

= Pittston Coal strike =

The Pittston Coal strike was a United States labor union action led by the United Mine Workers Union (UMWA) against the Pittston Coal Company , nationally headquartered in Pittston , Pennsylvania . The strike , which lasted from April 5 , 1989 to February 20 , 1990 , resulted from Pittston 's termination of health care benefits for approximately 1 @, @ 500 retirees , widows , and disabled miners . The strikers also cited the refusal of the company to contribute to the benefit trust established in 1950 for miners who retired before 1974 and the refusal of the company to bargain in good faith as grounds for their action . The company cited declining coal prices , decreasing demand , and recession as its reason for limiting health care benefits .

The strike affected production in mines mostly in Virginia , but a few in West Virginia and Kentucky as well . Mine workers and their families engaged in acts of civil disobedience , work stoppage , protests , and rallies . At its peak in June 1989 , the strike involved approximately 2 @, @ 000 miners daily staying at Camp Solidarity with thousands more sending donations and holding wildcat walkouts that involved around 40 @, @ 000 people . The participation of women in the labor action through the ad hoc formation of the Daughters of Mother Jones ? reminiscent of the early days of union organization ? proved an essential element of the successful strike .

= = Events leading to the strike = =

During the 1980s , the real (inflation @-@ adjusted) price of coal declined , putting economic pressure on coal companies . Many coal companies began employing non @-@ union workers who would work for less money so that the coal company could maintain a profit .

By 1987 Pittston Coal had dropped from being the seventh largest coal operator in the United States to the 15th , and coal production was at an all @-@ time low . The Pittston Coal Company had worked with the Bituminous Coal Operators (BCOA) , which regulated health and retirement benefits offered to Pittston workers . The Pittston mines continued to lose money , though , and in 1987 the Pittston Coal Company terminated its contract with the BCOA to establish its own health and retirement benefit contract with the UMWA . Through collective bargaining , the UMWA and the Pittston Coal Company established two different retirement plans for the miners : one for those who retired before 1974 and one for those who retired after 1974 , in the hopes that this would help the company gain a profit .

In 1988 , Pittston still felt the strain of providing benefits , with the cost per miner increasing by \$ 3 @, @ 746 from the 1979 amount . The company was still going into debt and having a difficult time paying for the miners ' benefits . To avoid losing more money , Pittston doubled health deductibles , lowered the coverage from 100 % to 80 % , and discontinued benefits to miners who retired before 1974 . This change in the health care plan was still not enough for the company to gain a profit , so they decided to keep the mines running 24 hours a day and seven days a week , with no overtime for the workers . Pittston also did away with successorship clauses , which meant that the miners of Pittston would not have job security or transfer of job rights in mines that were leased or sold . Miners were now working longer hours with more expensive health care plans , while the mine was losing no production time because it was never closed .

The UMWA took action against Pittston 's new plan of operation and offered to reach a settlement . The coal company stayed quiet , and when the time came to renew the health care and retirement benefit plans for its workers , Pittston refused . The refusal to renew the contract left about 1 @, @ 500 people without health care . These people were not just miners employed by Pittston , but also families , widows , and disabled miners in the Virginia area .

= = UMWA declares strike = =

In April 1989 , after the miners had worked 14 months without benefits , UMWA president Richard Trumka declared a strike against the Pittston Coal Company . Around 2 @, @ 000 UMWA members who worked for Pittston walked out of the mines and reported to the picket line . Pittston responded

to the strike by hiring replacement workers . To ensure that production would continue , Pittston also had help from the state police to escort the replacement miners and coal trucks across the picket line .

The UMWA used civil disobedience to attract attention to the needs of the miners . The union stressed that all actions of the strike must remain peaceful . However , many miners still used violent methods during the strike . The strike gained the media 's attention . People came from all across the country to support the UMWA 's cause , and around 50 @,@ 000 people went to southwest Virginia during the course of the strike .

During the strike , Pittston 's production was reduced by about one third . Low production could have been a result of the strike taking place in several mines owned by Pittston . The main mine involved was the Clinchfield Coal Company in Dickenson County , Virginia . Some of the other mines that participated in the strike of 1989 were the Moss 3 Preparation Plant in Russell County , Virginia , McClure mine , and the Westmoreland Coal Complex . Pittston refused to give in to the UMWA 's demands , although operating at a loss , and the strike continued . Unable to meet the financial needs of the strikers , the UMWA started to suffer as well . As the strike progressed , members of the union were paid less than \$ 210 a week on average ; less than a third of the average salary of \$ 640 a week .

Although the union members were getting less pay than promised , they did not lose their faith in the UMWA 's ability to negotiate a settlement . Due to Trumka 's efforts , the miners were able to keep their spirit and morale up during the strike . He knew that giving into the demands of Pittston would only lead to other mine companies revoking health care benefits . On August 20 , 1989 Trumka was questioned by B. Drummond Ayers Jr . , a local reporter from the New York Times , about how long he expected the strike to continue . Trumka responded to the question by saying , " People keep asking how long we can hold out . The answer : one day longer than Pittston . " The strike continued until February 1990 , when a settlement was agreed upon by both parties . The settlement was reached after taking the demands to court several times and after many ratifications were made . The miners of the Pittston Coal Company were able to once again receive health and retirement benefits .

= = Strike tactics = =

During the Pittston strike , the UMWA wanted to only use nonviolent means of protest against the company . Many union members practiced this method of civil disobedience and found creative ways for their message to be heard such as mass sit down strike and road blockades . However , many wildcat strikers ignored the request of the UMWA and used violence to express the anger that they felt toward the Pittston Coal Company . By the time the strike had ended , over 4 @,@ 000 people had been arrested for their actions .

= = = Violent actions = = =

A majority of the people who carried out violent acts were nonunion members and wildcat strikers . Actions included destruction of the Pittston Company 's mining equipment , pelting coal trucks with rocks to break their windows , and stopping the trucks by slashing their tires ? usually using Jack rocks . Jack rocks were sharp tools made up of nails welded together with their points facing out designed to puncture the tires . Wildcat strikers also began to organize walkouts which were illegal for UMWA members , but since the wildcats were not affiliated with a union , they continued to organize walkouts throughout Virginia . By June 1989 , nearly 37 @,@ 000 wildcat strikers became involved with the Pittston strike .

The strike acts soon spread past Virginia and into other parts of the country and other coal companies . Additional violent acts included the making of car bombs that were placed along roadsides that coal trucks would travel . Shotguns were used to shoot employees at the Hampton Coal Company when they tried to enter the coal mines . Some strikers shot into the windows of cars and houses of the replacement miners and Pittston Coal Company owners . There were many

different violent strike tactics carried out and although many people were injured , including one striker shot , there were no deaths associated with this strike .

= = = Civil disobedience = = =

The UMWA tried to focus the strikers on civil disobedience and often stepped in to stop the wildcat strikers . The union members used many different nonviolent strike tactics . These acts included standing and blocking the roads that the coal trucks would travel , mass sit down strikes , and large groups of people picketing outside of the Pittston coal mines . This method of protesting helped the UMWA gain support from other people around the country .

Another method of peaceful protesting was demonstrated in the formation of Camp Solidarity which was located in the center of the protesting , in southern Virginia . Supporters came from all over the country to show their outrage against the actions of Pittston but there was no place that they could stay . Although many people in the local towns would offer shelter , they could not provide enough beds and food for all the people who came . Union member supporters found a solution to the problem . A local recreational park near Castlewood , Virginia was turned into a campground where these supporters could stay . A small shelter equipped with bunk beds was built and an already existing snack bar was opened to provide food for the people staying at Camp Solidarity . Because the location was a recreational park , there was plenty of space for others to bring campers and tents into the area .

= = = Moss 3 = = =

The most important act of civil disobedience during the Pittston strike was Moss 3 . Since the strike had been going on for a few months , with no settlement expected in the near future , union members began to lose hope . Thousands of people had already been arrested and a lot of money had been spent on a cause that seemed to be never ending . Union members knew that something had to be done to regain the spirit of the strike and make it clear to Pittston that they would not give up .

The plan that the Union officers devised was called Moss 3 , named after the Pittston ? s Moss 3 Preparation Plant which was its primary coal processing plant at the time . The officials were very secretive about planning this act of nonviolent strike . They wanted Pittston to know nothing about what was about to take place . Officials selected 99 union members out of Virginia , West Virginia , and Kentucky to participate in Moss 3 and the selected miners met in Virginia and were told about the plan .

Moss 3 was set up to be an unexpected mass , nonviolent , sit down strike within the preparation plant . The 99 strikers walked into the plant peacefully and sat down inside the plant to halt production . Meanwhile , thousands of other supporters gathered outside the plant to encourage the strikers inside ? an estimated 5 @, @ 000 supporters at the height of Moss 3 were gathered outside the production plant .

The sit down strike inside Moss 3 lasted from Sunday to Wednesday . After four days , the strikers felt they made their point to Pittston and walked out . Local miners said that Pittston had called in the National Guard and state police to remove the miners if they did not leave within an hour ? s time . The Pittston owners felt that the miners inside were tipped off to this information and that they left to avoid being arrested .

= = Women ? s involvement = =

Although the Pittston strike involved coal miners , many of the supporters of the strike were not miners at all . A majority of the support that the union members received was from women , who were a pivotal aspect of the strike . Many of these women were either wives or daughters of miners who worked for Pittston , but some women supporters had no affiliation with Pittston Coal Company or mining at all . The women would sit down in the middle of roads causing blockages while others

would drive slowly in front of coal trucks to cause delays . Two famous groups of women supporters arose during this time ; " The Daughters of Mother Jones " and " The Freedom Fighters " . At the peak of the strike around 500 women were involved in supporting the miners , most of them housewives .

= = = Daughters of Mother Jones = = =

One group of women that formed during the strike was the ? Daughters of Mother Jones ? . The group took their name from Mary Harris Jones , also known as " Mother Jones " , a famous mine union activist . The group chose the name because they wanted to support the miners ' benefits and follow the same beliefs as Jones . The Daughters performed many of the same actions as other women supporters during the strike , including organizing places for supporters to stay , preparing food , and raising money for the miners .

The action for which the Daughters of Mother Jones are best known is their organization of an ongoing strike at the Pittston Coal State Headquarters in Lebanon , Virginia . The women would meet outside the headquarters and strike , without the instruction or organization of the UMWA . They picketed outside every Monday and Wednesday in the hopes that they could gain more media attention and support for the miners . Despite this , the Daughters did not feel that they were doing enough , so they independently constructed a sit down strike to take place at Pittston Coal headquarters , unorganized by the union .

On April 18 , 1989 , a group of 39 women went into the Pittston Coal headquarters and held a 36 ? hour sit @-@ down strike . The women stated that they would not leave until a contract was signed . When questioned by police and media reporters to give up their names , the women responded by saying that they were daughters of Mother Jones . The Daughters gained the attention of the media and completely halted production at Pittston for an entire day and a half . The women involved were not members of the UMWA but wanted to support their cause , and due to this they were linked to the UMWA and considered by some to be a part of the union .

= = = Freedom Fighters = = =

Another women 's group that developed during the strike , in Camp Solidarity , was the Freedom Fighters . The main mission of these women was to cook and provide meals for the people staying at Camp Solidarity . The Freedom Fighters set up a phone bank to inform other people of what types of food they could donate and how much food was needed . Because of the Freedom Fighters , many supporters were able to stay at Camp Solidarity for a long period because they were being fed for free . By forming this group , the women of the Freedom Fighters found a way to support the miners and the UMWA . The Freedom Fighters formed during the Pittston Strike , but they did not end there . Today the Freedom Fighters still exist as a group of women who help to support the benefits for miners across the United States .

= = Aftermath of the strike = =

In February 1990 , the Pittston Coal Company and the UMWA came to a settlement . The current miners of Pittston would receive health and retirement benefits once again . Pittston Coal Company also had to pay around \$ 10 million for the retirement benefits plan for pre @-@ 1974 miners . In return Pittston was permitted to operate seven days a week as long as they were closed from 8am ? 4pm on Sundays . Miners were also put on a rotating schedule where every 28 days they would work one week for 4 days , 10 hours each day .

Both groups had lost a considerable amount of money , Pittston due to the slowdown of production , and the UMWA for the cost of organizing the strike . At the end of the strike , the UMWA was fined around \$ 64 million because of their actions during the strike . Many of these fines were not just because of violence that had erupted , but also for the road blockages and other forms of civil disobedience . Union officials were personally charged \$ 13 @,@ 000 a day for the strike and the

union was charged \$ 200 @, @ 000 for their actions at Moss 3 . Many people opposed the charges that were made against the UMWA and petitioned that they be dropped . Although not all charges were , a vast majority were cleared and in return , union officials had to do 10 @, @ 000 hours of community service to compensate for the removal of the fines .

Miners of the Pittston Coal Company were glad that a settlement had been reached and that they would once again be receiving health and retirement funds . However , because they were without benefits for such a long time , many people had gone into financial trouble . During the strike , the costs of health care had to be paid out of pocket and many miners did not have the resources to do so . As a result , many miners had accumulated debt . Another direct result of the Pittston Strike was the formation of the Coal Act . This act was established in 1992 . This act made it mandatory by law for mining companies to provide health and retirement benefits for its workers .

At the time of the strike , Pittston was a strong coal company and the area was full of strikers protesting . Since the strike , many of Pittston 's coal plants have been sold to Alpha Natural Resources , which is now in the nation 's top three coal companies , in order to pay for the health care for the miners . After the strike ended , Moss 3 was demolished and a new plant was built and named after it , and the recreational park that became Camp Solidarity has been reclaimed by nature and is now an open field . Though the physical aspects of the area have changed since the strike has ended , what has not changed is the feeling that the miners of Pittston accomplished ? a win for their own benefits as well as benefits for the UMWA . The union 's actions during the strike made it possible for thousands of miners to receive health care and retirement funds for years to come . Even though the miners were able to reach a settlement in early 1990 , the case of the UMWA vs. Pittston Coal Company did not end in 1990 . The fines , over \$ 60 million , did not come into bargaining until 1994 and Pittston agreed to drop most of the charges . However , since the case was now in the court system , many courts wanted the UMWA to be responsible for all of the fines . The UMWA appealed all fines against them and the case remained undecided for many years .