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The Southern Company

DO NOT BUY
SOUTH AFRICAN COAL
UMWA Launches Battle To Stop South African Coal Imports

By DON STILLMAN

Seven years ago Cliff Pierson had a good job working in the iron ore mines that supplied the big steel companies around Birmingham, Ala. The pay was decent, the work interesting and the future seemed bright.

Then, suddenly, Cliff Pierson was out of a job. Instead of mining the ore in nearby Jefferson County, the companies began importing it from Venezuela, a South American country thousands of miles away.

Pierson, like hundreds of other unemployed ore miners, eventually became a coal miner. And again the future seemed secure because of the growing demand across the country for energy produced from coal.

But now Pierson is worried about his job and so are many of the 8,000 UMWA miners who work in Alabama. The reason: a major utility company is planning to begin importing 2.5 million tons of coal from South Africa.

"I've been a victim before," Pierson says. "When they shut down the ore mines and started bringing the ore in from South America, I was out in the cold. Now it looks like it could happen again with this South African coal."

For the moment, Pierson and most other Alabama miners aren't in immediate danger of being laid off because of the Southern Co.'s purchase of coal from South Africa. But the move has sent shock waves throughout UMWA District 20 and has caused a massive effort now underway to block the coal from being imported.

"We want that coal stopped pure and simple," UMWA President Arnold Miller said. "It's an outrage that in a country with billions of tons of low sulfur coal under the ground that the Southern Co. would go out and contract for coal from a foreign country more than 9,000 miles away."

Miller, in a letter to Southern Co. chairman Alvin Vogtle, urged the company to void its agreement to import the South African coal and explore in detail the apparent availability of low sulfur coal in Alabama. The UMWA president also has asked Alabama Gov. George Wallace to support the union's efforts to see that the South African coal does not come in through the state-owned docks in Mobile, Ala.

The first shipment now is reportedly to arrive there about July 15 from South Africa. The Southern Co., which owns Gulf Power, Alabama Power, Georgia Power, Mississippi Power and the Southern Electric Generating Co., has contracted for 500,000 tons of coal from South Africa this year. Southern has contracted for 920,000 in 1975 and 1,050,000 in 1976.

The company claims it was unable to purchase low sulfur coal in the U.S. that can meet the 1975 air pollution control requirements in Florida where it is to be burned in Gulf Power Co.'s generating plants in Panama City and Pensacola.

One of those plants, the Crist Steam Plant Unit 7, was just completed last August, but the company failed to install adequate scrubber systems and other technology that would allow the burning of medium sulfur coal. Southern Co. claims that such equipment does not exist, although it apparently is being installed elsewhere.

Increased demand for coal has created a tight market, but company sources now say that supplies of low sulfur coal are available although at prices double or triple what they were last year.

One top Alabama coal official told the Journal that "plenty of low sulfur coal exists, if the Southern Co. or any other utility is willing to pay the price."

"In my opinion, and I've been in the coal business all my life, there's plenty
Another company official told the Journal that “there’s no question that coal of the low sulfur variety is available.”

He said Southern may be fearful of driving up the purchase price for the bulk of U.S. coal it purchases from its regular suppliers. “They probably don’t want to disrupt the decent prices they get for about 90 per cent of their coal by being forced to bid higher for the last 10 per cent,” he said. “By going outside and buying South African coal they keep their regular supply and prices stable.”

In addition to the availability of low sulfur coal being produced right now, other company officials in Alabama indicate that even greater quantities could be provided if the Southern Co. was willing to sign long-term contracts that could lead to the opening of new mines and expansion of existing mines.

U.S. Bureau of Mines figures indicate that Alabama has 2,043,500,000 tons of deep minable low sulfur coal and 330,000,000 of strippable low sulfur coal. Most of it is within 200 miles of the power plants that plan to burn the coal imported from South Africa.

In the eastern U.S., Bureau of Mines figures prove that about 15,829,850,000 tons of deep minable low sulfur coal exist and about 724,000,000 of strippable low sulfur coal exist.

Nevertheless, Southern Co. officials still claim they intend to try to bring coal into Mobile next month. A company spokes-

man told the Journal that the coal has not been loaded aboard ship in South Africa yet. It reportedly will take about 30 days for the coal to reach Mobile after it is loaded. The Mannesman Pipe and Steel Corp. of New York City, made the sales arrangements between Southern and the South African operators.

If that coal does arrive at Mobile, it appears clear that it will have a welcoming committee of thousands of angry coal miners. Just days after UMWA members learned of the South African deal, more than 90 per cent of the 8000-man district walked off the job in protest.

The protest occurred May 22, the day that stockholders and the board of directors of the Southern Co. held its annual meeting in Birmingham. About 500 miners established a picket line around the Kahler Plaza Hotel where the meeting was held. They carried signs protesting the South African coal imports.

Pinkerton guards employed by Southern swarmed around the area as did Southern Co. plainclothesmen who carried walkie-talkies, cameras and portable videotape equipment. They attempted to take photographs of the picketing miners during the six-hour work action.

Tom Youngblood, a UMWA miner at Mary Lee #1 in L.U. 1881, was allowed into the Southern Co. stockholders’ meeting as a guest of representatives of the Georgia Power Project, a group opposed to the South African coal imports which had stock proxies entitling them to be admitted.

After hearing board chairman Alvin Vogtle, Jr., tell the shareholders about the “ever present need for greater profits,” Youngblood finally got the floor and told the executives and stockholders that the UMWA “is going to fight this South African coal 100 per cent.”

“You want to know how to get low sulfur coal?” Youngblood asked. “Well, I’ll tell you how. Go out and open up some new mines. Don’t put us out of our jobs for miners in South
TOP DOGS—Members of the board of directors of the Southern Co. relax as they listen to Alvin Vogtle, the chairman, tell shareholders at the annual meeting that the firm earned $148 million last year. Despite those huge profits, the company has refused to install available air pollution control equipment so its plants can burn medium sulfur coal. Instead, Southern is planning to bring 2.5 million tons of coal in from South Africa.

Africa who only make $66 a month.” “You people are always looking down for a nickel or a dime,” he said. “If you owe your allegiance to this country, then get your coal from it. Deep down in your hearts you know what is right. We want you to do it.”

The day before the picketing of Southern’s annual meeting, District 20 officials and delegates from UMWA local unions in Alabama made the rounds at the State Capitol seeking support from officials for UMWA efforts to stop the South African imports.

Sam Littlefield, District 20 president, Frank Clements, IEB member and Lloyd Baker, secretary-treasurer, led the lobbying group that met with Jere Beasley, Alabama Lt. Governor, and William Baxley, attorney general.

Assisted by State Senator Robert Wilson and Representative Bobby Tom Crowe, the UMWA members told Beasley and Baxley that the union expects the state to act to protect the jobs of Alabama miners. The docks at Mobile, where the coal is expected to land, are operated by the state government.

Littlefield later met with Alabama Gov. George Wallace and asked for his help.

“We’re ready to do just about anything we have to do to stop this coal from coming in here to Alabama,” Littlefield told the Journal. “We are seeking the full support of the longshoremen’s union in Mobile and we are confident they will stand together with us.”

A group of miners is expected to meet soon with local union officials of the International Longshoremen’s Association in Mobile to explain fully the issues involved in the UMWA’s opposition to the South African coal imports.

By taking a strong stand against the South African coal imports, the UMWA is joining with a broad coalition of other labor unions, church groups and social activists opposed to South African policies.

In addition to saving the jobs of UMWA members, the union is opposed to the import deal because of the slave labor conditions under which that coal is produced in South Africa. Black miners there are brought in from remote tribal areas and forced to work as conscript labor.

Black miners in South Africa work without union protection and earn only $3 per day. They are forced to live in concentration camp conditions with 20 or more crowded into a single room sleeping on concrete slabs. The men are kept separated from their wives and children for months at a time.

South Africa’s government officially enforces a policy called “apartheid” which requires strict separation between white and black persons there. The UMWA has joined with other American unions and various international labor organizations to condemn those practices.

The UMWA was one of the first in this country to admit black members from its inception and to oppose company efforts to divide the union by turning brother against brother. Richard Davis, a black miner, was elected to the UMWA’s International Executive Board with the highest vote of the convention in 1896.

While other unions barred black members in the early 1900’s, the UMWA had more than 40,000. Despite these moves, however, vicious discriminatory practices were common on the part of most coal operators for most of the UMWA’s history.

“It doesn’t matter if these people in South Africa are black, green or purple,” Earl Askew of L.U. 5933 in Trafford, Ala. said. “It’s slave coal no matter what their color. We’re in a union state and we don’t need any slave labor coal brought in here.”

“Slavery in the South went out a long time ago,” Howard Tedford of L.U. 1500 in Adger, Ala. said. “We don’t believe in slavery. Slave labor in Africa is real cheap and it’s my information that this coal is produced under slave labor conditions.”

“Our people feel pretty much the same way about this importing of coal from South Africa: one ton or fifty million tons, it’s got to be stopped. Not tomorrow, but today.”
EDITOR'S NOTE: Miners across the coalfields reacted angrily last month to the news that the Southern Co. plans to bring 2.5 million tons of steam coal into the U.S. from South Africa. The move could put the jobs of hundreds of UMWA members in jeopardy. Alabama miners told Journal Editor Don Stillman about their opposition to the South African coal imports and what they plan to do about it.

Howard 'Shep' Tedford
L.U. 1500
Adger, Alabama

Our people feel pretty much the same way about this importing of coal from South Africa: one ton or fifty million tons, it's got to be stopped. Not tomorrow, but today.

Our people is real deadset against that coal coming in, to the extent of doing just about anything to stop it. We found out about it last Saturday. I posted it on the bulletin board. Buddy, any bad news is like black powder after you light it. The word got out real quick to all the men. Some of them haven't got over the initial shock of it, though.

With this order for two million tons, we could have 500 men displaced. Bringing in South Africa coal would take jobs away from mining that we need in the coal industry and we as coal miners are not going to stand idly by.

Slavery in the South went out a long time ago. We don't believe in slavery. Slave labor in Africa is real cheap and it's my information that this coal is produced under slave labor conditions. We no longer have this any more and we are strictly against slavery.

We don't want any coal coming in to this country that's got blood on it. The information we got is that the safety conditions in South Africa for the miners is real bad. If it's worked under slave labor, then you know it's as bad as you can get.

Now we have trouble balancing our budget in the United States right now. We should open up more mines and export more coal—ship it out instead of going out and buying it from South Africa. That hurts us and means we can't get a balance on our national debt.

The information I have is that we have a good breed of people that works those docks in Mobile where that coal is supposed to come in. Those men are Alabamians just like we are. They belong to a union and I believe they would help us any way they can.

Joe Cruce
L. U. 8878
Brookwood, Alabama

We haven't made any official statement on South African coal as far as the local goes. Everything I say is personal, but I feel it would be like what the men would say if you asked them.

We want to stop that coal. We sell our coal to Alabama Power, which is part of the outfit that's going to try to bring in this coal from Africa. We have an interest in it, the way the electrical tie-ups are now.

They plan to take that coal to northern Florida. But if the power plants at Wilsonville and Gorgas run low on their supply, they can use the African coal to supply electricity into Alabama.

Our bargaining power is lowered by this and we need all the leverage we can get in bargaining when the contract time comes. That's what makes me wonder about the timing of this. If we go on strike, they'll run out of coal at the power plants here in Alabama and then they'll transfer electricity up here that's produced from the coal they got from South Africa.

I think the majority of our men are against any coal that is non-union produced. The miners in South Africa work under slave conditions for $3 a day. They are black miners. No blacks are allowed to hold supervisory positions. Of course South Africa has laws on which it makes it impossible for a black man in South Africa to hold any high position. They can't vote and they can't strike. If he does, it's a criminal offense. There are many miners in jail right now, due to these laws.

We want to make it known to the public what the Southern Co. and Alabama Power are doing. We'll do this through word of mouth and then through demonstrations and picket lines at different meetings of the Southern Co. and possibly a picket line at the state docks.

The dockers are strong union men, just like we are. We don't feel they'd cross a picket line.
Leon Alexander  
L.U. 8982  
Bessemer, Alabama

Now on the importation of this coal, our local union found out this past Sunday when we reported to them on the bargaining council meeting. They voted to send two men to the state capitol in Montgomery to see what could be done about this.

I'd like to point out that the Southern Company is a holding company for 25 other companies and a portion of those is the Alabama Power Co., the Georgia Power Co., the Mississippi Power Co. and the Florida Power Co.

This is the same thing under a different guise that we saw in the '40's when the major steel companies in Alabama decided to bring ore in from Venezuela. The cry then was they needed ore due to the war and all. Now the power shortage has got the Southern Co. saying they need this coal to combat the power shortage.

The miners in Alabama feel like the coal miners in Alabama can supply all the fuel that the Southern Co. needs. The coal is here and so is the men to dig it. They don't need to go to South Africa for it.

We are asking our state and federal officials to back us in this. We are asking our International union to back us in the effort to block this. The longshoremen's union will not unload anything in the docks of Mobile that has a legitimate boycott against it. They have been fined for refusing to unload things. We know that if we boycott that coal, the longshoremen will back us.

When we drag them into a fight and they get in trouble, we have to back them up all the way. We have to let them know what the issues was.

Don't let the first shipload come through the docks and you won't be bothered with the second load. That's my feeling on it. I think the International ought to get an import duty placed on this coal—in other words, if we put enough price on it they won't bring it in. The Southern Co. has made the boast they can bring it in from South Africa cheaper than they can get it here.

The miners in Alabama feel like the coal miners in Alabama can supply all the fuel that the Southern Co. needs. The coal is here and so is the men to dig it. They don't need to go to South Africa for it.

Earl Askew  
L.U. 5933  
Trafford, Alabama

The thing that concerns me is whether we're going to let them bring this coal in. Indirectly, it would affect our jobs if this coal is allowed to come in to the state of Alabama.

We had the representatives from almost every local in District 20 up in Montgomery. We were supposed to see Governor Wallace on this thing, but he was out of town. We talked to the attorney general and the lieutenant governor on it. They said they were with us, but no one really committed themselves. These people talk real good, but time will tell whether they were just blowing smoke or not. It's just like it always has been. We can't depend on anybody to do the job for us—we've got to do it for ourselves.

We got a good start in the picket line at the Plaza Hotel for the stockholders meeting of the Southern Co. to show them how we feel and to alert the general public in Alabama to what they're trying to do.

I've found Alabama Power to be an arrogant company. Their sole interest is how much money they can make. They don't care about what happens to the people. What about the people on fixed incomes that can't pay high rates for electricity? And that's a necessity now. It doesn't matter if these people in South Africa are black, green or purple. It's slave coal no matter what their color. We're in a union state and we don't need any slave labor coal brought in here.

I'll say one thing. I've got no doubt at all that the longshoremen are good union men. They'll support us all the way. The question is whether we're going to do what we should do.
South African Miners Live,

Miners live in crude barracks without

THE UMWA is fighting South African coal imports not just to protect American jobs, but also to protest the horrible conditions in South Africa. Black miners there work under slave labor conditions for $3 a day or less. They are brought in from tribal border areas and are forced to live in concentration camp conditions. These photos, by Ernest Cole, graphically document the miserable conditions in South African mining camps. Men there live 20 to a room and sleep on concrete slabs, separated from their wives and children. They work six days a week in crude, hazardous conditions until they become disabled and are deported. The slave labor conditions in South Africa enable the operators there to produce coal so cheaply it can be financially competitive with U.S. coal.

Tribesmen are brought in from the bush to work in the mines.

South African miners are crowded.
Suffer And Die In Slavery

their families. Black miners are often harassed. Food in miners' camp served with a shovel.

together like cattle. Living on $3 a day means little food or clothing for the children.