

Continued from page 9.

this "new generation" of mineworkers was more likely to fight back. As a result wildcat strikes escalated out of control.

Surrounded by Executive Board denunciations and vocal dissatisfaction among rank and filers, Miller became increasingly paranoid and incapable of steering the union's machinery. He began seeing union enemies lurking behind every door of UMW international headquarters. When Miller suspected his secretary of plotting with secretary-treasurer Harry Patrick, for instance, he had the door to her office removed. Staff persons were kicked out for "insubordination."

The internal chaos reached debilitating proportions during the last year. In a bitter race for union president last June Miller narrowly defeated—with 40 percent of the vote—Harry Patrick, who most closely represented the MFD perspective, and Lee Roy Patterson, the leader of the resurgent Boyle forces. Only half of the union's 277,000 working and retired members voted, however, so Miller entered his second term with the backing of about one-fifth of the membership.

After 20 young staff members resigned or were fired last year Miller approached negotiations woefully unprepared. He hired an outside consulting firm to collect bargaining information and put together the union's monthly newspaper. After four months of intermittent talks both sides agree that Miller has been a disruptive if not disastrous influence on negotiations.

Even the symbols of the reform movement have disappeared. When Miller took office, for instance, he sold the union's limousines and cut top officers' salaries. Last month, with his salary back up to \$45,000, Miller leased a nine-passenger Cadillac to keep in step with the coal operators who, after all, have Lear jets.

**HIS STRONG-ARM EFFORTS TO** intimidate union critics has also soiled his image among union members. Between Washington, D.C., meetings of the bargaining council, Miller and his bodyguard, Charles Johnson, flew to Charleston, W.Va., to confront Cecil Roberts, District 17 vice-president, on some charges he leveled against Miller in an interview with *Coal Age*. With a pistol prominently displayed in his belt Miller threatened to have Roberts removed from office for the accusations. A shouting and cussing match soon turned into a fistfight between Roberts and Johnson.

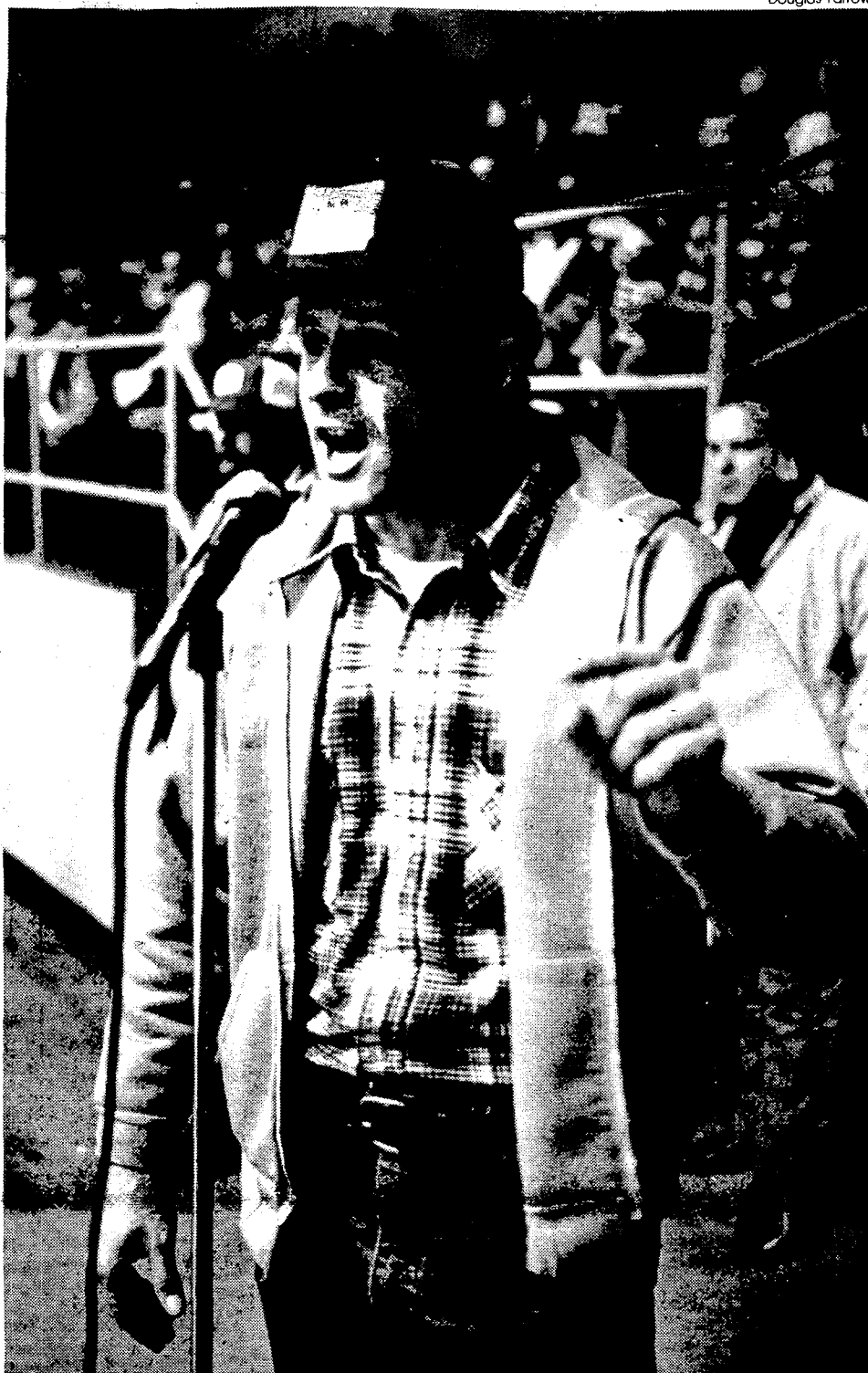
After the incident Miller was seen waving his gun and vowing, "I may live a hell of a lot longer than he [Roberts] will if he keeps up his ways."

In early February Miller pulled two veteran organizers out of the Stearns, Ky., strike, now entering its 19th month. Both supporters of Harry Patrick, the organizers had disobeyed Miller's order to cease all public events for the duration of the national strike. "It was clearly a move on Miller's part to put a silence to potential critics before the new contract comes out," remarked an observer.

But Miller has been damaged most by the details of the tentative contract, which have been widely distributed and

# UMW DISUNITY

Douglas Yarrow



Several thousand miners denounced the first contract settlement at a Beckley, W. Va., meeting on Feb. 11.

debated at local union gatherings. No expressions of rank and file support have been reported. "There is no other major collective bargaining agreement in the country with discipline provisions nearly so punitive," says a confidential Carter administration memo obtained by *Coal Patrol*.

"The contract was so much worse than anyone thought it would be. Miller had to be crazy to think that he could push it through," comments a coalfield observer.

"I wouldn't ask a dog to work under the contract he proposed. It's just pitiful," one local president told *The Mountain Eagle* of Whitesburg, Ky.

**THOUGH DISSATISFACTION WITH** the contract and with Miller is widespread,

the prospects for a "new" Miners for Democracy emerging from the strike are very unclear. Several "rank and file" organizations are gaining adherents and media attention but have yet to coalesce into a union-wide force. In addition, district and local officials have thus far held back from becoming public spokesmen for the opposition.

Miners for Recall, a group based in southern West Virginia that popped up during the summer's 10-week wildcat over health benefit cuts, is again circulating petitions to oust Miller. Recall leaders now claim to have collected almost enough signatures to start the union's complex recall process.

But observers question the viability of a recall attempt. Since it entails gather-

ing signatures from 30 percent of the union's total membership within 30 days, it would require a degree of organization not now evident among recall supporters. Their attempts to collect signatures in other districts have reportedly floundered because many miners see it as an extraneous issue in the midst of a national strike. Miller also would be able to delay the process indefinitely by challenging all the signatures gathered in the first stage.

Miners for a Fair Contract, based in southwestern Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio and northern West Virginia, apparently has the most legitimacy among the rank and file groups. Recently opening an office in Morgantown, W.Va., the group has helped to organize strike support rallies and provide relief for miners.

The most controversial and potentially destructive of these organizations, observers say, is the Miners Right To Strike Committee (MRTSC), which is heavily influenced by the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). Since a massive wildcat in August 1975—when the MRTSC advanced the position that the strike should continue until the right to strike was achieved—the MRTSC has trained its rhetorical guns more on the union's leadership than on the coal companies. They are reportedly planning to urge a no-vote on whatever contract is negotiated.

During a recent support rally in Charleston, according to an eye witness, MRTSC leader Mike Branch physically attacked Paul Nyden, an Antioch professor, for passing out copies of a pamphlet critical of both the far right and the far left inside the union.

MRTSC activities have also fueled a wave of red-baiting in coalmining areas. A group called "Miners Against Reds" has been cutting up newspaper articles quoting MRTSC/RCP activists and then passing them out with lines, arrows and comments like: do you want these people running our union?

"There's been an incredible amount of red-baiting around here," says Dennis Boyer of Morgantown. "It fills the newspapers, the letters to the editor and radio talk shows. The local media publishes half-hour tirades against socialism."

The rank and file unity displayed in the strike may prod secondary-level union leaders to align themselves with another rank and file movement that could grow in opposition to Miller. Jack Perry, District 17 director, and Ken Dawes, District 12 director, have gained prominence in recent months as sharp critics of Miller, but neither have stepped to the forefront of the opposition on the bargaining council. Cecil Roberts apparently intends to challenge Miller the next time around.

"They don't seem to be aware of the fact that they have all three networks and every major newspaper at their command right now," says Bethell. "They could go out and take positions on behalf of the reform wing of the bargaining council, but are very hesitant to be identified as spokesmen for any faction, wing or movement. The raw material for another rank and file movement is out there—probably a lot more than there was in 1972. The question is whether it's going to coalesce."

**AS IN THESE TIMES WENT TO PRESS** the nationwide coal strike was rapidly approaching a government-imposed climax. On Feb. 22 the UMW bargaining council, the group of district leaders and union negotiators who must approve any settlement before it goes to the full membership for ratification, agreed to accept any individual or industry-wide contract whose terms approximate a Feb. 20 settlement with the Pittsburgh & Midway Coal Co., a subsidiary of Gulf Oil Corp.

BCOA negotiators, whose member companies had been badly divided over the value of the P&M settlement, immediately rejected the council's offer.

The bargaining council dismissed an industry proposal that both sides voluntarily submit to binding arbitration. According to government and industry sources contacted by CBS News, the arbitration proposal was simply a "negotiating maneuver" intended to put the un-

ion on the defensive. It was assumed all along that the UMW would reject it.

While Labor Secretary Ray Marshall still hoped for a negotiated settlement, he stressed that the Carter administration would soon take drastic steps to end the strike that is precipitating mandatory electricity cut-backs in midwestern states, layoffs in steel mills, and the shutdown of some auto production facilities.

The P&M contract, waiting to be ratified by local unionists, would authorize the company to suspend or discharge the "instigators" of wildcat strikes, but not those miners who refuse to cross picket lines.

It also eliminates so-called production incentive plans, which district leaders believe would produce "extremely dangerous" conditions in mines, and a 30-day probationary period for new miners proposed by the BCOA.

The Carter administration, meanwhile, is left with two options to end the strike. Both would be difficult to implement and likely damage administration relations with the entire labor movement.

The first, a Taft-Hartley injunction that would order miners back to work for 80 days, now appears unlikely. Both Marshall and Carter have stated their reluctance to use it, since it would probably

be defied by the miners. The governors of nine hard-hit states, in a recent White House meeting, agreed that invoking Taft-Hartley would be unwise. Jay Rockefeller, governor of West Virginia, predicts that it would lead to further "chaos" and UMW president Arnold Miller says the result would be "bloodshed."

The most likely step, therefore, is federal seizure of the mines, also a politically controversial step. Both Miller and AFL-CIO president George Meany say that seizure is preferable. The details would be worked out in congressional legislation.

Coal industry officials, however, are worried about the implications of seizure and are certain to protest with lawsuits. "Nationalization of the mines would set a dangerous precedent," cautions a coal company vice-president. "We'd be heading down the road to socialism."

—Dan Marshall

# THE TALKS



By Edgar James

*I've stood for the union, walked in the line  
Fought against the company.  
I've stood for the UMW of A,  
Now who's gonna stand for me?*  
—Coal Tattoo by Billy Edd Wheeler

LATE IN THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 22, 1972, hundreds of coal miners celebrating Arnold Miller's victory over Tony Boyle surged through the union's baronial headquarters in a scene that combined the best of Andrew Jackson's inaugural and the storming of the Bastille. Now, just six years later, miners are once again strangers in their own house. To understand their current troubles one must understand the nature of the Lewis legacy and of the insurgent's victory.

From 1920 until 1960 John L. Lewis was the mineworkers' union. And it was not just a matter of tenure: Lewis was an often brilliant and always powerful leader.

In few industries have the class lines been more clearly drawn than in coal. Appalachian passivity to the contrary, in the '20s and '30s miners fought and died for the union. Matewan, Evarts, Cabin Creek, Paint Creek; there were no neutrals there.

The UMW began as a confederation of largely autonomous regional miners' unions. Lewis hammered them into a highly centralized autocracy by placing district after district into trusteeship. Henceforth, all union officers were elected in convention, after being nominated by a committee of Lewis appointees. No nominee ever lost.

At the bottom of Lewis' restructuring was his fear of potential rivals. Lewis counted few labor leaders among his coterie and associated with an unlikely assortment of Washington plutocrats. His break with Philip Murray in 1940 reveals a ruthless opportunism devoid of personal loyalties. Significantly, most of the union's best organizers and strategists left with Murray. By the time Lewis retired the union was devoid of leadership and with as many democratic features as a pressure cooker.

**LEWIS' IDIOSYNCRATIC ECONOMIC** views have had an equally lasting impact. While he might declaim that "labor and capital may be partners in theory, but ...are enemies in fact," he was a corporatist variant. Lewis would use the union to rationalize the industry by promoting greater productivity in smaller and more concentrated units.

Lewis made his boldest moves in the immediate post-war period when King Coal was in royal pain—the domestic heating market had dropped out and diesel was replacing coal. Lewis said that by shutting down 140,000 coal mines and forcing 200,000 miners into other industries, the coal problem will settle itself. Simple analysis suggests that Lewis traded job security for mechanization. But it was more than that.

Lewis took the contradictions between trade unions in a capitalist economy to new heights by loaning operators money to mechanize. And what he couldn't organize or muscle out, he bought out. Together with Cleveland industrialist Cyrus Eaton he devoured everything from a steamship company to coal companies and utility stock in his effort to reorder the industry.

The price of Lewis' policies was high in coal country. A veritable Coxy's army of unemployed Appalachians hit the northern industrial centers. In Harry Campbell's words, right as no to the Cumberlandians.

The legacy of Lewis' leadership would not have been such an issue had he not bequeathed the latter-day Caligula. Tony Boyle, Lewis' successor, was an inept, heavy-headed, authoritarian who was unfortunately chosen to have inherited the union just as the industry began to climb out of its post-war depression.

Failing to understand the change, Boyle was thrown in collaboration. He was the model labor statesman when he appeared before the Senate Labor subcommittee considering mine safety legislation in 1969. "We will not abridge the rights of the operators in running the mines. We



John L. Lewis after a visit to the mines.

follow the judgment of the coal operators right or wrong."

They were frequently wrong. Under Boyle's tenure alone, over 2,000 miners died on the job. In 1968 Boyle stood before the still smoking portal of Consolidation Coal Company's #9 mine where 78 men were trapped and told the soon-to-be widows: "Consol is one of the best companies as far as safety is concerned." The record was otherwise.

Slowly, steadily, the identity between the institution and its leaders that Lewis forged began to erode.

Barely four months after the Consolidation disaster, 40,000 West Virginia miners walked off their jobs to force passage of a law to make black lung an occupationally compensable disease. Boyle condemned the move.

Under Lewis, cooptation became a refined art; under Boyle, blacklisting was a blunt instrument. Beginning in 1964, when a dissident was so badly beaten on the floor of the convention that it had to be recessed, Boyle systematically purged the union of dissenters. In 1972 there were so many victims of Boyle's reprisals at

Miller's inaugural that it looked like the second coming.

Boyle has been convicted twice of instigating the murder of Joseph Yablonski and his family. Had he not overreacted to Yablonski's candidacy and ordered the murders, Boyle—like Frank Fitzsimmons of the Teamsters—might still be another gargoyle in labor's house.

**WHEN THE POST-YABLONSKI RE-**form organization, Miners for Democracy, chose candidates to go against Boyle in the 1972 court-ordered rerun election, they chose Arnold Miller, Mike Trbovich, and Harry Patrick.

The choice of Miller made geo-political sense: he was from the union's largest district, where the Miners for Democracy was weak; and he was Anglo-Saxon (MFD's northern ethnics believed one of their kind couldn't win in "hillbilly" country). Miller was also a retired miner, and Yablonski had only received some 7 percent of their vote. But as Miller emerged as the leader the evening before the convention he made a pact with Trbovich, MFD's chairman, that only the latter would accept the convention's endorsement, while Miller would become vice-president. Without notice Miller broke the agreement. Trbovich, himself erratic and irascible, would never forget.

Miller beat Boyle by a relatively thin 10 percentage points. There was no tradition of opposition within the union, and many Boyle supporters were simply institutional loyalists. Miller mistook a referendum on Boyle for his mandate. Instead of consolidating his hold, he alienated even the most loyal.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the disbanding of the MFD led to Miller's demise. But the MFD was largely mythical and its continuing symbolic existence thwarted coalition-building among the miners.

Miller himself never followed a consistent strategy. Instead he operated *ad hoc* under the maxim that if you're not for me, you're against me. In the early district elections that determined the composition of his executive board Miller capriciously endorsed good old boy candidates over the younger local leaders who made up his campaign organization.

In one eastern Kentucky district, he campaigned for a virtual unknown whom he had met at a retired miners' rally against the MFD campaign leader and a Boyle loyalist. Miller's candidate fared poorly, but the MFD leader lost by only seven votes—out of thousands—to the old guard candidate. When the latter resigned and a rerun was declared, Miller again backed his friend. This time, he barely placed; the MFD candidate lost by a wider margin; another Boyle supporter won.

The pattern repeated itself again and again. Morale sunk and eventually the balance of power on the board shifted as more Boyle supporters were elected and some MFD leaders went into opposition.

Miller was recently re-elected as a minority president and ironically succeeded in capturing the executive board. But once again, in the current negotiations, he established a self-fulfilling and institutionally destructive polarity by denouncing opposition to his contract as politically motivated.

It is difficult to overstate the political importance of the Mineworkers union. It exists as the only counter-position to the coal industry in a region synonymous with the other America. It also commands great loyalty. Most miners define themselves in terms of the union; they aren't miners—they're mineworkers. But the union in 1978 is fundamentally different from the union under Lewis or Boyle. Political culture has radically changed, and the union's structure now requires rank-and-file participation at critical junctures. Deciding whether to accept or reject a contract is one such juncture.

And miners aren't about to be sold out in silence.

Edgar James was an organizer for Miners for Democracy from 1970 to 1973, and served in Arnold Miller's administration until 1975. He is a contributing editor to *Working Papers*, where portions of this article have appeared.

## Dear Friend,

On December 6, 1977, the contract between the United Mine Workers of America and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association expired, and 160,000 mine workers went out on strike. At the same time, 810,000 miners, widows, pensioners and their families lost their medical benefits. As the strike enters its third month, many people are not getting the health care they need.

The Miners' Support Committee of Southern West Virginia recently organized a free clinic where active and retired miners and their families can get primary health care at no charge. The Miners Free Clinic is located in Beckley, W.Va., in the heart of the coalfields. Many individuals and organizations are donating services and supplies. The staff is entirely volunteer, composed of approximately 45 health workers, including 14 doctors. We use space loaned by a local clinic.

But we still need money—especially for medicine. We hope that you will support our work and make a donation to the Miners Free Clinic. We believe that the clinic is providing an important service. Any contribution you can make will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Miners' Support Committee

Enclosed is my contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.  
(Please make checks payable to the MINERS' SUPPORT COMMITTEE.)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Miners' Support Committee  
P.O. Box 3182  
East Beckley Station  
Beckley, W.Va. 25801