

POLITICAL COMMITTEE MEETING No. 49, December 9, 1977

Present: Blackstock, Clark, Garza, Hawkins, Horowitz,
Jaquith, D. Jenness, Jones, LaMont, Miah,
Petrin, Reid, Rodríguez, Stapleton, Waters,
White

Guest: Britton

Chair: Waters

AGENDA: 1. 'Bakke' Decision Protests
2. YSA Regional Work
3. Miners' Strike and Strike Support Work
4. Militant Subscription Drive
5. National Rail Conference
6. Antinuclear Power Activity
7. Plenum Observers
8. Membership

1. 'BAKKE' DECISION PROTESTS

(Harris, Hart, E. Mailhot, Musa, Sedwick, and Zárate invited
for this point.)

Miah reported. (Report to be published in the Party Organizer.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

2. YSA REGIONAL WORK

(Farley invited for this point.)

Petrin reported. (Report to be published in the Party Organizer.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

3. MINERS' STRIKE AND STRIKE SUPPORT WORK

(Cole, Henderson, Roberts, and Rose invited for this point.)

Jones reported. (See attached.) (Report to be published in
the Party Organizer.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

(over)

4. 'MILITANT' SUBSCRIPTION DRIVE

(Baron, Forgiome, Galligan, and McArthur invited for this point.)

Blackstock initiated discussion on results of fall subscription drive and how to most effectively follow up on gains made. (Report to be published in Party Organizer.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve the report.

Carried.

Motion: To propose that each branch and local do some organized renewal work on the expiring introductory subscriptions during the month of February. Details of proposal, including special offer to be made, and ideas on how to tie it into education and recruitment, will be explained in report for the Party Organizer.

Carried.

5. NATIONAL RAIL CONFERENCE

Britton reported on proposal to convene national rail conference in Detroit on January 1. (See December 9 mailing.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

6. ANTINUCLEAR POWER ACTIVITY

D. Jenness reported on the proposal that he be responsible to the Political Committee for coordinating our activity in the antinuclear power movement and working with the comrades writing on this question for our press. (See December 14 mailing.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

7. PLENUM OBSERVERS

Waters reported on the proposal to invite as observers to the plenum: 1) local organizers and 2) branch organizers in cities with only one branch. (See December 12 mailing.)

Discussion

Motion: To approve.

Carried.

8. MEMBERSHIP

Rodríguez reported on the recommendation of the St. Paul branch that G.B. be readmitted to the party.

Discussion

Motion: To concur with the recommendation of the St. Paul branch.

Carried.

Meeting adjourned.

Miners' Strike and Strike Support Work

By Lew Jones, December 9, 1977

This is a report on the strike support activity that the party can conduct during the coal miners' strike, which officially began December 6. Because of the issues involved, this strike is an important test of forces between the miners and the operators. It therefore has an importance to all working people.

In their profit-gouging drive, the mine operators have demanded a "stable work force" in the mines. They are trying to eliminate the means the union has to defend its members. They want an end to the union's right to strike in order to enforce the contract, stop dangerous work conditions or speedup. The operators' orientation in these negotiations was first tipped off when the miners' health and medical benefits were cut significantly in July. The miners union negotiators are now fighting for their reinstatement. The owners have also raised the threat of breaking off negotiations and signing individual contracts at separate mines if the union doesn't cooperate. The owners also keep bragging about how there are big coal stockpiles all over the country and how a long strike will have little effect.

The coal owners' attack is part of the general bosses' offensive against working people. Trying to inflict a big setback on a major industrial union, such as the United Mine Workers, is an important part of the ruling-class offensive. They have singled out the UMWA for many reasons. Among them are the importance of coal production in Carter's energy program and the need to try to wipe out the gains of democratic reform in the miners union and the militancy of the UMWA, lest they become examples to other unions.

For all these reasons, broad-scale solidarity and support to the striking coal miners becomes an important need for all working people and their allies. The party and the YSA will want to be in the forefront of this activity.

This week's Militant (December 16) carries a front-page editorial pointing to the political significance of the strike and the need for sustained support activity. It calls for united defense, including statements of support and contributions, by all working people. The special responsibility of steel and rail workers is underlined. It also points to the important contribution students can make. Broadly circulating the miners' side of the story is something the Militant can make a unique contribution to, and the editorial points to the special need for increased sales to miners and other working people. This issue of the Militant also carries an article on a strike support meeting in Morgantown last week which largely revolved around the Stearns strike in Kentucky. Other articles are on a Stearns meeting here in New York, an article on the Romanian miners, and one on Harlan County.

Thorough coverage such as this will continue throughout the strike. The Militant has lined up a number of articles covering different aspects of the miners' strike and related questions. These include: a second installment of the Harry Patrick interview, which will be in the next issue; Dick Roberts is writing an article on our Morgantown organizing committee; the comrades in Morgantown have interviewed a woman miner, which they are putting into article form; Nancy Cole will be going out to the minefields soon to get on-the-spot coverage of the strike; and articles on who owns the coal industry, the profit drive, and so on.

There has been some red-baiting in the strike. Comrades may have seen the recent red-baiting attack on the Revolutionary Communist Party in the New York Times. In a two-column spread the New York Times quoted the mine operators' charge that the RCP and the Miners' Right to Strike Committee were responsible for the wildcat strikes. UMWA President Arnold Miller echoed this attack a little bit later. Needless to say, the RCP is unable to answer this correctly. Given the importance of the issue, the Militant is preparing an article answering the red-baiting.

Our Support Work

Until the national strike began, our miners' support activity, outside of Militant sales, was limited mainly to branches nearest coalfields, especially Louisville and our organizing committee in Morgantown.

The YSA also decided to make building a Morgantown unit a major project, and the YSA National Office was able to have a number of leading YSA members transfer into Morgantown. This included Brian Williams from the YSA National Office; Carol Burke, a former organizer of the Milwaukee YSA; Mike Chamberlain from Newark; Mary Zinns from Richmond; and Dave Ferguson from Lexington. These comrades and others already in Morgantown have initiated a YSA there, recruiting one person with several other good prospects. Seven contacts attended the last YSA meeting.

The subscription and sales drive has provided the main activity for the Morgantown branch organizing committee. Comrades have sold at mine entrances at shift changes regularly, and covered a number of mining communities that surround Morgantown with the subscription drive. Afterward they went through the list of names obtained and did calling to see what people thought of the Militant and if they would be interested in coming to meetings such as the strike support meeting or Frank [Lovell]'s December 8 forum on "Prospects for Socialism."

This sales and subscription effort was essential to branch building in Morgantown and also laid the basis for the strike support activity there. After the Lexington YSA first helped put together a successful support meeting for the Stearns strikers, the Morgantown comrades decided to attempt a similar undertaking. What they were able to do can serve as an example for other branches and locals around the country.

The Morgantown comrades were able to help establish a committee on the campus of West Virginia University at Morgantown to support the Stearns strikers and which, we expect, will branch out to support the national miners' strike. This committee, the WVU Stearns Mine Workers Support Committee, consisted of representatives from the campus chapter of NOW, the Socialist Party U.S.A., a Nader-type student group, the YSA, the student government, and unaffiliated students.

This committee decided to invite Stearns strikers to send representatives for a Stearns strike support meeting to raise a little money for the strike and to present the facts of their situation. The Stearns miners liked the idea, and the committee began organizing.

The Revolutionary Communist Party, which has some influence in the Morgantown area around a group called the Mountain Community Union (MCU), assumed they had a monopoly on strike support work. Their approach to strike support activity is sectarian. In order to support the strike, in their view, you must identify with the Right to Strike formation, which they play a leading role in. This means that strikers and strike supporters must, among other things, agree that union leaders at all levels are sellouts. This narrow approach will exclude many miners and others.

When the WVU committee prepared to make its final plans for the Stearns meeting, the MCUs opposed it on the grounds that they were already going to have a community miners' support meeting, two days after the proposed meeting. They said miners would not come to campus and that students wouldn't be interested in such a meeting. They wanted to substitute their narrowly conceived and sectarian strike support committee for the broader WVU committee. But the work went ahead on the campus meeting.

An attractive leaflet was distributed at many mine entrances in the Morgantown area. We also passed the leaflet out as part of our sales efforts in smaller mining towns. The branch organizing committee also sent the leaflet to all subscribers in the area.

The net result is reported in this week's Militant in Dick [Roberts]'s article on the meeting. To summarize it briefly, there were 150 people present. This included between 40 to 50 miners, who led much of the discussion. Harry Patrick also sent greetings.

A meeting of this character--and built the way it was--has not occurred in recent years in Morgantown. The campus committee, for instance, had invited an official of the local Central Labor Council to speak. He declined, but by the time the meeting actually occurred, he decided to come and spoke in the discussion period.

The MCU, by the way, then went ahead with their meeting, where they showed the movie Harlan County, USA. About seventy-

five people attended but many left after the movie and before the discussion on strike support.

So, the WVU committee we supported clearly has the authority to go ahead and do strike support work at the Morgantown campus. They have had a couple of meetings since and are planning another big strike support meeting after the 1st of the year. This meeting would have a dual focus by calling for support to the Stearns strike and support to the national miners' strike.

This manner of doing some effective miners' support work can probably be duplicated in many areas and on many campuses around the country. I don't know if other places can get as many miners to attend as they did in Morgantown, but it is clear that the Stearns strikers are open to speaking. If we can help put together broadly sponsored meetings that can give them a platform and raise some money, our impression is that they are quite willing to come and speak. In addition, the movie Harlan County, USA and videotapes of the Stearns strike are available.

Since the strike began, there have been discussions with field organizers and several branch and local organizers on the possibilities for initiating some meetings of this kind and other forms of productive strike support work. And one of the things we discovered is that there are many branches that are within a few hours--or less--of coal mines or some other form of mining. [See attached map and chart.]

A number of branches have already begun selling to miners, or are about to begin. Louisville, for instance, is putting together a three-to-four-person sales and reporting team this weekend to go into eastern Kentucky.

And I understand the comrades from Salt Lake City have gone out to some coal mines in Utah. This is an important area, because as was reported in the news the UMWA has tried to picket some nonunion mines there, and the governor called in the state police. St. Louis comrades are planning to sell to miners in their area. The Atlanta comrades plan to send a team to the Birmingham area where there are mines. Pittsburgh has already begun selling at the mines and mining communities that surround the area. Last weekend, for example, they went to a community near Pittsburgh to sell, and they plan to continue that during the strike.

So those are some of the places we've already been able to have some sales teams out. In addition, we want to try to get the paper out to other workers by stepping up our effort around plant-gate sales and sales in general. A lot of the Militant's strike support coverage will be geared to try to draw the lessons of the miners' strike to other workers.

A number of branches are planning forums on the strike. We hope that some of the comrades who know a little about the history

of the miners union and have researched some of the issues involved will be able to speak at these. This would include comrades like Nancy Cole, Dick Roberts, Lew Jones, Frank Lovell, Ed Heisler, and Cindy Jaquith.

In terms of national strike support activity itself, we want to help develop this along the Morgantown model. The Stearns strikers have spoken at meetings under different auspices in New York, Boston, San Antonio, Morgantown, Atlanta, Louisville, and Lexington. The CP appears to have been involved in a couple of these, such as the one in New York. Different unions have supported meetings, such as the one in San Antonio, which will be reported soon in the Militant. The RCP has also helped set up a meeting or two as well.

Other Unions

There are opportunities to do miners' strike support work in the trade unions. Many union locals in all industries will want to send messages and statements of support to the miners. And as the strike continues, financial support will become more important. The miners have no strike benefits whatsoever; they have no strike fund. Their health and medical fund has been eliminated by the operators. Pension funds have been cut. They are not eligible for unemployment benefits. They can only get food stamps if they have a minimal amount of money in their savings account or checking account.

There are different possibilities for doing support work in the unions. These range from getting messages of support, to working within already established union strike support committees, to endorsing or setting up new strike support committees if that seems possible. The Militant points to the steel and rail unions as particularly important places where strike support work is important because of the direct connection to coal.

In carrying out strike support activity it is important to try to build support in the broadest possible manner. Many of our opponents have a proclivity for setting up narrowly conceived strike support committees and then using them for their own sectarian purposes. This has already occurred in some cities and can be expected in others. Although there may be specific tactical reasons for occasionally relating to one or another of such groupings, our aim is to steer a course that will ensure the widest participation and support for the miners' cause.

In order that comrades can become more familiar with the miners' struggle, many branches may want to consider having branch educationals on the current situation of the miners and their history. For such educationals, it's possible to take material from the Militant. Labor's Giant Step by Art Preis has much material on the miners' history, going into the pernicious role of the CP in the miners union--when they tried to break the coal strike during World War II. The biography of John L. Lewis by Saul Alinsky, Night Comes to the Cumberlands by Harry Caudill, and Death and the Mines by Britt Hume are also useful books. In ad-

dition, Morgantown YSA comrades have written a contribution on organizing support for the mine workers' strike, which will appear in YSA Discussion Bulletin No. 5.

The YSA is planning to continue their Morgantown project and will be projecting strike support activity at their convention. The expansion fund at the YSA convention will have a section on Morgantown and the miners' strike. There also will be a workshop at the convention on strike support activity.

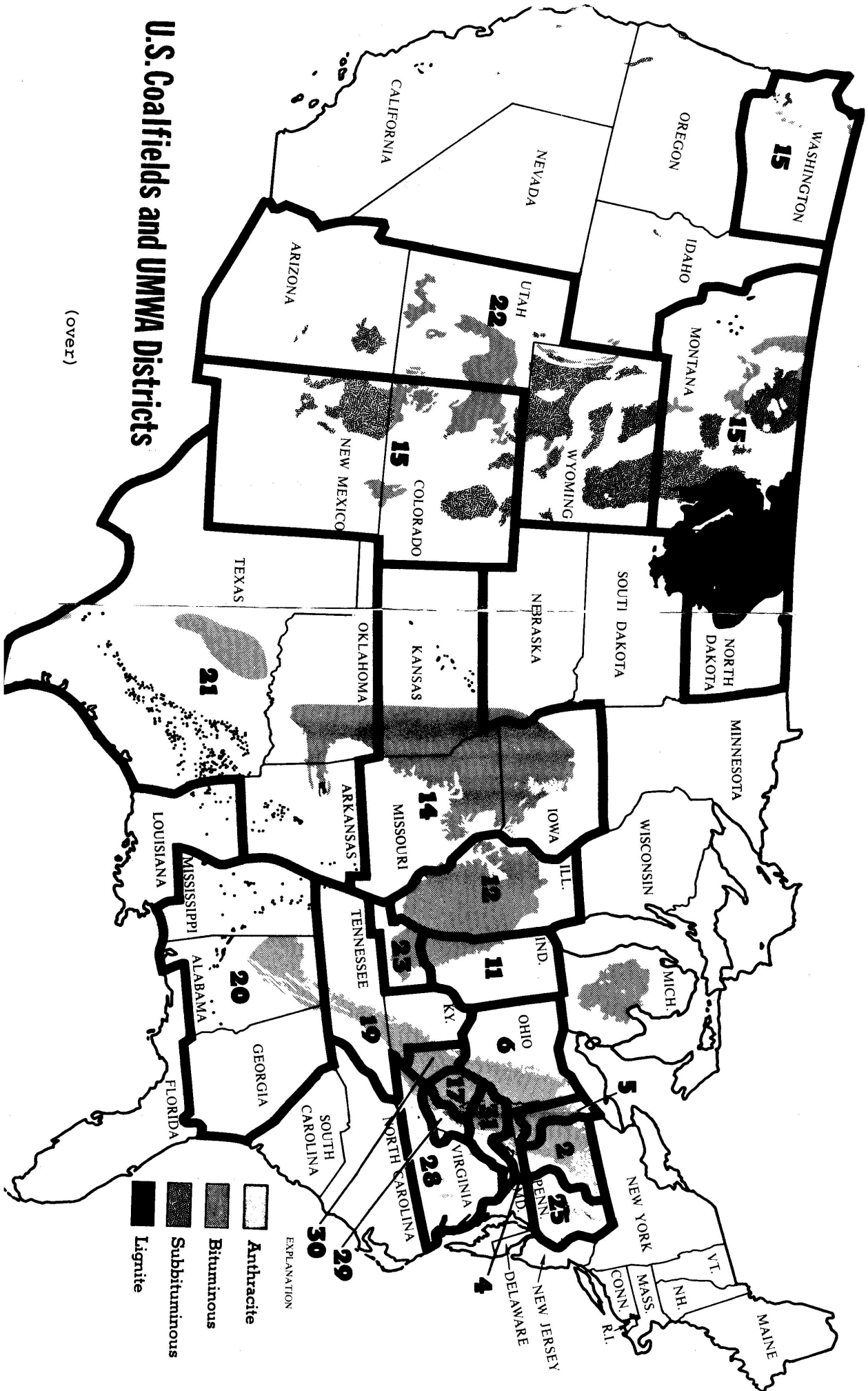
Also at the YSA convention they will see if there are some students who have a little bit of time before returning to school to make a sales and subscription trip through the minefields.

In terms of subs to miners, we want to see about the possibility of extending those subs through the duration of the strike. If there is a financial problem with that, perhaps there is a possibility of having a miners' subscription fund drive similar to the prisoners fund.

Branches may want to subscribe to the mine workers' newspaper, the UMW Journal. Subscriptions are \$5 a year and available from the Journal, 900 15th Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20005.

To contact the Stearns miners: UMWA Strike HQ, Old Post Office Bldg., Whitley City, Kentucky 42653. Telephone: (606) 376-8047.

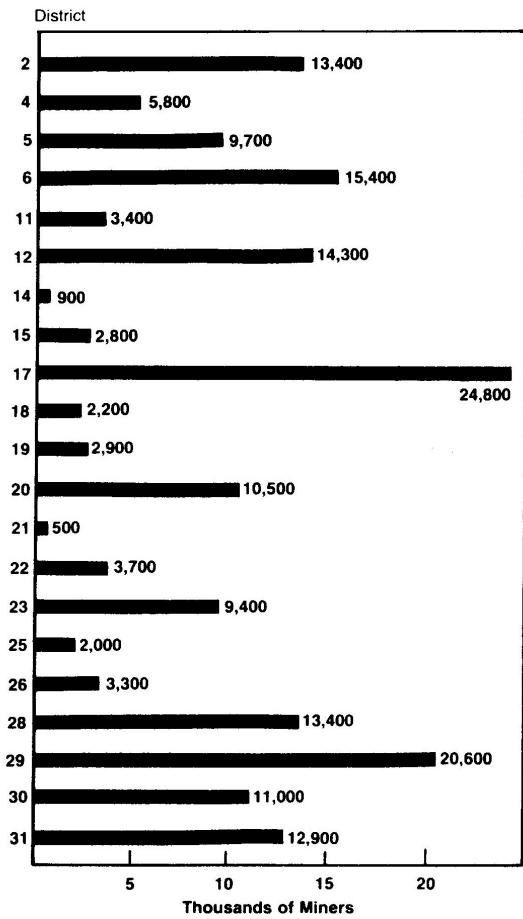
Speakers on the national strike may be available through the district offices of the miners union [see December 14 mailing] or from the nearest miners local. Since the UMWA has no national strike fund, financial contributions from other unions are probably more likely to reach the striking miners if channeled through the district office or a local.



U.S. Coalfields and UMWA Districts

(over)

UMWA WORKING MINERS, BY DISTRICT, 1976



UMWA Research Dept.