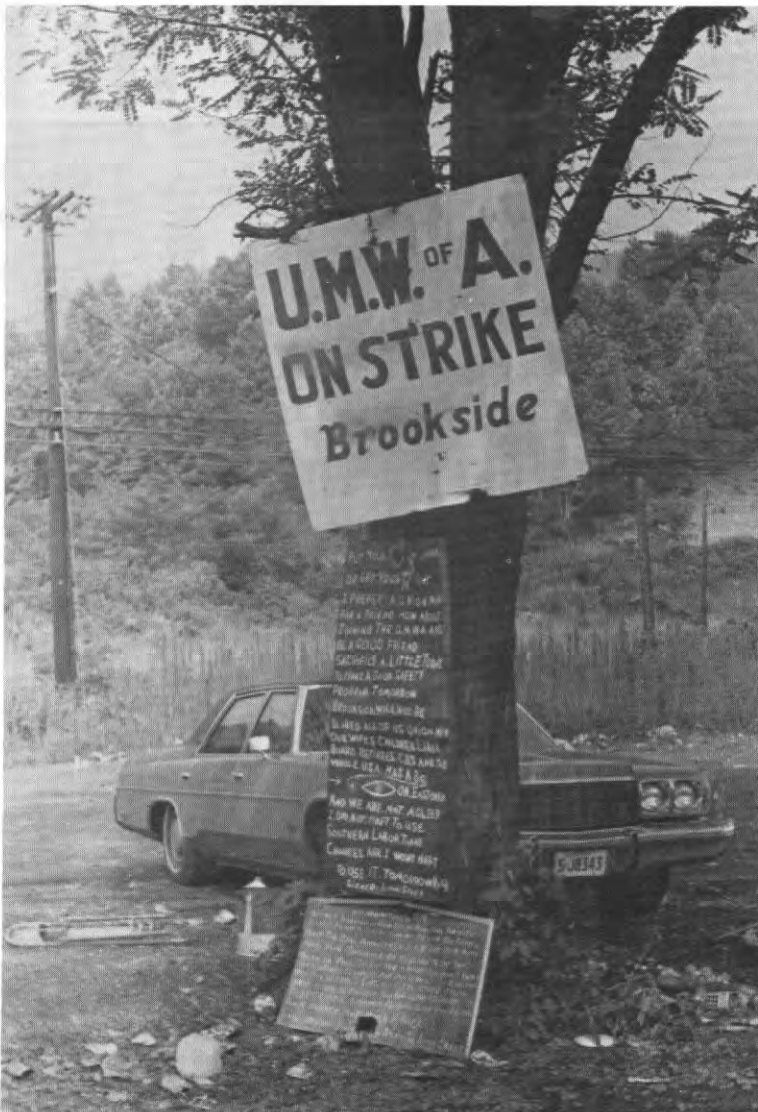


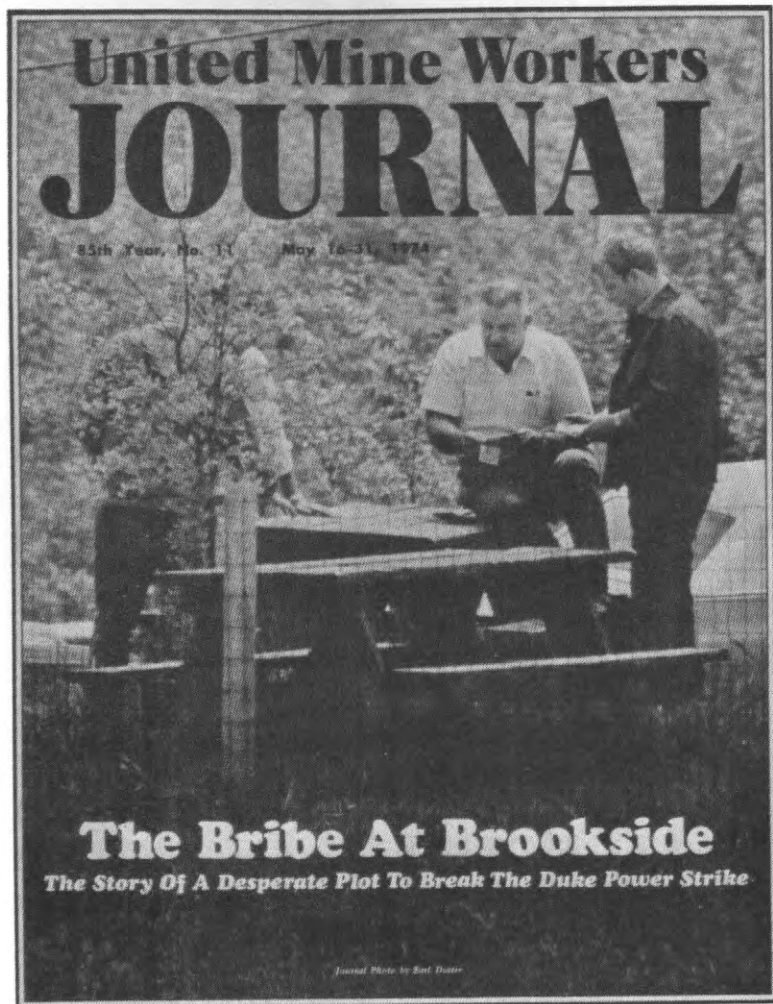


Till Every Battle's Won

The Brookside Strike of
Harlan County
by John Lewis



“Put your heart in UMWA or get your (ass) out. I prefer a union man for a friend. How about joining the UMWA and be a good friend. Sacrifice a little today to have a good safety program. Tomorrow Brookside will not be scabbed.”



SLU company union official "bribing" a leader of the Eastover strikers to get the miners back to work. Photo was taken with telescopic lens by the UMW. The strike leader was pretending. The company man was not.

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**The Brookside Strike of
Harlan County**
by John Lewis

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Center for United Labor Action

an association of working men and women devoted to the improvement of working conditions and the advancement of all workers of all races and nationalities in the struggle against the U.S. corporations. It helps to organize the unorganized and aims to make existing labor organizations more effective.

The Center has branches throughout the country and publishes a national monthly newsletter called United Labor Action. The subscription price is \$1.00 per year.

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UNION LABOR DONATED

Which Side Are You On?
Words by Florence Reece in 1931,
the wife of a coal miner
in Harlan, Kentucky

Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?
Which side are you on?

Don't scab for the bosses,
Don't listen to their lies.
Us poor folks haven't got a chance,
Unless we organize.

[Refrain]

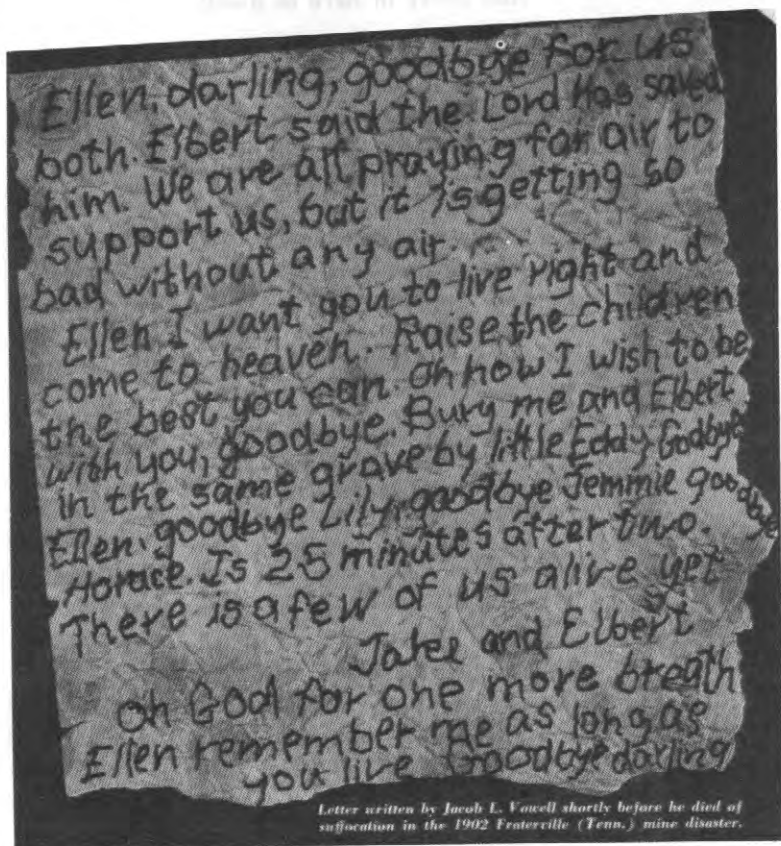
They say in Harlan County,
There are no neutrals there.
You'll either be a union man,
Or a thug for J.H. Blair.

[Refrain]

Oh, workers, can you stand it?
Oh, tell me how you can?
Will you be a lousy scab,
Or will you be a man?

[Refrain]

My daddy was a miner
And I'm a miner's son,
And I'll stick with the union,
Till every battle's won.



“Letter written by Jacob L. Vowell shortly before he died of suffocation in the 1902 Fraterville (Tenn.) mine disaster.” This was the cover picture of a memorial issue of the United Mine Workers Journal, Aug. 16-31.

introduction

This is the story of a workers' victory in a struggle between a union, the United Mineworkers of America (UMWA), and a boss, the Eastover Mining Company in Harlan County, Kentucky. The company is a subsidiary of the Duke Power Company which is a multi-million-dollar utility connected with multi-billion-dollar banks—the biggest in America.

It began in June of 1973. The coal miners working the Brookside mines of the Eastover company had voted the union in. But the company refused to recognize the union and forced the miners out on strike.

The strike lasted thirteen long and bitter months, and ended in victory on August 29, 1974. This was the first mine organized in Harlan County since the 1940s.



Members of the Brookside Women's Club, Harlan County women visited the Brookside mine when as many as 60 strikebreakers were crossing the picket line and persuaded them to stay home. It was the first turning point in the strike. Lois Scott is second from left. Photo:

It was still dark that cool morning in early August 1974 when the pickets began to gather in front of Mac's Grocery Store in Evarts. People were standing around in small clusters drinking coffee and stamping their feet, trying to shake off sleep and the morning chill. Lois Scott and Crystal Ferguson of the Brookside Women's Club and Bob Davis, a leader of the striking miners at Eastover-Duke's Highsplint Mine, were moving through the growing number of people, taking care of last minute details of organizing that morning's picket line.

I wondered why nobody said anything about the strike at Highsplint or Brookside. But the people there had lived it for so long, they didn't have to. Some of them were kind of joking around about how this or that scab had been spanked by the women, or about other events that had been taking place that week. But otherwise they seemed to be just taking it for granted that they were going to outlast Eastover-Duke and win the strike.

I don't think I had that absolute optimism at first myself, but I became more convinced during my stay.

While we were waiting for the other people to arrive, I asked one of the Brookside miners why they had decided to picket Highsplint. He told me how the mine at Brookside had been shut down since late February, but that Eastover was still taking coal out of the Highsplint mine. The same company owns both mines.

The miners knew that if they didn't shut down Highsplint and stop the coal coming out, they would never get a contract from Eastover. It was as simple as that. So the union decided to set up an informational picket line there on July 8. From that day on, a majority of the miners at Highsplint refused to cross the line. On the second day of the picket, Norman Yarbrough, president of Eastover, fired Bob Davis and Herschel McDaniel for being on the picket line (which they weren't).

After these two miners were fired, the Highsplint miners tried to get the Southern Labor Union, a company union that "represented" them, to force Eastover to give the men their jobs back. This "union" refused, and even called the state police on the two fired miners!

The men at Highsplint then walked out. They decided on July 22 to join the UMWA pickets on the line. Not one ton of coal was taken out of that mine from the time the line was set up there on July 8 until the strike was over on August 24.

A miner told me that during the first few days of the Highsplint picket line, things were pretty solid. He told of the violence that Eastover began to use once it saw that the pickets were a pretty determined bunch.

The company keeps a stable of some of the meanest hired killers and gun thugs in Eastern Kentucky. On the second day of the picket, one of these thugs shot down a 66-year-old retired miner in cold blood, but he couldn't kill him.

The miners' name was Minard Turner. He was shot twice in the chest with a .38 pistol at close range. He came back to the picket line the next day, bloody bandages and all, one of the slugs still deep in his chest.

During the first three weeks at Highsplint, things were nip and tuck. First of all it took a lot of guts to even go up there on the line at all. There were about 60 scabs and about an equal number of hired gun thugs. On one day there would be a couple hundred pickets, and the scabs wouldn't get by. But maybe the next day

only 50 pickets or so would show up. Being outnumbered, they couldn't keep the scabs out.

But even when the scabs passed through the line, they didn't work the mines. Most of them weren't even coal miners at all. They just sat around drinking beer, playing cards and taking pot shots at the pickets with guns supplied by Norman Yarbrough.

One of the miners spoke up and said that Eastover Company also had a machine gun up at Highsplint. He said it was kept in the front office and was fired every so often to try to scare the pickets.

Just to hear this kind of talk was enough to send chill bumps up my spine. I had heard of company goons before, but not goons that carried guns and shot people in open daylight. In the Army I had heard and even fired a machine gun. It's a terrible weapon.

More and more cars were filling the parking lot. It looked like the rally held in the community center the night before had been successful in turning out the people. There must have been at least 200 men and women out that morning.

Someone said, "It's 5:30. Guess we ought to be heading on down the road."

We all piled into the more than forty cars that had assembled by that time, and took off. It was still pretty dark, and it was kind of scary going down this narrow country road, with high mountains on either side shutting out what light there was and maybe hiding a lot of enemies. I remembered a story one of the older miners had told me the day before. His uncle had been shot through the head one dark morning during a strike in 1936. But today the people were out in force, I told myself. No scab would even try to stop us.

We were not going to the Highsplint mine itself. We were headed for Shields, a little railroad crossing a mile or two down the road from the mine. Later on that day, after the picket line disbanded, Lois Scott explained why.

"Last Sunday," she said, "the woman in the Brookside Women's Club had a meeting. We had heard about how these gun thugs had got this 16-year-old boy up on the picket line at Highsplint and beat him up and threw him in the river. They held a gun in his face and told him if he said who beat him up, they would kill him. The boy was petrified. He told me he was never more scared in his life.

"See, I've got a son that is two years younger than his boy,

Paul Shell. And if I lived over here on this side of the county, that same thing could happen to my son. My son comes from a union family and he feels like we do."

Lois got angry, like people do, just thinking about it when she was talking and there were tears in her eyes.

"The women felt that all of our kids were just going to get shot at, beat, thrown in the river or killed by these thugs," she said. "We felt like if we wanted our children protected, we would have to go up there and protest it. We had to go up to that picket line and protest Duke Power.

"When we went up there Monday morning, buddy, those scabs came out on us and beat the men on the picket line. After the scabs had already crossed the bridge to the mine, they jumped out of their cars and Basil Collins told them, 'Come on boys. Let's get 'em.'

"They came over and first they grabbed this photographer and broke her camera. They grabbed another man and was beating him. I grabbed a rock and was trying to keep as many of them off as I could. I was watching this one because I felt like he was really going to hurt somebody. I was expecting him to attack me at any minute.

"I glanced up the road and Basil Collins and another thug had Bill Worthington, a Black man, and they were backing him down the road. Basil had a gun in Bill's face. All during this time I was yelling 'somebody help Bill, somebody help him!'

"Basil and the thugs went back across the bridge after a while. He told this one thug while he shook a finger in his face. 'I want you to get him. I want you to get that goddamn n----.' It made me so mad. Oh, I went all to pieces, you know. It made me so mad to think—in what we are supposed to have here in America, a free country—that this one man can order another man's death in front of a hundred people and nothing is done about it, not a damn thing."

(While I was writing up this pamphlet I telephoned back to Harlan and found out that Basil Collins was promoted to superintendent at Highsplint after the strike was over.)

"Then they started shooting that machine gun. The next thing I knew, dust was flying up, and I ducked down behind this car. I started to thinking. They're just doing that to try to scare us. They're trying to run us off the picket line. I knew they weren't trying to shoot right at us. If they kill us, it's not going to

be on no picket line."

With the anger rising in her voice and seeming to forget I was there, she said:

"It made me so mad. I just jumped back out in the road. I told them to kill me. I told them if they wanted to shoot, to shoot somewhere else besides under the river bank. I knew it was possible that one of the bullets could glance off a rock or something and hit me, but I didn't care.

"I think there comes a time in everybody's life that you get ready to die. And that morning I was just ready to die. We got back out on the road. They stopped firing the machine gun. Then they fired again after a while. This time they shot it up on the cliff. One girl passed out.

"Then somebody came and told me that the police had been called. Well, I knew the police wouldn't do anything. I knew if the police came, they wouldn't do one thing to the thugs and Basil Collins for beating up the pickets and firing that machine gun. I knew what *would* be done: the police would arrest *us*. I would have stayed all day and let them fire that machine gun at me if they hadn't called the police. Because when you call in the police all you are doing is calling in Norman Yarbrough's buddies. I left then.

"After that we decided we couldn't protest at Highsplint under machine gun fire. So on Tuesday, the next day, we changed our plans. The next morning, Wednesday, we went to Shields. And we're still picketing there."



Highsplint miners gather July 20, 1974 outside meeting hall at the Multi Purpose Center in Everts, Ky., where a fund-raising rally took place for strike benefits for them. John Lewis is in center wearing glasses. With his back to camera is Bob Davis, a worker fired for being on the UMW picket line and a leader of the Highsplint strikers.

I got the idea that Shields was a more neutral sort of place and the picketing would turn out better there. But considering that all the things that Lois had been telling me about had happened only a couple days before, I didn't exactly think I was going to a picnic.

By the time we got there, daylight was breaking through the thick fog. We crossed the tracks and pulled into a small road and were directed into a sort of circle of cars. We were forming a barricade, as I had guessed. Lois and Bob started directing people, telling us what to do and what was going to happen. They seemed to be pretty worried about a certain fellow who was late. Pretty soon he showed. He was driving an old heap of a car, and he parked it close to the tracks and the road. We were going to use this car to block the road to keep the scabs from getting by, just like the other day.

Meanwhile, over behind the barricade, a small group of

miners were checking their guns. This was the defense guard for that morning's picket. But in addition to the defense guard, it seemed like nearly everyone else had a gun of some sort—and for good reason.

In Harlan County there is no law, except the law that defends companies like Duke Power and their "right" to shoot down unarmed pickets like Minard Turner. (The goon that shot Minard didn't even have to post bond after he was charged with assault with intent to kill.) The miners had taken things into their own hands. They knew if there was going to be protection for them, they had to provide it themselves.

I had heard how Duke Power would catch the strikers out on the road at night and beat them up with clubs and gun butts. I knew how they used hired killers to shoot into the miners' houses late at night and many of the people had taken to sleeping on the floor, as a result. I personally saw the bullet-ridden house of Mickey Messer, president of the Brookside UMWA local. On Thursday night, August 1, the thugs had fired a .45 caliber sub-machine gun at his house. There were bullet holes in the out-buildings as well as the house, and one old tree must have had 50 to 75 lead slugs in it. I couldn't help thinking to myself what would have happened if that tree had been a human being—and that's what Duke Power wanted everybody to think about.

But anyway, it was daylight now. The pickets were leaning against the cars, talking. Some were pitching pennies. Another group was up by the car that was going to be used to block the road. A group of the women armed with their switches (some of these "switches" were one or two inches thick) were also by the car. There was a lookout posted down the road to give the signal to let us know when the scab caravan was coming.

It wasn't long after 6:30 when the word was given. The gang of people around the old car heaved to and pushed it out onto the road. Someone locked the doors. Some of the women climbed up on the hood and sat there as if it were the most natural thing to do.

As the scabs came around the bend in the road and saw the car and the pickets, they slowed down, and then stopped about a hundred yards from the barricade.

So there we were in the tiny village (about a dozen houses) of Shields. The scabs and gun thugs lined up there on the road sitting in their trucks and cars on one side of the railroad tracks, with the miners and their supporters on the other side.

The people who had been leaning against the cars talking, the women with switches, the miners pitching pennies—everybody—kind of formed up behind the front part of the circle of cars.

The wait began. People from the community brought coffee out to the pickets. Everybody was in a great mood, but deadly serious.

It was a stalemate as far as anybody could see. Then the women who were out in front began to taunt the scabs. The way those women treated the scabs was really something.

One said: "Come on through, Basil. Come on through, you scab, we've left a space for you."

Another woman called out: "You old scabs, what are you going to get out of all this, except money? What are you going to do when you're old and feeble, sitting on your front porch, with no union pension or nothing? You'll just be an old scab."

The scabs would jeer back and yell obscenities at the women, but they had absolutely no intention of trying to go through that barricade.

Lois Scott explained why the scabs wouldn't try to come through the picket line today:

"When the scabs came in Tuesday," she said, "Basil led them right up to the car we had in the road. He stopped for a few seconds and then he jumped out of his truck with a gun in his hand and yelled, 'All right, boys, let's go get 'em.' But none of the scabs moved from their trucks. They just sat there. They had heard the union guys behind the cars cock their guns—click, click, clack. It was all that quiet.

"The men were supporting the women, because the women didn't have any weapons. Basil didn't see the men. All he saw was the women sitting on the car. So at first he felt like he'd just go up there and beat hell out of those women. But when he saw those men, when he saw what would happen to him if he came over there and started beating up on the women, he knew he'd get killed. Basil got so excited trying to get back in his truck, that he locked the door on himself and had to climb in the back window. We all had to laugh at him.

"It's hard for anybody to believe it, but we stayed out there in that hot boiling sun from 5:30 till 4 o'clock. Nobody left. We didn't have any lunch. Nobody would believe how people could feel so strong. They took that machine gun fire. They got beat up and arrested. And we sat there and got sunburned and blistered. We

stayed there all day until Basil Collins and his thugs went away.”

As she was telling me, I noticed more and more state police around. They had been arriving since about 7:30, and by nine o'clock there must have been about twenty of them. They took pictures of the pickets from every angle imaginable.

These gun thugs with badges harassed the pickets, but said nothing to the scabs. One state cop took license plate numbers from some of the miners' cars and gave them to Basil Collins.

Finally, at about 9:30 the scabs began to leave. The pickets gave out a cheer. But thinking some kind of trick was up, they stayed right there behind the cars, and didn't leave. Then one of the state cops came up to the pickets and said in a loud voice:

“All of you have to leave here. If you don't leave, I'm authorized to charge you all with 'banding together to incite a riot.' All the other cops stood around brandishing their three-foot long clubs, and adjusting their pistol belts so we would get the idea.

The head cop said: “We'll pick you up later on, with warrants.”

Damn right! They *had* to do it “later on.” There was no way these few cops could have taken those people that morning. They would use the pictures to identify the people and pick them up separately.

The cop asked the people if anybody had any questions. This one miner spoke up and asked, “Why are you trying to charge us with rioting? Does it look like we're rioting? We're being peaceful. The scabs and thugs are causing all the trouble. Why don't you arrest them and leave us alone?” The cop didn't say anything. He just walked away.

The words of Lois Scott were proved true. The state police were working hand in hand with Eastover in an open way. Here the miners and their supporters were going to be charged with a felony, inciting to riot, while the scabs were going to get off with nothing. Everybody was mad as hell.

Since the scabs had left, someone figured they had gone back to the Eastover Company office at Brookside. The leaders of the picket decided we'd leave too and go over to Brookside and set up the line over there. So the more than 200 pickets got back in their car and headed back down the road toward Brookside.

At Brookside the pickets stood around for a while. And when they were sure the scabs weren't going to try to return to

Highsplint, the people went home.

As it turned out, things weren't quite over for that day. The state police issued warrants for the arrest of about 20 of the pickets. The charge was blocking traffic!

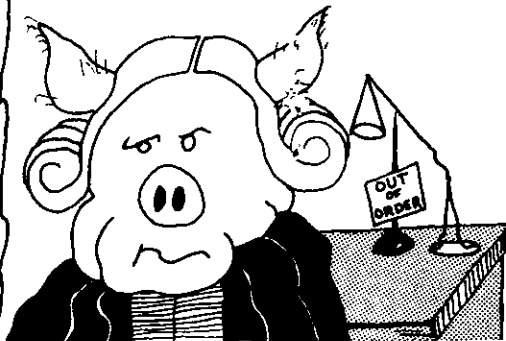
They went after what they considered the leadership of the action—Lois Scott, Bessie Lou Cornette, Tommy Ferguson and his wife Crystal and hauled them off to jail along with a dozen others.

One of the pickets arrested was young Paul Shell, the miner's son who had been so brutally beaten by the thugs at Highsplint the week before. Paul and the others had to post a \$500 bond, while the thugs who had terrorized Paul didn't have to post a cent, even though Paul had charged them with attempted murder.

The arrests continued all that day and into Friday. People were being picked up on the road by the police for hours. The leaders decided that since many of the pickets had been arrested and had to go to court on Friday morning, there wouldn't be a picket line at Highsplint on that day. (That was what the company intended to make happen, but the pickets just had no choice.) Everybody was told to be in Harlan town, at the court house, at 9 o'clock that morning.

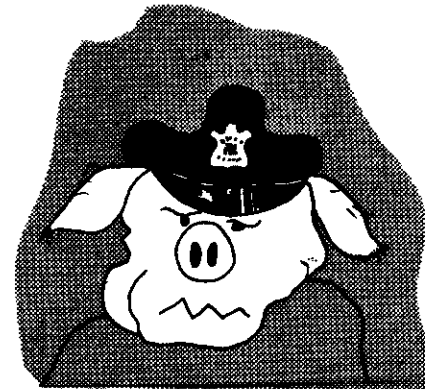
A pig sty view of the Harlan County miners' strike

I thought I could stop them by
limiting their pickets to six...



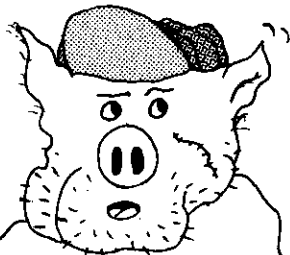
and they brought 200.

So, I thought I'd put them
in jail...



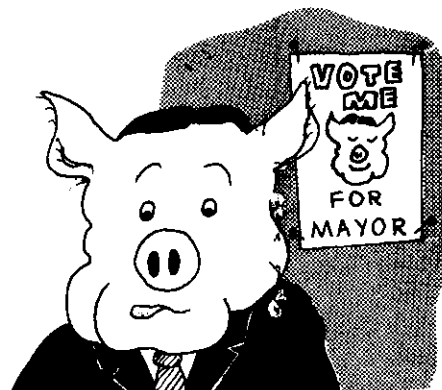
only they came with their
kids and drove me crazy.

I was hired to frighten
them with guns...



but then **they** got guns and
I got frightened.

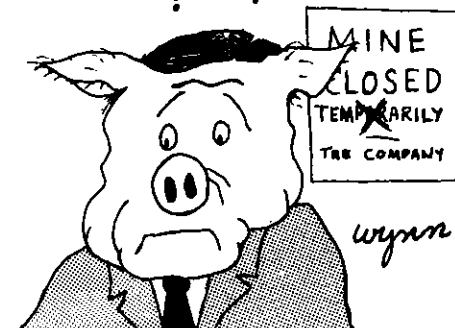
So I thought I could stop
them from marching...



but **HOW** do you stop 4,000
angry miners?

For a year, I've starved them
and evicted them, had them
beaten, and shot, and jailed.
And only one thing troubles
me...

???



how **DO** you stop 4,000 angry
miners?

Board election of the United Mine Workers at Brookside, the men there had been "represented" by the Southern Labor Union. The stewards and officers of that "union" were appointed by the company. And if a miner wanted to file a grievance and have half a chance of winning, he had to hire his own lawyer and fight outside his "union" altogether.

The most important issue for the miners, and one which causes a great many grievances, is the issue of mine safety. Many miners have died from accidents in the close, unventilated shafts of the Brookside mines. Many more have suffered accidents that left them crippled for life. Many already had Black Lung. (For that matter, every miner who has worked in any of the mines for ten years will have Black Lung, according to government-published statistics.)

The Brookside miners just had to strike, the people told me. There was just no way out. There was no way they could return to the death pits that they had worked in for so long without a real union and solid union conditions. That was why the men voted: No contract, no work. That's why they walked out and stayed out for thirteen months.

They had the support of the United Mine Workers Union and they had the sympathy of all decent human beings who knew about their plight. But the Duke Power Company had the open support of the state and county government.

Early in the strike, coal operator-owned judges like Byrd Hogg (a mine owner himself) issued injunctions limiting the number of pickets. That way the picket lines were made ineffective, because the scabs could come and go at will. The miners saw they had to come out in numbers to stop the scabs, but then the state police would come and beat them and arrest them.

During one of the first trials, which was a jury trial, the people on the jury, many of them coal miners or retired miners and people sympathetic to the union cause, found them not guilty. But at the next trial, Judge Hogg dismissed the jury, found the people guilty himself and sentenced them to terms ranging from two to six months in jail.

IV

After the first few months of the strike, things began to look pretty bad for the miners. Up to 120 scabs and thugs were going through the pickets every day. Fewer and fewer miners were coming out to the picket line. That's when the women first got into it. It was in September 1973 that the wives of the Brookside miners had just about all they could take.

Lois Scott said:

"Their husbands were sitting there on the line and the scabs were passing and would have guns in their laps. The union men weren't allowed a gun; they couldn't take a gun to the line.

"So the scabs would spit at them and stick their fingers up at them, call them names. The men had to take all kinds of abuse. Well, the women finally got so fed up with it they had a rally and decided to have a march on Harlan in support of the men.

"On their way back from Harlan, they stopped by at Brookside. It just happened that those women got there as the

scabs were coming off the hill from 'work.'

"Well, the women went over to meet the scabs and asked the scabs not to take their husbands' jobs, and did they know that the men had voted in the United Mine Workers at the mine.

"Mary Widener told me that a scab pulled a gun on her and she got so mad that she made a lunge at him and fought him. She had a pop bottle. Well, it turned into a fight between the women and the scabs. The scabs turned and ran back up the hill. We chased a lot of them off, but some of them were hard headed and came back next day.

"We started the first picket line with the women the next day. The women tried to talk to the scabs, asking them not to take their husbands jobs and all. Some would listen and go back. But some of the scabs would just sit there and look mean. Some would call the women names, then the women would hit them across the faces with those switches they carried or slap them.

"We had both entrances to the mine closed. No scabs were going through. But then Norman Yarbrough told the scabs that if they would just cross the picket line he would give them a day's pay. Some of the scabs would come out of the office waving these slips at the miners over on the railroad tracks and yell about how much money they had. The scabs would take the slips down to the Harlan County Coal Operators Association and get their money, and not even have to work.

"Well, the more these scabs did this, the more they agitated the women. The women decided we couldn't put up with this any longer. We decided to set up another picket line and not allow the scabs into the office to get the slips. One of the scabs came up the back way, and liked to run over one of the Brookside men, Tommy Ferguson. Well, when this scab got down to the entrance to the office, two women got him and beat the dickens out of him. They hit him with sticks, and he didn't come back to get another slip.

"We had pretty much shut down Brookside by October (1973). Not many scabs tried to come through, and the ones that tried, we turned them back.

"It was on Veterans Day in October, when the scabs and gun thugs came out again in force, trying to get through the line. We stopped them that time, too. The women laid down in the road in front of the scab cars. The police came and arrested me and my daughter. They drug us down the road. All the hide was skinned

off my back from that, and I was sore.

"As soon as we got out of jail, we went right back to the picket line the next morning.

"When we got to the picket line at 5:30 the next morning there was 75 state police there blocking the road. They lined up to protect the scabs and keep us from stopping them from going in the mine. These police looked real mean the way they had lined up. There were about 20 Brookside men and about 35 of us women. The state police were standing in front of the men, shaking their clubs at the men. Like those 20 men were going to attack those 75 police! The women were lined up behind the police.

"I didn't know what we were going to do. There wasn't enough of us to stop the scabs. We would not have been effective, and we would have gotten our brains beat out.

"At first I'm going up and down the line preaching and hollering, 'we elected Governor Ford, and he sends in these state police against us.' I called him a gestapo. I was real agitated. The scabs were just standing there. They knew that the police were there to escort them in.

"We talked to some of the policemen and told them that they didn't have any business there. We said, 'Your fathers are drawing UMW pensions. Go away from here.' Some of them said, 'Girls, we don't want to be here. We've got orders to be here.'

"Well, nobody told us to be there. The women weren't there because anyone told us. We were there because we were tired of the men being treated like dogs by Duke Power. We knew that Duke Power didn't care anything about the men, if they did they would give the men safety protection in the mine. All Duke Power wanted was for the men to dig its coal. We were there for the men.

"My husband didn't work at Brookside. He worked in a UMW mine. I wanted to see that all the other girls had that kind of protection, too.

"Anyway, we were standing there. We didn't know what to do. We felt there was no way we could stop the police from escorting the scabs in."

Lois's face broke into a big happy smile and she said,

"Then we looked up. Here come a hundred miners from Glenbrook. A hundred miners in all their mining gear, helmets

and everything. One hundred of them marching down that railroad to help us out. We were so tickled, because we knew right then that we could stop them with those one hundred miners. We sang:

*Oh, when those saints, come marching in,
Oh, when those saints come marching in,
Oh lord, we were glad to see there was a number,
When those saints came marching in.*

"We started singing and dancing on the picket line. We said, 'We love Glennbrook! We love Glennbrook!'

"We started passing the word from woman to woman that when the scabs' cars start to come through for us to lay down on the road in front of the cars and stop them. When they started to come through, all those 35 women just laid down there on the line. Thirty-five women, one after the other, laid down.

"The police started picking certain ones out and arrested them. They arrested me, my daughter, Melba, Betty Eldridge and others and took us off to jail. They tried to pick out the ones they thought were the ones that started it all.

"We had our trial by a jury. They said we were blocking the road, but we weren't. We were thirty feet off the road (i.e., on the sideroad into the mine works). The jury turned us loose. They said we weren't guilty.

"Well, we kept that mine shut down until February 28th. Yarbrough had 8 or 9 scabs working up in that mine on that day. When the women found out, the word got around that we were going to start the picket line again. We went up there that day and met those scabs coming off the hill. We didn't say anything to them, we just beat the mortally dickens out of them. One of the scabs raised a stick to hit one of the women. We beat him and he ran to the office and fell on his knees and crawled in, while a woman was beating him.

"February 28 was the last day Duke Power tried to work the Brookside mine. The mine stayed shut down until August 29, 1974, when Duke signed a contract with Local 1974 of the UMWA at Brookside."

I didn't think it was right for me to ask Lois how much opposition she got from the union *men* for playing the role she did, because it might bring up some personal things like relations with her husband and close friends. But I did notice that not every

single one of the men at Brookside took a one hundred percent correct position.

Most of the men, especially the most militant ones saw it right. The United Mine Workers Journal quoted Jerry Johnson as saying:

"I never saw anything like it when they came out on the picket line. To tell the truth, I always just thought women was for cooking and having babies. I used to just look 'em over. But now I see they're important people, just like the men."

And this was just putting into words what most of the men felt but couldn't or wouldn't say.

But some of the men resented the *leadership* of the women on the picket lines. I attended one meeting with about 150 men and women present where the principal subject was why the people—and the men especially—did not always come to the picket line on a regular basis. On several occasions, the fact that the men didn't show up in numbers prevented the scabs from being stopped. The women pointed out that they needed the protection of the men from the scabs.

During the meeting, an argument broke out between some of the women and a couple of men sitting in the back of the room. The men had been drinking. They were complaining about how the women always wanted to lead the men—how the women were always ordering the men to do this or that.

Then Crystal Ferguson, one of the leaders of the Women's Club, stood up and said in a loud voice, but still calm:

"Dammit, if all you men would come out as you're supposed to, the women wouldn't have to. Any time the men think they can do our job, they can do it. Until that happens, you can shut up!" And they did shut up.

But on the picket line it was altogether different. It was clear on the picket line at Shields where I was that the women were in charge. Nobody said a word about their leadership then. They were out front. They taunted the scabs and the police. They took risks. They certainly had the respect of the men there. Without the militant leadership of the women on the line, things would not have been the same. In fact, the picket lines in the form and force they had would not have happened at all.

Any man with eyes in his head could recognize that. And a lot of men learned a great lesson from it all. But life is complicated in Harlan County, like everywhere else.



Lawrence Jones
August 27, 1950—August 28, 1974

V

It was the heroism of the miners and women like Lois that did it, of course. But there had to be real wide support from outside Harlan County, too—like the money support that had to be given from the national treasury of the whole UMWA union—and the physical and moral support of a lot of other people besides.

In that February 28 fight I mentioned, they had 500 people from all over the county to support the strikers. The telephone grapevine got most of them together:

And on this past July 20 (1974) several hundred miners and supporters met at the Multi-Purpose Center in Evarts. A group came over from Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia. Others came from Louisville and Lexington, Kentucky; Atlanta, Georgia; Cincinnati, Ohio; and other areas, too, so they could express solidarity and support to the Brookside and Highsplint strikers. Money was presented at an afternoon rally. It had been collected from workers in plants in several cities.

The Brookside strikers were covered by UMWA strike benefits. But the miners at Highsplint were not getting any money because they were still in the SLU and wildcatting against it as well as against the company.

So the UMWA Boosters Club, an organization of retired miners, people from the Black Lung Association and other community people had begun a fund-raising drive to get money for the Highsplint men and their families.

For instance, Brookside striker Jerry Johnson contributed \$40 to the Highsplint strikers out of his union strike benefits. "The miners at Highsplint are good men and they are honoring our picket line," he said. "You know I can't be on a picket line and know that their children are going hungry just because they are good men. They fired some of these men and we've got to stick with them until they get their jobs back."

More than \$2,000 was collected and presented to the Highsplint men that afternoon. The Brookside Women's Club gave a \$1,000 check. Workers from different plants, mentioned above, gave money they had collected at plant gates.

On the next day, Sunday, July 21 (1974), more than 7,000 coal miners from throughout the Appalachian coal fields held a rally in Harlan County in support of the strikers. A trailer-truckload of food was collected by UMWA locals around the region and presented to the strikers and their families.

UMW President Arnold Miller spoke at the rally and said that the whole union was behind the Brookside miners. He said that the UMWA was in Harlan County and Eastern Kentucky to stay. He also said that a "memorial period" would be called within a few weeks. The UMWA contract with the coal operators allows for a ten-day memorial period to mourn deaths of miners from accidents in the mines. (All union mines in the country are shut down tight in such periods.) President Miller added that there was need also to protest the violence that Duke Power had used against the miners and their families in Harlan County.

As July went into August, things were not getting any better in Harlan County. The gun thugs and state police were still beating and arresting the pickets at Highsplint. All during the first few weeks of August, gun thugs would come late in the night

and fire automatic weapons into the homes of the striking miners.

On August 12, Miller announced that there would be a five-day nation-wide memorial period beginning on the 19th. He said that the memorial was being called to mourn the deaths of more than 100,000 coal miners who had died in unsafe mines during the past century.

On the weekend before the mourning period was to begin, hundreds of miners began to pour into Harlan County. From the beginning of the strike the Brookside miners had received moral and money support from throughout the coal fields outside the county. But on Thursday, August 22, this support came crowding right into Harlan in person. More than 4,000 chanting miners and supporters marched on the county seat to express their solidarity with the strikers. Many carried signs reading, "Stop the Killing," "Your Coal; Our Blood," and "UMWA: Safety or Else." They chanted, "UMW's here to stay" and "Stop Duke's gestapo tactics."

The front ranks stretched a large banner across the street which read: "Pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living!"—these are the words made famous by the militant union organizer, Mother Jones, during the great coal field organizing drives in the early part of the century.

During the five days, miners from Illinois, West Virginia and other parts of the coal fields joined the Harlan County strikers and supporters in closing down the eastover mine at Arjay, in neighboring Bell County. More than 200 non-union miners from the Harlan-Pathfork mine walked off their jobs in sympathy with the Brookside and Highsplint miners, and for a union for themselves, as well.

The thousands of miners who had traveled hundreds of miles to march through the streets of Harlan came in sorrow for the fallen, but they came in anger, too. They shook their fists at the court house, the high sheriff's office, the coal operator association's office, and other institutions of violence that had attempted to break the strong will and determination of the Brookside strikers.

But it wasn't long after the memorial for the dead that a new victim was claimed—not by coal gas or fire or cave-in, but by a leaden bullet paid for by the Duke Power Company.

The UMW Journal (September 1-16, 1974) tells how it happened:

At about 4:30 in the afternoon on Saturday, August 24, Brookside striker Lawrence Jones finished delivering some hay to Rev. Homer Jackson, a preacher and veteran miner who lives on Jones Creek.

On his way down the hollow, Jones stopped to talk to some friends who were sitting on a log. Now 23, he had been raised on Jones Creek, and his boyhood playmates were now his fellow miners and unionmen. They often gathered at the log to "talk union," giving each other encouragement and support during the hard-fought strike.

Jones told the men about his encounter at a grocery store earlier in the day with Billy Bruner, a foreman for Duke Power Co.'s Eastover Mining operation at Highsplint, Ky. Bruner had been drinking, Jones said, and seemed unusually worked up about the picketing which had shut down coal production at Highsplint for seven weeks. He pulled a gun on Jones, but there were other people present, and all that passed between the two men was a threat by Bruner that he would "see you later." Jones hoped that the threat would be forgotten when Bruner sobered up, but he was still a little worried.

As the miners talked, Bruner drove up, saw them sitting, and parked his truck. One of Jones' friends, concerned that there not be an incident, got up to meet Bruner, who had clearly done more drinking.

"Ain't nobody here wants no trouble, Billy," the miner told him. "Nobody's got anything against you."

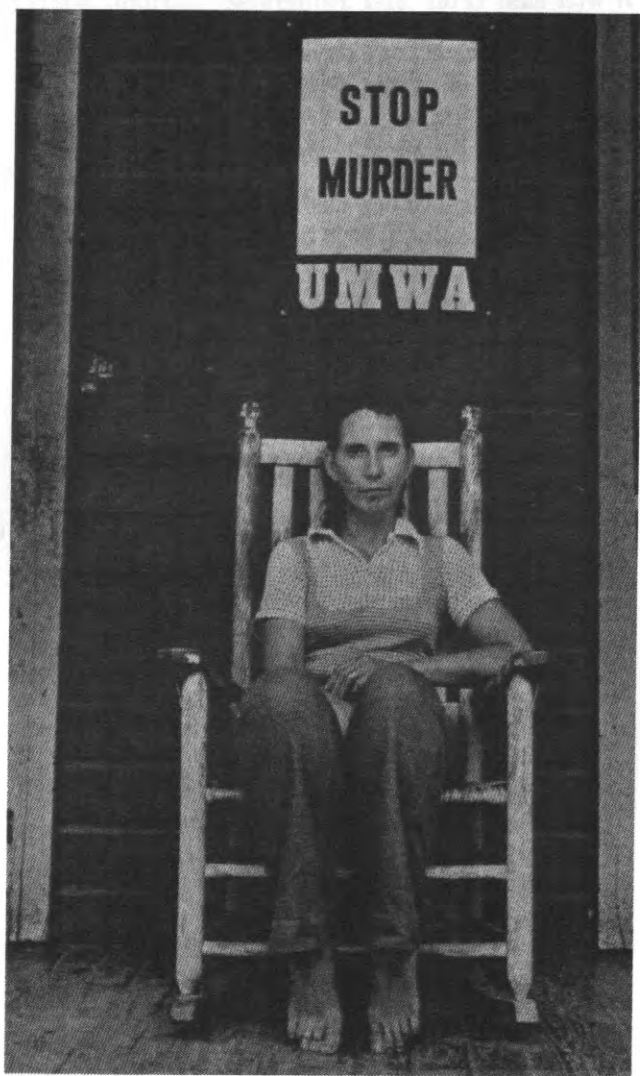
But Bruner seemed to have his mind set. He knocked the man out of his way with the butt of his shotgun and pointed at Jones.

"You're the monkey I want," he said, and opened fire. Everyone dove for cover, but too late. Lawrence Jones was hit in the head. Bruner was grazed by pistol fire while retreating to his truck, but was able to drive away.

The other miners rushed to Jones, who said a few gasping words and then fell silent. They drove immediately to Harlan Appalachian Regional Hospital.

Lawrence Jones lived for four days on a hospital operating table with the aid of a life-support machine, while his mother and his 16-year-old wife waited for the inevitable news.

On Saturday, August 31, the mining families of Harlan County came together to lay their fallen brother to rest. That morning, the Brookside men had met to vote on the contract Jones helped bring about. "We'll make them pay for this," said Jerry Johnson, pointing to the casket, "by signing up every mine in Eastern Kentucky."



NANNIE RAINEY, wife of Brookside striker Jerry Rainey and a member of the Brookside Women's Club. "I had to take my kids with me when Judge Hogg sent us to jail for picketing. I had never been in a jail before, and I hope I never am again. But I'm proud I did it, because good came out of it."

VI

As Lawrence Jones lay dying in the hospital, the company began to negotiate with the union in Washington. Duke Power had not sat down with the union since November 1973. But now it knew that it better sign a contract as soon as it could, or it would have a bloody war on its hands with the miners in Harlan County—and not just in Harlan County.

The murder of this young man, coming after the long bitter struggle, would be a new rallying cry to all the miners throughout the coal fields of the whole country. (Actually Duke tried to create the impression that they didn't want any more of the miners to get killed. But nobody in eastern Kentucky would believe such a thing.)

Within sixteen hours from the time negotiations began, a contract was signed. It was a good one.

The Brookside strikers won the standard UMWA contract, which includes: a mine safety committee, pay from the time they

enter the mine (which is often twenty minutes or more before they begin to work), job security, seniority, a genuine grievance procedure, decent medical program and retirement plan.

The company was forced to reinstate all miners discharged since the strike began, including Mickey Messer, the president of the Brookside local, who had been fired for union activities before the strike began in May 1973.

Eastover agreed to join with the UMWA in seeking dismissal of all strike-related cases pending before the courts, including contempt citations, fines and jail sentences.

The union and the company agreed to drop all cases pending before the National Labor Relations Board.

The company agreed not to oppose the UMWA's petition to the NLRB for decertification of the hated Southern Labor Union as bargaining agent at the Highsplint mine. In the event that the UMWA wins an NLRB election at that mine or any other Eastover mine, the company agreed to automatically and immediately sign the national UMWA contract for those mines as well.

Eastover promised to reinstate all miners at the Highsplint mine who the company claimed had "quit" their jobs during the sympathy strike which began July 8. The UMWA will pursue its request that the NLRB also reinstate three Highsplint miners who have been fired. In the meantime the three will be hired as temporary UMWA organizers.

The company also agreed to automatically sign the new national agreement, once it is negotiated, after the present contract expires on November 12, 1974. If the agreement is signed after November 12—that is, if there is a national strike—the Brookside miners will be given all economic benefits retroactive to that date.

Of course everybody knows that Duke Power isn't beaten *all the way*. For instance, the scab foreman who shot Lawrence Jones has now been turned loose by a grand jury. There just happened to be two operators and two operators' wives on that jury! Now he's out scot-free and he's a foreman at Jawbone, Virginia—a non-union mine.

And strong as the strike was, Harlan County is still two-thirds unorganized. There are 14,000 non-union miners in eastern Kentucky.

But the Brookside strike itself is over. Several of the miners

are back at work (at this writing, late September, 1974) installing new equipment and machinery in the mine, getting it ready for production again. Soon all the miners will be back. And besides that, fifteen of the women from the Brookside Women's Club have applied for work in the mine!

The Brookside victory is "just the first pebble on the beach," says Lois Scott. "The women are going to stay organized," she promised at the meeting where the contract was ratified by the miners, "because you may need us again. The strike's not over; there's still Highsplint and Benham and Pathfork-Harlan and Mary Helen and Arjay—you know what I mean. We'll always be there to help."

They have already helped a lot more than anybody including themselves would have thought possible thirteen months ago. The strike itself has helped many more miners than just the ones at Brookside.

During the five day memorial period in August, over 200 miners from the Harlan-Pathfork Mining Company walked out in sympathy with the Brookside strikers. Three years ago they had voted the UMWA in, too, but they had been forced to work all this time without a contract. Well, just two weeks ago that company signed a contract with the UMWA! And several other mines in the county are on the verge of doing the same.

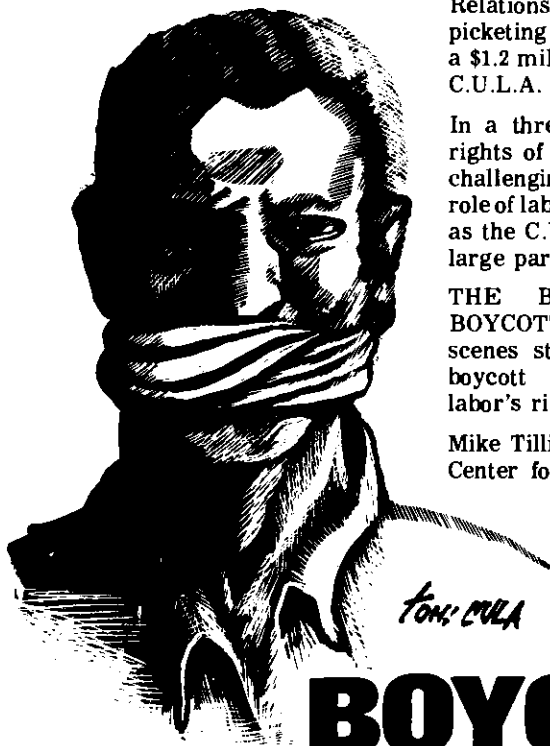
The Brookside victory is a beacon light, showing *all* the miners that they too can beat the coal operators. The victory has sent shock waves across the coal fields. "We're getting calls from unorganized miners all over eastern Kentucky every day," a UMWA representative told me.

When you get right down to it, the miners and their wives went on strike for themselves. They wanted conditions to work and live with. And they wanted the protection of a strong union. They just wanted to be treated like human beings, not like so many mules. Most of them weren't thinking about the thousands of other miners who didn't have a union. They were too busy dodging bullets to do much of that.

But these men and women of Brookside and Highsplint did more than they thought they did. They not only won a victory for themselves, but for all the working people in Harlan County.

And every county in the United States.

The BATTLE of the



The Farah strike has been won, but the issue of labor's right to carry out a boycott is still being fought.

As a result of actions in support of the Farah boycott, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the Center for United Labor Action are facing "unfair labor practice" charges from the National Labor Relations Board. A federal anti-picketing injunction remains and a \$1.2 million lawsuit against the C.U.L.A. is pending.

In a threat to the free speech rights of labor, Big Business is challenging the boycott and the role of labor-support groups, such as the C.U.L.A., which played a large part in the Farah boycott.

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