

UMWA dissidents among 450 workers laid off at Pennsylvania mine

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Consol Coal Group has laid off 450 coal miners at its Eight-Four Mine in Washington County, Pennsylvania, and closed offices of the Rochester & Pittsburgh Coal Co. in Indiana, Pennsylvania, laying off all 60 employees.

Consol briefly closed the mine on September 22, the same day it completed the purchase of R & Coal for reorganization. Two days later it reopened the mine calling back only 180 of the more than 600 miners, leaving 450 without jobs.

Miners with as many as 18 years' service lost their jobs. Many of those laid off had been traveling two hours each way to get to the mine. They had previously been laid off from other R&P Coal in the town of Indiana.

Consol claims that the layoffs were necessary to allow the company to reorganize the mine after taking it over from R&P, and to place it on a profitable footing.

However, miners believe that the layoffs were part of Consol's overall strategy of shifting production to its nonunion operations. So far this year the mine had produced 8 million tons of coal and was on schedule to mine a record 12 million tons before the takeover.

Consol operates two nonunion mines in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the Bailey and Enlow Fork mines. At both mines long-wall machines which cut vast swaths of coal from the face are used. The Eight-Four mine has two long-walls in operation and was a direct competitor of the Bailey and Enlow Fork mines. Consol has only placed one long-wall back in operation. Its continued use is in question once miners complete a current section of the mine in about 50 days.

R&P also had a very strong sales department with its order books full. With its takeover Consol also obtains R&P's long-term contracts with several power plants.

The Eighty-Four Mine is also the site of opposition to the UMWA leadership. Workers from UMWA local 1197 staged a protest at the union's annual Mitchell Day rally last April 1 to oppose the contract signed by the UMWA leadership, which allows the coal operators to impose ever-greater levels of forced overtime. A group of thugs on the International's payroll attacked the protesters, savagely beating several of them.

The UMWA has done nothing to oppose the layoffs. At a recent meeting, the UMWA leadership brought in the same group of lawyers who are defending the union officials accused of attacking the dissident miners to discuss the provisions of the layoffs with miners.

Richard Cicci, a miner from the Eight-Four Mine and one of the workers who was attacked by the UMWA leadership, told the WSWS, 'You could see the smug expression on the faces of all the district officials when we had our meeting. They don't care anything about the miners who are losing their jobs. As far as they are concerned, they are glad that Consol is closing this mine since we are the ones who were opposing them. The lawyers did not know anything about the mine. The real reason they came down was to see if Russell Walker and Greg McClure would be willing to drop the charges against James Gibbs [an administrative assistant to UMWA President Cecil Roberts who is charged with assaulting the two rank-and-file miners].

'Consol is trying to shift to nonunion. They are offering these guys the early retirement provision that was negotiated in the last contract. These guys will only get five or six hundred dollars a month but they will lose all rights to get rehired. Consol just wanted the coal reserve. They can close our mine, dig another portal, give it a new name and open nonunion and the union will let them.'

See Also:

An interview with dissident US miner Richard Cicci
[16 September 1998]



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