

Chronology of Co-Op Labor Struggle and Fight to Defeat Mine Owners' Retaliatory Lawsuit

(Prepared by Paul Mailhot August 18, 2006)

2003

- August** Coal miners at Co-Op Mine, near Huntington, Utah, begin discussions about how to fight for dignity and better conditions at the mine. Meetings are organized at the town hall and at the city park where miners discuss how to fight for a union.
- Early Sept.** Fifty Co-Op miners attend a meeting at the United Mine Workers of America District 22 union hall in Price, Utah. UMWA organizer Jim Stevenson pledges the union's support for the miners' fight at Co-Op.
- Sept. 22** C.W. Mining, owner of the Co-Op mine, fires Bill Estrada, a leader of the union organizing effort. Seventy-five miners are locked out after they stop work and confront management to demand Estrada's job back.
- Sept. 23** First day of the Co-Op miners' strike.
- Sept. 26** Some 40 striking Co-Op miners and family members participate in the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride activities in Salt Lake City. This is the first contact between Co-Op miners and other unionists in the Utah labor movement.
- Sept. 30** Coal miner Jesús Salazar speaks on behalf of striking Co-Op miners to the UMWA special convention in Las Vegas and receives a standing ovation. Several thousand dollars are raised and numerous pledges of solidarity are made to support the Co-Op struggle.
- Oct. 1** Picket line is established in front of the Co-Op mine near Huntington.

December Second edition of *Teamster Rebellion* by Farrell Dobbs is issued by Pathfinder Press (in English and Spanish) with new introduction by Socialist Workers Party national secretary Jack Barnes. The introduction draws out the significance for fighters today of the Co-Op organizing drive and historic 1934 battles by Minneapolis Teamsters that helped transform the labor movement across the Midwest and spur the rise of the industrial union movement.

2004

- Jan. 12-18** San Francisco Bay Area tour by striking Co-Op miners Ricardo Chávez, Alyson Kennedy, Benito Meza, and Juan Salazar. Miners address International Longshore and Warehouseman's Union Local 10 and other locals, raise \$10,000.
- Feb. 17** Longshore local members from San Francisco, miners from UMWA locals in the West, and other trade unionists join march and rally in front of the Co-Op mine.
- Feb. 29** Co-Op striker Bill Estrada explains struggle by Utah miners to meeting of some 360 socialists, workers, and youth in New York City, sponsored by Socialist Workers Party and Young Socialists. In remarks to the meeting, SWP national secretary Jack Barnes describes the Co-Op fight as "the most important strike going on today."
- Apr. 13** Miners and their supporters successfully organize to prevent state officials from removing their picket trailer from near the mine entrance.
- May** Sixty-six signatures collected from among 75 Co-Op miners in support of a union recognition election.
- June 8-10** Strike leaders Juan Salazar and Alyson Kennedy tour the Pacific Northwest at the invitation of local union bodies to win support for the Co-Op struggle.

- June 10-12** Socialist Workers Party convention in Oberlin, Ohio, attended by 400 trade unionists, youth, and supporters of the socialist movement from the U.S. and several other countries. Róger Calero presents report “The Organization of Western Coal Begins” on Co-Op miners’ battle and its interrelationship with opportunities to spread union organization through the coal fields of the western United States.
- June 27** Some 300 people – UMWA and other union members, and supporters of the labor movement – attend commemoration of 1914 Ludlow massacre in Ludlow, Colorado. Nine Co-Op miners participate and strike leader Celso Panduro is a featured speaker.
- June 28** National Labor Relations Board announces settlement reinstating the miners to their jobs at Co-Op. Back pay and a union election are to be settled after miners return to work.
- July 6** Striking Co-Op miners, along with more than 100 supporters, march to the mine to reclaim their jobs. The rally receives widespread media coverage. Thirty-five miners return to work July 12.
- July 15** Utah AFL-CIO holds Rocky Mountain Labor Organizing School at College of Eastern Utah in Price. Co-Op miners are featured speakers at banquet for 200 union organizers participating in the gathering.
- July 20-21** NLRB holds hearing in Price, Utah, to determine which employees will be eligible to vote in a union representation election at the Co-Op mine. Denver attorney Richard Rosenblatt, provided by the UMWA to represent the Co-Op miners, challenges company claim that relatives of coal mine owners and management personnel should be eligible to vote.

- August** Contest for union representation unfolds in the mine. Company-allied “union” seeks to organize meetings with Co-Op miners who have returned to work. Former strikers campaign to convince workers who crossed the picket line during strike to vote for UMWA in upcoming elections.
- Sept. 24** C.W. Mining and International Association of United Workers Union file federal lawsuit charging defamation, violation of federal labor law, conspiracy, and other offenses. (One year and a day after the strike began at the Co-Op mine.) Among the 100-plus named defendants are the Socialist Workers Party and the *Militant*, the UMWA, 16 leaders of the strike, and the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Deseret Morning News*.
- Sept. 27** Co-Op miner and union supporter Celso Panduro is fired by C.W. Mining.
- Oct. 31** Co-Op miner and union supporter Bill Estrada addresses meeting of 350 in New York City sponsored by the Socialist Workers Party and the Young Socialists. The Co-Op fight, says Jack Barnes, SWP national secretary, underlines the pressing need for working people across the United States to organize unions and mobilize union power.
- November** Two dozen Co-Op miners petition the National Labor Relations Board over company harassment of union supporters.
- Nov. 18** NLRB rules that family members of the mine owners and bosses are ineligible to vote in union representation election.
- Nov. 22** Some 30 Latino miners receive letters from the company stating that their Social Security numbers are not valid and the miners must provide new work documents by December 9.

- Dec. 2** Co-Op miner **and union supporter** Alyson Kennedy is fired.
- Dec. 7** Co-Op miner **and union supporter** Ricardo Chávez is fired.
- Dec. 9** Company files amended federal lawsuit within days of the December 17 union representation election.
- Dec. 9** Overwhelming majority of Latino miners at Co-Op are fired by C.W. Mining, which claims the workers do not have proper Social Security numbers. Family members of mine bosses now make up most of workforce.
- Dec. 17** Union representation election held at the Co-Op mine. NLRB impounds the ballots because of company challenge to miners' votes and company appeal of NLRB ruling that family members and bosses are ineligible to vote. No decision issued on vote.

2005

- February** Issue no. 12 of *New International*, a magazine of Marxist politics, is released, with lead article "Their Transformation and Ours" pointing to lessons of Co-Op struggle for the working class and labor movement.
- May 2** Spurred by the Co-Op miners' struggle and growing political weight of immigrants in the U.S. working class, the *Militant* announces it will begin publication as bilingual newspaper in June. "The new bilingual *Militant* will make it possible to reach out more broadly to working people, both English- and Spanish-speaking," wrote editor Argiris Malapanis, including with "the *Militant's* regular on-the-scene reports on the union-organizing battle by coal miners in Utah." The June 27 *Militant* was the first bilingual issue.

- June 9-11** Socialist Workers Party convention, attended by 400 unionists and others. Presentation on “Battle over Western Coal and Its Producers Continues to Widen” is presented by Bill Estrada, a miner and leader of the Co-Op fight.
- June 14** Attorneys for the *Salt Lake Tribune*, *Deseret Morning News*, and *Militant* argue their motions to dismiss the lawsuit before Federal Judge Dee Benson. Benson instructs C.W. Mining and IAUWU attorneys to rewrite their “amorphous lawsuit” within thirty days so defendants know who is being sued and for what.
- July 13** Second amended complaint filed by C.W. Mining and IAUWU. Socialist Workers Party dropped for moment as a defendant. New complaint repackages defamation charges against the *Militant*. Many alleged defamations previously attributed to the *Militant* are now refiled as charges against individual miners who are defendants.
- The *Militant*, the UMWA, the 16 miners and other defendants are also charged with invasion of privacy, civil conspiracy, negligence, and interference with economic activity.
- Additional charges are introduced against the 16 miners and UMWA, including being part of a fraudulent enterprise that conspired to violate U.S. immigration laws.
- The defamation charges against the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret Morning News* are greatly reduced.
- Aug. 15-16** Attorneys for the *Militant*, *Salt Lake Tribune*, and *Deseret Morning News* respond to plaintiffs’ second amended complaint, filing renewed motions to dismiss the lawsuit.
- Aug. 21** Miners hold picnic in Huntington park on the second anniversary of the strike, attended by 75 people.
- Dec. 17** Miners hold picket line outside Co-Op mine on first anniversary of union representation election.

2006

- Jan. 4** Twelve coal miners die in explosion at the Sago Mine in West Virginia. The year 2006 is to become deadliest in underground mining since 1995.
- Feb. 1** Mine fire at Co-Op forces evacuation of miners. Company must seal 4 million square foot section of the mine.
- Feb. 17** All remaining defendants in the lawsuit argue their motions to dismiss the case at a hearing before Judge Dee Benson in Salt Lake City.
- March** NLRB postpones public hearing on board's preliminary finding that bulk of miners were illegally terminated. Rescheduled for May 16 in Price.
- March** Massive working-class actions led by immigrant workers, demanding legalization, begin in Chicago and spread in April to cities across the country.
- May 1** Millions of immigrant workers down their tools and march in the streets of cities and towns across the United States demanding legalization. Action is first nationwide political strike in U.S. history.
- May 1** Benson issues ruling dismissing lawsuit against the 16 Co-Op coal miners and against the *Salt Lake Tribune* and the *Deseret Morning News*. Judge rules dailies are entitled to attorneys fees.
Judge allows plaintiffs' case against the UMWA and the *Militant* to go forward.
- May** Negotiations take place on settlement of remaining NLRB claims and federal lawsuit allegations between plaintiffs' counsel and attorneys for *Militant*, 16 miners, the UMWA. Agreement in principle reached on settlement of lawsuit and dropping of complaint against all remaining defendants.

- May 27** Meeting held in St. Paul, Minnesota, hosted by United Food and Commercial Workers local 789, to celebrate victory in battle to stop the company's assault at Co-Op. Bernie Hesse, legislative director of the local, tells meeting that the Co-Op struggle, like organizing drive by packinghouse workers at Dakota Premium Foods in St. Paul several years earlier, was defined by the fact that "the workers took ownership of their struggle" from the outset.
- June 15-17** Socialist Workers Party convention in Oberlin, Ohio. Alyson Kennedy presents report "Defeating the Bosses' Counterassault at C.W. Mining" to 450 delegates and guests.
- June 20** Final signed settlement agreement entered between the C.W. Mining/IAUWU and the UMWA, the *Militant*, and defendant Co-Op miners to end lawsuit and outstanding NLRB charges.
- July 6** Federal Judge Dee Benson issues order of dismissal with prejudice of all remaining parties in the C.W. Mining lawsuit. (See "Defeat of Utah coal boss suit a gain for labor" by Argiris Malapanis in August 7, 2006, issue of the *Militant*, included at beginning of this collection.)