

Miners pick new president

anon.

1972

Tens of thousands of miners across the country are voting this month, under the scrutiny of Federal government officials, to elect a new president in the scandal-ridden United Mine Workers union.

Miners will choose between incumbent president Tony Boyle, and reform candidate Arnold Miller, the leader of the Miners for Democracy group.

The new election was ordered by a Federal court earlier this year, when it invalidated the last UMW election (held in 1969) because of massive irregularities in the voting.

In that now-invalid election, Boyle defeated reform candidate Joseph ("Jock") Yablonski for the UMW presidency. Yablonski had charged Boyle with corruption and dictatorial rule during the campaign, and had pledged to renew rank-and-file democracy in the union if elected.

Miller has made similar charges and similar pledges in the current campaign.

After his defeat in 1969, Yablonski had claimed that massive vote fraud had occurred in the election. He filed suit to overturn the results but was murdered along with his wife and daughter on New Year's Eve, 1969.

Miller, along with Yablonski's two surviving sons, are attempting to rebuild the reform coalition that Jock Yablonski had begun. Miller, a 56-year-old former coal miner from West Virginia who was forced to retire from the pits because of black lung disease, was chosen by Miners for Democracy as their presidential candidate at an open convention last spring.

Miller is expected to run well among active miners in the Pennsylvania-West Virginia-Ohio coal belt, but his strength in other mining areas is uncertain. Boyle is expected to win the support of most retired miners, because of a pension increase he pushed through two years ago.

The final results of the election will not be known until late December, because of a Federal court order instructing officials from the U.S. Labor Department to oversee every phase of the election. This court order was requested by the Miners for Democracy forces, who hope to avoid the blatant fraud of three years ago.

The new election comes at a time when Boyle, who has run the UMW with an iron hand since 1963, is under fire from many sources. He has been indicted on two counts of financial corruption charges this year, regarding the payment of union money into Hubert Humphrey's presidential campaign in 1968.

Moreover, Boyle has been implicated in the murder of Jock Yablonski. The recent confessions of both Annette Gilly (wife of convicted murderer Paul Gilly) and Silous Huddleston (a UMW Official from Tennessee) indicated that a special fund had been created, out of union treasury funds, in order to pay for Yablonski's killing.

Both Gilly and Huddleston implicated Albert Pass, a close aide to Boyle, in the arrangement of the murder fund. Gilly said openly that she believed the orders to murder Yablonski had come from Boyle.

Miller has hit hard on these charges during the campaign, as well as attacking Boyle's lack of action on mine-safety issues during his term of office. Miller has also charged that Boyle has destroyed any vestige of rank-and-file democracy within the union.

Boyle's only answer to these charges has been to claim that Miller and the Yablonski brothers represent an attempt by "outsiders" to take over the union. Boyle has pointed to the Yablonskis' close friendship with Joseph Ruah, a prominent liberal Washington attorney, as proof of his charges.

How rank-and-file miners will react to these charges remains to be seen.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/173-december-16-1972-january-5-1973/miners-pick-new-president>
Fifth Estate #173, December 16, 1972-January 5, 1973

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net