, strip mining accounts for half of total production. But most of that is in the older Eastern coal fields.

The industry would like to raise strip mining production from its current 300 million tons annually to 1 billion tons in 10 years. To do that, they estimate, it would take an increase in the number of strip miners from today's 35,000 to 46,000.

Today, the UMWA has organized some 20,000 strip miners, still the majority. But if it fails to organize the thousands of new strip miners, in 10 years it will not even be able to stop production of half the coal produced. Under those conditions, it would be nearly impossible to win a strike.

When the Western strip mines began opening up in the early 1960's, Boyle simply ignored them. As a result, many strip miners remained non-union, while others joined the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE). IUOE is a construction trades union that organizes construction equipment operators and drivers. Strip miners operate giant drag-lines similar to those used in construction—though much bigger.

But the IUOE is a conservative, craft-minded union that is completely out of step with the traditions and needs of the UMWA. It has no interest in the health and safety problems faced by pit miners in the upper South and Midwest.

Clearly, the UMWA will need an aggressive organizing campaign in the

West, and an extension of the eastern Kentucky organizing drive that grew out of Brookside. Without this, the pit miners—and eventually the strip miners themselves—will face deteriorating safety conditions as their union becomes powerless in the face of the giant coal-owning companies.

The Miller leadership will have to be judged by its ability to turn the small victories at Brookside and Rosebud (in the Wyoming strip mines) into a nationwide movement to organize all miners into the UMWA. Like the 1974 contract fight and, indeed, the victory of the MFD, it will take more than talking and legal action through the courts. It will take some hard fighting and the willingness to use mass action to turn small organizing drives into crusades with their own growing momentum.

POLITICAL VISION, NOT JUST POLITICS AS USUAL

The UMWA faces the most powerful group of employers in America, today and in the future. The names of the companies that own over half of US coal production and most of the available coal reserves read like a who's who of American capitalism: U.S. Steel, Kennecott Copper, Bethlehem Steel, General Dynamics, Standard Oil of Ohio, Exxon, Gulf Oil, Continental Oil, Reynolds Metals, and Pittston Co., to name a few.

Behind many of these companies stand the equally impressive giants of world finance. Chase Manhattan (Rockefeller) and Morgan Guaranty, the third and fifth largest banks in America, appear again and again in connection with the coal-owning corporations. These corporations and banks represent the top levels of the US, and world, capitalist class. And it is no longer a secret that they are in trouble.

Watergate is followed by the elevation of a staunch anti-labor reactionary to the presidency and of the most powerful oil and coal baron around, Rockefeller, to the vice-presidency.

Years of intolerable inflation are followed by recession and, now, the spectre of world depression. But the capitalists and their government can't seem to do a thing about it.

Their solution to inflation is recession, and their solution to recession is wild inflation. Behind every proposal put forth by the Ford administration, their Democratic Party "critics," and the professional economists stands one idea: make the workers pay for the crisis.

In the case of the miners, these people want the workers to pay with their lives. The coal bosses complain that the health and safety laws cost them too much in profits. They complain that the right to walk out in the face of "imminent danger" has already cost huge drops in productivity—that is, millions in profits.

Their attack on the miners, and the rest of the working class, has only begun. Nixon's New Economic Policy was designed to "zap labor," as former Cost Of Living Council Director Arnold Weber revealed—yes, he used those very words! New policies will do the same. And, make no mistake, it is the same people who own coal who will make those policies. Rockefeller is only the most glaring—and outrageous—example.

The fight for decent conditions in the mines and for a better life for the miners, as with all other workers, is a political fight. To win it takes a political strategy in line with reality. Reality in the political field, as in the coal fields, is that the bosses are lined up against the workers. In the coal fields, the workers have their own organizations (the union, Black Lung

Associations) and the bosses theirs (the corporations and employers' associations). In politics, the UMWA is trying to share one of the bosses' organizations with them—that is, they are trying to share the Democratic Party with the bosses.

The Democrats' program for inflation and recession is wage-price controls: "zap labor," just like Nixon. The Democrats' program for the unions is to lure them into some vague "social contract," which, it turns out, is nothing but "voluntary" wage controls: you volunteer, they control. Democratic Party favorite John Kenneth Galbraith told one of Ford's mini-summit meetings in September that if you want to beat inflation you have got to restrain the unions.

The UMWA, however, has followed the decrepit example of the AFL-CIO by setting up a political arm modeled after COPE (Committee On Political Education). The Miller leadership's version of COPE is called COMPAC (Coal Miners Political Action Committee). Like COPE, COMPAC endorses political candidates, usually Democrats, after these candidates have already put themselves forward. In effect, COMPAC follows the old and never successful policy of backing the lesser of the many evils available.

In a few cases COMPAC has or plans to put forth UMWA members as candidates in the Democratic Party. But these UMWA members will only end up in the shape of all other politicians cast in the mold of the Democratic Party.

You can't fight the bosses with their own organization. Workers need a party of their own, an independent labor party, to fight the bosses in the political arena.

The UMWA could play a leading role in building an independent labor party. The aggressiveness and self-confidence of the UMWA ranks would give this party the human backbone a new party needs to grow, and the fighting spirit it needs to win.

But the reform-minded leaders of the UMWA have no such vision when it comes to politics. In fact, though they are unquestionably preferable to most other labor leaders, they share many of the ideas and preconceptions of the rest of the American labor bureaucracy.

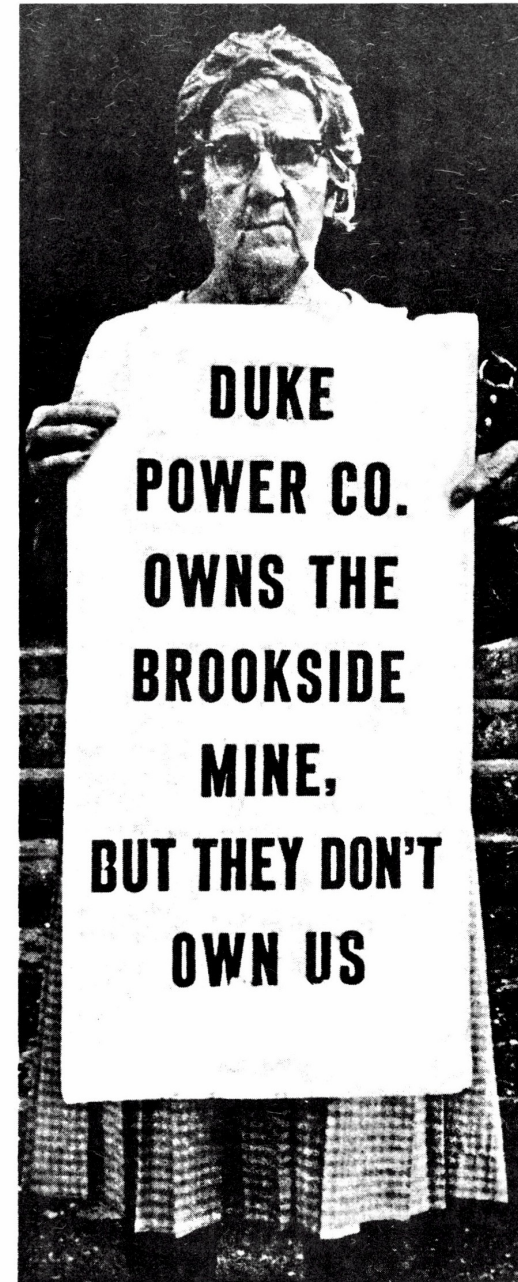
Although they tend toward militancy, at least while the ranks are in a militant mood, they do not see that the union struggle is a part of a **class struggle**. That is, the fight of one union against the employers of its members is only part of a broader struggle between the capitalist class and the working class.

As socialists, we believe that the most consistent union militants are those who understand that there is a class struggle over the wealth of society, all of which is produced by labor.

Unlike the "labor statesmen" who run the unions today, militants with a class struggle understanding do not make the interests of the bosses, their profits, a consideration in deciding when and how to fight. It is the interests of the workers that must come first in the class struggle. To put it another way, it is us or them.

The same must be true for politics. The unions must have a political strategy designed to fight the bosses, not cooperate with them. The starting point in that strategy, one that will soon become a matter of life and death for the miners and millions of others if there is a world depression, is an independent labor party.

The ranks of the UMWA have already taken the lead in building a rank and file movement in American industry. They can do the same for politics.



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