

**BLACK  
COAL MINERS  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES**

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I must give special thanks to my wife Linda Nyden who has worked very closely with me during the past four years studying the United Mine Workers throughout Appalachia. She has recently completed a long essay on Black miners, the United Mine Workers, and the National Miners Union between 1925 and 1933. Several of the formulations in the present pamphlet were worked out jointly.

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**BLACK COAL MINERS IN THE UNITED STATES**

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A livelihood belongs to every man and when you deprive me of it, ... you have almost committed murder to the whole entire race. ... When I go home and ... those little ones of mine are sitting anxiously waiting for papa to return and bring them something; I have to say: 'Son and daughter, I cannot get a job.' ... We have been accused of strikebreaking and many things. Take the steel strike for instance -- they imported them up here from the south, where they had no training in unionism. They were non-union men and they used them to break the strike.

But when the Black man is treated as the other races of men and given the privilege of making a livelihood, you and every other man that is in this hall will say that the Black man stands for something. But how in the name of God can we stand for anything when you have closed the door and avenues of life against us?

Delegate Thompson, speaking  
at the District 5 Convention  
held in Pittsburgh in 1921

Histories of the coal regions usually make little mention of the role Black miners have played in struggles against the coal operators. What little mention is made of Black people in the coal fields is often distorted. It is important to set the record straight, for these distortions slow down the rank and file in their fight against the fuel and steel monopolies which control the coal industry today. So long as the role Black coal miners have played remains poorly understood, unity between Black and white miners cannot be fully achieved.

This Paper begins by describing the diversity of races and nationalities among our nation's coal miners and by showing the contributions made by Black men throughout the history of miner's unions. It documents the way the coal operators have forced tens of thousands of Black miners out of the industry and takes a critical look at the racist myths which have sprung up to the benefit of those operators. Finally, it explores steps taken toward racial solidarity during the recent rank-and-file struggles and the progress being made under the new UMW leadership elected in December, 1972.

## NATIONALITY AND RACE IN THE COAL FIELDS

The nationalities of miners vary from region to region. In District 5 surrounding Pittsburgh, four out of every five miners have parents or grandparents who were born in the countries of eastern or southern Europe: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Lithuania, the Soviet Union, and Italy. Black miners make up less than five per cent of the district's work force. Farther south, the number of people with eastern European backgrounds decreases, but by no means disappears. Throughout southern West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky, Italian, Polish, and Slovak names can be seen painted on the mailboxes all along the mountain roads.

The percentage of Black coal miners increases the farther south one travels. Between 15% and 20% of the miners in many towns of southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky are Black, and many hold local union offices. At some mines in southern West Virginia and Alabama, more than half the men are Black. McDowell County, the largest coal producing county in the nation, has the highest percentage of Black people of any county in West Virginia. In Alabama, about 25% of the miners are still Black; at one time, half of all miners and local union officers were Black. But with lay-offs from mechanization and with the increase in the number of strip mines near Birmingham which employ only white men, the number of Black miners in Alabama has declined.<sup>1</sup>

Solidarity between Black and white miners is illustrated by the number of major Black rank-and-file leaders who emerged in recent years: Charles Brooks, the first President of the Black Lung Association which led the historic 1969 strike in West Virginia; Robert Payne, President of the militant Disabled Miners and Widows of Southern West Virginia; Levi Daniel, a Miners for Democracy leader who in 1973 served as President of District 29, the largest district in the UMW; and Bill Worthington, a disabled miner from Harlan County, who was elected President of the Kentucky Black Lung Association and who later served as the fourth President of the Four-State Black Lung Association.

The Mine Committee, or Pit Committee, plays a key role in any local union, for it fights on behalf of miners who have grievances with the mine management. A committeeman

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<sup>1</sup> Notes begin on page 65

must be both articulate and unafraid to risk his job, for superintendents often attempt to silence discontent by firing Mine Committeemen. Several men usually run for the Mine Committee. The three who receive the most votes form the Committee; its Chairman is automatically the man who won the most votes. Black miners are frequently elected to Mine Committees by their fellow miners across Appalachia. The Chairman of the Mine Committee is also often a Black miner.

Mexican-Americans also work in the coal fields, especially in southern West Virginia. In the 1930's, more than 1,500 Chicano miners lived in the region of Logan County with their families. By 1970, however, there were only about 50 still working in the mines. John Mendez, one of these men, was elected Chairman of the Logan County Black Lung Association, the largest chapter ever organized within the association. Mendez remembers when "every Saturday night in the coal camps there were long political arguments between the Villistas, the Zapatistas, and the Carranzistas. The revolution was fought all over again,"<sup>2</sup>

The parochialism and prejudices of white miners in the southern Appalachian coal fields are often grossly exaggerated. The region's racial and ethnic diversity, moreover, are overlooked. "Anglo-Saxon" miners are among the first to say that they choose neither their personal friends nor their union officials along racial and ethnic lines. Prejudices and hatreds are sometimes stirred up. But the source has usually been either the coal companies or the now ousted Tony Boyle leadership. Many Boyle officials and "organizers" felt that keeping the miners divided helped them maintain control over the union. During the MFD campaign in District 5 in the fall of 1970, for example, Boyle payrollers campaigned against MFD by visiting pensioners and encouraging them to vote for the incumbents. "Don't vote for that MFD ticket," one Boyle loyalist from Westland would say. "There's a n-----r running on it."<sup>3</sup>

Both during and after Jock Yablonski's campaign in 1969, incumbent International Vice-President George J. Titler maligned Yablonski's character, many times making reference to Yablonski's ethnic background.<sup>4</sup> In February, 1970, just after Yablonski's assassination, a Charleston Gazette reporter asked Titler how Yablonski could have held union office in western Pennsylvania for so many years if he was as bad as Titler claimed. Titler snapped back



that the top UMW leaders were forced to accept Yablonski:

You don't know that foreign element of coal miners from Russia and Yugoslavia and the like up there in Pennsylvania... I don't mean there's anything wrong with being foreign, but they stick together and stick behind their men. It's not like down in the Kentucky fields or someplace where everybody's an Anglo-Saxon.<sup>5</sup>

When Yablonski -- who was Polish -- lost, Titler expressed his relief that the "Hunkies" had been blocked from taking over the union.

Historically, ethnic and racial prejudice have helped the coal operators weaken and, at times, break the UMW. Whenever miners feuded among themselves, it became much easier for the operators to lower wages, lengthen hours, and speed-up the work, regardless of safety hazards. The fight against the operators has always required a parallel fight for unity among the miners themselves. Bill Worthington expressed a feeling widely shared in the coal fields when he said: "I don't think your name or your background should matter at all for union leadership. If your last name is Muleface, and you'll do the job right, then let's vote for Muleface!"<sup>6</sup>

Racism has not been eliminated from the coal fields today. James Millner, a militant Black pensioner from Princeton, West Virginia, thinks Black miners still face major problems. In July, 1971, he said:

Back in the 1950's, when the companies mechanized their mines, they pushed hundreds of Black men out of the industry. And our union hardly did one damn thing to protect us. Today as coal production is going up again, the companies need to hire more miners. But they still aren't hiring many young Black men. And Tony Boyle and our union still aren't doing anything about it.<sup>7</sup>

But the source of racist hiring practices is the companies, as Worthington always stresses. "The operators try to divide Black and white. It's a master plan to keep confusion among the workers. Keep the poor people fighting one another!"

Worthington, who was disabled in 1969 when a piece of

slate fell and broke his ankle in 13 places, explains the special problems he faced as a Black miner:

There were lots of Black men in the Chevrolet mine when I began working with the Blue Diamond Coal Company. They were all coal loaders; they shovelled the coal into mine cars by hand. I was the first Black man ever to do anything else. I became a brakeman; later I became the first Black motorman. I told them what job I wanted, and that I wouldn't continue working if I didn't get it.

While I was a brakeman, the company made me train dozens of young white men to be motormen. Finally, I insisted on being promoted to motorman myself. They accused me of being strong-headed and fired me. Well, I was strong-headed, and when they re-hired me two days later because they needed me back, they re-hired me as a motorman. At the time, I felt that they wanted to keep me on as brakeman because I was their best teacher for the new men. But later I got to thinking that they must have felt it didn't matter too much if I got myself killed one of those times braking for those greenhorns.<sup>8</sup>

Black miners today operate "motors" more than any other piece of machinery; motors gather the coal cars from the various sections inside the mine and then haul them to the tipple outside. Some white miners explain this by saying, "The colored miners all like to run motor because that's the easiest job in the mine." Shirley Coles, a Black man who worked in the mines of Mercer County, West Virginia for 43 years, gives a different explanation:

Next to hand-loading, the brakeman's job was always the lowest-paid job in the mines. But becoming a brakeman was the only way a Black miner could advance. As a brakeman, you work behind the motorman. You open and shut the trapdoors; you have to sprag moving cars and fasten couples. You push empties along the side tracks by hand. The brakeman has a dangerous job and he does all the footwork. It is because we had experience as brakemen that the companies began letting some of us become motormen when the jobs opened up.

Black and white miners have nearly always stood together in building their union. But their solidarity

sometimes evaporates once the miners leave the mine. "Underground, the white and Black get along fine," Coles explains. "We would eat right out of each other's buckets. But the minute we got outdoors, and we washed the coal dust off our faces, some white miners would become different men. They remembered they were white and we were Black!"<sup>9</sup>

White miners today, especially the younger ones, are discarding racial and ethnic prejudices. Their union, which has organized Black and white miners together, makes this possible. Even a weakened and corrupt UMW under Tony Boyle was far better than no union at all. Miners had to fight for years to reform their union, but they didn't have to build it from nothing. Two years before he was elected International Secretary-Treasurer, Harry Patrick quipped:

In the 1930's, John L. Lewis issued a call to 'organize the unorganized.' Today we have to 'organize the organized.' But even with Tony Boyle as President, I wouldn't ever work in any mine for 15 minutes without a union. It's not the union we're fighting against. It's the rotten union leadership.<sup>10</sup>

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BLACK MINERS

Black miners have always been an important force in the coal industry and in the United Mine Workers of America. The UMW was one of the first unions to organize Black workers into integrated locals, even in the Birmingham, Alabama coal fields. An anti-racist clause was placed into the very first UMW Constitution in 1890: "No member in good standing who holds a dues or transfer card shall be debarred or hindered from obtaining work on account of race, creed or nationality."<sup>11</sup> In Black Workers and the New Unions, published in 1939, Horace Cayton and George Mitchell wrote:

At the present time the Negro membership of the U.M.W. has been estimated at between 50,000 and 100,000 which makes this union, from the point of view of the participation of Negroes, the most important in the country.<sup>12</sup>

Black miners have nearly always held offices in local unions where they comprised a large part of the membership, and even in some locals where they didn't. Yet Black miners have always remained second-class members of the UMW. Only very rarely have Black miners held important positions in the International or the districts. The UMW always supported racial equality with words; but in reality, the union very often failed to defend the interests of Black members.

Black miners have been most heavily-concentrated in the mines of southern West Virginia and Alabama. During the 1920's and 1930's, between 40,000 and 45,000 Black miners worked in the pits of Alabama, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. Considerable numbers of Black miners also worked in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas, and New Mexico. But between 1930 and 1960, nearly 40,000 Black miners were squeezed out of the industry by the operators in the five coal-producing states of southern Appalachia alone. John L. Lewis and his bureaucracy did nothing to protect Black miners when the companies laid them off at a much more rapid rate than white miners whenever advances in mechanization were made.

Black men have provided leadership for all miners throughout UMW history. During the first decade of the UMW's existence, Richard L. Davis, a Black member of the International Executive Board from Ohio, travelled around

the country organizing miners into the union.<sup>13</sup> Henry Stephenson, a Black miner from West Virginia, also held a seat on the Board at the end of the 1890's.<sup>14</sup> But it was not until December, 1972, that another Black man occupied a seat on the International Executive Board, when Levi Daniel from Beckley, West Virginia, was appointed by Arnold Miller to represent District 29. Daniel soon resigned from the Board to become District 29 President until the November, 1973 election in southern West Virginia; Daniel thus became the first Black UMW President in the union's history. Daniel was defeated for the District Presidency, but Francis Martin, a Black working miner from Gary, won election to a four-year term on the International Executive Board from District 29.<sup>15</sup>

Black men and women played an important role in defending the existence of the UMW during the 1920's. Many of the miners who participated in the historic Armed March into the nonunion fields of Logan County in 1921 were Black.<sup>16</sup> Black men and women fought in the rank-and-file movements in the 1920's and helped organize the National Miners Union in 1928. Later they fought hard to reorganize the UMW between 1933 and 1935 and helped found the Congress of Industrial Organizations. In the rank-and-file organizations born in 1969 and 1970, Black miners again played leading roles. The first Presidents of both the Black Lung Association and the Disabled Miners and Widows of southern West Virginia were Black miners, even though the majority of the members of both groups was white.

Facing danger every day on the job, coal miners have always been very militant. Isolated from the rest of the population in mining towns where there are particularly sharp divisions between the working and the owning classes, the miners have developed strong feelings of class solidarity. And wage differentials in the mines have remained so narrow throughout the century that they have not created artificial divisions between the miners.<sup>17</sup> In the face of such militancy and solidarity, the coal operators have been left with few devices to divide their employees. Racial and ethnic differences have provided these operators with some of the few weapons for creating division, and they have always sought to play native-born whites, European-born whites, and Blacks against each other. In some towns, coal companies even set up different sections and prohibited all social intermingling between the three groups! The success of the UMW has always been closely related to its success in overcoming these splits nurtured by the

operators. Whenever the UMW failed to organize all workers regardless of color or nationality, the operators could use the unorganized as strikebreakers, as Sterling Spero and Abram Harris explain in their pioneering Black Worker:

In both West Virginia and Alabama the union's task was exceedingly difficult. The miners in these districts were chiefly Negroes and native white who were divided by race prejudice. Yet the organization of the Negro miner was particularly important because of the operators' reliance upon him as a strike-breaker.

### RACISM IN THE COAL FIELDS

In the early decades of the century, there was little discrimination by job category against Black workers in coal mining, primarily because job stratification was far less complex in the mines than in most other industries. The vast majority of mineworkers were hand-loaders. They shot the coal down from the face, then shovelled it into the waiting trams or coal cars. Coal mining was far less stratified than steelmaking, for example, where the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor was already well-developed in the 19th century.<sup>19</sup>

When new machines were introduced into the mines in the 1920's and 1930's, company bosses often refused to promote Black miners to the more highly-skilled jobs operating these machines. Many foremen held the racist view that Black miners were incapable of doing anything but physical work, and would damage the mining machines if they were permitted to operate them. The union had a very poor record on fighting against racist discrimination in job upgrading. This failure was to hurt Black miners even more in the years after 1930, when the coal companies began laying off those miners who had no experience in operating machines. In his Negro in the Bituminous Coal Mining Industry published in 1970, Darold T. Barnum states: "The Union's failure to insist on equality in upgrading has permitted the virtual elimination of Negroes from the coal industry."<sup>20</sup>

When he interviewed 2,411 Black miners in West Virginia for his 1936 study, James T. Laing determined that 75.7% of them were coal loaders. The percentage of Black miners in other job categories were: brakemen, 6.8%; trackmen, 5.5%; motormen, 4.9%; machine men, 2.3%; and outside workers, 3.2%. Only 0.5% of the Black miners studied held positions of authority, even by the most liberal definition of the term. (The job categories of 1.1% of the miners studied was not recorded.)<sup>21</sup> But even during the years when job stratification was minimal, there was some discrimination against Black miners. Writing in 1943, Herbert R. Northrup pointed out that 77% of all Black miners were hand-loaders, whereas only 60% of white miners were. On the other hand, 6% of all white miners operated undercutting machines, whereas only 2% of all Black miners did.<sup>22</sup>

In the hand-loading days, a miner's wages were determined by how many tons of coal he loaded. Miners were paid very little or nothing at all for "dead work," the work

necessary to prepare a section for mining and to keep it safe. A Bureau of Labor Statistics report issued in July, 1924 about labor relations in the West Virginia coal fields took note of the importance of this issue, and listed various kinds of "dead work":

Payment for dead work is a subject responsible for many disagreements between the operators and the miners.... Among the more important dead work items are:

1. Timbering the work place, which may consist of simple props or ... the setting up of cribs.

2. The pushing of cars, which may include pushing of cars both ways from the entry switch to the face.....

3. Top and bottom brushing. By this is meant the removal of the upper or lower strata above or below the coal seam in order to allow sufficient space for mining.

4. Removal of falls, horsebacks, and the like, which are protrusions of strata from above or below into the coal seam.

5. The removal of caly veins, slate bands, sulphur bands, and the like, which are layers of thin strata of impurities within the coal seam proper.

6. The laying of tracks.....

7. The bailing of water into pails and then into barrels.<sup>23</sup>

The U.S. Coal Commission, which issued its report in 1923, observed this same controversy, mentioning one mine where:

....the foreman complained that when men encountered thick slate they would quit and then when a new miner was given the same place he would quit too. When the foreman was asked why he should expect a new miner to take a place, which on the foreman's own admission was a handicap to his earning power, his reply was,.... 'Somebody has got to do it as I must get the coal out.'<sup>24</sup>



The companies always refused to pay a miner for time spent doing dead work.

Black miners often complained that they were assigned bad work-places, places where other miners refused to work because of bad roof or water. Shirley Coles, from Princeton, West Virginia, commented on his own experiences as a coal loader:

The operators always looked out a little better for the white miners. The kind of place you have to work in makes a big difference. You take a bad place, why most of the time you just couldn't load as much coal as you could in a dry place with good top. The number of cars you could load in a day would be cut down. You wouldn't be able to load more than three or four cars a day, where you could load nine or ten in a good place.<sup>25</sup>

James Mosely, who worked in Johns, Alabama before he moved to Washington County, Pennsylvania, made a similar complaint:

If you got a good, dry place in the mine, going up hill where you don't have to work in water and ain't got no big slate, a white miner would come around to your place and say to you: 'Ah, you got a nice place this time!' Then two or three days after that, you ain't got no place, cause he done went to the boss and slipped him a few dollars to get your place. And then the boss sent you to another section.<sup>26</sup>

Herbert Northrup confirmed such complaints in his book, Organized Labor and the Negro, noting that the mine foremen had the power to "discharge without cause and to assign to the poorer workplaces."<sup>27</sup> Whenever the union permitted these practices to go unopposed, the operators thereby succeeded in weakening the union: the white miners who benefitted from the favoritism of the bosses were encouraged to remain friendly to the company and the Black miners who were hurt came to harbor bitter feelings not only toward the company bosses, but also toward the white miners who took their places and the union which did nothing about it.

Some companies even segregated Black from white workers inside their mines. Angelo Herndon tells of a mine he worked in near Lexington, Kentucky when he was only 13

years old. His description comes from his autobiography, Let Me Live, published in 1936 when he was only 23 and serving a 20-year term imposed on him by a Georgia court basing itself on a slave-era law against inciting an insurrection. Herndon, a Communist and an organizer of integrated unemployed demonstrations, was freed after a worldwide mass movement in the spring of 1937 by a five-to-four decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. He wrote:

Segregation of the Negroes was not only an established practice in the company-owned houses, but it was observed during work hours as well. The Negroes worked on the north side of the mine and the whites on the south. We Negroes never had the slightest chance of ever getting any of the better-paying jobs. We could not become section foremen or electricians, surveyors, bank bosses, check-weighmen, steel sharpeners or engineers. We could only look forward to coal loading, to run the motors, to pick the coal and muck the rock and be mule boys like beasts of burden. We had to wear knee pants and work stretched out on our bellies most of the time.<sup>28</sup>

Shirley Coles illustrates the heritage of special oppression known by Black coal miners: his own father and mother were slaves. While many white miners knew hard times, their parents had never been the legal property of another man. None of them were ever sold by a slavemaster against their parents' wishes. Black miners not only faced problems of discrimination on the job, but discrimination during their leisure hours as well. Black families were (and still are) relegated to the most dilapidated houses in town, but still paid the same rent! Their children were often forced to attend segregated schools. Brotherhood underground was often literally "washed away" in the bathhouse, as Coles explains:

As long as we're in the mines together, we're brothers. But when we come out of the mine, we lose the brotherhood. Wash that dust and dirt off your face, and then you're John, but I'm still old Shirley. In fact, you're Mister John. As long as we're in the mines together, everything's fine. We work together and even eat out of the same bucket. If a white miner's got something special in his bucket, he'll give you some. But when he comes outside, why then he's a different man.<sup>29</sup>

In his 1952 article, "Race Relationships in the Pocahontas Coal Field" (where Coles worked), Ralph D. Minard made the same point about the deterioration of race relationships outside the pit:

A spirit of good will has been fostered within the mine among the white and colored workers. The community outside, however, constitutes a negative influence and the spirit of integration dissolves under its impact.... Within the mine [the white miner] assumes a role toward his fellow workers posited upon acceptance of practical equality of status. Outside his role as a member of the white community involves an elevation of status in which he becomes a member of a superior caste group.... The boundary line between the two communities is usually the mine's mouth. <sup>30</sup>

William Finley touched on a similar point in describing relations between Black and white miners in Westland, his own small coal town in western Pennsylvania:

I don't feel that you can say that you like to work with me, and then after you take your shower, you go home, you go to your private club, and leave me outside here somewhere. We aren't really union brothers if the only time you talk to me is in the mine. I feel that this relationship should carry over outside of your occupation, into your social life. That's where it's at. You can't meet my wife and children down in the mine. To really get to know each other, we have to socialize together sometimes. <sup>31</sup>

The coal operators' racism permeated everything and everybody in the coal fields. A story Shirley Coles tells about one of his experiences could be repeated hundreds of times by other Black miners and their families:

Back in the late 1940s, my wife and I were driving down to see her parents in Martinsville, Virginia. We were driving in my truck and we had our kids with us. We all stopped down there at Brushey Mountain on the other side of Dublin at a little filling station. I pulled up to the pumps and asked for some gas. After he filled me up, I said I wanted five Coca-Colas. I started to go into the station to get them, but the man said, 'We don't serve n-----rs.' Then I asked him to bring them out to us. All he answered was, 'We

don't serve n-----rs here.'

If you were Black, you'd have that problem wherever you'd go. When you got ready to use a rest room, do you know where you had to go? Over in the bushes somewhere. You could never go to a filling station. I used to drive a truck all over West Virginia when I couldn't find work in the mines. I used to wash my face in the branches and creeks which ran alongside the road. You couldn't go into most of the restaurants

Things have changed today. With the civil rights laws, they have to let you into the filling stations and restaurants. But it hasn't changed all that much. When you go into some places, a man looks at you like you're a grizzly bear or something like that, so you don't feel much like sitting down and eating. Sometimes they're slow about waiting on you when you know good and well it's your turn. You're not expecting a man to drop everybody else and run to you, but you want your service just like the next customer. If you don't get it, it makes you feel bad.<sup>32</sup>

Ansley Carter, a Black man who worked 24 years in McDowell County mines and who is now a janitor at Bluefield State College, echoed Coles' feelings:

The companies treat all the miners bad. When the mules that worked in the mines years ago got too old to work, the companies put them out in the fields to die. They fed them very seldom, so all they had was the grass. That's what they did to the old miners too. And if you were Black, you got even less than if you were white.<sup>33</sup>

## THE ELIMINATION OF BLACK MEN FROM THE MINES

Thousands of Black miners were hired after World War I both because the industry was expanding and because the coal operators tried to use Black workers to break strikes. Black miners faced discrimination on the job, but at least they could get jobs. During and after the Depression, discrimination took a new and even more serious form. When the new loading machines were brought into the mines, Black miners were never given their fair share of the skilled jobs operating those machines. Mine mechanization in the 1930s touched off a decline in Black employment which has never been reversed. In 1944 Herbert Northrup wrote:

When loading machines were installed, the employers gave white workers preference as a matter of course.... The district officials of the union have hesitated to take a firm stand on the question.... If Negroes continue to bear the brunt of technological unemployment, the UMW will no longer be able to claim that it adheres to a policy of racial equality as steadfastly as any other American labor union.

Northrup anticipated that further mechanization of the mines after World War II would put still more Black miners out of work, and stated that this would "put the equalitarian policies of the UMW to their severest test"<sup>34</sup> The UMW leaders failed that test dismally.

The history of mechanization in the mines can be divided into three major stages: the introduction of coal-cutting machines, coal-loading machines, and continuous mining machines. Coal-cutting machines were first used in the late 19th century, mechanical loaders in 1925, and continuous miners in 1948. By 1900, nearly 25% of all coal was being cut by machines, but all loading was still done by hand. In 1930, over 80% of the coal was cut mechanically and 10.5% was being loaded by machines. By 1950, over 90% of the coal was cut mechanically, and nearly 70% was loaded mechanically. In 1950, continuous miners dug only 1.2% of all the coal mined underground, but 20 years later in 1970, 50.1% of all deep-mined coal was being gouged out by these sophisticated machines.<sup>35</sup>

The employment of Black miners was influenced decisively by the mechanization of the mines. When the companies were hiring men during the first three decades of the century, thousands of Black men came into the industry. When

mechanical loaders were introduced, Black employment began to drop precipitously. Between 1930 and 1950, total employment in the industry in southern Appalachia increased by about 10% each decade. The number of white miners increased from 153,000 to 217,000, but the number of Black miners dropped from 44,000 to 26,000! The percentage of Black employment in the five southern Appalachian coal-producing states dropped from 23% in 1930 to 16% in 1940 to only 11% in 1950! The decrease in the number of Black miners in this 20-year period is roughly equivalent to the decrease which would have occurred if the Black miners who retired from the mines between 1930 and 1950 were never replaced by young Black miners.<sup>36</sup> Table 1 traces employment of Black miners in southern Appalachia between 1890 and 1960.

Black miners thus bore the brunt of mine mechanization in southern Appalachia between 1930 and 1950.<sup>37</sup> When continuous mining machines were introduced in the 1950s, all miners were hit hard, but Black miners were hit even harder as usual. The percentage of Black miners employed in the five southern Appalachian mining states dropped from 10.6% in 1950 to a mere 6.3% in 1960. In these states, white employment in the mines dropped by more than 50% between 1950 and 1960, from 219,655 to 105,289. But Black employment declined almost 75%, from 26,136 to 7,108.<sup>38</sup>

Until the late 1940s, the coal companies were not required to recognize mine-wide seniority in lay-offs under the UMW contract. Thus, the companies used "classification seniority" in determining the order of lay-offs. A man with 40 years of experience who had never operated a mining machine could be laid off before a man with only two years of experience who had operated a machine!<sup>39</sup> Since the companies rarely trained Black miners to operate machines, this system permitted the companies to eliminate thousands of Black miners between 1930 and 1950. Lewis and the UMW did nothing to counter this manifestation of the operators' racism.

Since mine-wide seniority was not guaranteed under their contract, the companies could use a second device to eliminate Black miners. Many companies, especially in West Virginia, would close down one particular section in many of their mines, laying off everyone working on that section. Because the UMW leadership permitted them to do this, the companies could put Black miners and "trouble-makers" of all colors onto those sections just before closing them down. In this fashion, many companies worked

TABLE 1  
BLACK MINERS IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIA, 1890-1960

	1890		1900		1910		1920		1930		1940		1950		1960	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Alabama	3,687	46.3	9,735	54.4	11,189	53.8	14,097	53.8	12,742	53.2	9,605	41.7	6,756	33.6	1,983	25.4
Kentucky	976	19.2	2,206	23.7	3,888	21.3	7,407	16.7	7,346	13.5	5,474	13.5	2,965	4.6	930	3.0
Tennessee	769	15.7	3,092	28.4	1,609	14.5	913	7.5	578	6.6	168	1.8	92	1.0	39	1.0
Virginia	1,700	43.3	2,651	36.0	1,719	23.6	2,450	19.8	1,511	12.0	1,190	5.9	900	3.6	570	3.6
West Virginia	2,016	20.8	4,620	22.2	11,237	20.5	17,799	20.3	22,089	22.7	18,356	17.3	15,423	12.1	3,586	6.6
Total for Southern Appalachia	9,148	29.0	22,304	33.7	29,642	26.4	42,666	23.3	44,266	22.5	34,793	16.3	26,136	10.6	7,108	6.3
Total United States			40,584	6.3	54,597	7.5	57,291	9.2	38,560	7.4						

## Sources:

1890-1920: Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 215.

1890-1940: Herbert R. Northrup, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," Southern Economic Journal, 9, 4 (April, 1943), p. 314.

1930-1960: Darold T. Barnum, The Negro in the Bituminous Coal Industry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), pp. 26, 39.

their "undesirable" employees into cut-offs.<sup>40</sup>

During the 1950s, Black miners lost their jobs in still a third way. Coal mines which had not yet introduced mechanical loaders usually had a higher-than-average percentage of Black employees, working as hand-loaders. When the markets for coal plummeted in the early 1950s and continuous mining machines were introduced, these hand-loading mines were forced to shut down if they couldn't afford to mechanize. Hundreds of Black miners lost their jobs in these closures, and couldn't find new ones anywhere else.

Although the miners won mine-wide seniority by the late 1940s, they did not win company-wide seniority in most districts until the 1960s. This too hurt Black miners. They may have accumulated 25 or 30 years seniority at their own mines, but when they closed down, their companies were under no obligation to hire them at any of their other mines when jobs became available. Since thousands of white miners were also laid off in the 1950s, the coal companies always had more than enough experienced white applicants to fill all their openings during these years.

These factors all operated in Alabama as elsewhere, with two interesting differences. Because of the nature of coal seams in Alabama, continuous mining machines are not used (although nearly 100% of the state's mines use mechanical loaders today). Mechanical loaders, however, were not introduced into Alabama as quickly as into other coal fields. A very high percentage of Alabama's mines are captive mines owned by steel and power companies, mines which produce coal which does not have to compete on the commercial market. These captive mines often used hand-loading technology until they worked out and closed down permanently. District 20 won company-wide seniority in the late 1950s, years earlier than most other districts. But before this victory, thousands of Black miners working as hand-loaders in mines which shut down had already lost their jobs.<sup>41</sup>

Ever since the UMW won mine-wide seniority in their contract, the coal companies have attempted to undermine this victory by claiming that "qualification" supercedes seniority in determining promotions within a mine. Attempts to promote men according to "qualification" have sparked a large percentage of the hundreds of wildcat work stoppages in recent years. Lavelle Finley, Chairman of the Mine Committee at Westland Mine in Pennsylvania, explains



how "qualification" is a weapon used against Black miners:

When a good job opens up, and the companies can't find a white man with enough seniority to beat out a Black man who had bid on that job, then they begin hollering about qualifications. The bosses get every young white apprentice that they think can become a mechanic, and they teach him how to be a mechanic. But they'll never come to a Black man and ask him if he would like to be trained to become a mechanic. So naturally, when a mechanic's position opens up, the only 'qualified' man will be a white man.<sup>42</sup>

Barnum also noted the great difficulty Black miners have in entering certain promotional lines within the mines:

Negroes were often found in the promotional line leading from mine helper to trip rider to motorman, but rarely, if ever, found in the lines leading to such jobs as hoist engineer, mine electrician, or maintenance mechanic.<sup>43</sup>

In many mines, even though Black miners were given jobs as brakeman, they found it very difficult to advance to motorman, as Bill Worthington explained, even though these Black brakemen were often used to train totally-inexperienced white motormen for their jobs.<sup>44</sup>

The total number of Black miners in the five southern Appalachian coal-producing states increased continually between 1890 and 1930; there were 9,148 Black miners working in Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia in 1890, and 44,266 in 1930. Their number has declined continually since 1930; by 1960, there were only 7,108 Black miners left in these five states. The pattern in each state has varied. The percentage of Black miners working in Virginia has decreased every decade since 1890, and every decade since 1900 in Kentucky and Tennessee. The absolute number of Black miners did not necessarily drop, however, since the total employment in coal was rising rapidly in the early years of the century throughout southern Appalachia. In Kentucky, for example, the number of Black coal miners employed more than tripled between 1900 and 1920, at the same time their percentage fell by 7%.

Black employment in Tennessee mines rose sharply between 1890 and 1900 from 769 to 3,092, largely because

Black men were being used by the coal companies as strike-breakers. But Black employment in the state dropped sharply every decade after 1900, so that by 1960, there were only 39 Black miners left in Tennessee, representing only 1.0% of the total work force. Northrup argues that Black employment in Virginia declined between 1900 and 1910 and again between 1920 and 1930 because Black miners were exported from Virginia to other states to become strike-breakers.<sup>45</sup>

The percentage of Black coal miners has always been highest in Alabama. This percentage remained remarkably constant between 1900 and 1930, varying between 53.2% and 54.4%. Total Black employment in the state rose from 3,687 in 1890 to a peak of 14,097 in 1920, and has dropped off every decade since 1920. In 1960, there were only 1,983 Black miners still working in Alabama, representing only 25.4% of the work force, the lowest level in the state's history.

Since 1910, West Virginia has employed a greater number of Black coal miners than any other state, while Alabama has maintained the highest percentage. Between 1890 and 1930, the percentage of Black miners employed in West Virginia was also surprisingly constant, ranging between 20.5% and 22.7%. The number of Black miners, however, increased from 2,016 to 22,089 during these four decades. But by 1960, there were only 3,586 Black miners left in West Virginia's mines, most of these being concentrated in the southern coal-producing counties. (The 1960 figure is an estimate made by Barnum; he assumes that the percentage of all miners in West Virginia who were coal miners remained the same between 1950 and 1960, for the 1950 census was the last one which recorded a precise racial breakdown in the coal industry.)<sup>46</sup>

By 1970, the employment situation for Black miners in West Virginia had become still more bleak. According to the 1970 census, there were only 1,850 miners working in the 21 counties which had more than 400 Black residents, representing only 5.1% of the total mining employment. (These figures include all types of miners; but coal mining represented more than 90% of all employment in mining.) Only seven counties had more than 100 Black miners working in their mines in 1970: McDowell, Mercer, Marion, Fayette, Raleigh, Kanawha, and Logan. The percentage of Black miners in each of these counties ranged between 3.1% in Logan to 14.2% in McDowell. There is some difficulty in working

with the 1970 census date, however, for some statistics are obviously inaccurate. The number of Black miners the census records as working in the 21 counties with the largest Black population in West Virginia exceeds the total number of miners working the all 55 counties in the state! Whereas there were 1,850 Black miners working in the 21 counties (5.1% of all miners there), there were only 1,803 Black miners working in all 55 counties of West Virginia (3.8% of all miners in the state)!<sup>47</sup> But whichever figure is used, it is clear that the proportion of jobs in the coal industry held by Black miners dropped still further between 1960 and 1970.

Between 1930 and 1950 in southern Appalachia for every three white miners who got jobs, one Black miner lost his. In the years between 1950 and the late 1960s, Black employment continued to drop sharply everywhere; but this time, white employment plummeted at the same time, although at a slower rate. Thousands and thousands of people moved out of the coal regions during these years, but Black families left even more frequently than white families. West Virginia, for example, lost 6.2% of her total population between 1960 and 1970, more than any other state in the nation. But during these same ten years, West Virginia lost 25.3% of her Black population!<sup>48</sup>

Beginning in the late 1960s, the situation in the coal fields changed, as markets for the black mineral picked up. Today coal companies are hiring thousands of young men every year, both to replace older miners as they retire and to fill positions available in newly-opened mines. The employment picture is bright for the first time in more than 20 years, and the coal operators themselves state that finding enough men to work in their mines is one of the main problems they face in the 1970s. Yet these companies still fail to recruit many Black men. The main form of discrimination takes today is this refusal to hire and train young Black men for careers in the coal industry. Commenting on hiring practices in southern West Virginia, James Millner observed with some bitterness: "They're just not hiring young Black miners today in any numbers. The ones that they do hire is only to protect themselves from law suits."<sup>49</sup> Black miners throughout the Appalachian coal fields concur with Millner's assessment.<sup>50</sup>

### WERE BLACK MINERS STRIKEBREAKERS?

Racist myths always help the coal operators, for they undermine unity between white and Black miners. The most widely-believed myth is that all Black miners came to the northern coal fields intending to be strikebreakers. This accusation often has absolutely no truth in it. In his 1936 article on West Virginia's Black miners, James T. Laing notes that the primary reason the miners gave for moving to West Virginia was to find increased job opportunities and higher wages. Crop failures and bad conditions on southern farms in states such as Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama drove many Black families away from their homes. Other motivations for Black migration to the coal fields included:

Better schools for their children and a greater opportunity for civic and personal liberty were also named.... Death of a relative or a wife and offenses against the law by them or their parents were not infrequently given as personal reasons for migration. Desire for travel and new experience led many young men to 'venture out.'<sup>51</sup>

Sometimes Black miners migrated into a region pre-cisely to get jobs in union mines. In 1918, several hundred Black miners began leaving the mines in the nonunion counties in southern West Virginia and moved to the coal fields in the northern part of the state, because the operators there had just signed wage agreements with the UMW.<sup>52</sup>

Depressed conditions in the South were an important force driving Black men to seek jobs of all kinds in the North. After World War I, the coal fields in Alabama experienced a depression, and many Black miners left the mines around Birmingham to seek jobs in the mines of West Virginia and Pennsylvania. James Mosely, who worked in a mine in Johns (just southwest of Birmingham) before the war, explains: "After we went to war, a panic hit the country. The mines shut down. The mine I worked at in Johns shut down. I had to move to other places to find work." Some Alabama miners left the state after the UMW was crushed in the strike of 1920-1921. They wanted to find jobs in union mines in other states. James Mosely himself migrated from the Birmingham area up to southwestern Pennsylvania for this reason: "There wasn't no strike going on when I came. I had an aunt in Pittsburgh. She kept writing us: 'Come up, come up.' She told us there were jobs.

Finally, I came up to the coke region in Fayette County, just before the 1922 strike."<sup>53</sup>

Some Black miners had pressing personal reasons for leaving Alabama. Andrew Dixon, a pensioner living in Omar, West Virginia, was a union organizer in Birmingham during the 1920-1921 strike. He explains his own abrupt departure from the Alabama coal fields:

No, I didn't have to leave. But they would have killed me if I hadn't! The company thugs were after me and I had to hide in a brush patch. Then some thugs and scabs set the whole patch on fire. I had to get out then and run for my life. I was afraid they would lynch me if they caught up with me. That's because I was trying to organize the UMW. I was one of John L. Lewis's men.

After Dixon escaped from the Birmingham coal fields, he went to Jenkins, Kentucky, the UMW sent him to Holden, West Virginia. In his later years, he moved to Omar, where he worked in the mines now owned by Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel until he retired.<sup>54</sup>

While the charge that all Black coal miners came to the northern coal fields to be strikebreakers is false, it always served a definite function, a function described by Philip Foner in his book on the American Federation of Labor between 1900 and 1909:

The whole issue of Negro strikebreaking was exaggerated by the A.F. of L. leaders as an excuse for their own failure to organize the Negro workers. Had these men spent half as much time informing the membership of the A.F. of L. of the heroic role Negroes played in strike struggles, of the fact that in such viciously anti-union centers as West Virginia, the membership of the United Mine Workers was predominantly Negro and that many of the Negro miners made desperate sacrifices to insure the success of their union, as they did in repeatedly declaiming against Negro strikebreaking, the American labor movement would have greatly benefitted [emphasis added].<sup>55</sup>

In many instances where both Black and white strikebreakers were used by a company, AFL leaders would single out the Black strikebreakers for special attack, omitting

all reference to the white strikebreakers.

Furthermore, there is a great deal of evidence that the Black men who were recruited by the coal companies to become strikebreakers did not know this when recruited. It was easy for company "transportation" agents to deceive the recruits, for they worked far from the scene of a strike. Black men from rural areas of the South, moreover, had little experience with industrial conflicts. Their desire to find better jobs to improve conditions for their families made them eager to accept industrial jobs in the North when they were offered.

Coal operators in the Hocking Valley in Ohio imported Black men from Memphis, Louisville, and Richmond to become strikebreakers as far back as 1873 and 1874. The men were told only that they would "dig coal in a beautiful country only three miles from.... Columbus." The labor agents mentioned nothing about the strike in progress. Some of the men recruited later told the striking union miners that they had been "led by misrepresentations to come North."<sup>56</sup>

The practice of importing Black men to become strikebreakers had already become common among some coal operators by the end of the 19th century. H.C. Frick imported Black labor in the coke fields of western Pennsylvania as early as 1892. Between 1890 and 1896, the Rockefeller-owned Colorado Fuel and Iron Company imported 2,000 Black workers from the South. In 1911 and 1912, it was rumored that Black strikebreakers were going to be imported into the anthracite region and even into the coal fields around Winnipeg, Canada.<sup>57</sup> These latter importations, however, never occurred.

Black men were also used to break strikes under the convict-labor system, which began operating in many southern states after the Civil War. It became so profitable for prisons to lease convicts to plantation owners, construction contractors, and mine operators that many innocent men -- both Black and white -- were arrested on trumped-up charges and railroaded to jail. The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company -- which became a subsidiary of the Morgan dominated United States Steel in 1907 -- began using convict-labor in its coal mines in 1871. T.C. and I. controlled nearly all the mines in eastern Tennessee and many in Alabama by the early 1890s. Paying the state only about \$60 apiece for its convicts, they even began sub-leasing convicts to smaller coal companies.

A major conflict was touched off when Tennessee Coal and Iron sub-leased convicts to the Tennessee Coal and Mining Company in July, 1891 to break a strike at their mine in Briceville. Tennessee Coal and Mining had refused to renew the Knights of Labor contract when it had expired in April, and their miners walked out on strike. On July 15, after the convicts had been brought in, 300 miners marched on the stockade where they were imprisoned and freed them. A representative from the Chattanooga Federation of Trades present at Briceville wrote that "White and Negroes are standing shoulder to shoulder." At another mine owned by the Knoxville Iron Company, 125 more convicts were released. But by July 25, the state militia had returned the convicts to their respective companies.

But the struggle of the miners against the convict-labor system continued. More convicts were freed in October. Then on August 13, 1892, a stockade erected by Tennessee Coal and Iron at Tracy City had begun when the company reduced their free miners to half-time work, but kept the convicts working full-time. This dispute developed into a large-scale armed battle, which was broken up only when trainloads of soldiers were sent in armed with field guns and Gatling guns. In the aftermath of the battle, hundreds of miners were rounded up; Jake Witsen, a Black miner, was killed by the militia. His body was found riddled with a dozen bullets. When his funeral was held in Clinton, several thousand of his white fellow-miners attended. Although the miners lost the long series of struggles in 1891 and 1892 against the convict-labor system, when the state's contract with Tennessee Coal and Iron expired in 1896, it was never renewed, and 25 years of this prison-labor system came to an end.<sup>58</sup>

In 1893, the "Big Four" coal companies in Kansas (Western Coal and Mining, Kansas and Texas, Central Coal and Coke, and Southwestern Coal and Improvement) imported about 375 Black workers from the Deep South to break a strike. Another UMW strike broke out on May 13, 1899 and agents for the "Big Four" were sent to Birmingham again. On June 6, two agents put up posters and distributed handbills reading:

WANTED! Colored Coal Miners for Weir City, Kansas.... the paradise (sic) for colored people. Coal three feet ten inches high.... one dollar per ton pay day twice a month, in cash. Transportation will be advanced. Special trains will leave Birmingham the 13th.... Get ready and go to the land of plenty.

A later poster read:

COLORED COAL MINERS.... Several hundred miners are at work.... making big wages.... Next and last train for Weir City, Kansas, leaves Birmingham Tuesday night.... get ready and join your friends in the land of plenty.

The labor agents also found "colored orators" in the Black community in Birmingham who were willing to speak to the miners about the virtues of mining in Kansas; these company agents succeeded in getting about 1,300 Black men to travel up to Kansas between June 13 and September 14, 1899. By 1910, when there were 40,623 Black miners working throughout the country (representing more than 8% of all coal miners), there were still 1,000 Black miners working in Kansas.<sup>59</sup>

It is obvious that the Black men who became strikebreakers in Kansas were recruited under false pretenses. In the 1960s, when John Robb asked surviving miners or their sons why they had left Birmingham to go to Weir City, Kansas many decades earlier, they answered: "for a real good job"; "seeking an honest living, to raise decent God-fearing families"; "it was a better life"; and "good steady money." One old miner named Sol Hester told Robb:

The K[ansas] and T[exas] men just said 'you all not getting very much down here. Up there they pay you better, and opportunity to be your own boss, with real wages, houses, transportation to where you can be free!'

The first indication the Black "strikebreakers" received that they had been deceived was when armed company guards got on the train as it passed through Memphis.<sup>60</sup>

A thousand Black strikebreakers were recruited from Alabama by the Illinois coal operators during the bitter strike in 1898 near Virden. When the Black strikebreakers arrived in Virden, according to The Public, an independent weekly, they:

... complained that they had been deceived by the operators, and most of them refused to work. Deputies stationed on the grounds are charged with threatening to shoot Negroes who attempted to leave.



Unfortunately, the white UMW miners on strike in Virden made no efforts to help these Black men the company imported nor to involve them in the union's struggle. The white miners fell under the influence of the anti-Black sentiments fanned by the operators themselves, and a bloody battle erupted on October 12, 1898 which left 14 people dead and 50 wounded.<sup>61</sup>

The Freeman, a Black newspaper published in Indianapolis, criticized the mine owners for importing Black men to break the strike, arguing that if the owners were so anxious to provide Black men with work, "let them employ Negro workmen in times of peace; put them in wherever they can and as many as they can until the faces of black men excite no curiosity."<sup>62</sup>

Thus, there is overwhelming evidence that Black men were not aware that they were going to be used as strikebreakers when they were recruited by labor agents of the coal companies. John L. Lewis himself took note of the deceptive practices used by these agents. In the UMW Journal of June 1, 1926, he singled out Pittsburgh Coal and Bethlehem Mines Corporation for attack:

Labor agents are employed to misrepresent the true state of working conditions to innocent victims in far away coal mining regions. Transportation costs are paid for the journey to Western Pennsylvania; guards are employed to keep the newcomers from forming contact with the communities in which the non-union operations are located; compensation laws are defeated; the imported men are robbed by company store prices.<sup>63</sup>

There is also a great deal of evidence to show that in almost every instance where Black men were used to break coal miners' strikes, large numbers of the "strikebreakers" deserted to the side of the union when they discovered what was going on. Whenever Black miners deserted the companies, they did so under very difficult and dangerous circumstances. They were usually hundreds of miles from their homes and had no other prospects of a job in areas strange to them. They had been uprooted from their homes, as Lavelle Finley poignantly explains:

Ninety-five percent of the Black men the coal companies brought up in boxcars from Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia couldn't even read or write.

When one of them got himself killed in the mines, no one knew where he came from or where his people was. The companies never did care enough to ask him nothing. When he got killed, they just buried him. And nobody ever knew.<sup>64</sup>

Deserting "strikebreakers" always faced the wrath of the coal company which had imported them. Spero and Harris report that:

Quitting workmen have been stopped by the coal and iron police, severely clubbed or otherwise beaten. Afterwards, the victims would be carried before a magistrate who was friendly to the employer and heavily fined or jailed for disorderly conduct.<sup>65</sup>

Sometimes the local unions on strike made efforts to help the Black workers who were stranded. They gave these men passes which read:

This is to certify that the bearer of this card was brought to ---- on the promise of a legitimate job. Discovering on his arrival that he was to act as a strikebreaker, he refused. We kindly ask all good union brothers to assist him in returning to his home in ----.<sup>66</sup>

From the coal fields of Kansas to western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, there are stories about Black "strikebreakers" who refused to break strikes. Among the hundreds of Black men from Birmingham imported by the "Big Four" coal companies into southeastern Kansas in 1893, there were many who escaped from the stockades built for them and went over to support the UMW, not wishing "to make anybody's condition bad or worse than [their] own." Some of these men then left for the coal fields of Wyoming and New Mexico; others stayed in Kansas to fight the companies. The Black miners in Kansas produced some outstanding union organizers, such as Milton Reed. Reed was born in Selma, Alabama in 1875 and grew up in Jefferson County. He migrated to Weir City in 1893, the year of the first major UMW strike in Kansas. Reed quickly became a union man, and had developed a reputation as an eloquent orator and leader by 1899, when the second big strike broke out.

Some middle-class leaders in the Black community in southeast Kansas felt that Black miners would do best to place their trust in the coal companies. They pointed to the hostility of some white miners for Black people as evidence that the bosses were their best friends in the white

community. Milton Reed, on the other hand, was convinced that the interests of the Black miners lay with the union. He was instrumental in organizing migrants from Alabama into the UMW. But Reed also warned the white UMW members that they must accept Black miners in their union on an equal basis, cautioning that "if the object was to drive out the colored man he would have to object." Reed proved himself such a capable organizer in Kansas that he was appointed a National Organizer of the United Mine Workers in 1901.

The efforts of Milton Reed and the other organizers were successful, and an integrated miners' union was built in Kansas. One foreign-born miner commented that "the colored made the best Union men after they joined up." Every contract from 1900 until the demise of underground mining in the state included the declaration that "the color line shall not be a bar to employment." Dan Freeman, one of the Black miners, was happy when the rights of Black miners were won, but added: "If you give to me what belongs to me, you ain't given me nothin'." Sol Hester, another of the Black miners, explained the racial solidarity which emerged by noting: "The damps and rock falls didn't care what color you were."<sup>67</sup>

The history of Black "strikebreakers" deserting the operators dated back well into the 19th century. In June, 1874, about 120 Black men quit the Ohio operators who had brought them into the Hocking Valley to break a strike led by the recently-founded Miners' National Association. The white miners provided sleeping quarters for the Black miners in their union hall, and raised money to help them pay their transportation back home. Many Black miners left, but the majority of them stayed on their new jobs.<sup>68</sup> Their new industrial jobs in the North provided a means of escape from the tenant farms in the Black Belt and from the menial jobs almost always relegated to them.

In 1922, James Mosely was already working in the mines of southwestern Pennsylvania and had gone out on strike himself when the companies began importing Black strikebreakers:

When we went out on strike against H.C. Frick in the spring of '22, they brought in other people to break the strike, to break the union. They had agents going around transporting people from the South and from Europe too.

They fooled a lot of [Black] people from the

South about the big money you were making in Pennsylvania. They told them they had a job just waiting for them. They paid their way up from Birmingham and brought some of them up in boxcars. But these people, after they got up here and found out what they were doing, then they joined the union.<sup>69</sup>

When he hears people claim that all Black miners were scabs, Mosely gets furious, and points out a very serious problem created by some white miners for Black union men:

When people says we were all strikebreakers, they's nothing but a bunch of liars. There were always more white strikebreakers and scabs than Negroes. When the companies went to Alabama and Georgia and transported men up here in boxcars, they went to the union when they found out what was going on.

We were union men. We got throwed out of our houses and stayed in tents up on a hill because we joined the union. I stayed for a whole year in a tent, after the Frick Coal Company evicted us. One day in the fall, about seven or eight of us left our tents and went over to Vesta No. 4 to get a job. But the pit boss there told us, 'If we hire you all, all these other [white] fellows will quit.' And that was a union mine.

If anybody did damage to the union, it was white people like those. Because sometimes when we joined the union, when we joined with them and worked with them, they turned around on us and refused to work with us.<sup>70</sup>

Racist attitudes quickly backfired upon the white miners themselves, for they helped the coal operators destroy the UMW in the 1920s. A report issued by the West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics in 1925-1926 explained why:

The operators contend that it is to the best interest of the Negro miners to side with them in this controversy because in the state of Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and part of Pennsylvania which are strongly organized by the United Mine Workers .... very few Negroes are employed, and where operators hire them they are driven from the operations by

white union miners; while on the other hand in the non-union fields of West Virginia Negroes are employed in the coal mines in numbers far in excess of the percentage of their race in the whole population.

This point was underlined when Black miners began to lose the best jobs in the mines to white miners after the UMW organized the mines in Fayette and Kanawha Counties. They regained their positions only after the UMW was broken! A Black local President in eastern Ohio in the 1920s complained that the Black miner had more opportunities for advancement in the non-union fields in Alabama and West Virginia than he did in the strongly-unionized fields of Ohio.<sup>71</sup>

During their 1921 District Convention, the miners in District 5 gave several examples of mines in which no Black men were allowed to work. Delegate Robinson, a Black miner, stood up to note that there was "a condition existing in Burgettstown wherein a man of color cannot get employment." Delegate Thompson said:

We have some mines . . . . where a Black man cannot get a job, and I as one have been to those mines and put an application for a job. The mine foreman has told me that he would give me a job, but the men would not work with me.

Thompson mentioned that he had worked for 12 years in the mines of West Virginia, and that he had been following the Armed Marches in the southern part of the state, marches in which hundreds of Black miners participated. He commented:

Those colored men from the State of West Virginia have put their shoulders to the shoulders of the white brothers, and our newspapers tell us that they have sacrificed their lives for this great movement.

I think it looks very embarrassing when a man would sacrifice his life for this movement, and after the victory is won then his brother would say: 'We need you no longer.'

Thompson then spoke the words with which this pamphlet opened. A few minutes later Tom Myerscough, a Communist and a delegate from Montour No. 4 Mine, who was later to become president of the revolutionary National Miners Union,

stood up to support Thompson:

I was impressed by the splendid talk made by Brother Thompson of Local 1372, and I believe that the statements made are well-founded, for there are many mining communities in this District where colored men can hardly go near the property. You may go into the community and the miners will tell you themselves, 'There are no n----- working here.'<sup>72</sup>

White miners in western Pennsylvania reaped the bitter harvest sown by their racist attitudes when Black miners were used to help break the strike of 1927. As they passed the striking miners while walking to work, some of the strikebreakers yelled at the pickets: "You would not work with me before the strike. Now I have your job and I am going to keep it." Employment statistics from the two largest coal producers in the Pittsburgh district demonstrate the opportunities the strike opened up for Black miners. Before the strike, the Pittsburgh Coal Company employed about 11,000 miners, only 7% of whom were Black. But between October, 1927 and February, 1928, the number of Black miners employed jumped from less than 800 to nearly 3,500; 40% of the average of 8,755 miners working during these months were Black. Pittsburgh Coal, owned by Andrew Mellon, was the largest producer of bituminous coal in the world. The Pittsburgh Terminal Coal Company, the second largest producer in western Pennsylvania, had never employed more than 100 Black miners out of its total work force of about 3,000 men. But during the strike, the number of Black miners increased to 962 out of the 2,645 men employed at its six mines. Whereas Black miners had comprised only 2% of Pittsburgh Terminal's work force before the strike, they became 36% of the miners working during the strike!<sup>73</sup>

It must also be remembered that the men who worked during strikes in the northern coal fields during the 1920s faced dangerous working conditions and lived in terrible poverty themselves. Even though they were helping the companies destroy the UMW, the companies treated them just as badly as they had their regular employees. Oliver Linkenhoker, a striking miner's son from Pomeroy, Ohio wrote to the UMW Journal in April, 1926:

The scabs of this mine tell me that they do not make a living for their families at the rate of wages being paid. Their children go to school without shoes and sometimes without enough food to eat.

They say to the children of union miners, "Our dads can do no better, although they work night and day; we can hardly keep from starving."<sup>74</sup>

In another letter to the Journal, John Hardrick, a miner from Glendale, Pennsylvania, wrote about the low non-union wages the strikebreakers were paid, and observed: "If you pass by a Pittsburgh Coal Company mine you will find it looks just like a convict mine in Alabama."<sup>75</sup>

A year before the strike which began in western Pennsylvania on April 1, 1927, white miners could have read a powerful plea for racial solidarity in the UMW Journal written by George H. Edmunds, a Black miner from District 13 in Iowa:

First, let it be known that Negro labor is destined to participate more and more each year in the industrial pursuits, either as organized, or unorganized workers.....

Second, the Negro has no desire to be a competitor in the field of labor; his one desire is that of an honest, industrious co-worker, sharing his part of the responsibilities of his particular craft, shoulder to shoulder with his Anglo-Saxon brother. His inclinations and desires lean naturally to the side of organization. Having experienced slavery, both chattle (sic) and industrial, he desires to breathe 'free air.'.....

Why do Negroes work as strikebreakers if they are naturally inclined toward organization?..... Negroes have always been oppressed; first by chattle slavery, then by corrupt politicians, religious bigots, scheming promoters of all kinds and last but in nowise the least, organized labor has openly scoffed at Negro participation....

Organized labor should take notice of conditions as they actually obtain and go about to remedy them before it is too late.... As long as organized labor keeps shut the door of equal opportunity to the Negro, we will be pestered by Negro strikebreakers.... The employers of labor have long played the Black man against the white man, and both races have fallen victims to the poisonous doctrine of color and race prejudices. Cannot we bury the monster,

and come together on a common industrial level and go hand in hand, and do battle against the common enemy [underlining mine]?<sup>76</sup>

When the coal operators in southern West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee had imported Black strikebreakers from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina during labor troubles in the 1890s and the early 1900s, Black miners had issued an appeal to "Our Colored Fellow-Men," which was reprinted in the UMW Journal on several occasions. Their appeal read, in part:

Those colored workmen who, in case of a strike or any other labor trouble, take the places of white workmen, make a mistake.... They do a wrong to all labor. They raise prejudice against their own race. They bring themselves into contempt.... Efforts.... have recently been made to use colored men as 'strikebreakers.'.... Numbers of them have been railroaded from the South to the North as labor mercenaries, and several capitalists threaten to hire thousands of them in case the white wage workers make trouble... We give notice, therefore, to our colored fellow-men whose welfare can never be promoted by injuring other people, don't try to cut under white workers. Don't let anybody use you as strikebreakers. Don't live as mere tools.<sup>77</sup>

On occasion, attempts of white miners to bar Black men from the mines were defeated. During the 1920s, an Ohio local struck when the company hired some Black miners. When these Black miners appealed to the International Executive Board, the Board revoked the local's charter. After this incident, a special clause was inserted into the District 6 Constitution: "Any Local Union that is found guilty of discriminating against a fellow worker on account of creed, color or nationality, said Local Union to be fined not less than \$125, for each offense."<sup>78</sup> But the burden to prove discrimination still rested upon the Black miners.

Despite the refusal of many white miners in the northern coal fields to work alongside Black miners, the Black miners generally stuck to the union. This loyalty to the union is remarkable in the case of men such as James Mosely, who was on strike and living in a tent with his family when he was refused employment at Vesta No. 4 because white UMW members there refused to work with him.



Black miners exhibited a high level of working-class consciousness when, in the face of racism from white miners coupled with offers of employment from the coal companies, so many of them still regard those companies as their enemy and the white miners as potential union brothers. Black miners knew they had to depend on their fellow workers in the long run. They never forgot that the coal companies were eager to use them when they needed their labor, but that those same companies would be happy to get rid of Black miners once their "labor troubles" were over.

Black miners also remained loyal to the union against the advice of the majority of their middle-class community leaders, who were pro-employer. In 1931, Spero and Harris characterized these "Negro leaders" in these terms:

In nearly every important controversy between organized labor and capital in which Negro labor has been involved, the Negro leader has sided with capital. He has approved and often encouraged the use of Negro labor for breaking strikes. He defends his position with the argument that the exclusion of the Negro worker from many trade unions forces him to accept strike breaking as his weapon against the unions and as the only means of obtaining employment in many industries.<sup>79</sup>

But there were always eloquent spokesmen among the masses of Black people to counter such "leaders." William Prentice, a Black miner who was an International organizer for the UMW in the 1920s, wrote in the UMW Journal:

Let us not be found skulking in the camp of the enemy..... Today the United Mine Workers organization is bearing the brunt of the open shop drive, now so well under way. Thousands of members of our group are members of that great organization.... Notwithstanding that fact, many inducements are being offered to members of our race to join the crusade for the destruction of our own Union.

Let me ask what could we as a race hope to gain by helping to destroy the United Mine Workers of America? And should such destruction ever be accomplished with our assistance, what standing would that give us with other branches of organized labor that we hope some day to enter?.....

Big Business is being assisted here in this nefarious practice by many of our race who toil not -- neither do they spin. Yet they style themselves race leaders. Nothing else, in my opinion, is doing more to fan the fires of racial hatred and broaden the chasm between the white man who works and the black man who works than the movement by Big Business, assisted by self-styled race leaders, to use the humble and ignorant of our race to assist in tearing down the standards of living of the American working man.

When this great fight is over and the Union is crowned with victory, let us ever be able to point with pride to the part played the the American Negro in this great conflict.<sup>80</sup>

Throughout the century, Black miners have showed they preferred working in union mines to non-union mines, when they were given the chance.<sup>81</sup>

Employers in almost every basic industry of the country used the tactic of "divide and rule" against their workers. The owners of the factories, mines and mills systematically set native-born workers against the immigrants, men against women, skilled workers against the unskilled, and played off members of various nationality groups and religions against each other. The most serious division of all within the working class was that between Black and white. For many years, the employers prevented Black men and women from getting jobs in the steel, auto, rubber, textile, lumber, and electrical industries unless they were willing to cross picket lines and break strikes.<sup>82</sup>

When Black workers stood up and fought for racial solidarity, as they did in every one of these industries, it placed a special responsibility upon white workers to fight against racism and chauvinism within their own ranks. The UMW's Richard Davis pointed this out to the members of the striking American Railway Union during the Pullman Strike of 1894, when Black workers were being imported to break the strike. The Black workers could not be labelled strikebreakers, Davis argued, when the ARU excluded Black workers form membership:

Surely, gentlemen, you have sense enough to know that we were born here and intend to remain here. We are American citizens and should be

treated as such. But what can you expect of the Negro with this kind of treatment?.... It is just such treatment as this that has caused the Negro to take your places when you were striking. Now, if there is anything that I do despise it is a blackleg, but in places in this country that they will not allow the Negro to work simply because of his black skin, then I say boldly that he is not a blackleg in taking your places. He is only doing his plain duty in taking chances with the world. We ask no one to give us anything. All we want is the chance to work and we assure you we want just as much wages as the whites [underlining mine].<sup>83</sup>

#### MORE RACIST MYTHS

James Kennedy, who helped organize the UMW in western Pennsylvania's captive mines in the late 1930s, and who lives in Clarksville today as a pensioner, comments: "Everyone remembers the Black scabs, but nobody seems to remember the Black organizers!"<sup>84</sup> In addition, many seem to have forgotten about the white strikebreakers. A second racist myth is that there were few or no white strikebreakers. Yet in fact, there were many more white strikebreakers than there were Black strikebreakers. The operators sent their labor agents to eastern and southern Europe to recruit scab labor, just as they sent them to the Deep South. Like the Black miners, hundreds of the new European immigrants also soon deserted the companies for the union. And like the Black miners, many of the Europeans became some of the strongest union men, even though they too had been deceived by the coal company agents into migrating to mining towns on strike.

It was especially disturbing when official UMW organizers made racist statements publicly. A report published in 1930 by the National Urban League about the 1925 strike in western Pennsylvania quoted a UMW organizer as saying:

We have a strike on at this time with the Pittsburgh Coal Company and three-fourth of the men working as strikebreakers are Negroes -- and bad ones too. They were the first to enter mines.... They [Pittsburgh Coal] are bringing colored men here to take the place of men who are resisting the thing the coal company is trying to do. We have some white scum also, but the Negro is in the majority.

The Urban League's report went on to praise the special efforts the National Miners Union made three years later to organize Black miners.<sup>85</sup> While the operators often recruited their gun thugs from the prisons and criminal elements, strikebreakers did not come from such lumpen elements; they were usually farmers or workers themselves. Yet official UMW publications rarely made this distinction.

On August 1, 1926, the Journal printed a letter from a Local Secretary in McDonald, Pennsylvania, which contained this description of the strikebreakers:

The Pittsburgh Coal Company has been importing

the worst type of men from the large cities of the country, the most ignorant, brutal, beastly, so-called men in all creation, and dumped them in these peaceful valleys to work in its mines.<sup>86</sup>

Another article published on October 1, 1926 commented: "We have seen the scum of the earth shipped into our camps, and we have seen many of them leave again because conditions became so unbearable they could not stay."<sup>87</sup> Racist hostilities lurked just beneath the surface of such remarks. J.P. Busarello, who was later to become President of District 5, wrote an article in the Journal on October 15, 1926, in which he stated:

Out of a total membership of 2,000 in the valley only three men deserted our ranks and returned to work. The Pittsburgh Coal Company imported colored men from Alabama and West Virginia to take the places of our men....

Every crime on the calendar has been committed by these men who were imported from the South, and a peaceful community has been transformed into a hell over night by the inauguration of a union-busting program by the Pittsburgh Coal Company.<sup>88</sup>

Oscar K. Eaton, an attorney for the UMW, became perturbed about the "immorality" of the Black strikebreakers, and communicated his concern to C.E. Leshar, Vice President of Pittsburgh Coal, while he was asking him questions before a Senate Committee in March, 1928:

Do you not know, as a matter of fact, that they have public dances at your camps where whites dance with the Blacks and the Blacks dance with the whites and intermingle freely? .... What do you know about the conditions of these colored men living in your houses with women not their wives? .... Do you not know that it is currently reported in the public press .... that these camp followers are living in open lewdness with these colored strikebreakers?<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps the most blatantly racist statement of all during these years came from the pen of Philip Murray, who had been President of District 5, was currently the International Vice President of the UMW, and would later become the first President of the United Steelworkers of America and the second President of the Congress of Industrial

Organizations. It is noteworthy that such a major American labor leader possessed such an abysmal understanding of Black workers. In a letter to the Council of Churches of Christ in Pittsburgh dated March 23, 1927, Murray discussed the efforts made by the Pittsburgh Coal Company to break the 1924 Jacksonville Agreement:

The Pittsburgh Coal Company began the importation of green, inexperienced men from other parts of the country to take the place of its old employees. Many of these recruits came from the underworld and the slums of the great cities. Thousands of others were Negroes imported from the cotton fields of the south, men with absolutely no knowledge of coal mining....

These imported men from the underworld, the slums and the cotton fields are a serious menace to the peace of the community.... White men and women and Negro men and women mix and mingle together. There are cases where white men live with Negro women and Negro men live with white women. One case is reported at Smithdale where a white woman left her husband and ran away with a Negro man.

Men and women bootleggers carry liquor into the camps in suitcases and hatboxes. Dope peddlers do a thriving business among the Negroes.... Crime is common in these places. There have been cases of rape of women by imported brutes. One farmer's wife was killed by a rapist, and that rapist was one of the men imported by the Pittsburgh Coal Company.

Murray closed his tirade against Black and foreign-born strikebreakers by claiming he wrote the letter simply so that "law-abiding church people of this district may be advised on the dangers that lurk among them." He urged the Council to "give this matter its most careful and searching consideration in the interest of religion and decency."<sup>90</sup>

The coal operators used whatever means they could and employed whomever was available to break strikes. After World War I, the Black worker became a permanent part of the working class throughout the North. The presence of native-born whites, immigrants, and Blacks made it possible for employers to maintain what they called a "cosmopolitan work force." Such a work force freed employers in all industries, Spero and Harris explained:

.... from dependence upon any one group for his labor supply and also thwart[ed] unity of purpose and labor organization. Or, as the personnel manager of a very large company near Chicago put it: 'It makes fraternizing among the employees difficult.'<sup>91</sup>

William Z. Foster, the leading organizer of the successful meatpackers' strike in 1917-1918 and then of the steelworkers' strike in 1919, also commented on the mixture of races and nationalities used for strikebreaking:

Of course, some Negro workers were misused as strikebreakers in the post-World War I years, but this development has been grossly exaggerated by enemies of the Negro people. Strikebreaking was far more prevalent among the whites. For every Negro strikebreaker there were scores of white ones.<sup>92</sup>

Spero and Harris also note:

When all is said and done, the number of strikes broken by Black labor have been few as compared with the number broken by white labor. What is more, the Negro has seldom been the only or even the most important strikebreaking element. Employers in emergencies take whatever labor they can get and the Negro is only one of many groups involved. But the bitterness of American race prejudice has always made his presence an especially sore point.<sup>93</sup>

James Mosely made an interesting comparison between the role Black and white people played in breaking strikes in western Pennsylvania:

Here's a point I can't get through my mind: Some people are always downing the colored man. They say he's this and they say he's that. But in all the years I worked in the mines, I never saw any colored man riding a horse to beat his people back to work. It was only the white man who was a Coal and Iron Police. He beat his people back and the colored too, if he could. We called them yellow-dogs; they were paid by the companies.<sup>94</sup>

Mosely's nephew, Lavelle Finley, added a point about the contemporary situation:

There are very few Black men working non-union

today. Look at all the non-union mines around here. They're all strip jobs. Who works in them? White men, not Black men. They won't even give a Black man a job in one of these strip jobs. They don't want him running their equipment. The workers in the non-union strip mines are 100% white.<sup>95</sup>

A third myth is that Black miners didn't help build the UMW. The many stories of Black miners who left non-union fields to seek employment in union mines and of Black "strikebreakers" who deserted the companies refute this myth. Shirley Coles argues that it was Black miners who first organized many of the mines in southern West Virginia:

The white man was scared to join the union at first around here. The Black man took the organizing jobs and set it up. We went into the bushes and met in secret; and we held all the key offices. A few of the white miners would slip around and come to our meetings. After they found out that the company wasn't going to run them away, why they began to appear more often. And quite naturally, when they became the majority, they elected who they wanted for their Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Treasurers. They left a few jobs as Secretaries for the Negroes. But at the beginning, most all of the main offices in the locals were held by Negroes.<sup>96</sup>

Coles added that he felt the Black miners were willing to sacrifice more to win the union because "we could always survive on what a white man would starve to death on. We never had much to begin with. We were raised that way."<sup>97</sup>

Black miners played a central role throughout the history of the Knights of Labor and the United Mine Workers in the Birmingham coal fields. They formed the backbone of the 1908 and 1920-1921 strikes.<sup>98</sup> Both times the employer met the striking miners with tremendous violence and attempts to stir up race-hatred. In 1908, a

.... tent colony in which the strikers lived after they had been evicted from the company-owned houses, was burned to the ground in order to prevent the 'mobilization of Negroes in union camps.' In addition, a committee of citizens threatened a race riot unless the President of the UMW ordered the miners to return to work. The UMW executive



was informed that . . . . 'the people of Alabama would never tolerate the organization and striking of Negroes along with white men.'<sup>99</sup>

Black miners played a major role again in the strikes at the end of World War I, and Andrew Dixon was not the only Black man who left Alabama to escape the operators' blacklists or even lynch mobs. When the 1920-1921 strike began, there were more than 25,000 miners working in the state. Although only 54% of the miners were Black, 76% of the strikers were! But this strike too was smashed; and by 1923, only 2% of Alabama's miners were UMW members. During the national strike in 1922, Alabama's mines worked full time and shipped coal to markets usually supplied by mines in the Central Competitive Field. The UMW did not come back to Alabama until the organizing drives of the mid-1930s.<sup>100</sup>

The struggles of the National Miners Union between 1928 and 1933 further illustrate the central role Black miners played in preserving unionism in the face of the most intense offensives by the operators. The UMW had been deteriorating steadily ever since John L. Lewis signed the bituminous contract in 1922, leaving out the nearly 100,000 coke region miners who were on strike. The operators broke their Jacksonville Agreement in 1924, and then lowered wages again in 1927, touching off a long and bitter strike which lasted into 1928. At the end of the 1927-1928 strike, the UMW had been completely destroyed throughout the Central Competitive Field; it had been crushed in the southern coal fields several years before.

Faced with the virtual disappearance of the UMW, militant miners from across the coal fields gathered in Pittsburgh at the beginning of September 1928, and formed the National Miners Union. This revolutionary union, affiliated with the Trade Union Unity League, fought heroically against the coal operators and provided a bridge of struggle between the UMW strikes of the 1920s and the drives to reorganize the UMW after the National Industrial Recovery Act was passed.

When the NMU was founded, hundreds of Black miners joined it almost immediately. The predominantly Black local union at Lincoln Hill, near Little Washington, became the very first local to take out an NMU charter. Black men such as William Boyce from Indiana and Isaiah Hawkins from western Pennsylvania played leading roles in

organizing both Black and white miners. One of the most significant achievements of the NMU was the response it won from Black miners who had broken the 1927-1928 strike, after they had been denied work in union mines because of the opposition of white miners. When the NMU proved it would fight for the rights of Black miners, the very men who had been strikebreakers in 1927 became some of the most militant leaders of the new union.<sup>101</sup>

A fourth racist myth prevalent among white miners is that the lot of Black miners has never been any worse than that of white miners. When two Black delegates to the 1921 convention in District 5 complained that Black miners found it difficult to find employment because companies wouldn't hire them, and asked the convention to pass a resolution against such discrimination, several white delegates argued that their problem was no different from that of miners who couldn't find jobs because of their nationality and age, or because they were known as union militants.<sup>102</sup> While these delegates were certainly correct in accusing the coal companies of using many forms of discrimination, they were wrong not to recognize that no form of discrimination has ever been so systematic and devastating as that suffered by Black miners.

The first Black coal miners were slaves, a condition never endured by any group of white miners. White miners never faced the difficulties in getting hired which Black miners encountered, nor is there any evidence that Black miners ever refused to work with white workers. Black miners were rarely promoted as rapidly as white miners; machine jobs were generally considered "white jobs." And the companies were always especially violent against any of their Black employees who crossed them. No white miner ever had to leave Alabama to escape a lynch mob. In the days of the Coal and Iron Police in Pennsylvania, Black miners complained:

.... that the company police made 'wild west raids' on their homes, while such raids were never made upon the whites. They said that the slightest provocation from a Negro miner would cause the police to give him a severe beating and then jail him on the charge of resistance and disorderly conduct.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, no group or nationality of white miners was laid off in the proportions which Black miners were between 1930 and 1970. While discrimination was suffered by the

European immigrants, this discrimination was neither as severe nor as lasting as that endured by Black people in the coal fields.

A fifth myth is that the UMW has always fought for racial equality. The UMW Constitution, as mentioned before, was one of the more advanced union constitutions in opening its membership to all miners regardless of race, creed, or nationality. In the early years of the century, Black miner O.H. Underwood stated: "I believe that the United Mine Workers has done more to erase the word white from the Constitution than the Fourteenth Amendment."<sup>104</sup> But the failure of John L. Lewis to protect Black miners after 1930 and Tony Boyle's neglect of the special problems of Black miners can never be balanced by constitutional clauses or public pronouncements about racial equality.

While the UMW organized Black and white miners together, its leaders generally took an opportunist position on Black men being elected to union offices, just as they took an opportunist position in allowing company bosses to promote white miners much more rapidly than Blacks. The Alabama district leaders, for example, advocated the election of whites as Local Presidents and Blacks as Local Vice Presidents, even in locals where Blacks constituted a majority, a procedure which came to be known as the "UMW pattern". According to Herbert Northrup:

This device was designed to facilitate good employer-employee relations, for the local President usually heads the 'pit' committee which meets with representatives of management for the joint settlement of grievances arising from working conditions in the mines. It was felt that the employers should be accustomed to the novelty of joint grievance committees before being subject to the still more novel experience of having to deal with Negroes as equals.<sup>105</sup>

But in some locals in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, Black miners were elected to be Presidents, Recording Secretaries, or members of the Pit Committees even though they were greatly outnumbered by foreign-born and native white miners, according to Spero and Harris. Sometimes the only Black member in the local would be chosen President or Recording Secretary!<sup>106</sup> While many native-born whites objected to Blacks serving as officers, the immigrants were often less prejudiced. This was in part due to the ability of Black miners to speak and write English;

the foreign-born miners also knew what it meant to be the victim of discrimination. Boris Emmet discussed this in his Bureau of Labor Statistics report of July, 1924:

The appearance of colored committeemen may be traced directly to the union scale agreement, which specifies that only citizens or men who have actually declared their intention of becoming citizens, and who speak the English language, may serve on committees. From the point of view of many of the miners who are of foreign birth, the Negro has all the necessary qualifications for a committeeman -- he is a citizen and he speaks the English language.<sup>107</sup>

In many West Virginia mines, the three-man Pit Committees were made up of one native-born white, one European-born white, and one Black miner.<sup>108</sup>

The position of the National Miners Union on the Black question was strikingly different from that of the UMW. NMU leaders always fought for racial equality, even under the most difficult circumstances. During their 1931-1932 strike in east Kentucky, NMU leaders knew that by feeding Black and white miners together in the same soup kitchens, they would arouse the ire of the police and probably suffer additional repression. Yet NMU officers and members stood firm on their principle of treating Black miners equally in every way.<sup>109</sup> Tilman Cadle, the NMU militant, is proud of the way he and his fellow-miners always fought for racial solidarity:

Once when I was working near Appalachia [Virginia] at the Roda Mine, we started to take up this grievance. I presented the miner's case. Then the superintendent presented the company's side of the case for Stonega Coal and Coke. After he had finished, I turned to Tom Long, our Black Committeeman, and said, 'Well, Tom, what have you got to say?' I wanted him to feel he had a right to speak too.

When he started speaking, the superintendent pointed his finger at him and he said: 'Shut up! I won't talk to a n---r and I won't let a n---r talk to me.' So I said, 'Well, if you can't talk to him, you can't talk to me either,' So we got up and walked out on him, and the strike went on.

The National Miners Union didn't believe in any

discrimination at all, on account of creed or color or nationality. They accepted everyone as a brother in the union. The United Mine Workers has that in their Constitution, but they don't carry it out. But the National Miners Union did. They didn't just talk about it. They carried it out. If the Black men found out that you was really fighting for them, I believe that they made better union men than the white men. 110

A sixth racist myth is that the number of Black miners in the coal industry today is so small that it is neither necessary nor even important for white miners to give the Black question any thought. Some miners even argue, "We made it the hard way, so let them do the same."

The bankruptcy of this argument is obvious, for Black miners have always "had it hard" too; in fact, they have always had it harder. But there are also very practical reasons for white coal miners to fight racism. Today, coal miners are making many demands for change; they want safer working conditions, higher benefits for retired and disabled miners, a six-hour day, and a better standard of living throughout Appalachia. Such demands bring them into intense conflict with the powerful energy and steel monopolies which control the coal industry. A fight against such strong enemies can never be won without strong allies.

Black people represent some of the strongest potential allies coal miners could have. Black caucuses and rank-and-file movements within other industrial unions stand for the same kind of militant trade unionism the miners created through their own rank-and-file movements. The Civil rights and Black Liberation movements have had a decisive impact upon the entire nation during the 1960s and 1970s. Victories achieved by Black people help all poor and working people, whatever their color or nationality. Conscious efforts to fight racism within the UMW and to establish alliances with Black organizations will strengthen the miners' own struggles.

### STRUGGLES FOR BLACK-WHITE UNITY

The first major industrial union to organize Black workers vigorously was the Knights of Labor; it was founded in 1869 but functioned secretly until 1878. The Knights organized both all-Black and integrated locals throughout the South. By 1886, the Knights claimed 60,000 Black members throughout the country. That year, the Secretary-Treasurer of the Knights of Labor reported to their General Assembly that:

The colored people of the South are flocking to us, being eager for organization and education, and when thoroughly imbued with our principles are answering in their fidelity.

The thousands of Black workers who participated in organizing activities and strikes led by the Knights included coal miners in Alabama and Tennessee, longshoremen in New Orleans and Newport News, turpentine workers in Mississippi, tobacco factory workers in Florida and Virginia, plantation hands in Arkansas, and railroad workers throughout the South.<sup>111</sup>

The early history of the UMW was closely tied with that of the Knights of Labor. The UMW had been formed in January 1890 at a unity convention held in Columbus, Ohio between delegates from the mining assemblies of the Knights and from the National Progressive Union and Miners and Mine Laborers. In Alabama, the statewide organization of the Knights collapsed in the early 1890s and the state's miners had not yet decided to join the UMW. But Knights of Labor locals still existed in many mining camps, many of which had Black officers. When Alabama miners finally voted to affiliate with the UMW in November, 1897, these locals became the foundation of the UMW's organizing drive in the state.

By the end of the 19th century, there were 25,000 Black coal miners working in the South and thousands more in the Midwest; more than 20,000 of them were UMW members. Whereas many Black workers were introduced into the northern fields during strikes, Spero and Harris note, Black miners were employed from the very beginning in the southern fields. Since the days of the Knights of Labor, Black miners were strong union men in Alabama, West Virginia and Virginia.<sup>112</sup>

Because both the Knights and the UMW were industrial unions, and because there was little job stratification in the coal mines, there was little basis upon which exclusion of Black men could have been justified. The early local and national leaders of the UMW also believed in racial solidarity personally. The racist diatribes which appeared in so many publications and newspapers during the 1890s were largely absent from the UMW Journal.<sup>113</sup> The need to prevent Black miners from being used as strikebreakers in Illinois, Ohio, Kansas, and Colorado mines provided additional impetus for organizing all Black coal miners into the UMW.<sup>114</sup>

In Alabama, Black miners became important leaders both in the UMW and in the State Federation of Labor. Silas Brooks, a Black miner, served as Vice President of District 20 between 1898 and 1900, and remained an important organizer after he left office. B.L. Greer, another Black miner, became District 20 Vice President in 1902 and remained in office until 1908, when the UMW was largely destroyed in the state. When the Alabama Federation held its founding convention in 1900, Silas Brooks warned any delegate who might be disposed to exclude Black workers from the Federation that Black workers would side with the employers against white workers if they were not included. Just one month before the state of Alabama was to disfranchise Black voters, the delegates to the convention of the State Federation of Labor demonstrated their views by electing Silas Brooks their First Vice President and J.H. Bean, a Black carpenter from Selma, their Second Vice President. These and other Black labor leaders were far more influential among the Black masses in the state than conservative, anti-trade union elements, led by Booker T. Washington.<sup>115</sup>

Black miners exerted a powerful influence in the Alabama coal fields. Sometimes they differed with white delegates at District Conventions, and often won in a vote. The coal operators came to the District 20 Convention in 1900 and asked permission to address the delegates before the convention opened; both the District President and UMW President John Mitchell himself supported the operators' request. Two Black delegates were among those who objected to the resolution to allow the operators to speak. The convention, which was 40% Black, defeated the resolution. At the same convention, Mitchell supported a request from the Birmingham Trades Council that the UMW pass a resolution stating the union miners would give their business only to union workmen. Silas Brooks rose to

oppose the resolution on the grounds that some of the Council's affiliates barred Black workers from membership. Mitchell protested, but the Black delegates and their white allies succeeded in getting the convention to table that resolution.<sup>116</sup>

The UMW had a number of prominent Black national and district officers and organizers, especially during the first decade of its existence. William Riley was Secretary-Treasurer in District 19 in eastern Tennessee. Three Black miners were elected District Vice Presidents: Henry Rector in District 12 in Illinois, F.A. Bannister in District 17 in West Virginia, and Thomas Rollins in District 24 in Michigan.<sup>117</sup>

But Blacks remained second-class union members. Perhaps the most telling illustration is the story of Richard L. Davis, the most prominent of all Black UMW officials. Davis had been a delegate to the UMW's founding convention in 1890, and was elected to the District 6 Executive Board every year between 1890 and 1895. In 1895, he ran for the National Executive Board at the UMW convention, but lost narrowly. The next year, he ran again, and received the highest vote total of any candidate. He won a second one-year term to the Board the following year. He served as an organizer in some of the most difficult UMW campaigns, and was probably the best-known Black organizer in the entire country. Because of this, he was never able to get a job from the mine owners again. In 1898, blacklisted, Davis lived with his family in terrible poverty and wrote a letter to the Journal which was published on May 16, 1898:

I have had the unpleasant privilege of going into the most dangerous places in this country to organize.... I have been threatened; I have been sandbagged; I have been stoned, and last of all, deprived of the right to earn a livelihood for myself and my family.

I do not care so much for myself, but it is my innocent children that I care for most.... I have spent time and money in the labor movement during the past 16 years, and today I am worse off than ever, for I have no money, nor no work. I will not beg, and I am not inclined to steal.

An old Black miner who called himself "Old Dog" from Congo, Ohio responded to Davis' letter:



He can't get work in the mines, and he says he can't get work to do as an organizer.... He has a family to keep and I think we owe him something. He nor his children cannot live on wind, and further, if he was a white man he would not be where he is -- mark that -- but being a Negro he does not get the recognition he should have.... Dick deserves better usage.... He feels sorely disappointed.... For my part, I think if we would do right he could either go in the mines to work or we should see to it that he was started up in a small business or given field work. I want President Ratchford to show all colored men that he values a man irrespective of his color and he can best do this by giving Dick a helping hand.

UMW President Michael Ratchford never responded. In 1899, while the UMW delegates were assembled in their convention, Richard L. Davis died from "lung fever," one month after his 35th birthday.<sup>118</sup>

The cooperation between Black and white miners in Alabama, furthered by the efforts of men like Richard Davis, made the UMW the only important industrial union in the Deep South before 1900. Coal strikes there dated back to 1879, and there were major confrontations between the miners and the operators in 1893, 1899, 1908, and 1920-1921, when the UMW disappeared until the new organizing drives of the 1930s.<sup>119</sup> When the miners began to reorganize in the 1930s, the mine owners attempted to revive the Ku Klux Klan to split the white and Black miners. But white miners thwarted these efforts by joining the Klan themselves, winning control over it, and destroying its effectiveness.<sup>120</sup> In his autobiographical A Southerner Discovers the South, Jonathan Daniels attributes this strategy to UMW organizer William Mitch, who "met the effort to use the old Ku Klux Klan against the union by getting union men on the inside of the sheets."<sup>121</sup>

It was not only the coal companies which feared racial unity among the miners. John L. Lewis became disturbed when Black and white miners began working together in the Save-the-Union Movement, which was founded in 1926. One of its leading organizers was Isaiah Hawkins, a Black miner from UMW Local 762 in Vestaburg, Pennsylvania. Because of his activities in the Save-the-Union Movement, Lewis expelled Hawkins from the UMW in May, 1928. Hawkins joined the National Miners Union when it was formed in September and

became head of its Negro Department. The Pittsburgh Courier, the city's Black newspaper, reported Hawkins' expulsion in their issue of May 12. The Courier quoted Lewis as saying:

We white members cannot tolerate this sort of thing. This man Hawkins is getting too strong a hold. He already has attained the leadership of a large group of whites throughout Western Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. He must be stopped before his following spreads throughout the country and creates an embarrassing situation. He must be stopped now and thereby be prevented from getting into any of our meetings. It would not matter so much if his work attracted simply Negroes, but he has a large and growing following among whites [underlining mine].

Hawkins responded by stating:

Mr. Lewis is not afraid of me. He is afraid of the million miners whom he has attempted to delude and double-cross. Right will prevail. The miners will eventually discover the perfidy of Lewis and his group of supine henchmen... Banishing me from the union will not prevent the things I have been fighting for coming up in the international to defeat him.<sup>122</sup>

But the majority of struggles against racism went unreported in any newspaper. Tilman Cadle, a white miner who was active with the National Miners Union in east Kentucky, tells an interesting story about his little mining town of Roda, Virginia:

The company had three sections in this mining community. They had one place they called 'Nigger-town.' They had another one they called 'Hunktown' and a third they called 'Newtown.' Foreign-born people lived in Hunktown -- Hungarians, Polish people, and all different nationalities. The 100% Americans, they wasn't supposed to enter Hunktown and Niggertown. They was supposed to stay in Newtown.

So my brother-in-law and me, we fell on a plan how we could get into Hunktown. We found a tailor who pressed clothes. We would always keep a suit of clothes with him. So whenever we started to go

into Hunktown and the police guarding it would ask us where we were going, we would tell them, 'We're going to get our clothes.' So we got in and, of course, after we got in, we'd go anywhere we wanted to.

One evening, one of the Black men who worked in the mine with me said: 'I've got some home brew at home. I'd like to invite you up, but you're not allowed in our community.' So I said, 'I'll come anyhow.' He said, 'They won't let you. The police won't let you in.' I said, 'Well, I'm going to come anyhow.' So that evening after supper, I started walking up there. When I got there, here was two policemen standing there guarding the entrance to Niggertown. When I walked up, one of them said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I'm going to visit a friend of mine.' They said, 'Oh no, you can't go in there!'

So I said, 'Listen, me and this man, we rubbed elbows all day today, and I'm going up there to talk with him about our work tomorrow. Do you mean to tell me I can't go and talk about our work?' He said, 'You're not allowed to go into Niggertown.' I said, 'I'm going anyhow.' The policeman said, 'Are you?' I said, 'I certainly am.' So I just started walking on by them, and I went on to my friend's home.

Cadle also fought racism even when it came from his fellow miners:

We always had a lot of trouble. For instance, when we'd be a'travelling, we'd go into restaurants and they'd say: 'We don't serve Black people here. We'll let them go off in the kitchen.' We'd say: 'No. If they can't eat with us, we won't patronize you. We'll just go somewhere else where they will. And we wouldn't patronize places where they wouldn't serve Black people.'

Sometimes we'd be a'having a Committee meeting in my home. We'd have Black people come as members of the Committee. You'd hear white people around in the community saying, 'What was you doing with them n-----s in your home?' I'd say, 'Well, they're

members of our union. They're fighting for exactly the same things we are.'123

Since the days of the National Miners Union, there has never been such a systematic and vigorous attempt to defend the rights of Black miners and eliminate racism from the union. Resolutions were often drafted by local unions and sent to International Conventions, but action on such resolutions was never taken. A dozen West Virginia local unions asked the 1948 convention to guarantee "that a proportionate number of Negroes be given employment on jobs and in positions within the United Mine Workers of America's organization." Another local sounded a stronger note when its members stated:

The question of [International] Board members of the Negro race has been put before the last three International Conventions and the same was referred to the Executive Board for consideration and no action has been taken by the Executive Board; therefore be it

Resolved, That Local Union No. 4452, Osage, W. Va., goes on record asking the Fortieth Constitutional Convention to act on this resolution and the appointments be made.124;

This resolution was sent from Local Union 1005 in Harrisville, Ohio to the 1960 Convention:

Whereas, the year 1960 marks that momentous point in history when the rising winds of civil rights revolution are sweeping the continents of American and Africa with ever-increasing force and challenge. Nothing can stop it. No one can escape it. It accents a time when millions of Black men and women, students and trade unionists, stunned by the humiliation of the colored caste system inherent in American culture, driven by the deepening hunger for status and acceptance, trapped in the spreading sunless ghettos of Jim Crowism, are breaking through to a new life of meaning;.... be it

Resolved, That the United Mine Workers of America lead the field and pave the way as they have done in the past by giving the Negro greater recognition and representation; be it further

Resolved, That the Executive Officers of the United Mine Workers of America take full cognizance of this fact in carrying out the resolutions passed by previous conventions and lead the way on all levels by giving the Negro proper consideration in staff appointments.<sup>125</sup>

The "Executive Officers" did not take this resolution seriously, and all the top district officers remained white throughout the 1960s during Tony Boyle's regime. Even today, many white miners fail to see the importance of guaranteeing their Black union brothers a fair share of all union offices and staff positions. This was reflected in the fact that not one resolution to the 1973 UMW Convention in Pittsburgh dealt with the problems of Black miners, whereas nearly 20 such resolutions had been sent to the 1948 Convention!<sup>126</sup>

### MINERS FOR DEMOCRACY

Black rank-and-file miners played a central role in the development of the rank-and-file movements which emerged in 1969 and 1970, especially in West Virginia. The first President of the Black Lung Association was Charles Brooks, a Black miner from Kanawha City, West Virginia. The Black Lung strike began in southern West Virginia, where there are more Black miners than anywhere else in the country. The fourth President of the Black Lung Association, elected in April, 1973, was Bill Worthington. The President of the most militant rank-and-file group, the Disabled Miners and Widows of southern West Virginia, is still Robert Payne, a disabled Black miner from Itmann. Payne was instrumental in keeping the rank-and-file movement alive even after the election of reform candidates to office in 1972 and 1973.

Yet Black miners have never been given the recognition they deserve from the white rank-and-file leaders. The climax of the rank-and-file movement was the Wheeling Convention, where over 500 miners nominated their reform slate for the election of 1972. Yet the atmosphere of this convention was tainted by a philosophy of "No Hunkies, No Blacks." James Millner, the retired Black miner from Princeton, West Virginia, expressed the reaction of many Black miners to this atmosphere:

I am a Black man first, before I am anything else. I want to know how any program or any slate is going to help my people. I worried about what happened at Wheeling. They nominated an all-white slate. If you start out with discriminatory practices and an all-white slate, then I'm worried about what's going to happen in the future.<sup>127</sup>

Nathaniel Lambright, a Black pensioner from Bishop in McDowell County, attended the convention as a delegate from District 29. He was also upset:

They made it so you couldn't bring up the problem of prejudice at the convention, unless you wanted to break it wide open. I was downright angry when I left the convention. Before Wheeling, I could have said that MFD was the majority of the Black vote. Now, I'm afraid to say. I was glad that more Black miners weren't on hand to witness what was happening there.<sup>128</sup>

Many white leaders and lawyers for Miners for Democracy felt that a Black man couldn't win an election and that it would jeopardize everyone's chance of winning to include a Black man on the ticket. Some Black miners were promised appointed positions after an MFD victory. Such a strategy, of course, made it easier for the white candidates: they didn't have to fight on behalf of Black candidates publicly. William Finley, who lost his first bid for a seat on the District 5 Executive Board in December, 1970, put his finger on the meaning of such promises:

MFD can never satisfy the Black man with promises that they will appoint Black people to authoritative positions. They are going to have to put out the effort to elect Black people from time to time. This appointive thing only goes to a certain point. When you are appointed to a job, you have to be a yes-man, because you are indebted to the person who appointed you. But when you are elected, you are elected by all the miners. You are responsible to them, and not to one individual. That is what Black people want.<sup>129</sup>

When William Finley prepared to run for the District 5 Executive Board again in May, 1973, there was even some opposition within MFD to his nomination. Since he had been disabled for two years, he couldn't afford to make the \$1,000 contribution to the campaign expected from all candidates for Board positions. But he was chosen and two of his strongest backers were Lesko Bugay and Dick Kuzio, both white miners, one of whom would certainly have received the nomination from Finley's sub-district had Finley not run. Bugay and Kuzio had supported Finley since 1970, and never let him down. As the campaign got under way, some MFD "strategists" and attorneys urged Finley to keep his picture off all MFD literature in order to hide the fact that he is Black. Finley refused, and his picture did go on the literature, as did the pictures of all the other major candidates.<sup>130</sup>

The results of the May, 1973 election in District 5 dealt a decisive blow to such opportunist thinking. Running in a sub-district where more than 95% of the miners are white, William Finley beat the white incumbent by a margin of nearly two-to-one! He won election to the highest office ever held by a Black man in the history of District 5, proving beyond any doubt that white miners will not vote against a man simply because he is Black.

Two other elections in 1973 proved further that white miners will elect Black leaders. The first was the June election in Barking Local No. 6566 in District 5. There was no contest between MFD and pro-Boyle forces in this local; in the district election in May, Lou Antal had received 189 of the 197 votes cast for District President. In June, a three-way race for Local President developed. Henry Garner, Chairman of the Mine Committee, declared his candidacy and was opposed by two white candidates. One of them approached Garner during the campaign and suggested he would do best to drop out of the race and support him, since "a colored man doesn't have much of a chance to win, and I can look out for you after I win." Garner declined this "generous" offer, and went on to win the election, polling far more votes than either of his two opponents. More than 90% of the miners in this local are white.<sup>131</sup>

The November, 1973 election in District 29 in southern West Virginia provided a third example. Levi Daniel, the Miller appointee who was the incumbent District President, headed the MFD slate. Unfortunately, Daniel lost. But his loss cannot be attributed simply to the fact that he is Black, for the anti-MFD slate also included a Black candidate. MFD's opposition swept the top three district offices, and Francis Martin, a Black miner from Gary, won a seat on the International Executive Board, becoming the first Black man to be elected to the Board in the 20th century.

One of the best efforts against racism during 1973 came from a young white miner who was running for Vice President in the Ellsworth Local in western Pennsylvania. Tal Dean was a 27 year-old miner who returned from Vietnam in 1969 and began working in the coal mines. When he ran for local office in the June, 1973 local elections, he published a campaign platform, something almost unheard of in the coal fields in recent times. Dean included a strong plank against racism, something else almost unheard of. This plank read:

Bethlehem Mines Corporation uses the 'point system' to discriminate in their hiring practices. Why is it that Bethlehem uses this system when other companies, like J&L, don't? I think we know why!

When a white miner's son applies for a job, the company officials say: 'Sorry, you don't have enough points. Now if you were Black, you'd have



enough points. Yet everybody knows that Bethlehem hires only one Black miner for every ten white miners -- only as many Black workers as the Federal Government requires them to!

Why? Because the company's trying to create racism! They want to divide us, white against Black. They want to prevent a strong, united Local 1190. BUT THEY'RE DEAD WRONG. Local 1190 is capable of being the strongest Local in the United Mine Workers of America. As Vice President, I will head a committee to investigate and abolish the 'point system'.<sup>132</sup>

Tal Dean didn't win in June, 1973. But he did pick up 25% of the votes in a three-way-race -- a good showing for his first campaign. But most important, he raised the issue of racism, and got Black and white miners talking about the problem. This alone was an important accomplishment. The Ellsworth local held special elections in June, 1974, because the local officers resigned before their terms expired. Tal Dean ran for Vice President a second time. He lost again, but this time by only a single vote!

Dean's efforts are especially important, for discrimination in hiring will undoubtedly continue to be the major form racism will take during the coming decade. Now that the industry is booming and thousands of young miners are being hired, it is an opportune time for the miners to insist that the companies restore a fair share of the jobs in the coal industry to Black miners. Employment hit the lowest level in the century in 1969; only 124,558 men worked in the bituminous mines, whereas 441,631 miners had been employed in 1948. Productivity had increased tremendously since the late 1940s: 419,182 men were needed to dig 631 million tons of coal in 1948 (the top year for production in U.S. history), but only 140,149 miners were needed to mine 603 million tons in 1970 (the second highest year for production)!<sup>133</sup>

There are nearly 165,000 miners working today in 1974. Arnold Miller has estimated that continually increasing coal production will require nearly 250,000 miners by 1985. This new hiring, coupled with hiring to replace the men who retire, means that well over 100,000 men will begin their careers as miners during the next ten years. Black men and women deserve at least 10,000 of those jobs.

The victory of Arnold Miller and his nine-man slate over Tony Boyle's ticket in December, 1972 was a victory for workers everywhere. Arnold Miller was elected on a reform platform. But unlike many "reform" candidates, Miller fought hard to make his platform a reality during his first year in office. During 1974, Miller has been moving even further ahead. On July 9, the UMW President publicly supported strict regulations on strip mining. On July 21, he spoke before an historic rally of 5,000 miners and their families in Harlan County, boosting the critical UMW organizing drive at the Brookside and Highsplint Mines, owned by Duke Power. It was the first time since the 1930s that any UMW President had put his full prestige and power behind an organizing drive in east Kentucky.

Despite the facts that the MFD slate was 100% white and that the MFD candidates said nothing during their 1972 campaign about the special problems Black miners face, their victory was of great importance to Black miners. (The December, 1972 victory was also a prelude to MFD victories in most of the major district elections held in 1973.) The new International and district officers have already shown themselves willing to take positions on a wide range of issues -- something which Tony Boyle and his appointed district officials never did.

Louis Antal was elected President of the important Pittsburgh district on an MFD slate in May, 1973. In October, Antal issued a press statement calling for a boycott of chrome from Rhodesia, whose government he characterized as "an illegal regime which is based on the disenfranchisement of the 95 per cent African majority and discriminatory social and economic laws paralleled to apartheid in South Africa."<sup>134</sup> The 1,000 rank-and-file delegates attending the International UMW Convention in Pittsburgh in December, 1973 showed their concern for the rights of non-white workers to organize when they gave Cesar Chavez a standing ovation, then contributed several thousand dollars to the United Farm Workers from their own pockets. Antal then rose from the floor and moved that the International donate an additional \$10,000 to the UFW; his motion passed unanimously.<sup>135</sup>

Then in July, 1974 -- when the Pittsburgh police began illegally harrassing and breaking into the homes of Black citizens in the wake of the shooting of a patrolman -- Antal joined with several other labor leaders in condemning the police actions and Mayor Peter Flaherty's full support for

those actions. Antal's statement pointed out: "The coal miners of western Pennsylvania and the United States have themselves been the targets too often of such lawless attacks by law enforcement officials."136

On several occasions, Arnold Miller has also shown his concern for fighting racism. On May 26, 1973, the new UMW President spoke to more than 1,200 delegates at the opening session of the conference held by the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in Washington, D.C. Miller noted that racism had "crippled the labor movement in the past" and attacked Nixon's "southern strategy" and racist politics. He then stressed the importance of maintaining a strong coalition between labor and the Black community:

Have we forgotten that the same labor coalition that helped pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act also passed Medicare and Aid to Secondary Education?..... When labor was united in the cause of justice for Black Americans, the society was more just. Divided today by fears and mistrust, we watch our liberties eroded and justice perverted from the highest levels of government.137

In May, 1974, after the Southern Electric Company announced plans to import 500,000 tons of coal from South Africa to fire its Alabama power plants, the UMW launched a campaign of importance to the whole American trade union movement. Pointing out that there is plenty of unmined coal in Alabama itself, Arnold Miller accused the Southern Company of "subsidizing conscript labor at the expense of American miners" and of supporting

South African policies of apartheid, under which human beings are treated as commodities and forbidden the rights we take for granted. We condemn these policies and all who support them.138

On May 22, the day of Southern's annual stockholders meeting, more than 90% of Alabama's 8,000 union miners walked off their jobs.

Dozens of miners, most of them white, picketed in front of the Birmingham hotel where the meeting was being held. They carried signs, some of which read:

[Do Not Buy South African Coal.] [United Nations Says -- Crime Against Humanity. Southern Company Says

-- Anything for a Butk!!] [Stop Slavery in Africa.  
Stop Imperialism. Stop the Southern Co.]

The UMW Journal interviewed several of these miners and ran two pages of pictures exposing the terrible living conditions suffered by the South African coal miners. Howard Telford, one of the miners interviewed in Birmingham, said:

Slavery in the South went out a long time ago. We don't believe in slavery. Slave labor in Africa is real cheap and it's my information that this coal is produced under slave labor conditions. Our people feel pretty much the same way about this importing of coal from South Africa: one ton or fifty million tons, it's got to be stopped.

Telford was right about slave labor. Whereas an Alabama miner was receiving between \$42.50 and \$50.00 each day in 1974, his South African Black counterpart was being paid less than \$3.00 a day!<sup>139</sup>

The contract demands advanced by the UMW in September, 1974 represent another big step forward in the fight against racism. Under John L. Lewis and Tony Boyle, the UMW did nothing to guarantee Black miners a fair share of jobs in the mines. Thousands of Black families were forced into unemployment and onto the welfare rolls. Thousands were forced to leave Appalachia for jobs in the cities.

Today, the UMW is insisting that all promotions in union mines be made strictly according to seniority. The coal operators want to retain their option to promote the most "senior qualified man" bidding on a job, but the union maintains that any miner can be trained to do any job in the mines. If the bosses feel a particular man is not presently qualified to perform a job he bids upon, they should be forced under the contract to train him for that job to which his seniority entitles him. Such an innovation in the contract will help prevent a repetition of the massive lay-offs suffered by Black miners between 1930 and 1960.

The UMW is also demanding an article in the 1974 contract "expressly prohibiting discrimination against workers on the basis of race, creed, sex, age, union or political activities, or physical disability."<sup>140</sup> During contract negotiations, the UMW Journal published a seven-page article exposing the continuing racist practices of the coal companies. An anti-discrimination clause is needed in the

contract "so that a miner and his local union would have the clearest possible grounds on which to protest unequal treatment." State human rights and civil rights commissions have done little or nothing to stop coal company racism, prompting Arnold Miller to comment: "Discrimination by coal companies appears to be a problem we are going to have to deal with ourselves, through the contract.... But it's still the job of the state governments and federal government to enforce the law, and we insist that they do so."14]

The UMW represents a new direction in the American labor movement. The old Meany-dominated labor movement means a path of red-baiting, race-baiting and collaboration with the bosses. The UMW, on the other hand, represents rank-and-file control and a militant defense of workers against those bosses. The UMW was the backbone of a new movement for industrial organization in the 1930s and may become so again in the 1970s. The coal miners will continue to provide political and moral leadership for the millions of Black and white workers in all industries as they continue to fight against racism and for the unity of all workers.

NOTES

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1. Interview with C.E. Beane, President of District 20, in Birmingham, Alabama on July 21, 1971.
2. Interview with John Mendez in Chapmanville, West Virginia on July 16, 1971.
3. Interview with William Finley in Westland, Pennsylvania on December 8, 1970.
4. Titler quoted by James A. Haught, "Beckley UMW Affairs 'Curiouser, Curiouser,'" Charleston Gazette, February 19, 1970; reprinted in Congressional Record, February 23, 1970, p. E1188. On Titler's description of Ray Lewis, see Rex Carella, "'Worst Mistake I Ever Made' -- John L.," Miner's Voice, Vol. 2, No. 2 (October, 1970):1.
5. Titler quoted in Haught, reprinted in Congressional Record, p. E1189.
6. Interview with Bill Worthington in Coxton, Kentucky on July 22, 1971.
7. Interview with James Millner in Princeton, West Virginia on July 14, 1971.
8. Interview with Bill Worthington in Coxton, Kentucky on July 22, 1971.
9. Interview with Shirley Coles in Princeton, West Virginia on July 12, 1971.
10. Interview with Harry Patrick in Fairview, West Virginia on August 2, 1971.
11. Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, The Black Worker (New York, 1931), p. 355.
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13. Herbert G. Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning: 1890-1900," in Julius Jacobson, ed., The Negro and the American Labor Movement (Garden City, New York, 1968), pp. 49-127.

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19. John A. Fitch, The Steel Workers (New York, 1910), passim.
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25. Taped interview with Shirley Coles in Princeton, West Virginia on September 1, 1971.
26. Taped interview with James Mosely (of Washington, Pennsylvania) in Westland, Pennsylvania on October 20, 1971.
27. Herbert R. Northrup, Organized Labor and the Negro (New York, 1944), p. 168.
28. Angelo Herndon, Let Me Live (1937; rpt. New York, 1969), p. 45 and back cover.
29. Taped interview with Coles.

30. Ralph D. Minard, "Race Relationships in the Pocahontas Coal Field," Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1952); 30.
31. Taped interview with William Finley in Westland, Pennsylvania on October 20, 1971.
32. Taped interview with Coles.
33. Interview with Ansley Carter in Bramwell, West Virginia on June 23, 1972.
34. Herbert R. Northrup, Organized Labor and the Negro, pp. 169-171.
35. National Coal Association, Bituminous Coal Data, 1971 edition (Washington D.C., 1972), p. 8.
36. Barnum, pp. 25 and 32.
37. Northrup, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers," pp. 169-171.
38. Barnum, pp. 39-40.
39. Barnum, p. 29.
40. Interviews with James Millner in Princeton, West Virginia on July 14, 1971 and with John Mendez in Chapmanville, West Virginia on July 16, 1971.
41. Barnum, pp. 43-44
42. Taped interview with Lavelle Finley in Westland, Pennsylvania on October 20, 1971.
43. Barnum, p. 46.
44. See footnote 8.
45. Barnum, pp. 20-21.
46. Barnum, pp. 39, 66-67.
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48. U.S. Bureau of the Census, County and City Data Book 1972 (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 510.

49. Interview with Millner on June 22, 1972.

50. Taped interview with William Finley, Lavelle Finley, and Bill Worthington in Westland, Pennsylvania on October 20, 1971; taped interview with Shirley Coles in Princeton, West Virginia on September 1, 1971; and interview with Andrew Dixon in Omar, West Virginia on July 15, 1971.

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