

Talks close to resuming

Coal industry strike still a serious concern

By BARRY RENFREW
Associated Press Writer
CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — United Mine Workers President Sam Church said yesterday that union and coal industry representatives are close to resuming contract talks, and summoned his negotiators back to Washington just five days before an impending strike.

He recalled the UMW bargaining team and bargaining council that must approve a contract covering 160,000 members of the UMW, which has struck over every contract since 1964.

But brightened hopes for renewed talks did not diminish prospects for a walkout at 12:01 a.m. Friday, as ratification requires about 10 days and the UMW has a long tradition of not working without a contract.

"Hopefully we'll be at the table within the next 24 hours," said Church in an interview with WCHS-TV. "I think we'll be able to get back to the table in the next day or so."

Asked if an agreement was near, Church would only say that he was waiting for resumption of talks with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association.

"We've really been working on it cause we'd like to get this settled. I don't want to see my people suffer," he said.

Earlier, Church recalled the union's five-member

bargaining team and 39-member bargaining council to Washington. The union's five top negotiators were to meet last night with Church.

Church said Friday that although he had so far failed to revive the collapsed talks, he would continue his efforts to get them going again so any strike would be brief.

Vernon Massey, international executive board member for the UMW's District 17, said yesterday that he and other members of the bargaining council were told to meet at the union's national headquarters on Tuesday.

"There's something developing or he (Church) wouldn't be calling us back," said Massey. He declined to elaborate, adding only: "They just called me. I haven't had time to get my plane ticket yet."

Jack Perry, District 17 president and bargaining team member, confirmed that the council had been recalled. Asked if the move indicated possible progress in contract talks with the coal industry, Perry said, "Yes, or I wouldn't see any necessity for us to be called back."

Under UMW procedures, the five-member bargaining team meets with BCOA negotiators to work out a contract, and the 39-member bargaining council must ratify any contract before it can be submitted to members. Church sent the bargaining team home on Friday. The council left three days before.

BCOA officials could not immediately be reached for comment on the union's action. B.R. Brown, the group's chief negotiator, said industry representatives would resume the talks when the union softened some demands.

It could not be learned whether Brown and his two negotiating partners were returning to Washington. But a call to the home of Dennis O'Neill, Brown's chief aide, indicated he was en route to Washington.

Temperature's rising

It should be partly sunny and cool today with an afternoon high of 46. Partly cloudy and cool again tonight with a low of 28. There should be a moderate amount of sunshine tomorrow with a milder high of 50. Partly cloudy and mild on Wednesday with an afternoon high of 52.

Coal strike may cause summer power crunch

By CINDY COX
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

The University would probably not be affected by the approaching United Mine Workers' strike until the summer, University manager of energy conservation programs said.

J. Carroll Dean said any problems resulting from the strike would come from an electricity shortage rather than a direct coal shortage.

"A strike would not affect our coal supplies but our electricity supplies," Dean said.

Coal comprises about 80 percent of all the fuel used at the University, about 45,000 to 60,000 tons of coal a year. The University has stockpiled enough coal to last four or five months, he said.

"The University buys most of their electricity through West Penn Power Co. — which is predominately a coal-consuming power company," Dean said.

Thomas Kearney, power services engineer for West Penn Power, said coal is used to generate 93 percent of

the company's electricity.

"The effect of a strike depends on how long it lasts," he said. "We hope to have enough coal stockpiled to get us into the summer, until the end of June."

If the strike continues into June, Kearney said the Pennsylvania Public Utilities Commission or Gov. Dick Thornburgh might restrict the energy demands of commercial businesses, and possibly those of University.

Kearney said West Penn Power usually makes a public request for conservation when faced with power shortages. He said mandatory conservation can only be ordered by the PUC.

The last UMW strike lasted for 111 days from December 1977 to March 1978, during which the University went to full-generating capacity to help West Penn Power, Kearney said.

"The University cannot be self-sufficient," he said, "but they can generate as much power as possible to ease the demand on West Penn."

During the 1977-78 strike, Dean said part of the emergency period occurred while students were on spring break. The University extended the break a week and reduced the temperature in buildings on campus to ease the shortage, he said.

Dean said the University would make any decisions about service reductions later in its planning process.

The present disagreements between the coal miners and the Bituminous Coal Operators Association are related to salaries and voluntary Sunday shifts.

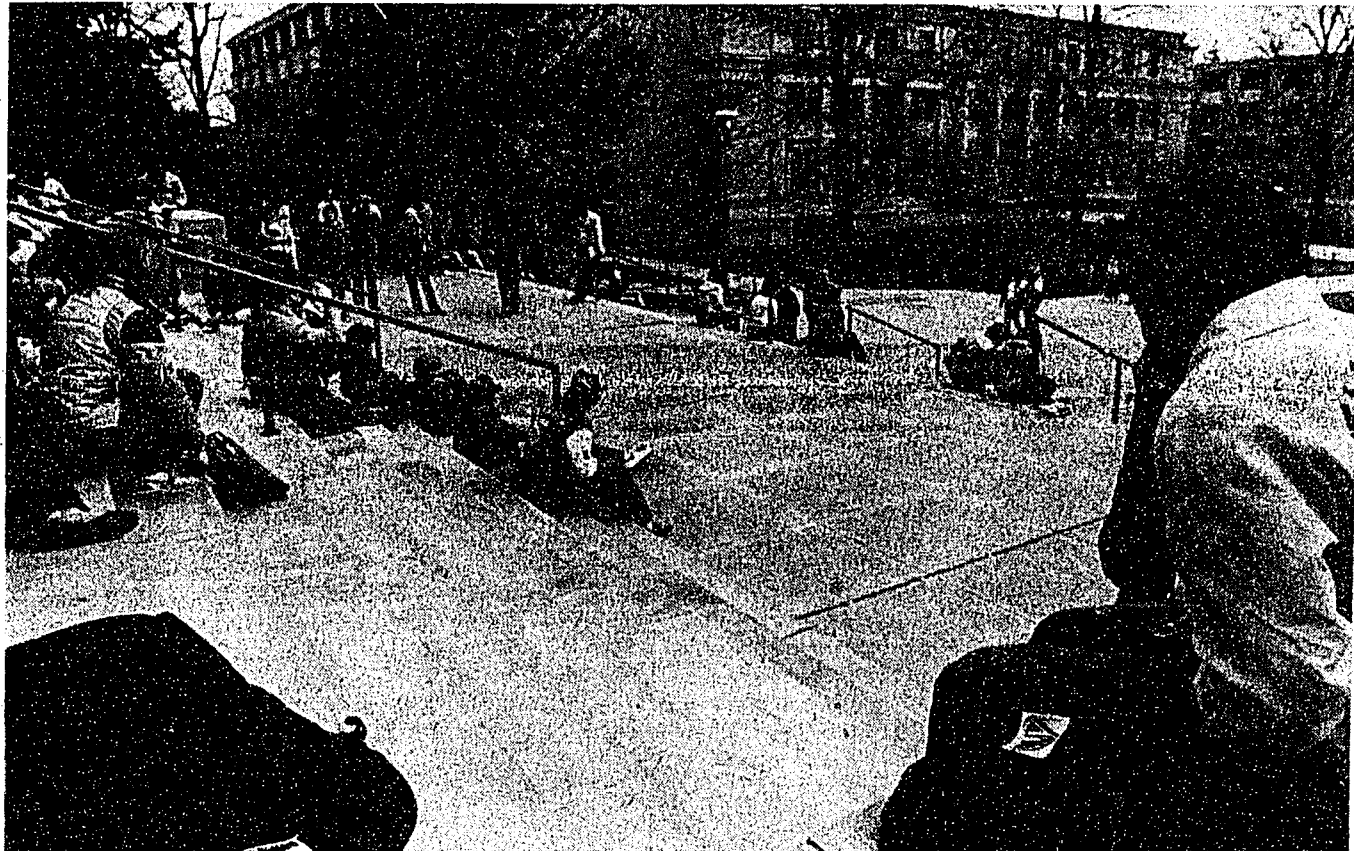
Coal miners in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, West Virginia, Ohio and Illinois staged wildcat walkouts last week after contract negotiations broke down in Washington D.C. By the end of last week, about 12,000 miners were off their jobs.

The UMW contract expires at 12:01 Friday morning. Even if a tentative agreement is reached before then, contract ratification procedures by the rank and file take 10 days.

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Pattee patience

Penn State is famous for its lines. With the memory of the dorm contract campout just a week old, students are again patiently falling into line. Yesterday afternoon, they wait for Pattee to open its doors so they can catch up on the studying they managed to avoid all weekend.



CATA management sets new priorities

By PAUL BOYNTON
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

With new faces in leadership positions, the Centre Area Transportation Authority is emphasizing improved labor-management relations and maintaining, rather than expanding, existing service.

This is a direct contrast to recent problems with labor-management relations and the rapid growth seen by the CATA system in the past year and a half.

the authority," he said. "I know the drivers have better things to do than grievances and arbitration and testifying before the personnel committee. I think it was hurting both sides."

But communication channels are opening — just what Oversier thinks is necessary for efficient operations.

Westby, elected two weeks ago to replace resigning union president Christine Catalano, said he is optimistic about improved relations with management, but is cautious given past experience with CATA management.

analysis

Among the new faces are: Paul Oversier, CATA manager; Kurt Westby, president of the American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees local 1203-B; and John Spychalski, chairman of the CATA board.

Controversial confrontations, sometimes vehement, between management and union officials in the past overshadowed any gains CATA made as an efficient, expanding mass transit system.

Oversier, who worked in the public transportation bureau with the Illinois Department of Transportation before coming to CATA, said troubled relations between labor and management were detrimental to CATA.

"Look at what it's done to this place," Oversier said. "It's hurt us in terms of our public image. It's hurt us in terms of our credibility with public officials. It hurts us up to this day."

"Both the board and manager were spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with labor issues — time that could have been better spent on other types of problems confronting

my door is always open. Drivers are free to come in and talk things over. That kind of input is always welcome.

Let's face it, they're out on the streets — some of them for eight hours a day — and they see things we can't see. They are a valuable source of information.

COLLEGIAN: Are you searching for ways to increase labor participation to perhaps help formulate policy proposals?

OVERSIER: The informal lines of communication we've set up give them the opportunity to let their ideas be known.

I'll consider their input seriously. But, the fact is, I'm answerable to the CATA board, they're not.

I'm the one that has to develop the alternatives, but, again, they have a big say in that. But I'm the one who has to evaluate the alternatives and make the proposals to the board.

COLLEGIAN: Do you think excessive

Manager says CATA changing

Editor's Note: Paul Oversier, 28, recently took over as manager of the Centre Area Transportation Authority. He earned degrees in economics and transportation at Northwestern University. He managed a transit system in Highland Park, Ill., and also worked in the public transportation bureau of the Illinois Department of Transportation. He is a former bus driver and emphasizes accommodating labor-management relations. Daily Collegian staff writer Paul Boynton recently interviewed Oversier, and the following has been edited for length and clarity.

Interview

COLLEGIAN: Are labor-management relations more conciliatory now, rather than adversarial as they had been before you became CATA manager?

OVERSIER: The key point is that both management and the union are moving in that direction.

That's the only way things are going to get done — if both parties are willing to compromise. In terms of substantive issues, we've gotten somewhere in the short time I've been here.

We were able, for example, to settle our first grievance without having to go to the personnel committee or all the way to arbitration.

It wasn't easy because it took us a couple of weeks to settle it. But we were able to sit down and come up with a solution acceptable to both sides. It is an important precedent to set. We should be able to work most things out by just sitting down and working things out and compromising.

COLLEGIAN: Do you have any thoughts on forming informal labor-management committees to increase communication which would perhaps increase performance efficiency?

OVERSIER: Informal, to me, is that

conflict between labor and management is detrimental? Is the traditional adversarial relationship between labor and management archaic as far as being conducive to efficient operation?

OVERSIER: Without a doubt.

Look what it has done to this place. It has hurt us in terms of our public image and our credibility with public officials — it hurts us up to this day.

At public meetings we've heard comments like "How can we be sure you can provide us with uninterrupted service." It's part of my job, and the board has been working on this also to improve CATA's credibility.

The other thing is that if your employees are unhappy, they are not going to do a good job. I want the bus drivers to be happy at what they are doing, and that will in turn have a good impact on the system.

I hope the adversarial relationship is a thing of the past.



Paul Oversier

Photo by Greg Bullock

It is my understanding that both the board and the manager were spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with labor issues. The time could have been better spent dealing with other problems confronting the authority.

I know the drivers have better things to do than to spend hours and hours on grievances and arbitration and testifying in front of the personnel committee. I think it was hurting both sides and it wasn't accomplishing much.

COLLEGIAN: Was it the fault of both parties then?

OVERSIER: I'm not in the position to say who was to blame.

But I do think there could have been more give and take by both management and labor. That's what it's all about. It got to the point where it was hard to make even small progress. I want to avoid those kind of situations.

COLLEGIAN: Given the fact that you are a former bus driver, perhaps the union can identify with you and vice-versa.

OVERSIER: I have some empathy with what it means to be a bus driver. I can see things from their perspective. I think they realize that.

COLLEGIAN: With the ever-increasing operating costs, do you expect a fare increase in the upcoming budget?

OVERSIER: (CATA finance committee chairman James) Miller is proposing slight increases in the prices of the passes. There won't be any increases in the cash fare.

COLLEGIAN: Do you expect to upgrade present bus routes?

OVERSIER: At this point, my plans are to do a route-by-route, trip-by-trip analysis of the system.

We have ridership data for every trip. I want to sit down with that data and see where we can streamline the system, that is, are there any areas where there is excess service?

I suspect from what I've seen thus far that there is a little bit of that, but not too much.

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