

LABOR

Iron range workers end strike

DULUTH, MINN.—“A big victory for labor on the iron ore range” is how United Steelworkers of America District 33 director Linus Wampler describes the recently settled 138-day strike by 18,000 steelworkers in Minnesota and Michigan.

The longest strike in Northern Minnesota's Iron Range history ended Saturday, Dec. 16, when the rank and file from the 600-member Steelworkers local from Inland Steel Company in Virginia, Minn., ratified a three-year contract by a two-to-one margin.

Contract settlements were reached over a four-week period as each of the Steelworker locals worked out specific strike issues. Members of the four locals from Cleveland Cliffs Company in Upper Michigan and one in Northern Minnesota were back on the job at the iron ore and taconite mines and processing plants before the last week in November.

Strikers were seeking, among other important worksite issues, 100 percent parity with the incentive pay that production workers in the mills can earn. About 85 percent of the millworkers in the East receive incentive pay averaging about 80 cents an hour.

Contracts agreed upon here in the last month give iron range Steelworkers union members only about two-thirds of the incentive pay paid eastern millworkers, with from 75 to 80 percent of the workers covered as of November 1979. The contracts also provide an opportunity for all non-production workers to earn a 30 cents per hour attendance bonus pay.

“I'm very happy that we were able to establish the incentive that we started out to establish. It's been a long, hard battle and people have fought hard,” Wampler said on Dec. 15.

The contract provisions represent what the steel industry called its last, best offer. This general proposal was brought here early in November by Steelworkers International president Lloyd McBride, but was rejected by unanimous decision of union negotiators representing all 15 locals because it was reportedly vaguely worded and ignored local issues.

After slight revision and clarification and discussion of important worksite issues at the respective bargaining tables, the offers were submitted to the union rank and file and one by one locals ratified the pacts, usually by significant majorities.

One local at Eveleth, Minn., rejected on Nov. 25 the tentative agreement worked out by union negotiators but ratified an agreement offered two weeks later, after other Minnesota locals had accepted a slightly improved offer making a few more workers eligible for incentive pay, and settling some worksite issues.

The industry was accused of not bargaining in good faith. “Over the last 12 to 15 days they [U.S. Steel Company] finally found out they got a tough negotiating committee and a bunch of members that were going to hold out until they got all these issues resolved, and on the last 30 some issues, there were some 25 or 26 pretty good answers,” said Joe Samargia, president of the largest Minnesota Iron Range local after reaching a tentative agreement here Dec. 15.

Not all workers were called back to the job immediately after signing new contract agreements. At Reserve Mining Company's locals at Silver Bay and Babbitt only 200 out of 2,000 workers have been called back. Boat landing crews have started shipping Reserve's taconite pellet stockpile on Lake Superior and maintenance crews have begun overhauling pelletizing equipment that was idle for more than four months.

At Aurora-Hoyt Lakes, Minn., nearly 1,800 of a total 2,000 USWA members were laid off within 15 minutes after signing a new three-year contract with Erie Mining Company. A company spokesman said the layoff will last at least



Striking workers received support from all over the country in their 138-day strike. Left, Joe Samargia, president of the largest Minnesota Iron Range local and a militant strike leader.



Despite the official ending of the strike, not all the workers have been called back as the companies slowly begin to produce.

satisfied with the international leadership, and the strike was seen, in part, as a challenge to the Experimental Negotiating Agreement (ENA) that prohibits strikes for wages.

Some union leaders here say they found that the ENA was used by the industry to avoid discussing worksite issues by challenging the right of locals to ask for incentive pay. But they add that since big steel was forced to grant most iron ore and taconite workers incentive pay, the industry conceded an important negotiating point for future contract talks.

Union leaders acknowledge only a partial victory in the areas of incentive pay, worksite issues and ENA. “I'll never be satisfied until we win 100 percent, and I guess that's going to be a fight for

another day,” local president Lee Smargia said.

“I have nothing but praise for the negotiating committee and the people who stood behind them all these months in order to gain what they started out for,” said district director Linus Wampler. Local president Joe Smilanich voiced the sentiment of most steelworkers when he said, “We couldn't have done it without the solidarity” amongst the steelworkers and their families.

The steel industry has had no comment on the strike, but a representative of an industry supplier here called the end of the long strike a “welcome sight” and “a great boost in the arm” for the area that is so economically dependent on mining. *Phil Glende is a reporter in Duluth, Minn.*

Poor settlement in Indiana strike

by David Moberg
Staff writer

After 8½ months of fighting scabs and gun-wielding security guards, workers on strike at the Essex Corporation plant in Elwood, Ind., returned to work with a contract that gave them no more money than the original company offer last spring. (ITT, Nov. 9-15) Pressured into a quick vote on the morning of Dec. 21, following a late-night negotiating session, members of UAW Local 1663 voted 77 to 40 to end their strike. It was a tearful meeting as the auto parts assembly workers, many of them middle-aged women, heard their president describe the offer as “rotten” and criticize the international union for not giving their local sufficient support. Many of the 181 eligible

voters were not informed of the meeting, since it was called at short notice.

Over the course of three years workers' base pay, which is now \$2.76, will be increased by 61 cents. One cent was knocked off the original offer to pay for a \$2.50 a week increase in sick pay benefits, now only \$35. In an effort to win greater wages and benefits in early negotiations, the local had also given up some of its controls over the workplace.

The estimated 120 strikebreakers brought in by Essex, a notoriously anti-union company, will keep their jobs. They do not have to join the union. Local 1663 leaders fear that the company will soon press for decertification of their union.

The contract promised that 68 of the original 222 strikers would be rehired

immediately, and a total of 110 within the first 90 days. The cases of workers fired during the strike will be discussed by a union-management committee, and if not resolved there they will be sent to an arbitrator picked by Essex.

Only eight of the strikers broke ranks and returned to work during the bitter, prolonged battle in Elwood. As time passed strikers grew angry with the international union, which vacillated on whether it would pay the fines of picketers arrested by the county sheriff and had tried for months to persuade the strikers to concede.

“I felt the international betrayed us,” strike spokesperson Georgia Ellis said. Despite her misgivings, she returned to work to carry on her fight and to try to preserve the union: “Our union is the only hope we've got.”

ELECTORAL POLITICS

Black Marxist wins in Detroit

By Jack Russell

DETROIT—On Nov. 8, 1977, voters here elected a black Marxist to the nine person Detroit City Council.

Attorney Ken Cockrel received 166,643 votes and finished a strong seventh in a field of 18. Cockrel was first among non-incumbents and was the only candidate elected without DAW and Democratic party endorsements.

His election surprised most liberal/labor power brokers. For the next four years they will have to cope with an aggressive socialist presence in city government.

Cockrel has been a public figure in Detroit ever since he helped organize various plant-based left groups into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers following the 1967 black rebellion. He has become well known through a series of intensely political trials and his capacity to convey socialist analysis within the black community.

In seeking the city council seat, Cockrel did not retreat from his record. The campaign was not draped in red in the manner of most symbolic socialist candidacies, but Detroit voters were aware of Cockrel's politics.

In the weeks following the Cockrel victory one heard talk in the boardrooms and barrooms of Detroit that come 1981 or 1985, a socialist might run for—and win—the mayor's office in the nation's fifth largest city.

The Cockrel victory marks a new stage in the development of a movement that has been gathering strength over the past ten years here. (Readers interested in a narrative of the 1967-1973 period should consult Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin's *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying*.)

Cockrel's legal work has been essential to this development. He has successfully defended the right to militant self-defense and made the criminal court a tribunal in which, while thousands watch, capitalism goes on trial.

In the "New Bethel" case of 1969, Cockrel won acquittal for members of the Republic of New Africa who had been involved in a fatal shootout with Detroit police.

He then challenged the jury selection process and proved systematic discrimination against blacks, women, youth and working people generally. Thereafter, juries in Recorder's Court have more accurately reflected the city's population.

In 1971 Cockrel defended James Johnson, a black worker at Chrysler's Eldon Avenue Gear and Axle Plant who had killed two foremen and a job-setter after being fired. The defense put Chrysler on trial, contending that company harassment and the murderous working conditions at Eldon had pushed Johnson over the edge.

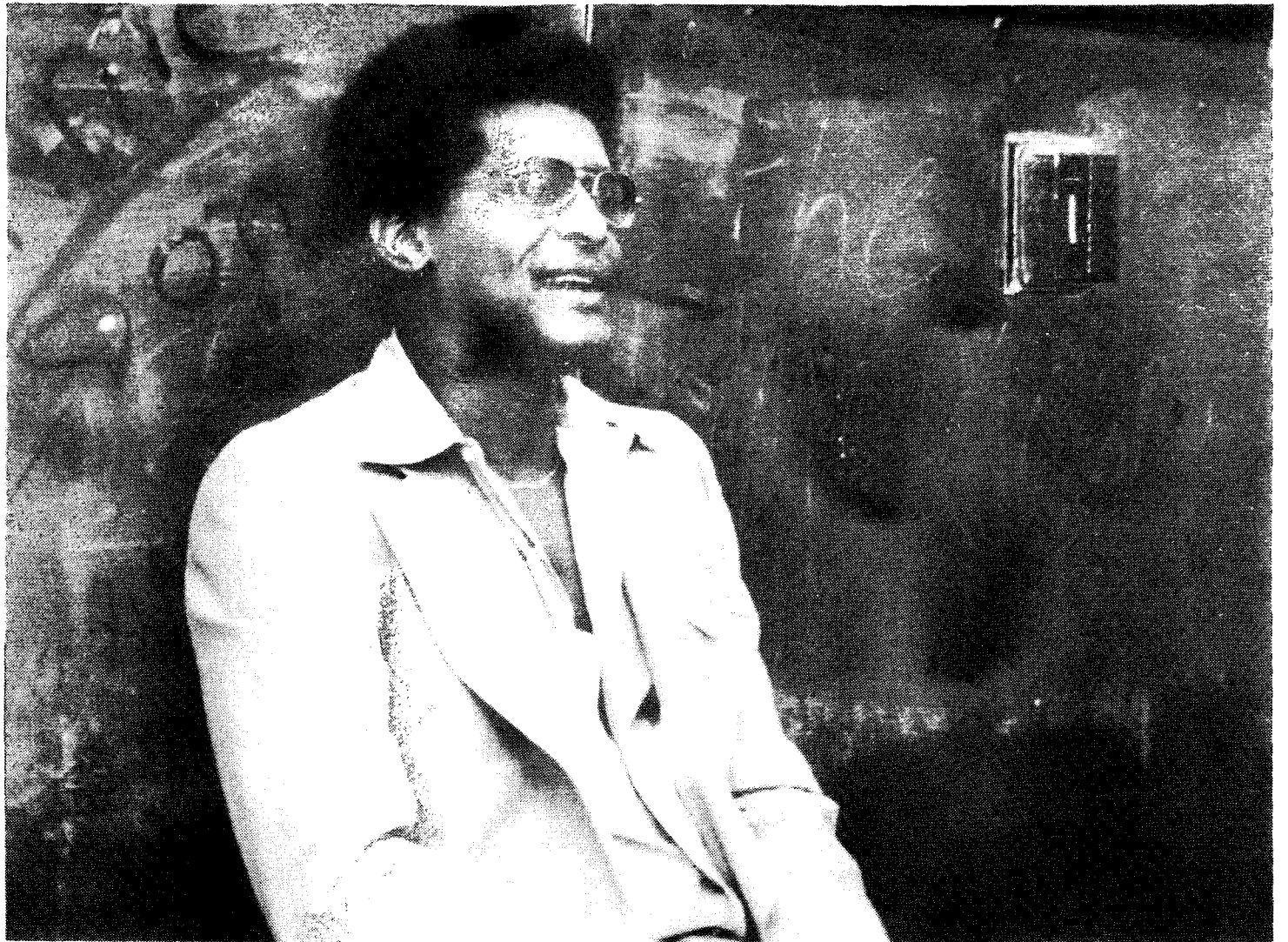
After Cockrel took the jury to see the plant, they held Johnson not responsible for his actions.

Two years later the long battle against the Detroit police STRESS unit was dramatically focused by the trial of Hayward Brown.

The elite police unit had killed nearly a score of Detroiters, all but one black. There was general suspicion that they were also giving protection to heroin dealers.

Brown and two comrades who had been waging their own private war against dope were involved in a shootout with STRESS officers in which four police were wounded. They became fugitives in the largest manhunt in Detroit history. Black homes were terrorized by police raids. Brown was eventually captured; his friends were killed by police in Atlanta.

Cockrel again took the offensive, putting the police and STRESS on trial, and instructing both jury and city on the history of police violence in Detroit. Brown was acquitted. Early in 1974 newly elected mayor Coleman Young fulfilled a campaign pledge and abolished STRESS.



Ken Cockrel was well known in Detroit because of his political work and a series of intensely political trials. Though his campaign was not draped in red, Detroit voters knew his views.

The most recent publicized Cockrel defense was top-of-the-hour news in Detroit. A black policewoman in Flint, Mich., Madelyn Fletcher, was forced to armed self-defense by the threats of white male officers. A shooting incident left her and an antagonist wounded. Cockrel exposed the racist and sexist history of the Flint police department and the specific abuse of Fletcher. The prosecution collapsed.

Cockrel's use of the courts has been complemented by other political activity. In the '70s a disciplined and experienced cadre of associates, working in a series of coalitions and organizations, have published newspapers and pamphlets, held monthly educational forums, staffed a bookstore and a printing operation. Their first electoral test resulted in the

1972 election of Justin Ravitz, the nation's first Marxist judge.

The Cockrel victory further demonstrated the potential of a movement that combines a remarkable individual leader, an organizational center, and people prepared to embrace left initiatives. Cockrel's vote came from the black working class, from the underclass of permanently unemployed, from black professionals, and from the 15 percent of the white electorate who respect an independent fighter and a man with ideas.

How Cockrel will be received in the halls of power and how he will represent the tens of thousands who look to him for leadership remain to be seen, but the most important urban contest of the 1980s may now be shaping up in Detroit. ■



M.C. Rice (with mike) Berna Friedman (at blackboard)

Aware of the limitations

Ken Cockrell was recently interviewed for *In These Times* by Jack Russell:

Ken, we know that a lot of people wanted you to win. Who didn't?

The Labor/Democratic party axis didn't want us elected and obviously don't want to see the emergence of an independent locus of political leadership inside of the city and especially inside the black community.

Mayor Young didn't want us in, either, because one would have to be awfully naive to imagine decisions being made as to what kind of slates are going to be drawn up by that axis without at least these being checked by Mayor Young and his operatives.

They're threatened by our campaign and have behaved accordingly. But we have been sufficiently powerful so that they have had to be very careful about how their opposition has been expressed. They haven't been able to bait us on our Marxist or socialist politics.

Mayor Young and I have not had substantive discussions. My guess is that's going to change. One thing that results from our election is the necessity of those folks engaging us in direct communication. They'll have to present some rationale for what they're doing. They gotta deal with me.

What do you think has been won—in the narrower sense? What can be done on the city council?

I'm aware of the limitations that are imposed upon the city council. The job is not one that is established for the initiation of programs to influence the kinds of services that are being provided by the city. It's a collegial body and you're one of nine and confronted with the parliamentary necessity of getting majority support for your position.

You are assigned the responsibility of budget approval, discharging, the approval of contracts that the city negotiates, the approval of settlements of lawsuits that are initiated involving the city, and so on. The resources made available to the council are essentially to increase their capacity to exercise an auditing, monitoring, reviewing function.

I'm trying to be honest with people. I

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