Fighting Harlan miners win strike

"Bloody Harlan," a county in the coalfields of eastern Kentucky, gained its name in the early 1930s when these mines were first unionized.

Forty years later, after another bloody struggle, (this time against the country's sixth largest power company), the United Mine Workers of America were recognized as sole bargaining agent at the Brookside Mine of Eastover Mining Co., a subsidiary to Duke Power of North Carolina.

The 13-month strike had all the ingredients of "bygone days;": a stubborn company that went to any means to stop the miners and the UMWA--state troopers, private guards, and local gun фирм into miners' homes, threats and promises of miners' homes, injunctions against picketing, and a miner shot down near a picket line.

UNITED TO WIN

But it also had the miners, their families, and working people in Harlan and across the country united together to win this battle. The miners maintained a militant picket line against scabs and resisted the gun thugs.

And when the picketing was limited by injunctions, the Brookside women kept the mine shut down by forming "a barrier that scabs couldn't break."

The UMWA gave support to the strike. A five-day walkout was staged from August 19-23 (to protest safety and health conditions in the mines). During the shutdown in Harlan, 3,500 miners and their families gathered in support of the Brookside strikers.

On August 29, Duke Power signed the agreement giving a victory to the miners including the regular UMWA contract and the rehiring of 39 Brookside strikers it had earlier fired.

IMPORTANT VICTORY

This victory was important for many reasons. The reform leadership of the UMWA, pushed by a rank and file still in an insurgent spirit, came through in one of its most important promises--to organize the unorganized.

A union spokesman said, "We're getting away from unemployment! miners all over Eastern Kentucky."

This victory as much or greater than the "energizing" of Tony Boyle signifies the start of something new in the coalfields.

The big test for the miners and their reform leadership is the successful completion of contract negotiations started September 3 when contract with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association expires Nov. 12.

SUPPORT MINERS' STRUGGLE

These negotiations provide the battle ground for other reform promises, especially health and safety. There is the increasing possibility of a walkout this fall, because the coal operators feel that they could whip up public hysteria if the miners would back out of the "energy crisis."

It is important for all working people to support the miners' struggle since a defeat handed to the coal operators would mean a defeat for the monopoly capitalists who are increasingly trying to shift the burden of their crisis on our backs.

Boston busing used to divide working class

The Boston School busing plan--as a strategy which flows from the class and national oppression which is part and parcel of the system of monopoly capitalism--is being used by the ruling class to divide the working class and set one nationality against another. That sums it up.

When the Boston schools opened on Sept. 12, thousands of white parents began a battle in some areas, especially in the South Boston neighborhood, in reaction to a court-ordered busing plan that called for busing 15,000 children supposedly to achieve "racial balance" and desegregation.

In a rally before the busing began Sept. 9 and in subsequent rallies and public statements leading politicians made the purpose of the ruling class clear. Several members of the Boston School Committee (the school board) including chairman John Kerrigan and South Boston lawyer Louise Day Hicks, point to blacks as attacking white working people's education. Massachusetts Senator Talmage "supports busing" and points to "backward, racist whites" as the problem.

WHAT'S THE REAL PROBLEM?

The busing plan pits various neighborhoods and nationalities against one another creates no real improvement at all in the schools. The plan does not distribute funds and resources more equitably, nor does it deal with the fact that there are not enough resources for all the schools in Boston.

The Boston School system is bad and getting worse--in both the white and Black working class communities, with the minority schools getting the worst. And the busing/anti-busing controversy is a perfect example of an issue which heightens the contradictions of people of different nationalities, with the goal on the part of the ruling class of getting people to fight each other for educational crumbs.

UNITY KEY TO SOLVING PROBLEM

To deal with this it is necessary to unite the people--Black and white--against our common enemy--the ruling class and its agents such as Kerrigan, Hicks and Kennedy and groups like the Ku Klux Klan, to fight for a better education, better school facilities, etc. for all the children. This means in the Boston situation also organizing progressive whites and blacks to fight white chauvinism and narrow nationalism in their respective communities.

And within this general struggle, it is essential for everyone to fight the oppression and discrimination against Black people and other oppressed nationalities; concretely, by recognizing that schools in predominantly Black areas are generally the worst anywhere and focusing on the demand to improve them and also by fighting against discriminatory housing regulation, plan and patterns that create and further develop the ghettos and barrios.

It is important to realize that the ruling class, especially in times of severe economic and political crisis such as now, always resurfaces issues like busing to create tensions and divisions among the people so that it is harder for them to unite against the ruling class that is responsible in the first place for national oppression and the lousy education system and cutsbacks.

And when not thoroughly exposed, their attempts can cause temporary setbacks for the working class, as in Boston, where there has been fighting between Black and white students in the schools and cases of older whites attacking Black people.