

New contract proposal by N.Y. transit authority angers workers

BY MICHAEL ITALIE

NEW YORK—A new Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) contract “offer,” unveiled after transit workers voted down a deal between the bosses and the leadership of Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100, has sparked anger among many subway and bus workers here. “It’s a slap in the face,” train operator Alexander Woolfe told the *Militant* January 28 at the Forest Hills subway station in Queens. TWU Local 100 president Roger Toussaint called it “an insult to our members.”

On January 25 the transit bosses put back on the table one of the concessions that had provoked the December 20–22 strike by the 34,000-member Local 100: a two-tier pension plan, under which new hires would have to pay a

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Miners, other workers snap up the ‘Militant’

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

“When coal miners heard about the miner dying in Utah, many expressed agreement with the sign we were holding: ‘Unionize the mines! UMWA=Safety. No miner has to die,’” said Betsey Stone. “Many cars and trucks passing by near the entrance of the McKinley mine also honked. This is a surface mine organized by the UMWA. A number of workers stressed the importance of the union in enforcing safety.”

Stone was describing the response by miners to a team of *Militant* supporters selling the paper at that mine portal near Window Rock, Arizona, January 30–31. Among the 300 work-

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Unionists support labor defense case

BY PAUL MAILHOT

SALT LAKE CITY—With two weeks until a scheduled February 17 hearing on the C.W. Mining harassment lawsuit, supporters of the Militant Fighting Fund are responding to the latest coal mine disasters by reaching out to win new support for this labor rights case. One of the central issues in the lawsuit brought by the Co-Op Mine bosses against the United Mine Workers of America, 16 individual Co-Op miners, the *Militant*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Deseret Morning News*, and others is whether miners can speak out on safety violations in the mines, and

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Boss contempt for safety kills coal miner in Utah

Worker dies after blowout of coal face underground

BY ALYSON KENNEDY

PRICE, Utah—At around 11:00 p.m. on Sunday, January 29, Shane Jacobson was killed when he was struck by chunks of coal at the Aberdeen mine near here. Jacobson, 37, was from Helper, Utah, and had worked at the mine for 10 years. His death marks the 16th fatality in underground coal mines in the United States the first month of this year.

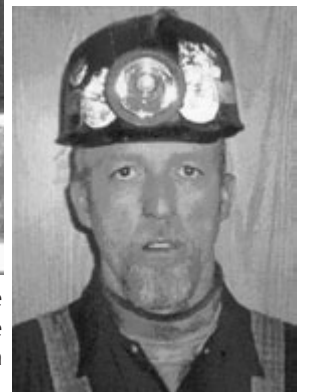
“Given the price of coal, that’s what these companies are concerned with, not safety details,” Jack Blades, a local miner for nine years at the nearby Dugout Mine, told the *Militant*, responding to Jacobson’s death and the rash of other deaths in the mines.

Jacobson was operating the cutting head of the longwall equipment when a blowout from the coal face, caused by pressure from the mountaintop, blasted out chunks of coal that fatally struck him, company officials told the press. Jacobson was part of a crew of five miners who operate the longwall—underground mining equipment that runs a cutting head back and forth across a

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Aberdeen mine (above) near Price, Utah, where miner Shane Jacobson (right) was killed January 30 after a blowout of the coal face underground. Andalex Resources owns the mine, which was cited in 2004–05 by the federal mine agency for 327 safety violations.



...As we go to press

Two more miners die in W. Virginia Governor calls for ‘Mine Safety Stand Down’

BY ARGIRIS MALAPANIS

February 1—As we go to press, West Virginia authorities and company officials announced that two more coal miners died on the job in

that state today. According to *Metro News* of West Virginia, Massey Energy confirmed this afternoon the death of one miner at its Black Castle

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Int’l Coal Group forced to allow UMWA officials into W. Virginia mine for Sago disaster investigation

BY PAUL PEDERSON AND CINDY JAQUITH

LOGAN COUNTY, West Virginia—Officials of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) have rejoined the on-site investigation team at the Sago Mine, where an explosion killed 12 miners January 2. On January 26 a judge ordered the owners, the International Coal Group (ICG), to stop blocking the union’s participation. Days earlier, company security at the mine had stopped UMWA representatives from entering the mine as part of the investigation team, which also includes federal and state officials and mine employees.

The company’s lawyer, Albert Sebok, said the union should not participate because it is trying “to infiltrate the Sago Mine” and launch a “broad-based campaign against ICG, a 100 percent union-free company.” Several Sago workers and the families of two of the miners who were killed in the explosion had appointed the UMWA as their representative in the investigation.

The Sago explosion was the deadliest mine disaster in West Virginia in nearly 40 years. It was followed by the deaths of three other underground miners in the region at other nonunion mines: one in a roof collapse a week later in Kentucky and two in a mine fire Janu-

ary 19 at the Alma No. 1 mine here in Logan County, West Virginia. This string of deaths in nonunion mines has rekindled discussion among workers on the need to build the UMWA and extend

unionization in the coalfields.

“If there had been a union in those mines these things would not have happened,” Ryan Webb, a blaster at

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U.S., Israeli rulers stay the course after electoral victory by Hamas

BY SAM MANUEL

WASHINGTON—Headlines predicting doom for the “peace process” between Israel and the Palestinians in the aftermath of the victory by Hamas in the recent Palestinian elections dominated the front pages of much of the big-business press in the United States. Others painted the electoral victory of a group the U.S. government has labeled “terrorist” as a blow to Washington’s Mideast foreign policy.

“Hamas Routs Ruling Faction, Casting Pall on Peace Process,” read the lead headline of the *New York Times* on January 27, the day after the elections. “U.S. Policy Seen as Big Loser in Palestinian Vote,” said the *Washington Post* the next day.

Statements by Israeli and U.S. officials, however, indicate that the outcome of the Palestinian elections will have no impact on the course of either Tel Aviv

or Washington regarding Israel and the broader region. Two days before the elections acting Israeli prime minister

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Colombia lawsuit aimed at decriminalizing abortion

Fight for women’s rights spreads in South America

BY LUIS MADRID

A lawsuit demanding the full decriminalization of abortion was filed December 12 before Colombia’s Constitutional Court by attorney Mónica Roa.

Days earlier the court had recused itself on a related lawsuit stating that the plaintiffs had not presented their case clearly enough. That suit asked that exceptions be made in the penal code in cases of rape, when the woman’s health is at risk, and when the fetus is deemed nonviable. It also demanded that in such cases women be given access to a legal and safe abortion.

In refiling the lawsuit on behalf of Women’s Link Worldwide, Roa explained it would be up to the court to rule on exceptions to the laws that make abortion a crime. A woman who undergoes an abortion can face up to 54 months in jail. Abortion rights activists say that most women convicted are put under temporary house arrest or receive suspended sentences.

“The problem with illegal abortions is not that women go to jail,” Roa says. “The problem is that they die.”

From the moment the initial lawsuit was filed in April 2005, it became part of a broader debate throughout Latin America and the Caribbean where abortion is illegal. Available on demand only in Cuba, abortion is also legal in French Guiana and in Guyana. Abortion is not a crime in Puerto Rico, whose colonial status means U.S. law applies. Of the remaining 29 countries, accounting for 97 percent of the region’s 543 million inhabitants, about half have highly restrictive abortion laws, allowing it for the most part only when the

woman’s health or life is at risk. As in Colombia, abortion is illegal under all circumstances in Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, and Suriname.

Four million abortions are carried out annually throughout Latin America, according to the United Nations. Most are performed under unsanitary conditions, with an estimated 5,000 women dying each year from complications during the procedure. Working-class women are most affected, because they cannot afford to travel abroad or pay to have one done in a safe environment.

In Colombia alone more than 300,000 abortions are performed yearly. According to polls, one in five women has had an abortion, and of these over 40 percent are said to have had more than one.

Since the 1980s, Washington has used its “Mexico City policy” to blackmail organizations abroad that advocate decriminalization or simply provide abortion counseling, with threats to cut any U.S. financial aid.

Reproductive rights mobilizations in the region have increased in recent years, with decriminalization as the central demand. Bills are being introduced in parliaments with the same goal. At the end of November, for instance, the Brazilian legislature initiated debate on such a bill. Its supporters stress it must be seen as part of a broader program to include family planning, sex education, and abortion procedures provided at public hospitals.

In Venezuela, recently reelected deputy Cilia Flores said a debate on decriminalizing abortion would be high on the agenda of the incoming National Assembly.

Backers of a woman’s right to choose abortion mark 33rd anniversary of ‘Roe v. Wade’



Militant/Glova Scott

WASHINGTON—Some 75 supporters of a woman’s right to choose abortion held a candlelight vigil here January 22 marking the 33rd anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court ruling that decriminalized abortion. Representatives of women’s rights organizations addressed the gathering. Opponents of the right to choose abortion attempted to disrupt the vigil, but the rally proceeded without incident. The next day, another rally took place here calling for the overturn of *Roe v. Wade*.

—JANICE LYNN

U.S. gov’t threatens hefty fines against two groups for travel to Cuba

BY ARRIN HAWKINS

NEW YORK—The Pastors for Peace and Venceremos Brigade announced January 13 that some 200 individuals who participated in recent trips to Cuba organized by the two groups are threatened with hefty fines by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Fines could surpass \$1.5 million, with individuals facing penalties of up \$7,500 each.

The groups organize solidarity trips to Cuba despite laws restricting travel by U.S. residents there, and without applying for government licenses. Their spokespeople said the groups are asking for court hearings to challenge the fines.

“Those who received OFAC letters in previous years were a scattering of individuals,” Ed Felton of the Venceremos Brigade said. This time, added Lucia Bruno of Pastors for Peace, “Everyone participating in the trips got letters from the Treasury Department.”

Pastors for Peace organizes trips to Cuba to bring items restricted by Washington’s trade and economic embargo

against the country, such as medical supplies and computer equipment. The brigade participates in agricultural and construction projects on the island.

Since 2004, OFAC increased the number of notices threatening fines for alleged violation of U.S. travel restrictions to Cuba. Recipients of the letters are informed the penalty will be imposed unless they make a request within 30 days for a “timely hearing.” Several groups and university programs that in the past had obtained U.S. Treasury Department licenses for travel to Cuba for research, humanitarian, and religious purposes have had their licenses suspended under new government regulations.

According to the *Miami Herald*, in 2004 the government collected \$1.5 million in fines from 894 people accused of traveling to Cuba without a license. The *Herald* also reported January 27 that the Treasury Department had suspended four days earlier the license of La Estrella de Cuba, one of south Florida’s largest Cuba travel agencies, and may take similar action against other such agencies.

THE MILITANT

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“We have found that the ‘Militant’ newspaper reports the facts in every case we have read about. They state the working men and women’s case fully. They are pro-union and honest. Thanks for the coverage.”

—Bob and Ann Fivecoat
East Carbon, Utah

Bob Fivecoat, a retired miner and UMWA Local 9958 member, and Ann Fivecoat at their home in East Carbon, Utah. They have been staunch backers of the Co-Op miners’ fight for UMWA representation.

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Over 1 million march in Cuba against provocative 'billboard' on U.S. Interests Section



Photos by Granma (above); AP/Javier Galeano (right); Militant/Martín Koppel(below)

HAVANA, January 31—More than 1 million people marched along the seafont boulevard here January 24, past the U.S. Interests Section, in a massive protest against the latest hostile actions by the U.S. government against Cuba (pictured above). Since January 16, the U.S. diplomatic offices have been lit up at night by a streaming electronic "billboard" that flashes provocative messages (pictured upper right behind news conference with Cuban president Fidel Castro).

Local residents expressed their outrage to the *Militant* that the U.S. government had the gall to inaugurate the five-foot-high ticker on January 16, Martin Luther King Day, with quotes from the civil rights leader. The quotes from King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, along with others from Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi, are presented as if these world figures, who are well known in Cuba, are calling on the Cuban people to resist an illegitimate and repressive government. The ticker also flashes "news headlines" under the pretext of providing Cubans with information that is allegedly censored here.

At the demonstration, Cuban president Fidel Castro promised a response to Washington's "perverse violation of [Cuba's] dignity and sovereignty." Since then, construction workers have been busy enlarging the Anti-Imperialist Tribune, an open-air stage and assembly area in front of the U.S. Interests Section that has been used since 2000 for rallies to express solidarity with anti-imperialist struggles around the world and to oppose Washington's more than 45-year-long economic war and ceaseless efforts to overthrow the Cuban Revolution. Workers have been erecting a series of tall flagpoles in front of the U.S. diplomatic building (lower right). The expanded tribune is scheduled to be inaugurated in the next few days.

—MARTÍN KOPPEL



U.S., Israeli rulers stay the course after Hamas wins vote

Continued from front page

Ehud Olmert said Tel Aviv's policy of maintaining settlements in the Palestinian territories and building a wall separating Israel from the West Bank would continue regardless of who runs the Palestinian Authority (PA). After Hamas was declared the winner, Olmert and Israeli military leaders made clear they would maintain the use of murderous force against Palestinians, including assassinating leaders of Hamas, as they have done in the past.

Meanwhile, U.S. president George Bush, Democratic and Republican politicians, and officials of the European Union (EU) said they will squeeze the PA to press Hamas to end armed attacks and recognize Israel.

Hamas won a decisive victory over Fatah, which has long been the dominant faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Hamas won 76 of the 132 seats in parliament giving it the capacity to form a new cabinet. Palestinian officials said PA president Mahmoud Abbas, a leader of Fatah, would ask Hamas to do so. In a recent press conference Bush urged Abbas to remain in office under a Hamas-led cabinet.

In an appearance on the CBS TV program "Face the Nation," the U.S. president said Hamas would have to disband its militias and renounce its platform calling for the destruction of Israel if the Palestinian Authority were to continue to receive financial aid from Washington. If Hamas refused, Bush said, "Aid packages won't go forward. That's their

decision to make... But we won't be providing help to a government that wants to destroy our ally and friend."

PA dependent on aid

The Palestinian Authority depends heavily on funds from imperialist powers in Europe and North America, which provide \$870 million of the \$900 million it receives annually.

EU officials said they will not immediately cut off funding. "We will have three or four weeks to make up our minds," said Dutch foreign minister Bernard Bot. "Once people are in power, maybe they change their position."

Addressing a weekly cabinet meeting January 28, Olmert said if a Hamas government is installed Israel would stop the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of tens of millions of dollars in taxes and other funds it collects.

During an annual Israeli policy conference January 24, Olmert said Tel Aviv might initiate further unilateral withdrawals from Palestinian territories to "ensure a Jewish majority in the country." This would be another step in Tel Aviv's course of trying to maintain Israel as a junior imperialist power by acting on the reality that the Zionist dream of "Greater Israel" has collapsed, because of the "failure of Western Jews to immigrate in large numbers," as Olmert reportedly said last year. Israeli premier Ariel Sharon, now incapacitated due to a stroke, was the architect of that course.

Israeli defense minister Shaul Mofaz said if Hamas resumed attacks on Israel

it would face an "unprecedented Israeli attack," reported the January 29 *Jerusalem Post*. Mofaz said leaders of Hamas are still subject to arrest, adding that its officials would not be guaranteed freedom of movement between the West Bank and Gaza. He noted that even under the former Palestinian administration certain Fatah officials were denied freedom of movement.

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) is a bourgeois party that has often taken responsibility for "suicide bombings." Its leaders have tried to sound a conciliatory note following the election. In an article in the January 31 *Washington Post*, Mousa Abu Marzook, deputy political bureau chief of Hamas, urged Washington and its allies in Europe to continue "their commitment to aid" the Palestinian Authority. He also praised the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and "the democracy you have built."

Fatah lost popular support as an increasing number of Palestinians saw its administration of the Palestinian Authority as ineffectual on all fronts—from foreign policy to its handling of economic and social affairs, which has been marked by corruption. Many Fatah members are turning against the group's leadership. Thousands of Fatah supporters marched in the West Bank and Gaza after the elections calling for Abbas and his cabinet to resign. They blamed Fatah's defeat on Abbas's policy of accommodation with Israel.

Abbas has promoted concessions to Washington and Tel Aviv with little in

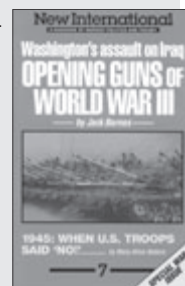
return. Official unemployment among Palestinians exceeds 28 percent. Between September 2000 and January 2005, Israeli forces had killed 3,570 Palestinians and injured another 28,500, the Palestinian Red Crescent reports. Their effort to quell the Palestinian "intifada" (uprising) was carried out with increasing impunity.

Israel's "security wall" and its more than 700 checkpoints make emergency medical services all but impossible. Palestinians who call an ambulance in heart attack cases may have to meet it at a checkpoint. Israeli soldiers decide whether they will allow the ambulance to pass, or not.

For Further Reading

"WITHIN AN IMPERIALIST FRAMEWORK, there is no solution to the Palestinian question. The fight for the national rights of the Palestinian people is the axis of the class struggle in Israel and throughout those areas that historically constituted Palestine....[E]very step forward in their struggle for national liberation is at the same time an internal social and political crisis for Tel Aviv."

—Jack Barnes
"Opening Guns of World War III"
in *New International* number 7 —\$12



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—ON THE PICKET LINE

Steelworkers in Pennsylvania strike for new union contract

MENALLEN, Pennsylvania—Thirty-seven workers here have been on strike against Shane Felter Industries since January 17. The company fabricates steel beams for bridge construction. The unionists, members of United Mine Workers of America Local 2022, point out that since their first contract in 1995 payments for health benefits have risen drastically. “We were forced out because we couldn’t take the big deductibles,” said Neil Patrick, a former union safety representative at the plant. “We only make between \$8 and \$13 dollars an hour. You can’t make those payments with health care going up.”

The unionists have been working for 13 months under an extension of the old contract. The owner has refused to negotiate a new one with the union. “We shocked him though, he didn’t think we would go on strike. Then we did,” said Patrick.

—Ryan Scott

Steelworkers in Ontario end four-month strike

HAWKESBURY, Ontario—After a

four-month strike against Ivaco Inc.’s steel mill here, 435 members of United Steelworkers (USW) locals 8794 and 7940 voted by a large majority January 10 to accept the bosses’ latest offer and return to work. The company, which locked out the workers September 15, had demanded freedom to contract out union jobs, and a two-tier pension for new hires. USW Local 8794 president Richard Leblanc reported that the workers had defeated the demand to contract out jobs but accepted a two-tier pension. Ivaco was recently bought by Heico Companies LLC, a large U.S.-based corporation.

The strikers faced scabs brought in from outside their ranks and a court injunction limiting the time they could hold up trucks coming in and out of the plant. During the course of the strike they held two marches in the town, winning support from other workers and bringing the two union locals at the steel mill together.

—John Steele

Garment workers win severance pay in San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO—After months of protests, 140 garment workers won an



Chinese Progressive Association
NOVA Knit workers rally in San Francisco for severance pay April 12, 2005.

agreement January 12 from NOVA Knits garment bosses to provide \$500,000 in severance pay. Between October 2004 and March 2005 the workers had been laid off with as little as one hour’s notice, in violation of federal law requiring employers to give 60 days’ notice of a mass dismissal or plant closure. With support from the Chinese Progressive Association, workers held street protests at the Gap, organized a rally at Union Square in front of City Hall, and other actions to fight for their rights. NOVA Knits is a manufacturer for Gap, Abercrombie and Fitch, Sears, Liz Claiborne, and other major labels. It also has factories

N.Y. transit workers resist contract concessions

Continued from front page

higher percentage of their income toward their pension. At the same time the MTA sits on a \$1 billion surplus. The new proposal also maintains a clause withholding 1.5 percent of workers’ wages for health coverage.

The MTA tops packaged their new proposal with a request to the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB)

for binding arbitration. Their petition to the board also charges that Local 100 members “engaged in an illegal strike.” The union has 10 days to respond to the company’s request. Local 100 officials have spoken against binding arbitration, pointing out that it violates the membership’s right to vote on any contract proposal. The government board can declare an impasse in negotiations and

set up a three-member panel with the power to impose a contract.

After the three-day strike, the MTA withdrew the pension proposal and shifted to a demand that workers make first-ever payments of 1.5 percent of wages toward their medical coverage, which was agreed to by a majority of the union executive board.

On January 20 transit workers voted down the agreement by a slim margin. The unionists opposed the payments for medical care, which were likely to increase in the next years of the contract because they would be linked to changes in health-care costs. Derrick Tingle at the Coney Island yard reflected the views of many who voted for the contract, saying, “It’s the best we’re going to get, better than with binding arbitration.”

The latest MTA offer also dropped portions of the rejected deal favorable to the transit workers: medical coverage for retirees too young to qualify for Medicare, and refunds due as many as 20,000 union members for overpayments to the pension plan.

Russell Jefferson, a train operator at the Forest Hills station, pointed to other concessions in the new MTA offer. “They’re taking away the Martin Luther King holiday. There’s broadbanding [speedup through job combinations]. They’re taking away 70-30,” he said, which will produce increased harassment over attendance.

The 70-30 policy, which was an improvement over the previous attendance plan, restricts company spying on workers who call in sick. As long as workers have not used more than 70 percent of their sick time, workers explain, the bosses can’t send agents to their homes to check on whether they are actually staying home sick. Train operator John Stevenson said supervisors would describe themselves as “zero tolerance. They’ll go after us per everything in the rule book, and when we stand up for ourselves they charge us with insubordination.”

The MTA issued more than 15,000 disciplinary actions against workers in

in China, Africa, and Mexico.

Michelle Xiong, who worked for NOVA Knits for a year and a half, told the *Militant* that when she started most of her 300 co-workers were from rural China, many of whom had worked at the plant at least 10 years. None will receive pensions from the company.

—Laura Anderson

Unionists at Albany TV station fight for decent contract

ALBANY, New York—Unionists here, members of the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians—Communications Workers of America (NABET-CWA) Local 21, have launched a campaign to push back contract concession demands by WRGB-TV, the local CBS affiliate. The company is seeking to cut pay up to 15 percent and turn many full-time workers into part-time. A “Turn Off CBS 6” campaign features billboards around the Albany-area calling for viewers to boycott WRGB-TV until an agreement is reached between the union and Freedom Communications of Irvine, California, the parent company of the station. The campaign also includes radio ads and lawn signs to build solidarity for Local 21.

—Ben O’Shaughnessy

Union rat under fire from bosses

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

NEW YORK—The display by unionists of large inflatable rubber rats on public streets against bosses’ antiunion operations is facing a legal challenge before the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). A ruling is expected soon, reported the December 28 *New York Times*.

The rats have had a visible presence at nonunion work sites around this city over the past nine years—from numerous building construction projects to New York University where graduate teaching assistants are on strike for union recognition. “At any given

moment, labor leaders say, as many as 35 rubber rats are at work around the region,” the *Times* noted.

Legal action against the right to hoist these rats to back union fights was undertaken by Concrete Structures Inc., a concrete pouring firm. In 2002 the company filed a complaint with the NLRB against the Laborers’ International Union for setting up rats at several of its sites on Long Island as part of job actions against poor working conditions and the use of nonunion labor.

Last March NLRB administrative law judge Steven Davis ruled in support of the employer. “The union’s use of the rat,” he wrote, “constituted confrontational conduct intended to persuade third persons not to do business with Concrete.” The judge claimed the rat is a “well-known symbol” of “an invisible picket line they should not cross.”

Describing the rat as “an imposing figure” 15 or 30 feet high, the judge added, “The body of the rat is gray with pink eyes, ears and nose. It sits on its haunches with its front paws outstretched and claws extended. Its mouth is open, baring its teeth.”

The union has appealed this ruling. Lowell Peterson, the lawyer for the Laborers in the case, said that if the government board upholds its antiworker ruling, then “it will not matter [since] the unions have a host of beasts in their menagerie,” the *Times* reported. “You don’t like the rat?” Peterson said. “Fine. We’re going to use a skunk.”



Associated Press

Bricklayers picket site along with rat in York, Pennsylvania, in October 1999.

2004 alone. They are “vindictive,” said Jefferson, and now the bosses are “trying to force arbitration, which normally sides with the MTA.”

Meanwhile, on January 10 the PERB took the first steps toward revoking Local 100’s dues checkoff by charging the union with calling an illegal strike. The union lost dues checkoff for several months after the previous strike in 1980.

Hearings have not been set yet on these charges or on possible fines against Local 100 under the Taylor law, which bans strikes by public employees. “That law only benefits companies,” Larry Padilla, a bus driver, told the *Militant* January 27 at the Mother Clara Hale bus depot. “The union was strengthened by the strike.”

Arrin Hawkins contributed to this article.

—MILITANT LABOR FORUMS—

ALABAMA

Birmingham

The Bipartisan Campaign to Win Support for Domestic Spying. Speaker: Susan LaMont, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Feb. 10, 7:30 p.m. 3029A Bessemer Rd. Tel: (205) 780-0021.

IOWA

Des Moines

Government Spying: A Threat to Working People. Speaker: Edwin Fruit, Socialist Workers Party and member, UFCW Local 1149. Fri., Feb. 10. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. 3707 Douglas Ave. Tel: (515) 255-1707.

MINNESOTA

West St. Paul

The Fight for Immigrant Rights Today. Panel discussion. Sat., Feb. 12. Dinner, 6:30 p.m.; program, 7:30 p.m. Donation: \$5 dinner, \$5 program. 113 Bernard St. E. Tel: (651) 644-6325.

NEW YORK

Manhattan

Transit Workers’ Cause Belongs to All Working People—Workers Must Repudiate MTA’s Attacks on Union. Speaker: Mike Italie, Socialist Workers Party. Fri., Feb. 10. Dinner, 7:00 p.m.; program, 8:00 p.m. Donation: \$5 for dinner, \$5 for program. 307 W. 36th St., 10th floor. Tel: (212) 629-6649.

Miners snap up ‘Militant’

Continued from front page
ers there, 41 bought the issue with the banner headline “Unionize the mines! Build the UMWA!” and another four subscribed.

There was a similar response to last week’s issue across the United States and other countries, especially among miners. For that reason, the *Militant* went to press a second time, with some 13,000 copies of that issue distributed—more than double the normal run. Partisans of the paper are getting additional bundles of the last issue to continue selling in coming weeks at the special price of 25 cents per copy.

This response by working people is building momentum in the campaign to win 1,000 readers to renew their subscriptions or purchase long-term subs.

Dennis Adkins works at the Hobet mine, a UMWA-organized surface coal mine near Danville, West Virginia. He had subscribed to the *Militant* earlier and decided to renew for one year after he met other readers of the paper outside

the mine January 28. “I’ve got a friend who worked at a Massey mine over in Mingo County,” Adkins told *Militant* reporter Paul Pederson. Massey Energy is the largest nonunion coal company in the state. “The bosses cut his wages from \$17 to \$12 and then \$10 an hour. He quit. I told him we need to call the union and organize that mine.”

Fifteen *Militant* supporters went to mine portals and elsewhere in West Virginia last weekend, selling 60 copies, six subscription renewals, and two introductory subs, reported Ryan Scott, a coal miner in southwestern Pennsylvania. “A team I was part of met with four students near West Virginia University in Morgantown,” said Jay Ressler, also a coal miner and UMWA member. “Three of them were already getting the paper and decided to re-subscribe. They said they admire the *Militant* because of its uncompromising, working-class point of view. One of them bought the book *Our History Is Still Being Written*’ (See ad below.)

At the same time, *Militant* supporters in Utah sold about 100 copies of the last issue and a dozen subscription renewals. “Many working people want to talk about why most of the mines here are nonunion and what can be done to organize them,” said Alyson Kennedy. Joel Britton reported the following: “An older woman walked right up with her dollar, while we were selling the paper outside the post office in Price, and said, ‘I am really mad about what the coal companies are doing. I’ve always been for the union, and that’s what I tell the younger ones today. And when they tell me about the high wages, I tell them that’s not enough, as they will soon see, because of the safety problems.’”

Other working people had a similar response. “The highlight of the day was when 49 workers bought the *Militant* and another subscribed for the first time at



Militant/ Paul Pederson
Militant supporters sell the paper outside Hobet Mine near Danville, West Virginia, on January 28. Coal miner Ryan Webb, center, signs up for introductory subscription.

the gate of the Excel meatpacking plant in Hazleton, Pennsylvania,” reported George Chalmers, a garment worker in Philadelphia. “I held up *El Militante* and said, in Spanish, ‘For safety on the job and for the union.’ If there was any hesitation, I would add, ‘What happens in the mines affects us all.’ Many workers agreed.” The team also visited a number of *Militant* readers, four of whom decided to renew their subscriptions.

Militant readers in Des Moines, Iowa, organized one of the most successful efforts last weekend. They visited Storm Lake, Iowa; Norfolk, Nebraska; and the southern Illinois coalfields, selling 46 copies of the paper, 10 subscription renewals, and four introductory subs. “So far seven readers of the 41 who subscribed last fall in Norfolk have renewed,” said Edwin Fruit. “Many of them are meatpackers, originally from Somalia, who fought for prayer breaks last year at a union-organized plant there owned by Tyson. One worker from Mexico said he appreciates the paper’s coverage in Spanish of union struggles and the international news. Two subscribers exchanged phone numbers so they could collaborate in reaching the *Militant* if any

new struggle breaks out in the area.”

College students are also following suit. “Two more students at the State University of New York here joined the Young Socialists last week,” said Ben O’Shaughnessy an Albany student, in a January 30 note. “All three of us hit the streets of Albany, selling six copies for the first time, and starting to learn the city better. We also got about half of the eight students who subscribed last fall to renew their subs.”

All readers can join such efforts. You can order a bundle by contacting the *Militant* (see information on page 2) or join teams organized by distributors nearest you (see directory on page 8).

‘Militant’
Sub Renewal Campaign
January 21–March 6
Week 1 of 6

Country	Quota	Sold	%
AUSTRALIA	18	7	39%
SWEDEN	12	4	33%
NEW ZEALAND			
Christchurch	6	1	17%
Auckland	15	2	13%
N.Z. total	21	3	14%
CANADA	55	6	11%
UNITED STATES			
Albany	6	3	50%
Price, UT	50	12	24%
Des Moines	60	12	20%
Pittsburgh	30	5	17%
Philadelphia	45	7	16%
San Francisco	40	6	15%
Los Angeles	60	8	13%
Washington	25	3	12%
Salt Lake City	18	2	11%
Atlanta	45	5	11%
Miami	43	4	9%
Chicago	35	3	9%
New York	150	12	8%
Seattle	33	2	6%
Newark	60	3	5%
Houston	45	2	4%
Boston	30	1	3%
Twin Cities	60	2	3%
Birmingham	35	1	3%
New Orleans		4	
U.S. total	870	97	11%
UNITED KINGDOM			
London	35	4	11%
Edinburgh	15	0	0%
UK total	50	4	8%
ICELAND	6	0	0%
Int'l totals	1032	121	12%
Goals/Should be	1000	167	17%

25, 50, AND 75 YEARS AGO



February 13, 1981
On January 31, the Polish government again backed down in the face of massive struggles by the workers and farmers. The Polish government and the independent trade union Solidarity

signed an agreement that was described by union spokesman Karol Modzelewski as “an initial stage in the fulfillment of the Gdansk agreement.”

As a result of the government’s concessions, the union agreed to call off a one-hour general strike that had been scheduled for February 3.

The government agreed to give workers three Saturdays a month off during 1981 instead of only two. It was agreed that a five-day forty-hour workweek will be established in 1982.



February 13, 1956
FEB. 8—Autherine Lucy spent this week fighting lynch mobs and racist officials of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa for her elementary right to study in a public school. While she was facing the racist mob almost alone, Adlai Stevenson, the leader of the Democratic party, was making a speech in Los Angeles, Feb. 7, expressing the view that desegregation should “proceed gradually” so as “not to upset, overnight, traditions and habits older than the republic.”

Stevenson, banner-bearer of the Democratic party and supported by the Negro leaders, made it absolutely clear that if elected president, he would

not use the power of his office to provide protection to the Negro people in the South who are in a life and death struggle with organized terrorists.



February 1, 1931
For the period of the coming three months one of our plans call for an intensive campaign for new subscribers to the *Militant*. Our goal is the definite return to the Weekly at the end of this period. With the proper response from our branches, our readers and sympathizers the goal will become a reality.

Our branches should make up competing teams and set to work with some inducement for the winning team, that is the one securing the most subs on a yearly basis. We offer for this period a special three months trial subscription of 25c [cents], also a special combination offer of either one of the three books with a yearly subscription. “Criticism of the Draft Program of the Communist International,” or “The Strategy of the World Revolution” (both by L.D. Trotsky), or “Since Lenin Died (paper cover) by Max Eastman, for the price of \$2.00, good only for this period. This campaign commences Feb. 1st, continuing up until May 1st. What is your answer?

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is still being written

THE STORY OF THREE
CHINESE-CUBAN GENERALS IN
THE CUBAN REVOLUTION
ARMANDO CHOY
GUSTAVO CHUI
MOISÉS SÍO WONG



Armando Choy, Gustavo Chui, and Moisés Sío Wong—three young rebels of Chinese-Cuban ancestry—threw themselves into the great proletarian battle that defined their generation. They became combatants in the clandestine struggle and 1956–58 revolutionary war that brought down a U.S.-backed dictatorship and opened the door to the socialist revolution in the Americas. Each became a general in Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces. Through their stories the social and political forces that gave birth to the Cuban nation and still shape our epoch unfold. \$20

Special offer: \$15 for Pathfinder Readers Club members (through March 31)

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Company greed killed coal miners in Utah

21 years since Wilberg mine disaster; how Emery Mining Corp. tried to hide facts

About 21 years ago the Wilberg mine disaster took place near Orangeville, Utah. The excerpt below is reproduced from the Jan. 11, 1985, *Militant*, providing an eyewitness account of this event. We publish them as the question of on-the-job safety has come to the fore once again, after the deaths of 18 men in coal mines in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Utah between January 2 and February 1 of this year.

The authors of the articles were both coal miners who participated in the union rescue and relief efforts. Cecelia Moriarity worked at the Wilberg mine where the fatal fire occurred. She was a member of United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) Local 2176 and of the Lady Coal Miners of Utah. Moriarity ran for governor of Utah in the 1984 elections on the Socialist Workers Party ticket. Joe Geiser, a member of UMWA Local 1769, worked at the Deer Creek mine, which was located directly above the Wilberg mine. Both mines were owned by the Utah Power & Light Co. and were managed by the Emery Mining Corp.

BY JOE GEISER AND CECELIA MORIARITY

PRICE, Utah—Nineteen members of UMWA Local 2176, and eight company executives and foremen, were killed by a fire that started Dec. 19, 1984, at the Wilberg mine outside Orangeville, Utah. The mine is located in the main coal-producing region in the southeastern part of the state.

The bodies of the 26 men and one woman remain inside the mine despite attempts to rescue them. On December 23 rescue teams were evacuated from the mine on the order of federal mine inspectors as explosive gases reached a dangerous level. On December 29 the mine portals were sealed in an effort to bring under control the fire that has raged since December 19.

World production record

The dead miners were all working in a section of the mine where a longwall, the most modern and mechanized machine for producing coal, was in use. The company was attempting to achieve a 24-hour world production record at the time of the fire.

Emery spokesman Robert Henrie refused to confirm that the company was pushing for a world record, but said that even if this were true, "It is totally unwarranted to suggest that an attempt for a record led to this tragedy."

UMWA members, widows, and other community residents here are in general agreement with UMWA International Pres. Richard Trumka, who said, "When a coal operator becomes so concerned with setting short-term coal-production records, safety is made

an afterthought and miners are needlessly killed."

Few miners or other community residents here believe the company's story that the fire was an unpredictable "accident." They blame Emery Mining Corp. for recklessly endangering lives and disregarding safety in its drive to boost coal production and profits.

The union victims of this drive were the following: Bert Bennett, age 37; Ricci Camberlango, 26; Curtis Carter, 29; Robert Christensen, 32; Gordon Conover, 24; Randy Curry, 31; Owen Curtis, 31; Roger Ellis, 28; Brian Howard, 23; Gary Jennings, 33; Lee Johansen, 35; Joel Nevitt, 33; Kelly Riddle, 28; Lynn Robinson, 28; Ray Snow, 27; John Waldoch, 22; Lester Walls, Jr., 23; Nanette Wheeler, 33, the one woman killed; and John Wilsey, 31. The men leave more than 40 children, as well as widows, surviving them.

Emery Mining has tried to cover up its responsibility for the disaster, claiming the fire probably started as a result of a mechanical failure on the conveyor-belt system that brings coal out of the mine.

However, at a press conference December 28 at UMWA Local 2176 headquarters in Orangeville, eyewitness testimony was presented by two union members who discovered the fire. Their story contradicts the company version.

What union members saw

Speaking at the press conference were UMWA members Alex Tidwell and Clinton Price. They are beltmen, whose job is to maintain the conveyor belt and keep the area clean of coal dust accumulation that could lead to a fire.

According to Tidwell and Price, the fire broke out near an electrical cable in the fresh-air tunnel leading to the longwall section, not on the conveyor belt.

In the Wilberg mine, the power system is equipped with safety circuits that should shut off power if cables are overloaded, damaged, or catch fire. But once the fire started, and the cable exploded, the power stayed on, the two unionists reported. They said the company "may have jumped the cable, a common practice."

Wilberg miners are familiar with this practice, since the company regularly overloads the electrical system to increase production. Often a miner is assigned to repeatedly turn on the machinery every time the safety circuits shut it down because of overload.

The two men said the phone nearest the fire was not working so they were unable to immediately call for help. As the fire spread to the conveyor belt motor, an automatic foam system that should have been activated to put out the fire failed to work. "It just bubbled," they said.

One of the miners finally found a working phone to call in an alarm. They also attempted to put out the fire but the flames quickly spread throughout the area, forcing them to leave.

Gov't inspectors' role

Just a week before the fire, the federal government's Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) had inspected the Wilberg mine. Faulty equipment

and other safety violations are supposed to be detected during such inspections.

Earlier last fall, MSHA inspectors had found caved-in coal and rock blocking an escape route. Instead of ordering Emery to clean up the cave-in, MSHA issued the company a variance, which is a permit to keep operating despite a safety violation. The union cannot appeal a variance.

Because the cave-in was never removed, there were only two — instead of the normal three — exits available to miners in the area. The fire broke out on one escape route and quickly burned through to a second exit, blocking both. The third escapeway was blocked by the cave-in. The miners on the longwall were thus trapped.

UMWA members had been discussing the cave-in prior to the fire. One person said the area was a potential "tomb" if anything ever happened requiring a quick escape.

Needless deaths

At a press conference December 24, the UMWA District 22 president, Michael Dalpiaz, called the deaths of the 27 trapped in the mine "needless." UMWA International Safety Director Joe Main, who also spoke, said, "these things don't just happen. Usually when fires or explosions occur, safety rules have not been complied with or they have been altered." He mentioned in particular the inadequate number of escape routes at Wilberg.

Such safety violations are only part of the assault on miners' health and safety that has been carried out by the company in recent years. The Wilberg mine has had one of the highest accident rates in the country. Safety jobs have been eliminated through layoffs, and a speedup "bonus" plan has been introduced that further endangers the workers.

Emery's lack of concern for miners' health and safety was demonstrated last fall, when it refused to sign the national coal contract ratified by UMWA members. The company insisted on ending its payments into the 1950 UMWA Health and Retirement Fund. Miners at Emery's Wilberg, Deer Creek, and Des-Bee-Dove mines went on strike for a month, finally forcing the company to accept a contract similar to the national agreement other companies had signed.

Company cover-up on safety

After the fire broke out at Wilberg December 19, the company tried to give the impression that emergency procedures at the mine were in good working order. It released statements implying that the trapped miners would be able to save themselves if they made use of safety



Sun Advocate/Larry Beckner

Fire in Wilberg mine outside Orangeville, Utah, killed 27 people in December 1984. Company tried to cover up its responsibility for the disaster.

measures provided by the company.

For example, Emery held out the hope that the miners could escape from the fire to a "logical safe retreat area" 1,500 feet from where they were working. Emery spokesman Henrie said that there were "emergency supplies, including oxygen tanks, throughout the mine and each miner can carry a self-rescue unit."

But the "logical safe retreat area" he referred to is simply a small, empty space left from digging tunnels. It was never designed for safety purposes.

The "oxygen tanks" in the mine are not for miners to use in breathing — they are used to run acetylene torches to cut metal.

The oxygen-supplying self-rescue units Henrie referred to are not generally carried by miners; they are too bulky and heavy. Instead these are stored at various points in the mine, as much as 1,000 feet away from work areas.

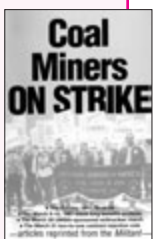
When rescue teams discovered the bodies of 25 of the victims, none were in the "logical safe retreat area." A number of union members were found dead at the coal face where they had been working, indicating they never had a chance to try to escape. Another victim was found in the kitchen near the work area. Most of the bosses were found near some diesel trucks used to transport workers.

Many Wilberg miners report they have not participated in a fire drill for years, despite the fact that these are required periodically by law to make sure all workers know how to use the escape routes. Many say they have had no special fire-fighting or evacuation training beyond how to put on a self-rescue unit. It had become common practice at Wilberg for "safety meetings" to be no more than company personnel asking miners if they knew how to evacuate the mine in case of fire. The miners would then be asked to sign a statement that they had received escape training.

For further reading

Coal Miners on Strike

by Nancy Cole and Andy Rose
Lessons from the 111-day 1977-78 coal strike led by the United Mine Workers of America, the fight for health benefits, and compensation for black lung victims. \$5



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Boss contempt for safety

Continued from front page

panel of coal. The panel is 750 feet wide and nine feet high at Aberdeen, according to the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

The Aberdeen mine is owned by Andalex Resources Inc., which also owns two other mines in the Price area—the Westridge and Genwal underground operations. All three are nonunion.

The current depth of the longwall operation at Aberdeen is 2,700 feet, making it one of the deepest underground mines in the country, with particular safety problems because of the extreme pressure bearing down on the coal seam.

This is the third death at Aberdeen in the last 10 years. “It’s a very unsafe mine,” Mike Dalpiaz, international vice president of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) who works out of the union’s District 22 office here, told the press. The union gets calls frequently from miners at Aberdeen concerned about the dangerous conditions, he added.

“If the situation is unsafe, miners have to find a way to stop until it is safe,” Dalpiaz told the *Militant* in a subsequent interview, noting this can be difficult in a nonunion situation. “Miners can’t do this individually,” he said. “They have to band together.”

Company at fault for previous deaths

A mine foreman on the longwall was killed in a similar incident at Aberdeen in 1996. Bret Robertson died from his injuries and another miner was hurt when coal burst from the longwall face hitting the miners. At that time, the depth of cover (overburden) above the longwall face was 1,600–1,700 feet. A report on the accident by the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) said that “stress from overburden weight provided the energy for the burst.” It noted that a study conducted by the firm Agapito and Associates said that “stress

levels, particularly in the coal ahead of the face, reach and exceed bounce prone levels (4,000–4,800 psi) to some degree at cover depths of 1,600 feet.”

This 1996 MSHA report put the blame for that fatality on the company. “Bounce potential was increasing as projected in the studies done by Agapito and Associates,” it said, concluding: “Recommendations from the consulting report relevant to longwall mining in the Aberdeen Coal Seam were not being followed in the area where the accident occurred.”

In 2004 another miner, Jacob Jorgensen, was killed in the outside yard of the mine. Jorgensen was operating a hauling utility vehicle at night when he ran into the canopy of a longwall shield, crushing his head. At the conclusion of its investigation, MSHA recommended that the company install more secure compartments for the type of vehicle Jorgensen was operating, but did not make it mandatory. Miners at Aberdeen report the company has not heeded that recommendation.

“The company needs to do a lot on safety,” a miner who has worked on a longwall crew at Aberdeen told the *Militant*. He asked that his name not be used, because of fear of reprisal by this nonunion company. “They are still in the stone age if you ask me. They don’t use modern technology to improve things. Only a few people are trained in first aid at the mine.”

“Having a safety committee would be a way to have input from the miners since we are the eyes and ears in the mine,” the miner continued. “Things wouldn’t be so one-sided. We have a right to do it but you have to be adamant about it.”

There are 13 active underground mines in Utah and only two are organized by the UMWA.

The Aberdeen mine has a reputation among workers in this region for being especially dangerous. MSHA cited the mine for 327 safety violations in

2 more miners die in W. Virginia

Continued from front page

surface mine in Boone County after a natural gas explosion and fire above ground. This operation is nonunion, like most other Massey facilities in the state.

Another coal miner died underground in the Long Branch Energy No. 18 Mine near Danville, West Virginia, after a wall support collapsed, reported the Associated Press. This mine is organized by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA).

“I can confirm that we have had accidents at three separate coal mines, two underground mines and one surface mine that have resulted in two fatalities,” West Virginia governor Joseph Manchin told the press in a news conference this afternoon.

According to Reuters, the third incident occurred in Kanawha County at a Kanawha Eagle Coal Company mine that resulted in injuries but no deaths.

“As the result of these three incidents, all of which occurred within just the last few hours, I am calling on the industry to cease production activities immediately and go into a Mine Safety Stand Down,” Manchin said. “This means that starting with the current shift, and each new shift after that, the mine

companies, supervisors, and the miners themselves are to engage in a thorough review of safety procedures before any work is to continue.”

“There have now been 18 coal miners killed in the United States in the first 32 days of 2006,” said UMWA president Cecil Roberts, in a press release today. “That’s outrageous, and we must take all steps necessary to look at the condition of the coal mines right now, so as to identify any potential problems and act on them before they cause an accident that could add to this tragic toll.”

Roberts said the UMWA supports Manchin’s call for a “safety stand down.” He added that the union has ordered all UMWA safety committees to undertake a meticulous inspection of their mines. “At nonunion mines, that means the Governor will have to rely on the word of the operator that the mine has carried out his directive,” Roberts said. “The UMWA will be taking that a step further at union mines with the order for a full safety inspection.”

If the bosses at unionized mines do not cooperate with the inspection, “the union will consider taking further action under the authority of the union’s collective bargaining agreements with the operators,” the UMWA press release said.

Canada potash miners survive underground fire



CP photos by Troy Fleece

TORONTO—Potash miners at the K2 mine near Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, return to the surface after being trapped underground by fire, smoke, and toxic

gases for more than 30 hours. After the fire broke out, 72 miners, members of the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, barricaded themselves in six underground rescue rooms January 29 that had a 36-hour supply of oxygen along with food and water.

The K2 mine (inset) is the biggest potash mine in the world, with more than 3,000 miles of tunnels running through an area stretching 12 by 18 miles. Potash is used mostly in the production of agricultural fertilizers. Taking advantage of high world prices, U.S.-based Mosaic Co. increased production in its four Saskatchewan potash mines by 21 percent in 2004.

—MICHEL DUGRÉ



2004–05, second in the state. MSHA classified 184 of these infractions as “significant and substantial,” the highest recorded for such violations in Utah. Some of those violations consisted of accumulations of combustible materials, improper ventilation and roof controls, and lack of underground examinations. In comparison, the Sago Mine in West Virginia, where 11 miners and a foreman were killed in early January, received a total of 276 violations, with 120 noted as “significant and substantial,” during the same period of time.

In response to Jacobson’s death, Dalpiaz told the *Deseret Morning News* that 98 percent of all mining accidents can be prevented. He later told the *Tribune* that the Aberdeen mine is very deep, and the mountain above is too big for its support mechanism. He later told the *Militant*, “This happened because of the pressures from 2,700 feet of overburden.”

Not a ‘freak accident’

An article in the January 31 *Deseret Morning News*, one of Utah’s main dailies, said Jacobson was killed because of a “freak accident,” which echoes statements by company officials. Many miners and UMWA representatives, however, say that is a cover-up, an attempt to avoid responsibility for the loss of a miner’s life.

“Every company tries to blow off mine fatalities as a freak of nature,” Bob Butero, director of organizing for Region 4 of the UMWA, told the *Militant*. “That’s not acceptable. We can’t just say every four or five years a miner is going to get killed. There are very specific laws that require companies to develop plans when they have particular dangers mining coal. Not heeding those laws leads to unnecessary injuries and deaths.”

There are indications the company was not taking proper precautions before Jacobson’s death. Several Aberdeen miners, who asked that their names not be disclosed for fear of dismissal by the

bosses, told the *Militant* that on January 7 two workers were hurt when hit by a blowout at the longwall face. Then on January 14 a roof fall shut down production for a few days when the roof top collapsed over a conveyor belt, the workers said, adding that the roof fall was 200 feet long.

“At a union mine the miners have input into the roof control and mining plans,” Tain Curtis, UMWA Local 1769 safety committee chairman at the Deer Creek Mine near Huntington, Utah, told the *Militant*. “The resources of miners are a great asset not just for the work but also in the plan and in the implementation of the plan. The union helps look after the miners. Without the union all you have is the company and MSHA.”

At a company safety meeting held with workers in the Aberdeen mine one week after the Sago Mine disaster, it became clear that the government agency is not interested in rigorously enforcing safety standards routinely broken by the bosses. Instead, miners reported that MSHA inspector Pat Boyack claimed that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest safety danger underground.

The way the government and company owners are running MSHA is a serious problem for workers’ safety, Dalpiaz told the *Militant*. “The coal operators never side with the union to get better safety conditions,” he said.

The recent fatalities in the mines highlight why miners need the union today, Butero said. “If miners see safety problems, even in a nonunion mine they are supposed to be able to report the issue without fear of retribution,” the UMWA officer noted. “Companies may not victimize the miner for doing so directly, but they’ll look for any other pretext to fire a miner who complains. With the union the workers have more protection to speak out and fight for safe working conditions.”

Paul Mailhot contributed to this article.

Seasoned workers led February 1917 Russian Revolution

The following is an excerpt from Leon Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution, one of Pathfinder's Books of the Month for February. It analyzes the February 1917 Russian Revolution. On International Women's Day, Feb. 23, 1917 (old Russian calendar), women textile workers in several factories in Petrograd went on strike demanding "Bread!" In the four days that followed tens of thousands of working people, driven by their growing opposition

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

to the imperialist slaughter of World War I, widespread hunger, landlessness, and lack of basic democratic rights, joined in general strikes and mass protests that culminated in the overthrow of the Romanov monarchy.

The central leadership of the Bolshevik Party, including V.I. Lenin, was then in exile and could not direct the workers toward taking state power during the February insurrection. Unable to explain the revolutionary actions of the proletarian masses that overthrew the monarchy, bourgeois politicians and pundits argued that the insurrection was a "spontaneous" act lacking an origin and conscious leadership. In the excerpt below taken from Chapter 8, "Who Led the Febru-



Bolshevik Party demonstration during Russian Revolution in 1917

ary Insurrection?" Trotsky, a central leader of the Russian Revolution, dissects this myth. Copyright © 1932 by University of Michigan.

BY LEON TROTSKY

Who led the revolution? Who raised the workers to their feet? Who brought the soldiers into the streets? After the victory these questions became a subject of party conflict. They were solved most simply by the universal formula: Nobody led the revolution, it happened of itself. The theory of "spontaneousness" fell in most opportunely with the minds not only of all those gentlemen who had yesterday been peacefully governing, judging, convicting, defending, trading, or commanding, and today were hastening to make up to the revolution, but also of many professional politicians and former revolutionists, who having slept through the revolution wished to think that in this they were not different from all the rest...

In order to get a clear conception of the situation in the sphere of revolu-

tionary leadership it is necessary to remember that the most authoritative revolutionists, the leaders of the left parties, were abroad and, some of them, in prison and exile

But if the Bolshevik Party could not guarantee the insurrection an authoritative leadership, there is no use talking of other organizations...

The mystic doctrine of spontaneousness explains nothing. In order correctly to appraise the situation and determine the moment for a blow at the enemy, it was necessary that the masses or their guiding layers should make their examination of historical events and have their criteria for estimating them. In other words, it was necessary that there should be not masses in the abstract, but masses of Petrograd workers and Russian workers in general, who had passed through the revolution of 1905, through the Moscow insurrection of December 1905, shattered against the Semenovskiy Regiment of the Guard. It was necessary that throughout this mass should be scattered workers who had thought over the experience of 1905, criticized

the constitutional illusions of the liberals and Mensheviks, assimilated the perspectives of the revolution, mediated hundreds of times about the question of the army, watched attentively what was going on in its midst—workers capable of making revolutionary inferences from what they observed and communicating them to others...

To the smug politicians of liberalism and tamed socialism everything that happens among masses is customarily represented as an instinctive process, no matter whether they are dealing with an anthill or a beehive. In reality the thought which was drilling through the thick of the working class was far bolder, more penetrating, more conscious, than those little ideas by which the educated classes live. Moreover, this thought was more scientific: not only because it was to a considerable degree fertilized with the methods of Marxism, but still more because it was ever nourishing itself on the living experience of the masses which were soon to take their place on the revolutionary arena. Thoughts are scientific if they correspond to an objective process and make it possible to influence that process and guide it...

In the working masses there was taking place an independent and deep process of growth, not only of hatred for the rulers, but of critical understanding of their impotence, and accumulation of experience and creative consciousness which the revolutionary insurrection and its victory only completed.

To the question, Who led the February revolution? we can then answer definitely enough: Conscious and tempered workers educated for the most part by the party of Lenin. But we must here immediately add: This leadership proved sufficient to guarantee the victory of the insurrection, but it was not adequate to transfer immediately into the hands of the proletarian vanguard the leadership of the revolution.

February

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

PATHFINDER READERS CLUB SPECIALS

25% DISCOUNT

History of the Russian Revolution

by Leon Trotsky

Describes how working people of town and country toppled the tsarist regime in 1917, and how, under the leadership of Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, they established a government of the toilers and overturned capitalism. \$36

Special price: \$27

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No ‘freak accidents’

There is only one effective tool coal miners can use to ensure mine safety: a local of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) in every single mine. That’s why the Militant is calling upon workers, farmers, and others to support union-organizing efforts by coal miners across the United States.

That statement opening our lead editorial a week ago has become more urgent as another three miners perished on the job over the last seven days. With the toll climbing to 18 men in just over a month this year, working people face a crisis that calls for immediate demands on the government and the bosses.

Miners facing one disaster after another are taking initiatives that deserve emulation and the support of the entire labor movement. At Sago, a nonunion mine where 12 people died underground in early January after being trapped for two days following an explosion, several workers designated the UMWA as their representative. Their action found widespread support, forcing the International Coal Group—which has boasted of running “union free” operations and being a model “low-cost producer”—to allow UMWA safety inspectors to enter the mine as part of the investigation into that disaster.

Facing outrage by working people at the bosses’ contempt for the miners’ safety, Joseph Manchin, the governor of West Virginia, announced that not only company personnel but miners must be involved in carrying out a thorough review of safety procedures in mining operations in that state and ensuring their enforcement during his “safety stand down.” Capitalist politicians like Manchin always wag their finger for a week or two after disasters and pledge new federal

or state measures. Working people, however, can take advantage of any openings such calls may provide.

The current crisis is not focused only in West Virginia but extends across the United States and beyond. It’s time to demand from Washington that all coal mines be shut down for a thorough review of safety procedures.

We call on working people to support the UMWA’s demand that the bosses cooperate with union safety committees in all such inspections in unionized mines in West Virginia, and to back demands by any miners to extend such union-organized safety inspections in all operations—union and nonunion. Miners should receive full pay while off the job during such inspections.

At the same time, working people know they cannot rely on the Mine Safety and Health Administration or other agencies of local, state, or federal governments, all of which speak and act on behalf of the employing class. They know that miners like Shane Jacobson, who just died in Utah, are not killed by “freak accidents” but perish as a result of the unrelenting drive by the bosses to increase productivity in order to maximize profits.

As UMWA Region 4 director Bob Butero said, “If miners see safety problems, even in a nonunion mine, they are supposed to be able to report the issue without fear of retribution. Companies may not victimize the miner for doing so directly, but they’ll look for any other pretext to fire a miner who complains. With the union the workers have more protection to speak out and fight for safe working conditions.”

That applies not only to coal but any other mines, as well as every other industry. Support all efforts by miners to organize!

Court dismisses Massey defamation suit

BY JAY RESSLER

PITTSBURGH—A Virginia judge on January 23 dismissed a defamation lawsuit against the United Mine Workers of America and *The Charleston Gazette*, which was filed by Massey Energy Co. and its chief executive officer, Donald Blankenship. Massey had sought more than \$300 million in damages. Blankenship personally sued the *Gazette*.

Fairfax County Circuit Judge David Stitt ruled that Massey and Blankenship had failed to demonstrate a conspiracy by the defendants to defame Massey and Blankenship. Massey contended the defendants spread false information about coal mines it had purchased after the bankruptcy of Horizon Natural Resources in

2004. Massey argued that the union falsely stated that the company shut down the mines and laid off 250 workers. Massey claimed that the mines were already shut down when the company bought them. Stitt ruled that the comments about Massey were not defamatory.

However, the judge let stand one claim against West Virginia Consumers for Justice, a political advocacy group, which Massey also sued for running TV ads condemning Blankenship’s role in a 2005 state Supreme Court race. Blankenship had contributed \$2.5 million for a series of ads attacking then-Justice Warren McGraw, who lost the election.

Massey and Blankenship have 21 days to file an amended lawsuit, if they decide to do so.

Unionists back labor defense case

Continued from front page

whether newspapers can report on what workers say.

After sending two \$500 contributions, Maritime Union of New Zealand Local 13 sent a formal letter of endorsement this week. “Local 13 is totally supportive of the stance taken by the *Militant* in exposing the C.W. Mining Company and its anti-union policies,” the message from Russell Mayn, secretary/treasurer, read. “Unions must support each other and publications like the *Militant* in their fight for fair and dignified work agreements.”

Another letter was received from Local 27 of the

United Food and Commercial Workers union in Baltimore. Buddy Mays, president of the local, wrote to “commend your efforts against the attack on labor rights at the C.W. Mining Company.” He also asked to have the local included on the Militant Fighting Fund endorser list.

Six individuals sent in contributions to the Militant Fighting Fund this week, totaling \$500.

To endorse the Militant Fighting Fund or make a much needed financial contribution, send to: P.O. Box 520994, Salt Lake City, Utah 84152, or fax (801) 924-5910.

LETTERS

Sundown Towns

Your review of the book *Sundown Towns* in the February 6 issue brought back some memories of living near Grants Pass, Oregon, in the early 1970s. The Black population of Josephine County at that time was less than 10. I learned that Grants Pass had officially been a Sundown Town until the 1920s. The local paper, the *Grants Pass Daily Courier*, even in the ’70s, had a setting sun as its logo. (Don’t let the sun set on you here). It was also not until the 1920s, when the Ku Klux Klan lost control of the state legislature, that

Blacks were allowed to own majority control of property and businesses. I’m happy to see this history, on a national scale, accessible in book form.

Vern Cope

West Mifflin, Pennsylvania

‘Militant’ gets around

We have sent out your article “*La Gaceta* takes up fight against racism in Cuba” to the “Solidarity with Cuba” e-mail list sponsored by the Mexican Movement in Solidarity with Cuba. Obviously credit was

given to the *Militant*. Some 6,000 people receive this mailing, most of them in Mexico, plus several hundred others in Latin America. Thank you.
Pedro Gellert
Mexico

The letters column is an open forum for all viewpoints on subjects of interest to working people. Please keep your letters brief. Where necessary they will be abridged. Please indicate if you prefer that your initials be used rather than your full name.

West Virginia miners

Continued from front page

a union surface mine in Wyoming County, West Virginia, told the *Militant*. “Those Massey mines are unsafe.” Many other miners interviewed in the region shared this sentiment. Massey Energy Company, which operates the Alma No. 1 mine, is the largest coal company in West Virginia. Most of its mine operations are nonunion.

Webb’s cousin, Danny Adkins, was one of the 13 miners killed in Massey-owned operations over the past five years. He died Jan. 2, 2002, in a roof fall at the Justice No. 1 Mine in Boone County. “The part of the mine he was working in had been cited for violations, but they sent him back in anyway,” Webb said.

William Chapman, who was an underground miner for 20 years, was on the scene at the Alma No. 1 mine along with four UMWA rescue teams from union mines in the region. Chapman noted that a lot of nonunion mines don’t have their own rescue teams, including Alma No. 1. “There’s been a decline in interest in the nonunion mines in keeping a rescue team on hand,” Chapman said.

Massey reportedly waited over two hours after the fire broke out to report it, delaying the arrival of the rescue teams.

“In my opinion, there should never be a belt line catching fire, not a major fire anyway,” Chapman said, referring to the cause of the fire at Alma No. 1. “There shouldn’t be intake air coming in on the belt line. That is not safe.” At that mine, the tunnel that the conveyor runs into also serves as an intake for fresh air. This causes smoke and fumes from any fire on the belt to be carried deeper into the mine or into possible escape routes.

The union has opposed this practice, which was illegal until the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) rewrote federal rules in 2004 to allow widespread use of such ventilation plans. In the wake of the disaster, state government officials are now considering outlawing it.

“If there is a safety problem, you’re protected by the union if you speak up,” Justin Spradlin, 24, a member of UMWA Local 1113 at the Rockspring mine in East Lynn, West Virginia, told the *Militant*. “In nonunion mines you can be fired.”

“The bosses’ concern is the lump of coal,” added Kennedy Marcum, who has worked at Rockspring for 20 years. “Greed is all it is. Greed has killed a lot of people.”

A majority of the more than 250 workers at Rockspring voted in November 2003 to unionize. The regional labor board certified the election, but the company has appealed and the miners have been waiting now more than two years for a decision from the national board. “They know we won the election, so they are just stalling,” Spradlin said.

Dennis Adkins has worked at the Hobet Mine, a surface mine near Danville, West Virginia, for 21 years. He is the former chairman of the union committee in the mine. “It’s our safety and we have to have control over it. If we see something wrong we react,” Adkins said. “If the company doesn’t fix it we’ll point it out to the inspectors. You can’t let a bunch of bosses tell you what’s safe because they only think about production.”

The demand for coal has continued to keep prices very high, and coal operators are pushing to produce as much as possible.

“I think we’re going to have a big resurgence of union people over the next year or two,” Adkins said. According to 2004 figures provided by the federal Energy Information Administration, 41 percent of underground miners and 18 percent of surface miners are unionized in West Virginia, compared to the national figures of 34 percent and 22 percent, respectively.

For further reading

The Changing Face of U.S. Politics
Working-Class Politics and the Trade Unions



by Jack Barnes

“The workers must have veto power on questions of safety. They should insist that production be shut down at once on demand of the workers and at no loss in pay whenever safety of personnel is at stake. All safety controls and the speed of the production line must be set by the workers themselves.” Also available in French, Greek, and Spanish. — \$23

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