

Will Miners Vote Yes On New Contract?

Negotiators for the United Mine Workers union and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) last week announced that they had reached agreement on a tentative contract that could end the now 100-day old national coal strike. On March 15, the full UMW bargaining council narrowly approved the pact by a 22-17 vote; it comes up for a ratification vote by the membership on March 24.

Preliminary examination of the pact shows that it is a marked improvement over the last UMW proposed contract. Its wages and benefit aspects are better than either the autoworkers or steelworkers agreements reached over the last year. Key UMW leaders feel that the agreement will be acceptable to the majority of the membership although they expect a close vote.

Institute for Policy Studies networks in the union are committed to disrupt the contract ratification. The terrorist networks embedded in the mining country, and augmented by recent deployments of university students, are going to have to be removed. These networks, centered around the Miners' Right to Strike Committee; are currently planning acts of violence and sabotage sometime next week. With knowledge of the contract proceedings leaked to them, reportedly by Rich Banks in the Labor Department and Bernie Aronson in Vice President Mondale's office, they were this week mapping a campaign to terrorize miners into staying off the job. Their deployments are being coordinated with various British-linked media sewers to assure maximum psychological effect.

Officials in the Justice Department and in state governments have been studying information on the IPS thugs provided by the U.S. Labor Party. For over a week, they have been reported near beginning a coordinated mop-up of these agents such as the MRSC's Mike Branch. "We know our real fight against these people is just beginning," said a Justice official today. "We have no illusions that a contract ratification, if it should occur, will stabilize things...."

The Crisis of Leadership

Another factor dangerously threatens the contract ratification process. Thus far key leaders of the traditionalist wing of the United Mineworkers union linked to former UMW Presidential candidate Lee Roy Patterson are withholding their support for the contract. At the same time they are helping circulate the line that a vote for the contract is a vote for UMW President Miller.

The traditionalist strategy is to try to torpedo what most of their faction admit to be an acceptable contract in an effort to set Miller up for ouster. Their opportunism is playing directly into the hands of the IPS dissidents,

giving the Miners Right to Strike Committee critical cover for its antileadership, anticontract organizing.

Responsible UMW leaders, including former UMW President Mike Trbovich, have stated that the contract is worth fighting for and have warned that a defeat of the contract will only help destroy the union and the nation.

Sources close to the union recognize the weakness of the Miller leadership; the key to the contract ratification from the union's standpoint, they point out, is for the Miller leadership to be strengthened by the public support of responsible traditionalist leaders for the contract. "It's about time that these guys (the traditionalists — ed.), grew up and began to think of more than intra-union politicking," said a UMW source.

The U.S. Labor Party has released a statement to the press calling for support for the contract and Miller's effort to gain its ratification; the statement denounces the opportunism of the traditionalist leaders, charging that Patterson has demonstrated that he is unqualified for national union office.

The Battle in Washington

The fact that a potentially workable contract framework was reached this week is no small achievement — especially given the campaign by the Schlesinger faction in the Administration against it. An effective counter-deployment was mounted by mainstream Democratic politicians, including Special Trade Negotiator Robert Strauss and key coal state leaders such as Gov. Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, who have fought to keep Carter and his "Georgia mafia" locked onto the path to a negotiated settlement.

Strauss and others last week let it be known to key UMW officials and BCOA members that the Administration wanted a negotiated settlement and that they should begin industry-wide bargaining. They sat hard on the BCOA, inside sources report, forcing realignment of its negotiating team, taking it out of the hands of saboteurs dominated by U.S. Steel and placing it under control of Pittston coal head Camicia. If they wanted a pact, Strauss and others told the BCOA, they were going to have to give the union something that could be sold to the membership. "We have our ways of making these people listen," an aide to a coal state Senator said of the BCOA.

The climate of terror created by the IPS coal field networks kept miners from Taft-Hartley back-to-work orders. Schlesinger reportedly called on Carter to "come down hard on the miners" — a move which gave his IPS thugs more organizing room. But despite Schlesinger's hysteria, the Administration has not been provoked. They are following a policy analysis put forward by Strauss and others that defines the primary

national interest as the movement of adequate coal supplies to utilities to prevent massive economic dislocation, and negotiated settlement as the only basis for a lasting solution to the crisis. No one had really expected large numbers of miners to return under Taft-Hartley. Carter was told that if a small number of miners returned, if a good percentage of the nonunion mines closed by strike-related activity could reopen, and most importantly if coal supplies could be moved, then he should wait for results at the bargaining table.

According to last reports from utilities sources in the Midwest, coal is indeed flowing and without incident — thanks in large part to the political and legal penalty now placed on IPS terrorist operations by the Labor Party. This, however, will work, these sources state, to “buy a two to three week breathing space. . . .”

Utility spokesmen also indicate that the timing of the UMW ratification vote — next Friday — pushes the coal supply situation “very close to the threshold point. . . . we will lose most of our maneuvering room.”

IPS Networks Gear Up For Contract Rejection

The following is an interview with Jim Hepe, the President of United Mineworkers local 1440 in Ohio's District 6. Hepe, a former employee of former UMW Secretary Treasurer Harry Patrick, has been identified by sources close to the Institute for Policy Studies as an “up and coming militant leader in the union.” Hepe, as the interview reveals, was against the previous contract and is against the new one as well.

Q: ...What is the latest? What do you see developing. Everything looks quiet.

A: Well, it must have been about an hour ago that they announced that they had reached a contract agreement. Apparently the union bargaining council is going to look at it tonight. It didn't really say too much on the news, from what they said on the news story, it said that they agreed to drop the payment back provision in the health and retirement benefits which has been a major stumbling block and the union agreed to let the companies put a clause in the contract that said they could put a production price tag incentive on coal. If these are the two things they changed, then it's no use sending it back down here. What they are thinking is that the health and retirement payback will help. They are probably thinking that if they can slide that in there most of the guys will vote for it. All they need is 20 percent vote different from that last time to turn it around. We beat

them 70 to 30, so they are thinking that maybe with the help of the retirement payback they could swing 50 percent, enough to pass it. As far as everything else goes, it's been real quiet. Not much happening. Because of Taft-Hartley there are not many pickets. There's more law out there than there is pickets, you wouldn't believe it. Everywhere you look there are state police and national guard.

Q: Are the National Guard out in Ohio?

A: I don't know who they are. They're out in auxiliary cars and everything. I don't know what kind of title they have but they're not state patrolmen because there are not that many state patrolmen. They have some kind of task force. We call them rent-a-pigs.

Q: Are there plans for support demonstrations or rallies?

A: There hasn't been one back here for a couple of weeks. What they've been doing is in different areas they've been going out and speaking out at different rallies and things like that.... Weather's been bad too. When we have rallies we have it outdoors and the conditions have been real bad here. If something comes down this week as far as the contract is concerned they'll be a rally within the next three or four days after that.... We haven't even needed a rally to tell you the truth because they're all against it anyhow.

Q: How is it that Ohio is so strongly against the contract?

A: Well, we like to think that people down here in Ohio get their shit together...we try to keep everything 100 percent.

Q: All of this functions through the union or is there a cross local caucus that functions to organize things?

A: Everything's been done through the district. We have a rank and file committee that is working with the miners on the support thing, hardship cases, and we have a fund raising committee. But beside that everything works out of the district office.

I wish I could tell you more. You know I went to school up there, in Rutgers. I went to Labor Ed up there in 1975.

Q: How did you get into the coal mines?

A: I was in the coal mines for five days before I went to school up there. I worked for the International union up in D.C. I worked for Harry Patrick and I was his assistant. I worked with him for six or seven months and then he asked me if I wanted to go up to Rutgers for six months. I went up and took a crash course. They have a special course set up for me, set up for mineworkers. I was the first mineworker they ever had. Yeah, I was up there September, October, November 1975.