

Press Sabotages Coal Production With Lying Campaign

“The national press focuses on negative newsworthiness, the disaster angles, not constructive angles — this is the nature of the big national press. Their reporters are reacting to what their editors want, like ‘camera-worthy’ incidents.”

This was one Virginia coal-field daily newspaper editor’s attempt to explain the “rationale” behind major East Coast press and media actions in the coal fields, misreporting or fabricating “news” in such a way as to maximize chaos and disruption of United Mineworkers Union members’ return to work this week.

The fact is, the “news events” which major media have hyped or created from whole cloth do not constitute news but “dirty tricks” to confuse and intimidate miners, the results of which are then beamed over radio and TV to viewing audiences as: “Here’s what’s happening in the coal fields today.”

Prior to the Taft-Hartley invocation last week, the national media had targeted the UMW-BCOA negotiated settlement for destruction with misinformation on its contents and disproportionate publicity for the “objections” of so-called UMW militants — that is, the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) networks in the “Miners Right to Strike Committee.” What the national media determined to hide from miners were the national interests at stake in a resolution of the coal strike. Headlines and features in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and on CBS and NBC-TV instead “predicted” a negative response to the contract and interviewed “discontented” mineworkers from the most heavily IPS-contaminated union districts to back up these “predictions.”

Once the contract was defeated, NBC, CBS, the major wire services and East Coast press served warnings like: “There will be civil war in Ohio.” Or, as one local police official put it: “They (the press) seem willing to start one (civil war) to get their footage.”

“It is not just that they are lying...they are actively trying to make their disgusting lies come true,” said a coal-state governor’s aide.

Take One: NBC

Take the case of last week’s reporting by one Mike Devlin of the Richmond, Va., NBC-TV affiliate, WWBT. Devlin was deployed into the southwest Virginia coal mining area near Norton to give a “visually effective” rendition of “violence against non-union coal operators.” After a week’s futile search for violence, Devlin drove to the entrance of the UMW Guest River Mine site to stage some “violence.” He carried with him a strip of spiked rubber, which he told his TV audience he had “obtained from UMW pickets.” He proceeded to lay the strip in the roadway entrance to the mine — in plain view of a peaceful UMW picket line. Devlin started his cameras rolling to film the action of “the problems of non-union drivers

— flat tires,” but the local UMW president, Mr. Bateman, intervened, persuaded him to stop, and leave.

Devlin later fumed to an interviewer: “Bateman’s ignorant, he doesn’t know anything about TV...He thought I wanted to take his picture. I just wanted to show the problems of non-union miners. On TV you can’t just say it, you have to reinforce it visually.”

Apparently, none of the local newspapers or media in Norton, who have been attempting to responsibly report on progress toward a settlement of the matter, understood “the demands of television” either. According to Devlin, their reports on his “staging” attempt the next day were “irresponsible, one-sided and unprofessional...they didn’t tell my side.” The local press reported UMW members’ “anger that UMW local president Bateman was arrested” when he intervened to stop a second staging attempt by Devlin, who had simply driven down the road after Bateman’s first warning to try his act again. This time Devlin was directly trespassing on UMW property at a mine entrance, but it was Bateman who was arrested — perhaps for interfering with the “freedom of the press.”

Richmond NBC-TV’s local News Director Ron Miller is still “backing Devlin and his camera crew 100 percent.” The Federal Communications Commission has entertained a complaint on Devlin’s activities.

Journalism for Fun and Riots

In other instances of press “strike duty,” TV cameras and correspondents of the national media converged on the entrance to Keystone Number One mine in West Virginia, immediately after receiving news of the return of a full UMW work crew to that mine on Tuesday, March 14. A bevy of cameras and reporters greeted the miners returning to work. On the following day, an angry miner summarized the result: “After what happened here yesterday, this local is marked...the whole world saw it.” He accusingly asked a *New York Times* interviewer, “Of all the mines you could have gone to, why’d you come here?” The miner’s remarks appeared in print the next day and although he did his best to withhold his identity from his *New York Times* interviewer, *Times* correspondent Reginald Stuart reconstructed the miner’s description and circumstances to the best of his ability.

On the next shift, almost no one showed up for work at Keystone Number One, the *Times* triumphantly reported.

Attempting to give the benefit of the doubt to NBC national network reporters who put a major non-union coal operator on the spot for a provocative interview, one local Virginia newspaper editor asked if perhaps “they just don’t know any better...They should have known that after that interview there would be increased violence at the mine” of the non-union company. (The next day there

was.) "They just should not have asked him to do the interview; it was in bad taste." He described the McCarthyesque "do you still beat your wife" method used by the interviewing reporters whom he identified as primarily from CBS, NBC, the Associated Press and United Press International.

Meet IPS

"Anyone who's down here long enough gets to know the Institute for Policy Studies," said one local newsman, referring to the "Miners Right to Strike Committee" and the so-called UMW dissident network. "You might say the UMW's 'reputation for violence' comes from IPS," reported another.

But *New York Times* labor reporter Ben A. Franklin, who did feature coverage of the "Miners Right to Strike Committee" for that paper, consistently and knowingly

concealed Committee leader Mike Branch's IPS credentials, painting him as a "revolutionary organizer" working at the "grass roots" in the UMW.

Take Two?

With a second contract being placed before the UMW membership at the time of this writing, a new round of the same old press tricks has begun. Washington, D.C. CBS radio affiliate WTOP announced yesterday that the UMW bargaining council meeting scheduled to vote on the contract proposal has been "postponed indefinitely." No reason given. The radio station later "corrected their mistake" — privately to an inquiring caller: it seems the bargaining council's meeting room had simply been changed. No explanation for the "mistake" ever reached WTOP's listening audience.

—Fay Sober