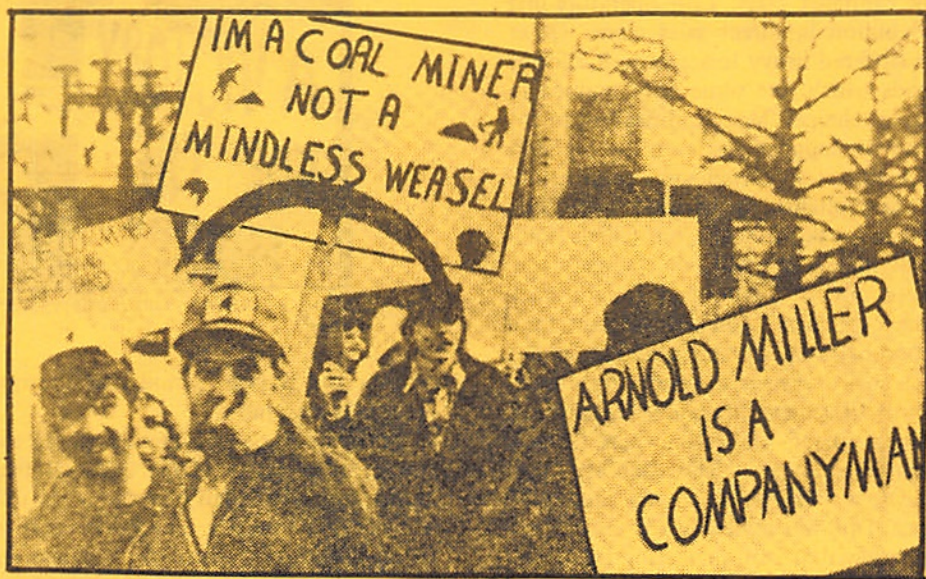


The 109 Day United Mine Workers' Strike



Selected Articles from
GETTING TOGETHER newspaper

April, 1978

MINERS DEFIED OPERATORS, GOVERNMENT, BUREAUCRATS

Longest U.S. coal strike ends

The longest coal strike in U.S. history and one of the most militant in recent times ended on March 24, after 109 days of sharp struggle. Throughout the strike, the miners of the United Mine Workers showed the tremendous strength of the working class in the strike — they united together, stood up against the coal bosses and defied the authorities.

The miners' strike dealt heavy blows to the monopoly capitalist class. Coal operators lost over \$2.8 billion in direct sales alone. Other capitalists suffered heavy losses as well, such as the railroads which lost some \$660 million in coal transport charges. Many utilities had to cut back on power supplies and even the big auto giants were forced to curtail some production.

These big capitalist forces tried everything they could to break the strike, but failed. Holding fast, the miners rejected two company contract offers out of hand, and fought back against the capitalists' violence and laws, and the treacherous UMW bureaucrats. The miners forced the coal operators to give in on a number of points to achieve the ending settlement.

The miners forced the coal owners to back down from the proposed "labor stability" provision, which would have fined and fired wild-cat strikers. This was a victory for the miners, who have wildcatted with increasing frequency — over 5,000 in the past 3 years — due to the coal operators' flagrant disregard for the miners' health and safety and the UMW bureaucrats' refusal to sanction such strikes. This was an important success for all workers, since the right to strike is under attack throughout the U.S. at this time.

The miners also succeeded in winning an immediate wage increase from \$7.30 to \$8 an hour. Pensions from the 1950 agreement will be raised from \$250 to \$275 immediately, instead



Miners defying Taft-Hartley, March, 1978.

of over the 3 year period that the operators previously demanded.

But while the coal miners achieved some advances, they also did not gain all that they hoped for, particularly in the areas of health and pension benefits. The miners did not win an equalization of pension payments. Pensioners who retired under the 1950 agreement will be receiving \$275, while those who retired after 1976 are receiving up to \$500 a month.

The new contract provides for a commercial health plan with a \$200 maximum deductible. This is better than the \$700 deductible that the bosses originally demanded, but still a set back from the fully-paid independent health fund under the old contract.

The vote on the final contract was close — 57% of the miners voted for it, and 43% voted

against it. The miners' vote was divided over how much more they could have won had they continued the strike, and how much longer they could hold out. This division reflects the fact that the miners' movement, while one of the strongest workers' movements in the country, is still spontaneous and without clear leadership.

Defying bureaucrats and government

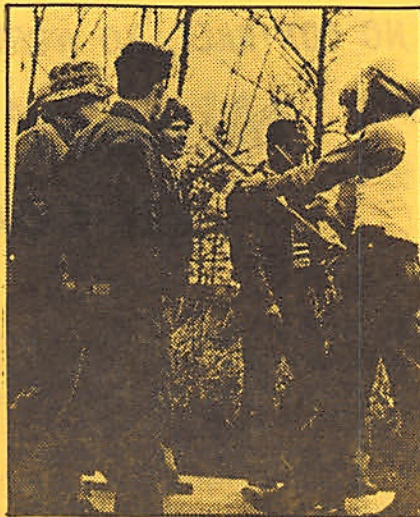
But there can be no doubt that the miners waged one of the toughest struggles of U.S. workers in recent years. The miners not only battled against the coal companies, but they also openly rejected the treachery of the UMW bureaucrats headed by Arnold Miller. Each time the union chiefs tried to sell out the strike, the miners responded by defying the bureaucrats and widening the struggle. They relied on mass actions and fought to keep the strike in their own hands.

They gave tit-for-tat to scabs, goons, and police. Even the murder of 2 miners could not force the miners to back down.

The coal miners boldly tossed aside the capitalists' laws, sending the ruling class into a helpless frenzy. The miners ignored the Taft-Hartley back-to-work order in overwhelming numbers. In West Virginia, where one-third of all union coal is mined, only 30 out of 65,000 miners went to work under the government order. The injunction was so ineffective that the government had to suspend it. A federal judge stated he would not renew it because it was useless, and President Carter announced with embarrassment that he could not pursue it any further. A Carter aide admitted, "Nobody can control the miners."

It is this strength of the miners which will carry them forward in their continuing struggle against the capitalists. The miners have returned to work, knowing the power they hold in their hands and ready to go to battle against future attacks.

Already, the coal bosses are expressing fears of summertime wildcats, and the government is



Full armed power of the state did not stop the miners' strike.

hurrying around trying to figure out how to undercut the miners. Within two days of the settlement, Carter announced that he would form a "Presidential Commission on the Coal Industry" to address "long term problems" such as wildcat strikes and the role of coal in his energy policy. But the strike has strengthened the miners and put them in a better position to deal with future struggles and attacks, and the capitalists know that the miners will fight.

(January, 1978 issue)

Miners' tough fight in coal fields

“ NO CONTRACT, NO WORK ”

Southern West Virginia — The coal towns of the Appalachian hills of West Virginia and eastern Kentucky are deep with snow. Winter has hit hard. The 2-lane roads leading from mine to mine, from town to town are ice-covered, making travel difficult. But there is less traffic on the roads these days anyway. Most of production is shut down, for the miners are “on strike!”

This is the heart of coal mining in the U.S. The 160,000 miners striking against the Bituminous Coal Operators Association since December 6, 1977, when the contract expired, are concentrated mainly in this region. And though the air is cold, the spirit and militancy of the miners is running high.

“We’ll win. We have to!” This sentiment is expressed by miners throughout the area. Though they are demanding increased wages, it is the medical and pension funds and the right to strike which especially concern the miners.

The United Mine Workers’ medical and pension funds are empty, drained by the sabotage of the companies and the class collaboration of the union leadership. Due to a pro-management arrangement, company contributions to the funds are based on mine output rather than on the needs of the miners: the companies are supposed to put 80 cents into the fund for every ton of coal produced. But they have not even done that. “We wildcatted for over ten weeks this summer to get the companies to put money they owed us into our medical funds. All of them are behind in their payments. The company right here, Consolidated Coal, is over one million dollars behind in their payments.”

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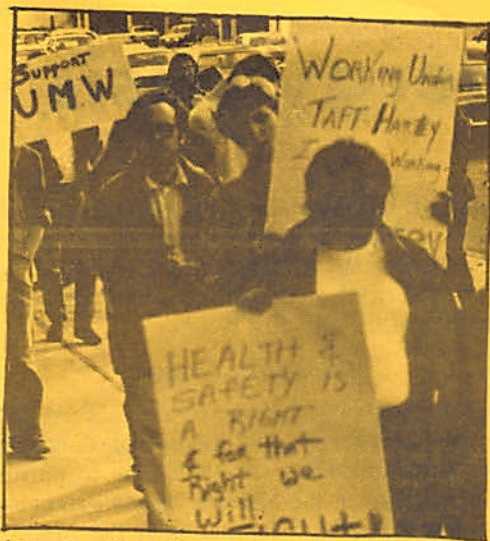
But UMW President Arnold Miller has done nothing to get the money back. Instead, he worked hand in glove with the owners to break last summer’s wildcat and get the workers back into the pits.

Health benefits are critically important in an industry where some 80,000 workers are already suffering from the black lung disease. Black lung, caused by the thick coal dust stirred up by the drilling machines, kills an estimated 4,000 miners each year.

The accident and mortality rate too is well-known in the industry. On the average two miners a week die in the mines. Close to 300 have been killed in just the past two years.

Appalachian miners burn second contract offer on March 6, 1978.





Los Angeles demonstration supporting miners.
(Getting Together photo)

Explosions, cave-ins, gas poisonings, floods and fire are regular occurrences, made so because of the owners' overriding greed for profits.

Right to strike

Using a Supreme Court decision which outlaws all strikes not explicitly sanctioned in a union contract, the mineowners have increasingly used the courts against the union when local strikes have occurred. The Miller leadership has obstructed rank and file demands for protection of local strikes during the 1974 contract negotiations, and Miller agreed not to permit local strikes. His policies, though, have not stopped the wildcats, which are at an all-time high.

One hears opinions such as, "It doesn't matter so much if the strike clause is in the contract. We'll strike anyway!" However, the legal prohibition of strikes places an added burden on the workers, and this is sure to be a major continuing issue among the miners.

The miners throughout the region also point out that Miller is inviting the coal companies to destroy their organization. In just the past five years, the proportion of coal mined by UMW members has dropped from 70% to 50% of the

national total. This reflects the rise of non-union mines, and Miller's obstruction in organizing the new mines.

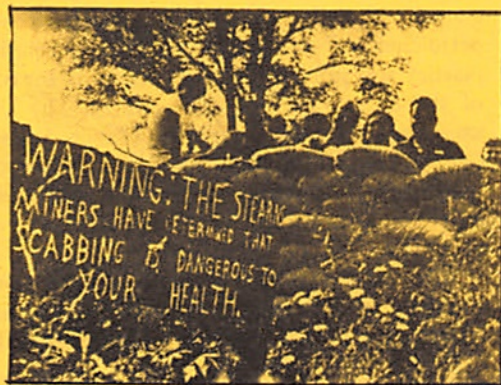
All this, though, has not disheartened the miners. Instead, throughout the country they are relying on their own efforts to conduct the strike. Miners in West Virginia are organizing caravans to close down the non-striking and non-union mines in neighboring Kentucky. Some miners are packing their 44's to "shoot the engines right out of the cars of the scabs."

The miners and their families have packed up stores of food and supplies to weather through the battle. They're prepared to continue the strike for months if necessary.

The miners have a tradition of self-reliance and fighting spirit. Their enemies are imposing: the coal industry is dominated by the largest monopolies in the U.S. This includes oil (Exxon, Continental and Mobil), metals (Kennecott, Anaconda), steel (U.S., Bethlehem) and the utilities (Duke, Tennessee Valley Authority, American Power).

But powerful though the forces seem to be, the coal is not coming out of the ground these days. The hills are quiet — without the workers there is no rumbling of coal trucks nor the rattle of machinery. Let Rockefeller get down into the mines if he is so concerned about energy supplies. Let him mine the coal because the miners refuse to!

(January, 1978 issue)



Coal and the energy crisis

The current miners' strike has significance beyond the coal industry. Monopoly capitalists have made increased domestic production of coal a basic aspect of their strategy for dealing with the "energy crisis." They want to establish "stability" in the coal industry, and that, to them, means breaking the resistance of the miners to exploitation.

Even before the oil crisis of 1973, the monopolists were worried about their energy supplies, especially petroleum. Noting that "the abundance of secure and inexpensive energy" has historically been crucial to U.S. industrial power, the Chairman of Mobil Oil recently voiced the concern of his class when he admitted that the "era of inexpensive energy is past."

Reliance on oil

The bulk of the cheap fuel supply which the capitalists have relied upon resulted from U.S. imperialist domination of international oil production following World War II. The monopolists drained the oil-producing third world countries of their oil and used it to fuel U.S. manufacturing, utilities, transportation and basic industries. Oil was a foundation for the rapid expansion of the U.S. military (ships, aircraft, land vehicles, the space and missile programs). It made possible the growth of new petro-chemical industries such as synthetics, plastics and rubber. Today it accounts for 65% of the energy used in this country. The U.S. uses more oil every year than France, Britain, Canada, Japan and Italy combined, and more than *twice* the amount used by the entire third world! Significantly, half of this is now imported.

With the rise of the struggle of third world countries to take back control of their natural resources, the U.S. monopoly capitalists suffer

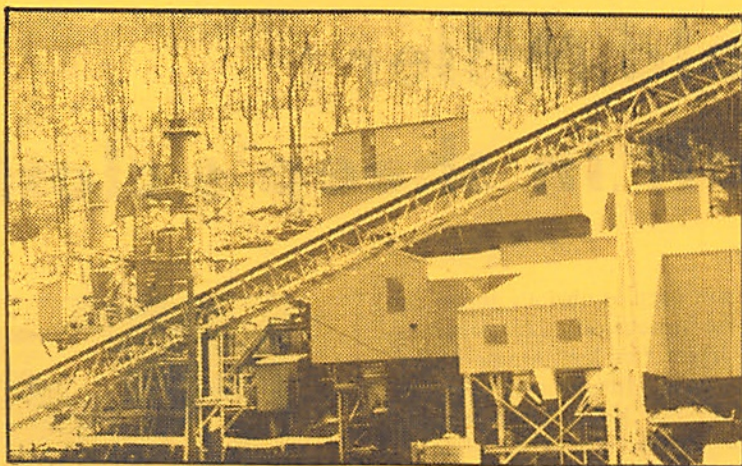
constant headaches over the security, availability and expense of oil supplies. The Secretary of Defense calls it "the single surest threat to our security" — meaning, of course, the security of the capitalist system.

Crisis for capitalists

The monopoly capitalists have several different courses they could follow in dealing with this situation. They are continuing to pursue U.S. interests in the Mideast. They are stepping up domestic oil production as in the Alaskan fields. Nuclear and solar energy also present possibilities but these are too technologically infeasible, politically troublesome or unprofitable for the capitalists to rely upon at this time.

Coal is another story. The U.S. has some of the world's largest coal deposits, representing more potential energy than all of the rest of the world's oil reserves combined. However, while coal production has remained fairly steady for the past 20 years, it has accounted for a declining proportion of energy resources consumed in the U.S. This is an indication of the monopolists' massive reliance on petroleum since World War II.

Now President Carter proposes a substantial expansion in coal use. By 1985 the government hopes to see coal production more than double. But obstacles stand in the way of increased coal use. Environmentalists want to limit strip mining or impose further pollution controls on coal burning. The monopolists themselves cannot agree upon an energy policy for allocation of resources. And even to meet Carter's proposed goal, the capitalists would have to spend a huge amount of capital: coal companies will have to invest an estimated \$23 billion to open new mines, while the utilities will have to put in \$73 billion to convert present facilities over to



Empty coal chutes show the impact of the strike on this important source of energy for the U.S. monopoly capitalists. (Getting Together photo)

coal use.

But the most important obstacle to them is the staunch resistance of the miners to capitalist exploitation.

Militant struggle

The miners have consistently waged militant struggle against the coal owners. Miners' struggles for safer working conditions and better health and pension benefits have been particularly sharp over the past several years. Last year the miners staged an unprecedented number of wildcat strikes amounting to over 2 million working days lost for production.

The owners' association cites this "labor instability" as "one of the principal reasons" for a lack of "business confidence" in coal as an energy source. This simply indicates the extent to which coal owners have been hurt and their profit plans disrupted by the miners' struggles. The owners' objective in the current strike is to wage a counter-offensive to "whip the miners into line." This is one reason why the strike is especially critical.

The strike is also being closely watched by other sectors of the monopolists to see if domestic coal can truly become a "secure" and

"reliable" fuel source for imperialism. Energy supply is of direct importance to them, of course, since the great portion of energy is used by the capitalists. 99% of coal goes to the utilities (with most of the electricity allocated to business and factory uses), steel and other manufacturers.

No solution

But however much the monopoly capitalists hope coal may solve the "energy crisis," the nature of the imperialist system itself ensures there will be a continuing fuel problem. Since energy materials are a commodity used for profit by the capitalists, energy will always be squandered. Rational use and development of energy is impossible as long as energy is regulated by money interests.

The coal industry, which declined in relative importance in the economy in the 1950's and 1960's is sure to become an arena of intense struggle in the up-coming years, and the struggles of the miners definitely will have an increasing impact on the workers' movement in the U.S.

(January, 1978 issue)

Arnold Miller : a wolf in sheep's clothing

Few things have been as obvious during the coal strike as the treacherous role played by United Mine Workers President Arnold Miller. Working hand-in-glove with the coal operators and the White House, Miller has repeatedly tried to jam a contract down the miners' throats which is even worse than the one they had before the strike.

Miller's actions from the very moment he took office stand in sharp contrast to the "militant" image he cultivated when he first ran for UMW President in 1972.

Miller: The capitalists' "alternative"

By the time Miller ran for office, UMW gangster President Tony Boyle was rapidly losing control of the union. The miners' struggle had turned the union into a battleground. Miners openly defied the murderous rule of Boyle, and wildcatted by the tens of thousands in West Virginia, demanding workmen's compensation benefits for black lung victims and basic health and safety conditions in the mines. They demanded the right to elect their district officers and vote on their own national contracts.

In order for the capitalists to regain control, a federal court ordered a special union election in 1972, and the Labor Department spent \$4 million supervising it to make sure Boyle did not stay in power through vote fraud. The capitalists' "alternative" to Boyle in this election was Arnold Miller.

Miller portrays himself as a "worker" coming from the "grass roots," but he has long been a servant of the capitalist class. Disabled by black lung disease, Miller retired from the mines in 1965 and tried to make it as a bourgeois politi-



Arnold Miller: servant of the capitalist class.

cian. He ran twice as a Democratic Party candidate for the state legislature, and was on the payroll of his local government War on Poverty office. But he found that he could advance himself much faster riding on the coattails of the growing UMW rank and file movement. He became active in the Black Lung Association and built up ties with many pensioned and disabled miners to advance his own career. When the special election came in 1972, he used these ties to promote his candidacy for the UMW presidency.

He was quite suitable for the capitalists, for while he mouthed militant words and posed as a champion of the workers' demands, he sought to co-opt the miners' movement. When miners aimed demands at the union bureaucrats, like membership ratification of contracts, Miller boastfully made it sound like it was his endorsement rather than the organized strength of the miners which won the demand. As for miners' demands against the coal operators, Miller claimed these could be won without real struggle. Miller wanted the miners to rely just on himself.

With Miller's election, the UMW remained in the hands of the same class force that Tony Boyle represented. Like Boyle and other union bureaucrats, Miller is part of the labor aristocracy — that section of the working class which has a stake in the continuation of the capitalist system.

The labor aristocracy exists only because of monopoly capitalism. The capitalists bribe them with part of the superprofits obtained from imperialist plunder abroad and from superexploitation of oppressed nationalities at home. The labor aristocracy produces both the Boyles and the Millers and constantly generates new capitalist agents who strive to keep the workers' struggles within the boundaries acceptable to the capitalist bosses — by any means necessary.

The trade union bureaucrats can never lead workers' struggles to victory, for they work for the capitalists. They are the capitalists' mouthpieces within the unions. Arnold Miller's treacherous actions serve as an important lesson — that "militant" trade union bureaucrats are the same as the old "conservative" bureaucrats. The coal miners are rightly seeing that they must persevere in their struggle and never leave it in Miller's hands. The miners' open defiance of Miller is a blow to the capitalist class, and advances the class struggle to regain genuine workers' control of the trade unions, to replace the bureaucrats with revolutionary working class leadership, and to make the unions in this country once again the fighting mass organizations of the working class.

(April, 1978 issue)

OVER 100 YEARS OF STRUGGLE

Miners' militant history

Coal miners have an unparalleled history of struggle. They have experienced much suffering and battled heroically against the brutal conditions in the industry. They have died by the thousands in mine disasters and from black lung disease. They have known plummeting wages, massive layoffs and terrible privation every time the fluctuations of an unstable capitalist economy have lessened the demand for coal. In no other industry do the contradictions between the workers and capitalists stand more naked.

There were strikes in the coal fields as early as 1848. In Tennessee during the 1890's miners waged open warfare during the Coal Creek Rebellion. The Tennessee Coal and Iron Company had contracted with the state government to lease out convicts, mostly Blacks, for use as



1919 Ludlow miners' strike.

strikebreakers. The miners responded by arming themselves, marching on the prison stockades, freeing the convicts and burning the jails to the ground. Eventually they succeeded in getting the convict-lease system in Tennessee abolished, striking a blow not only against the mineowners but also against an institution which was a bastion of national oppression of Black people.

Ludlow Massacre

The miners also shed much of their own blood in battles with the coal operators. Among their best-known martyrs are the twenty people, mostly women and children, who died in the 1919 Massacre at Ludlow, Colorado. After three years of fighting for union recognition from the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, Ludlow miners and their families were evicted from company-owned shacks and forced to set up a tent colony. Rockefeller's hired thugs strafed the tents with machine gun fire and then put them to the torch. The victims perished in the flames or were shot down.

Experiences of this sort tempered the miners and deepened their understanding of the struggle against exploitation. They were among the first to organize in an industrial union, bringing together all coal miners under the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). This was at a time when most trade unions were still organized along narrow craft lines. In 1931, when coal owners forced them to the edge of starvation, striking miners in Harlan County, Kentucky, braved the bullets of sheriff's deputies and company thugs and fought for their lives. The Harlan strike, battled with fierce determination by miners and their families, was a landmark U.S. labor struggle and continues to inspire the working class to this day.

"Captive mines"

During the Great Depression the miners rapidly built up their union and then tackled the auto, steel and rubber barons, the owners of the so-called "captive mines" in which companies like U.S. Steel produced coal for their

own use. The miners helped form the Congress of Industrial Organizations to break the open shops in these mass production industries.

In the 1950's, however, the demand for coal fell off as other forms of energy were increasingly used in its place. The UMW's autocratic president John L. Lewis took steps to protect the profits of the coal companies by sacrificing the jobs of some 300,000 miners, many of them Black. He openly encouraged mineowners to mechanize and ruthlessly suppressed wildcat strikes. The companies rewarded him with sweetheart contracts, while the hills of Appalachia and the streets of uptown Chicago were filled with miners thrown out of work by the introduction of the new machines.

In 1959 Lewis retired, hand-picking his successor, a gangster named Tony Boyle. Under Boyle, conditions in the mines and in the union worsened. Introduction of new machinery greatly increased the level of coal dust in the badly ventilated mines. One miner now recalls that it was "so bad the only thing you could see at a distance of three feet was the light from another miner's lamp." The miners, forced to breathe the dust, fell from black lung in unprecedented numbers.

Boyle tolerated no opposition in the union. In 1969, when Jock Yablonski challenged Boyle for the presidency of the UMW, Boyle had Yablonski, his wife and daughter murdered.

New struggle

At this time, the miners began launching a new wave of rank and file struggle. In the wake of a November 1968 disaster at Mannington, West Virginia which killed 78 miners, the Black Lung Association was formed to fight for improved health and safety conditions. Three months later 44,000 West Virginia miners, 95% of the miners in the state, launched a historic eighteen-day wildcat strike demanding workmen's compensation benefits for black lung victims. Their struggle also helped force federal legislation to tighten up health and safety standards in the mines.

In 1972 Arnold Miller capitalized on the

opposition to Boyle and was elected UMW president. Once in office, however, he proved himself to be little different from previous bureaucrats. The right to strike over local grievances, which has long been a basic weapon of the miners, especially against being forced to work under unsafe conditions, was under attack from the companies and the courts. Each local strike brought lawsuits, court injunctions and fines calculated to drain the union's financial resources. But Miller refused to insist that these strikes be protected under the national con-

tract. Instead, he has tried to stamp out all wildcats and saddle the miners with a bureaucratic grievance procedure which forces them to keep working even when their lives are in danger.

Miller's actions have only served to intensify the struggle in the coal fields. The current strike has shown once again that miners have no intention of relying on the UMW bureaucracy to fight their battles for them, but are resolved to take their destiny into their own hands.

(April, 1978 issue)

From the Chinese Revolution

Chairman Mao with the Anyuan miners

One of the first organizers of the mine-workers in China was Chairman Mao Tsetung. Shortly after the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921, Chairman Mao led 17,000 Anyuan miners and railway workers in a successful strike—demanding back pay, higher wages, benefits and political rights. Chairman Mao calculated that each miner produced over \$70 worth of coal for \$5 per month in wages.

The coal mines of Anyuan in southern Hunan were owned by German and Japanese capitalists. In a series of strikes, the miners displayed tremendous strength, unity and endurance. The first workers' strikes in China took place at the Anyuan mines, whose miners were some of the first to grasp Marxism-Leninism. With his brother Mao Tsemin (who was years later executed by the Kuomintang), Chairman Mao organized seven miners into a party cell, which was instrumental in leading a general strike throughout Hunan in sympathy with the miners and railworkers. Chairman Mao was chairman of the Hunan branch of the All-China Labor Federation.



Chairman Mao with miners.

Chairman Mao worked in the pits side by side with the miners. A resident recalls how Chairman Mao crawled through the small tunnels where ten-year old children pushed the coal carts.

Chairman Mao also organized a labor night-school to help the mineworkers "acquire necessary knowledge and strengthen their resolve to change society." The student card bore a hammer and sickle and a five-pointed red star for an

insignia.

The textbooks, written in concise, everyday language, linked Marxism-Leninism directly to the workers' struggles. Old workers in China today still remember some of the texts and how they influenced the revolutionary struggles of China.

One text read: "When one robs a few, it is called robbery. When one robs great numbers, it is 'making a fortune.'" Miners recounted bitter family histories: "The father digs coal in the pit, the son drags it out. While the coal piles into a mountain, the father and son go hungry."

The school taught that in order to emancipate themselves workers must meet reactionary

violence with revolutionary violence. The "Workers' School Song" went:

*It is we workers who create the world
It is we workers who change society.
We rush on the enemies,
Capture and kill them,
Open up a bright path,
Wipe out all crime and evil;
We will break this world's cage!
Vanguards, charge! Charge!*

Led by Chairman Mao, this fighting call of the awakened Anyuan mineworkers became a marching song of the entire Chinese working class.
(January, 1978 issue)

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