

Miners Struggle At a Crossroads



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by the
Revolutionary Communist Party, USA

Introduction

This article was written shortly before the 1977-78 contract strike of coal miners began. It appeared in the December, 1977, issue of *Revolution*, the newspaper of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA.

The miners strike and the whole militant movement of rank and file miners which it is part of are of great importance to the whole working class. The main forces on both sides of this battle are clearly lined up: the miners, other workers and the majority of American people on one side; the coal bosses, the rest of the capitalist class, their government and the traitorous union sellouts on the other.

The article sheds light on some of the key questions facing miners in this contract battle, but beyond that also on the broader and more long range struggle miners and the rest of the working class must wage to put an end to the modern day slavery called capitalism.

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Struggle has raged sharply in the coalfields, particularly in Appalachia, for ten years. The stakes have risen steadily as the company owners and the coal miners have fought toe-to-toe. The capitalists are desperately hunting ways to crush the miners wildcat strike movement. To them, it is the major obstacle in their coalfield push for higher profits. And the miners, who have held their own for years, persisting in their strike movement to beat back company attacks, are looking for ways to strengthen their struggle and are searching for new understanding to counter these constant attacks. This war between the coal owners and miners is now focusing around the contract which expires December 6.

This struggle has great importance outside the coalfields. Many workers have watched the miners' strikes carefully. The upsurge gives inspiration and hope to many. And it has taught important lessons on how to fight, on who are our friends and who are our enemies.

The active forces of the working class have built new organizations to carry forward this fight. With the formation of organizations like the Miners' Right To Strike Committee (MRTSC) and the National United Workers Organization (NUWO), our class can more consciously set about rallying its forces, spreading the news and fanning the sparks of struggle. The NUWO has taken up a campaign of class-wide support for the miners in their contract battle.

The capitalists, out to survive a major crisis, need to wring even more wealth out of the working class, and they desperately need a stable and loyal workforce. They can't afford to have their "Energy Program" disrupted in a key industry. But there is more than just dollars and cents involved. The miners' struggle is a political danger to the capitalists. Their "domino theory" has truth to it. They can't allow thousands of workers to fight back, breaking loose from the chains of the union misleaders. The capitalists hate to see their courts defied, or workers freed from jail by massive strikes.

Not only is the struggle a terrible obstacle in their coalfield plans, it is echoing throughout the working class, and threatening to spark new struggles elsewhere. So crushing the miners is high on the agenda of the whole capitalist class. And likewise it is important for all workers to defend this movement, to learn from it, to help it develop and advance as part of developing and advancing the class struggle overall. The miners are on the front lines at this point, exchanging some of the heaviest fire back and forth with the capitalists. But it is the same battle against the same class enemy confronted by every worker in every industry. The working class cannot allow this battle being waged by the miners to be isolated or crushed.

The Upsurge and its Background

Many people ask, "How did the upsurge break out? Where did it come from?" and "What are the lessons that can be learned and applied by workers elsewhere?"

First off, the miners' strike movement did not develop because of some mysterious quality possessed only by coal miners. Some try hard to picture miners as a "breed apart." But in fact, the struggle grew out of the oppression which coal miners share in common with all workers under the thumb of the rich. The working class is driven down, ripped off and sold out. And it is inevitable that people will not put up with this without fighting back.

However, it is true that the struggle in the mines has been particularly fierce and has grown over the past ten years—now meeting setbacks, now surging forward again. The reasons for this lie in some of the particulars of the coal fields.

The class nature of American society has always stood particularly exposed in the coal camps. Coal is not mined in cities, in centers of commerce and population. Taking advantage of this, the capitalists built the coal camps, consciously to be able to squeeze every drop of labor and profit out of the workers they ruled. Everywhere in the U.S., capitalists are the rulers of society, but in the mountain coal camps they just never bothered much to hide that fact. In the coal camps, just like the famous song "Which Side Are You On?" lays it out, you are either a company man or a union man.

And the masses of workers remember well the times when the mine owner was not just employer, but also the loan shark, the gouging merchant and the landlord. He didn't just own the mines, but also the cops and the gun thugs. The companies ran the political parties openly; they picked the preachers and the

teachers. Through struggle these coal camps have changed some in the last decades—but it is still obvious to many workers that the nature of the coal companies has not changed.

Joe Brennan, the head of the Bituminous Coal Operator's Association (BCOA) and Arnold Miller, president of the United Mine Workers (UMWA), have announced a "New Era," a time to "forget the hostilities of the past."

But the memories and lessons of the past are very much alive and rekindled daily. Unionization in the coalfields was a particularly bitter and bloody struggle. For more than a century, rank and file miners organized in secret and rose up, over and over again. The unions were formed, smashed and then reestablished repeatedly.

Because there is hardly any other industry around the coalfields, these experiences have not been lost or dulled as each generation of workers follows their fathers into the mines.

No New Era

There is no "New Era." And a great lesson lives on among miners: If workers don't stick together life is a living hell. In the unsafe conditions underground, the strength of the men literally can mean the difference between life and death. "If we ever let our strength slip away, they'll drive us back down to the way it was."

The roots of the miners upsurge in the late 60s and 70s can be seen in the 1950s. The 1950s are played up as a time of prosperity and boom, but even where there was truth to this, it was only partial and temporary and in the coalfields because of the anarchy of capitalist production, it was just the opposite. It was a period of extreme hardship and economic slump as coal lost huge markets to oil and natural gas. In this situation with miners laid off and strikes to stop production not so powerful again, the miners' struggle went into a deep lull as the tight dictatorship within the UMWA quelled rank and file resistance to the attacks.

The union leadership joined with the larger capitalist owners in wiping out the smaller coal companies and by the 1960s firmly establishing monopoly control over coal production and distribution. Grinding attacks of mechanization and layoffs hit the mines. From 1950 to 1960 approximately 300,000 miners (more than 2/3 of the workforce!) were driven out of the mines and into northern cities. This included a great number of the Black miners.

The outrages mounted. Pensioners lived at starvation levels on checks that had barely risen in twenty years. Widows and the disabled miners were thrown away like garbage, often with

no benefits at all. Mechanized mining led to increased Black Lung and injuries as the push for production ground on.

The '60s were a time of turmoil throughout the imperialist system. It was the time of the Vietnam war, the rising Black Liberation struggle, and the mounting attacks on the people. Struggle was breaking out on the campuses and in the ghettos and many other places as well. On a beginning level there was an upsurge of rank and file struggle not only against the companies, but also against sellout union officials.

In the newly mechanized coalfields, the new cheap cost of producing coal relative to other sources of energy caused the industry to pick up. Demand and production and investment increased; but there was no trickle-down effect for miners. In fact things kept getting worse. But the rise in production brought thousands of new miners into the pits. Many were Vietnam vets who, having seen another ugly side of capitalism's face, brought their broader experience and anger with them.

With coal again in demand, the feeling grew that miners, again, had real power in stopping production. Anger fused with the powerful solidarity among miners: it broke through many of the chains held by the hacks. It gave birth to revolt.

The Movement Grew Spontaneously

This movement was spontaneous. Miners united and fought because they were being attacked and betrayed. But the movement was born with deep-seated illusions. Even with their obvious hatred for the coal company owners, workers are just starting to understand what they are up against. And there is another side to life in the coalfields, beyond the militant and elementary class consciousness that flows from being locked in constant and direct battle with the owners and operators. This is reflected in a certain narrowness, a tendency to see it simply as the miners alone versus coal owners, crooked judges, bought off politicians and union hacks.

Of course that's not really surprising. Even when the workers rise up in struggle against the capitalists, the ideas of the capitalists still have a great hold on them. As V.I. Lenin, the leader of the Russian working class and of the Russian revolution of 1917, said, these ideas are far older, and they have at their disposal "immeasurably more means of dissemination." (In his book *What Is To Be Done?*) According to Lenin these *spontaneous* struggles of the workers "represent nothing more or less than [class] consciousness in an embryonic [beginning] form." But "the spontaneous development

of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology" [to the outlook and views of the capitalists and the capitalist system].

This spontaneous development (towards the capitalists' way of viewing and doing things) has great force when the struggle breaks out in the absence of a genuine revolutionary party with deep roots in the working class. In the U.S. the capitalists and their lieutenants and lackeys in the unions have certainly had a dominant influence in the labor movement. The treason of the old U.S. Communist Party added to this. In the 1950s the CP completely capitulated to the capitalists and abandoned the task of leading the workers in revolutionary struggle to overthrow the rule of the capitalists and set up a society ruled by and for the working class and the great majority of people. A new party of the working class, the Revolutionary Communist Party, has been formed, which represents and fights for the interests of the working class as a whole. Although still young it is involved in and at the forefront of many battles of the working class. Nevertheless, the loss of the old CP was a setback only now being overcome.

The class struggle of mine workers, which raged throughout the 1920s, '30s and '40s, was consciously channeled by UMWA President John L. Lewis toward the most narrow economic goals. The revolutionary leadership of large sections of the miners was crushed as early as 1933. And because of a retreat by the CPUSA it was never rebuilt. With the UMWA hacks firmly in the saddle of the miners' organization, the miners were carefully isolated from the political ferment in the rest of the working class. Throughout the 1930s the miners union served as a powerful rear area for the massive unionization drives, but was used as a source of power by those within that movement committed to "pure and simple" trade unionism.

Once unionized, miners went on to win great victories through struggle. And through their unity and sacrifice the masses of miners vastly improved their everyday lives and conditions. On the basis of these economic reforms miners came to feel great loyalty to their union. And John L. Lewis became heir to that loyalty and respect among the masses of miners. At the same time as he jumped out to claim leadership of the fierce struggle for economic gains being waged by the miners in the 30s and 40s, Lewis was ruthlessly stamping out any independent organization or dissent among the ranks.

From the beginning, Lewis was a conscious standard bearer of capitalism and enemy of the working class posing as its "militant leader." As early as 1924 he made his outlook clear:

"The policy of the UMWA... is neither new nor revolutionary... it ought to have the support of every thinking business man in the U.S., because it proposes to allow natural laws free play in the production and distribution of coal." In the midst of the brutal coal slump of the '20s he said, "Shut down 4,000 mines, force 200,000 miners into other industries, and the coal problem will settle itself."

In 1935, in the thick of the depression and just as he was initiating the CIO, Lewis said:

"Far be it from me to foster inferiority complexes among workers by trying to make them think they belong to some special rigid class... it is conceivable that if this dangerous state of affairs is allowed to continue there will not only be 'class consciousness,' but revolution as well. But it can be avoided. The employers aren't doing much to avoid it. But the United Mine Workers are doing everything in their power to make the system work."

This same stand was held by Lewis' corrupt successors to the end. Tony Boyle, Union president at the time, told the Senate in 1969:

"The UMWA will not abridge the rights of the mine operators in running the mines. *We will follow the judgement of the coal operators, right or wrong.*"

"Common Interests" Pushed

The Union officials moved to constantly tie the workers more tightly to the profits of the companies. Once mechanization axed the piece rate system, it is not surprising that the hacks helped pioneer a new system tying health benefits and pensions directly to production. Although the health card miners won in 1946 was a major concession to protracted struggle, it was also an attempt by the coal companies and the Lewis leadership to lay the basis for "labor peace" and an outlook of "common interests" between the miners and the companies in the years ahead.

Miners entered the '50s with strong loyalty to the union structure forged by twenty years of economic gains and militant organizing drives. But they entered the '50s, too, with a union leadership at the top dedicated to class collaboration, retreat and defeat.

Into the '60s the firm grip of the union structure on the miners weakened. Tony Boyle replaced Lewis. The trust of the miners in their officials was deeply shaken as betrayal after betrayal rolled in.

While the upsurge of the late '60s quickly picked up great

power, it was born in a labor movement that had been completely dominated by capitalist ideas for a generation. So it was born groping for understanding, struggling to find ways to organize, and full of confusion over exactly who is the enemy and what is the problem in society.

The rank and file started to move mine by mine, local by local. Mines are relatively small workplaces, each usually has no more than a couple of hundred workers. But from the start the stronger locals became storm centers, drawing neighboring mines into the struggle, throwing miners there into motion. Because of the obvious power of the movement, miners moved quickly and naturally to take on major issues that naturally affected them: the Black Lung disease (1969 and 1976); the attempted Nixon wage-freeze (1974); bad roads; flood relief; and the extremely important strikes of the last years against injunctions, for the right to strike; and recently against vicious cuts in health benefits.

These broader movements have grown out of the day-to-day fights at the mine sites, and in turn they spread the ferment to new areas. New forces have constantly been thrown into motion.

From the beginning, organization grew trying to focus the movement onto key issues. The Black Lung Association and the Disabled Miners and Widows Association were formed in the late '60s. They sparked major wildcat strikes that forced concessions, including the 1969 Health and Safety Act, the payment of Black Lung Benefits to thousands and the return of the health card to many disabled and retired miners and to widows. Out of the gas protest (1974) and the contract battle of 1974, the Miner's Right to Strike Committee was formed.

Aim at the Union Traitors

Early on, the struggle took aim at the union traitors. Boyle's cronies were just the old Lewis machine with its makeup off. The Yablonski campaign challenge gave the movement its early form. And with Yablonski's defeat and murder, Miners for Democracy was formed, representing the strength of the rank and file, while also embodying many of the weaknesses the movement was born with, Miller's election on the tide of the rank and file movement brought with it actual advances, including vastly increased autonomy for districts and locals, the right of the rank and file to ratify contracts, and with the extensive dismantling of the Boyle machine, it brought more freedom of movement for the rank-and-file.

Miners started learning the hard way. They grabbed at all

the means of protest open to them. Besides strikes, court suits were filed by the dozens. Years have been spent running around the halls of Congress, lobbying. And many had high hopes of quick and easy victories through the union elections of Miller and others.

Though these earlier rank-and-file organizations were important advances, they had exactly these serious weaknesses in outlook. That's why miners were hardly able to resist when the Miller organization pushed to dissolve the Miners For Democracy (MFD) and the Black Lung Associations saying, "These organizations are no longer necessary, the reformed UMWA will now take over their tasks."

Both organizations were severely weakened, despite their mass nature and their history of struggle. The MFD ceased to exist. The Black Lung Associations (always more independent of the professional reformers) have survived and they struggle on, in places. But much of the national strength of these Associations drained off, as some members were co-opted to union payrolls and because the Associations themselves were unable to break the legalistic grip of endless lobbying.

The weakness in outlook comes directly from the spontaneity of the movement. By themselves, the day-to-day struggles, however militant and widespread they might be, do not bring the workers a conscious understanding of the whole position and historic tasks of the working class. As Lenin said, left to themselves the day-to-day struggles lead to the rudimentary class understanding that workers need to unite and fight back against their immediate employers. And this understanding, while it in some ways may represent an advance, is not in itself a break with the outlook of the capitalist system. And therefore spontaneous struggles like this "naturally" develop as struggles over the terms of the sale of labor power, not in opposition to the whole set up where workers are maintained as wage slaves.

Struggles Over Summation

In fact, the debate over how to sum up the upsurge has been going on for years. The capitalist class, with "immeasurably more means of dissemination" plays a big role. And this ideological warfare has gotten sharper as time goes on. And in the repeated experience of the wildcat strikes, in the many twists and turns of a great struggle, there is a great deal of *raw material* from which the working class can learn to understand its situation. The *Programme* of the RCP points out the process clearly:

"Where the struggle is successful in wringing concessions from the employers it spurs further struggle. Where there is a temporary setback, it spurs discussion among the workers as to the cause of the defeat.

"In these struggles, the workers begin to throw off the foot of the employer from their necks, to raise their heads. And in raising their heads they are able to see farther and more clearly. The face of the enemy and the forces fighting him come into sharper focus. And this gives rise to vigorous discussion not only about every question in the immediate struggle, but also about events throughout society and the world." (p. 101)

It is important to understand that these massive wildcats have not been "pure," simple, clean-cut affairs. They have grown in direct opposition to union officials, as well as the companies themselves. And this is just as true of the Miller administration in power, as it was of Tony Boyle's clique.

In fact, each strike has been a battle in itself, within the ranks of the miners. There has always been great controversy over whether to strike at all. Once a strike breaks out the debates focus on what demands to raise and when to go back to work. Discussions rage over who is the enemy and how deep the rot in society goes. There is also debate over the methods to use in the strike, whether to strive to unite the broad masses of miners consciously around the demands or simply rely on violence and respect for picket lines.

Within these struggles the top union officials constantly strive to confuse, narrow, control the movement. And to do this they must reach out to win workers actively to their side.

Today the union is in tremendous turmoil—the rift between the top officials and the rank and file is so deep that, at times, the top hacks have virtually no control over the ranks. Miller has even had to import his bodyguards from outside the Eastern coalfields!

And the hacks are at each others' throats, scrambling like rats for the top spots, while they fight over which tactics are best for suppressing the rank-and-file. Some union officers have scrambled to join strikes and scream their opposition to Miller, all in order to advance their own positions. In the recent strike over health benefits, a few full time officials actually presented themselves as militants to draw around them the active fighters while confining the struggle to "acceptable" goals.

The active and advanced miners are forced to contend with all these hacks for the leadership of the intermediate majority. Both sides call meetings, reach out local by local, and use all available means to affect public opinion. It is a sharp contest

that has several times erupted into armed conflict.

The great strength of the active miners is that their line of struggle genuinely represents the interests of the great majority. The strength of the officials is in their control of the commanding heights of the union structure, a well-financed national organization. They also have the force of habit on their side, the ingrained ideas of generations of capitalist propaganda and of narrow trade unionism—the outlook that workers should limit their battles, usually trade by trade, to get better wages and conditions within the confines of the capitalist system, that they should continue as wage slaves rather than fighting for an end to these conditions by ending the whole capitalist system itself. This is true whether it's the trade unionism of the Lewis, Boyle or Miller brand. And above all, even while they have conflict with particular capitalists, overall their grip is reinforced by the capitalists, their media, and their state. Using all the forces at their disposal, the capitalists have launched a frontal assault on the miners' feelings of solidarity, their deep hatred of scabs and their respect for picket lines.

Even as they fight among themselves, the union officials have made some advances in whipping the lower level hacks into a "front-line fighting force." Because honest fighters often appear in local positions, this has required years of patient work, with lots of cash, secret conferences and heavy pressure from the top.

Rank and File Organization

The rank and file has sensed the need to get organized. The degree of organization has varied greatly in different strikes. It has depended on the particular issue. It depends on how well miners are able to shake loose the hold of the union officialdom. And it has, more and more, depended on the role of rank-and-file organizations within the strike.

In the face of heavier and more sophisticated attacks, the old loose "ad hoc" strike organization has shown its weaknesses. More and more it has been necessary to find tactics that constantly strengthen the rank-and-file through the complex struggle. The Miners' Right To Strike Committee has played an extremely important role in developing and spreading the struggle. And in addition, with its consistent practice of bringing out the opposing interests of the workers and owners on every question of the battle, the Committee has led the struggle to popularize the most advanced lessons of the struggle, to broaden and strengthen the movement.

Because of its role in the struggle, the Miners Right To Strike Committee has been the special target of attacks within the union and in the press. The capitalists aim both at separating the active workers from the intermediate and at splintering the unity among the active themselves. To do this dirty work the union officials couple their usual garbage about "common interests" between capital and labor, with outrageous lies about how "wildcats destroy the union," and how the movement is the sinister child of "radicals," "communists," "outsiders," and "young hotheads who just don't want to work." They concoct tales of how the strikes come from a "tiny handful of right-to-strikers" who terrorize the "silent majority." They have even fabricated rumors of incidents where communists were supposedly lynched. And when they have felt strong enough, the officials have temporarily suspended rank-and-file leaders from the union, waved their notorious "10 point program to end wildcats" around and threatened to attack still more.

Limitations of the Movement

While the movement has come far and won great victories it is showing limitations that are frustrating and demoralizing to many.

As the movement has grown, miners have gotten strong enough to take on one issue after the other. And the movement, in some areas, has grown into a constant chain of strikes which naturally raises the question: "Where is all this leading us to?" For the masses of miners the struggle has brought with it tremendous hardship. Thousands of people have gone for years with irregular paychecks and for months with no income at all. 5,500 strikes in three years is a lot of sacrifice.

In the same period the crisis has deepened. The capitalists are attacking the workers in ever broader ways. And at the same time, the increased desperation of the owners has simply meant that it is harder and harder to win concessions—meaning that strikes have gotten longer and more bitter.

All this means that miners are asking serious questions about the future path. On the one hand, people know "You don't ever win anything without a fight." On the other hand, the old slogan of "Work a while, strike a while" is not good enough.

Miners are directly confronting the fact that workers are up against a system. A system based on exploitation. And that striking miners, though powerful, can't break through alone. *Victories have not given rise to peace, but have given rise to*

ever sharper battles! The very ability of miners to resist has come under fiercer and fiercer attack. And the bourgeoisie is being forced to throw more forces into the battle—like greatly expanding non-UMWA Western coalfields. The class struggle is obviously not as simple or as quick as it once seemed to most. Many more now see that the struggle is a protracted and a very serious undertaking.

Through struggle miners have learned a lot. Thousands have a real grasp of the treason of their top officials. The brutal wave of injunctions, fines and jailings have dispersed many illusions about the courts. And the constant insult in Congress over Black Lung has certainly given lobbying a bad name with many workers. In other words, understanding has grown since the early days, and the formation of the MRTSC has influenced that development.

But at the same time lessons are not learned automatically and can't be limited to these struggles and the lessons drawn from them alone. The process of learning is itself a class struggle. And a sharp one! Bourgeois trade unionist ideas are strong, and constantly reinforced from above. Even among the most active there is resistance to organizing independent of the union structure. The question is often asked, "Why isn't the UMWA enough?" And even among the relatively advanced there is a strong push to keep the movement narrow and to "stick to miners' issues." The struggle will be long. Experiences must be summed up and popularized.

It is one task of communists to help the miners sum up their struggles and these debates and draw from them the revolutionary lessons they contain. This includes, but is not limited to, such basic truths as the fact that the workers will never be able to have decent lives, to "live in peace," under the capitalist system. That system's laws constantly compel, regardless of anyone's will, the bosses to grind down the workers and the workers to resist.

Broader Experience

But the miners' struggle is so sharp that it has drawn the assaults of the capitalist legal system, the scrutiny and slanders of the capitalist media, the attention and intervention of politicians, reformers and others whose interests draw them to one side of the battle or another. This intensification and broadening of the struggle becomes an even richer source of lessons about such things as the role of the state, the interests of other class forces, and the operation of the capitalist system as a whole.

Even this is not sufficient. If more and more miners, as well as other workers, are to become conscious fighters for the working class, communists must use Marxism-Leninism to help them sum up and understand their struggle in the context of all the other battles in American society and the world today. Only by learning about and participating in such battles, will miners together with other workers come to understand that they are all aimed at the same oppressors, the same "dark forces" Lenin spoke of. This is key in miners, together with all workers, becoming class conscious revolutionaries and fighting still more powerfully.

In contrast, without bold and fierce struggle by the conscious forces of the working class, the capitalist class will win the battle for summation every time, by default. The struggle for reforms gets summed up as an endless treadmill, where workers fight, fight, fight and sacrifice endlessly... and the capitalists always have the last word.

In the coalfields the level of struggle requires changes. The old ways of loose organization and the old ways of looking at things just aren't up to the tasks at hand. And not only are these major advances necessary—it is more and more possible to shed the spontaneity of the past. With the rich experience of the last ten years, and with the development of new organizations of class conscious workers the basis actually exists for a major advance in the level of the movement—in its level of class consciousness and in its level of organization.

The problems within the miners' upsurge are the direct result of the growth of protracted struggle over ten years. These are natural growing pains, that require *ever more understanding and activity* from the forces of the working class conscious of their real class interests and tasks. This crossroads presents both the opportunity to advance off the victories of the past and the danger of a confused retreat.

It is generally accepted that the miners' upsurge has been a "great inspiration." It is seen as proof that workers *can unite* their ranks, that struggle is the only way forward and that the power of the working class is tremendous when the workers fight for their own interests. But an equally important lesson must absolutely not be forgotten: that it is exactly in the tremendous upsurge of struggle that it becomes clear again that building the day-to-day struggle as *an end in itself*, is a *dead end*.

The problem of workers everywhere are not solved by one piecemeal reform after the other, but by building an increasingly revolutionary workers movement that recognizes the face of its enemy, recognizes and struggles against all oppres-

sion and aims at the overthrow of the system itself. The point should not be to just build a movement that powerfully tackles one grievance after the other, since capitalism has a limitless capacity to create new oppressions and outrages. The treason of the John L. Lewises of the labor movement is *not* principally that they don't fight militantly for reforms on occasion, but that they consciously and purposely *limit* the struggle of the working class to those reforms, condemning the workers to perpetual wage slavery.

Battle Taking Shape

The antagonism in the coalfields is heightening, and the struggle is getting ever more complex. The aim of the companies is not just putting over minor attacks. They're aiming for a knockout punch. Driven to desperation by their inability to control "these damn stupid miners," the companies are now dreaming of wiping out the ability of miners to organize and resist. Their policies have steadily gotten more sweeping. Along with the attacks on benefits and the opening of large nonunion fields, they are openly calling the continued existence of the *union itself* into question! They are threatening not to sign another agreement unless the contract *guarantees* "labor peace." For the companies as well as for the miners the right to strike is the key issue in December.

The whole battle is taking shape as a major showdown between capital and labor. It requires the attention and active support of all workers. By building this contract fight as a key part of the overall class struggle, both nationally and in the coalfields, we will be taking a major step toward the day when "From individual strikes the workers... go over... to the struggle of the entire working class for the emancipation of all who labor." (Lenin, quoted on page 101 of the RCP *Programme*.)