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16 APRIL 2010

## Anne Lewis : Don Blankenship and the A.T. Massey Crime Spree



Don Blankenship, a "plump, soft-spoken accountant with a smirk." Image from [treehugger.com](http://treehugger.com).

### ***The porcine man:*** **Don Blankenship and the Sordid history of A.T. Massey**

By Anne Lewis / *The Rag Blog* / April 16, 2010

[See Mine War on Blackberry Creek, the 30-minute 1986 documentary by Anne Lewis about the 1984 United Mine Workers of America strike against A.T. Massey -- including her interview with now CEO Don Blankenship -- [here](#).]

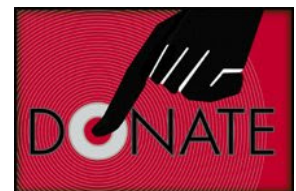
Who is this porcine man (all apologies to the noble pig) wrapped in our country's flag saying that federal regulation of mine safety is as "silly as global warming?" Why it's Don Blankenship, CEO of A.T. Massey, the

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Onward Through the Blog

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fourth largest coal extractor in the United States and now the source of the worst killings in a U.S. mine in 40 years.

The context is an [anti-union rally](#) last Labor Day in Holden, West Virginia, hosted by Sean Hannity and starring Ted Nugent and Hank Williams, Jr.

First a few highlights of the A.T. Massey crime spree, going backwards over decades:

- **2010** -- the latest and worst of four fatal accidents in 12 years at Massey mines: 29 men killed in the explosion at Upper Big Branch mine.
- **2009** -- \$3,000,000 contribution to elect a state Supreme Court justice that would rule in favor of Massey. Found guilty by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Company*.
- **2009** -- at company's behest, Raleigh County West Virginia judge blocks anti-mountaintop removal activists from peaceful protests on A.T. Massey strip mining sites.
- **2006** -- two miners killed in a fire at Aracoma Alma Number 1 Mine in Logan County, West Virginia.
- **2000** -- 300-million gallon spill of toxic sludge from Massey strip mine impoundment in Martin County, Kentucky, three times the size of the Exxon Valdez. The EPA called it "the nation's largest man-made disaster east of the Mississippi."
- **1984** -- UMWA strike against A.T. Massey Coal concludes with 400 union men blacklisted and permanently fired and an unconditional return to work for the rest of Massey's workers without a union.
- **1980** -- St. Joe Minerals and Royal Dutch Shell, which owned mines in South Africa under apartheid, create the Massey Coal Partnership.

The consistency of the record and its intersections are truly amazing -- from neo-liberalism to ecocide to corruption to murder, this is a huge lesson in the dark side.

In 1984, I sat in Blankenship's office looking out at a community (including the post office) that was hemmed in with barbed wire and armed guards. Blankenship was then president of Raul Sales, a wholly owned subsidiary of A.T. Massey. Don (I might as well use the familiar -- he called me Anne) was delighted to show me the bullet pattern that marked the edge of his television set.

A plump, soft-spoken accountant with a smirk, he explained the progress offered by A.T. Massey to South African miners. He offered a social Darwinist analysis of capitalism, calling it "survival of the most productive."

The interview and the rest of my film about the 1984 United Mineworkers (UMWA) strike against A.T. Massey -- *Mine War on Blackberry Creek* -- streams on [www.annelewis.org](http://www.annelewis.org). Rather than quote

## THE RAG: A Film



Part I of a documentary film about the life and times of Austin's pioneering underground newspaper, *The Rag* (1966-1977), by [People's History in Texas](#). *The Rag Blog* and *Rag Radio* are a digital-era rebirth of *The Rag*.

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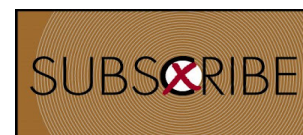
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from the film or try to describe visuals, I would suggest a free viewing. The end of the film is a defeat of the strike, but a victory in the spirit of the men and women who fought for their right to have a union.

At the time I was making the film, my future partner was working underground less than 40 miles away from the Upper Big Branch Mine that exploded April 5. He worked in similar conditions, on a long-wall section in a gassy mine. The difference was that the mine was unionized. The union safety committee shut the mine down at least three times and the miners walked out. None were hurt and none were fired.

That's one part of the story that's missing. In all the talk of federal regulation there's been no talk of the power of union rank and file miners to protect themselves. There's one notable exception -- Rush Limbaugh. [Rush asks](#), referring to the explosion, "Where was the union?" Rush, that may be the best question you ever asked.

Less than 20% of the miners in this country are unionized at present. That's scandalous and has a lot to do with Blankenship, his industry buddies, and reactionary labor law. In Canada, nearly every miner is in a union and there are almost no mining accidents. Strange coincidence? How about passing the Employee Free Choice Act so that miners could make the decision to be unionized.

And why aren't we hearing anything about what the union thinks in the mainstream press? [Here's Cecil Roberts](#), President of the UMWA saying that Blankenship should be "handcuffed and in jail."

The United Mineworkers fought for and won those regulations that Blankenship called "silly." There's miners' blood on every coal mine health and safety regulation.

The other part of the story is just as sad and far more complex. There's a picture of a floral arrangement taken at one of the 29 funerals this week that includes a hard hat with a sticker that reads "Friends of Coal." Friends of Coal? That's the group created by the West Virginia Coal Association that wants to educate us about the "new war the Environmental Protection Agency is waging against West Virginia coal" (would that it were so). That's who brought us the Labor Day rally where Don Blankenship spewed his ecocidal and murderous garbage.

## To Make a Comment

**Comment Policy:** This blog enforces a specific comment policy that prohibits personal attack, goading and harassment, and other malicious remarks. We will delete remarks considered inappropriate, at the discretion of the editors. We will also delete all commercial solicitations.

## Recent Stories

**Tom Hayden : Progressive Dems See Opening for New Politics by Tom Hayden / The Rag Blog.** The sight of progressive Democrats shaming and exposing the Wall Street-funded "Third Way" Democrats is a sign of a powerful new opening for progressives on the American political spectrum.

**Jack A. Smith : Climate Change Confab Brings Too Little Too Late by Jack A. Smith / The Rag Blog.** The sharply increasing scientific indicators of impending disastrous global climate change have failed to motivate the principal developed countries to accelerate the lackluster pace of their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**Lamar W. Hankins : Opportunist Narvaiz Takes On Doggett Again in Gerrymandered 35th by Lamar W. Hankins / The Rag Blog.** Former San Marcos mayor Susan Narvaiz, who is again challenging U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett in Texas' gerrymandered 35th district, is a political chameleon who says what she needs to say to protect herself from political accountability.

**Steve Horn : Keystone XL's Houston 'Fork in the Road' by Steve Horn / DeSmogBlog.** The southern half of TransCanada's Keystone XL tar sands pipeline includes a "Houston Lateral Pipeline" that is leading the LyondellBasell refinery to retool itself for the looming



*A miner's hard hat was placed in a floral arrangement at the funeral of William Roosevelt Lynch. Photo by Amy Sancetta / AP.*

And so the divisions within coal mining communities between the haves and the have-nots; the fight between those who would protect the environment and those desperate for jobs; the so-called individual “rights” of scabs versus community survival are used by Blankenship and A.T. Massey to do even more damage to a ravaged land and people.

I’m reminded of the great Hazel Dickens song -- you can substitute “Blankenship” or “A.T. Massey” or “coal” for “black lung,” or leave the words to stand in their original power.


**“Black lung, black lung, oh, your hand’s icy cold,  
As you reach for my life and you torture my soul.  
Cold as that water hole down in that dark cave,  
Where I spent my life’s blood digging my own grave.”**

*[Anne Lewis is an independent filmmaker associated with Appalshop, senior lecturer at UT-Austin, and member of TSEU-CWA Local 6186 and NABET-CWA. She is the associate director of Harlan County, U.S.A and the producer/director of Fast Food Women, To Save the Land and People, Morristown: in the air and sun, and a number of other social issue and cultural documentaries. Her website is [annelewis.org](http://annelewis.org).]*

### [The Rag Blog](#)

Posted by thorne dreyer at [5:15 PM](#) 

Labels: [A.T. Massey](#), [Anne Lewis](#), [Coal Mining](#), [Documentary Film](#), [Don Blankenship](#), [Labor Unions](#), [Rag Bloggers](#)

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feast of tar sands crude and fracked oil bounty.

**RAG RADIO / Thorne Dreyer :** November Guests Include Spiritual Counselor, Citizens’ Advocate, Singer-Songwriter by Rag Radio / The Rag Blog. Thorne Dreyer’s guests in November included a Methodist minister and longtime social activist, a noted citizens’ advocate, two staffers from the original Rag, the author of a book about the ‘movement that started the civil rights movement,’ and an acclaimed singer-songwriter. [Listen to the podcasts here.](#)

**BOOKS / Alan Wieder :** Paul Buhle’s ‘Radical Jesus: A Graphic History of Faith’ by Alan Wieder / The Rag Blog. Noted historian Paul Buhle, who has published an acclaimed series of nonfiction comics, is one of the most prolific and insightful critics from the American left. “Radical Jesus,” which communicates the social message of Jesus Christ in comic format, investigates the inequalities that exist in the world through a theological lens.

**Rabbi Arthur Waskow :** Israel, Hillel, and Idolatry by Rabbi Arthur Waskow / The Rag Blog. Hillel International, the “home” for many Jewish college students of diverse backgrounds and beliefs, has been beset with controversy about when uncritical support among American Jews for Israel becomes “idolatry of the State.”

**Paul Krassner :** Is There a Doctor in the House? by Paul Krassner / The Rag Blog. The Coachella Valley in Southern California hosted a massive four-day health clinic that helped more than 2,500 uninsured patients. Krassner points out that California leads the nation in people without health insurance and says that “the insurance industry has a

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preexisting condition known in technical terminology as greed."

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**Kate Braun : Winter Solstice Falls on Saturn's Day by Kate Braun / The Rag Blog.** Our celebrations during the Winter Solstice take from many traditions, including the Roman Saturnalia, Druid customs, the German "Yule," and the birth of Jesus; and it was Queen Victoria who popularized the lighted Christmas tree.

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**Allen Young : Ralph Dungan, the 'Good Liberal' by Allen Young / The Rag Blog.** A recent obituary of Ralph Dungan, one of President John F. Kennedy's top aides who later served as ambassador to Chile, reminds Allen of a revealing experience he had with the man referred to by a historian as a "good liberal."

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**Ed Felien : A Good [Angry White] Man With a Gun by Ed Felien / The Rag Blog.** Paul Anthony Ciancia considered himself a "good man with a gun" -- a warrior against the traitors who were taking over our government, bankrupting our currency, and trying to establish a New World Order -- when he walked into the Los Angeles airport and opened fire with an assault rifle.

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**BOOKS / Ron Jacobs : Matt Hern Writes With Bravado That Sports Do Matter by Ron Jacobs / The Rag Blog.** Engagingly written, Matt Hern's "One Game at a Time" is motivated by the belief that sports do matter as much as sports fans think they do. Hern, like leftist sportswriter Dave Zirin, "walks into the terrain where sports and politics mesh."

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**Lamar W. Hankins : Right-Wing Rants and the Abominable Straw Man by Lamar W. Hankins / The Rag Blog.** The Internet is a marvelous tool when used honestly and correctly, and with recognition of its limitations. But

it is also home to angry rants, often from the far right, that make ridiculous claims -- like the one (that actually originated on a satirical site) saying that the Obama administration was setting up gasoline stations to provide free gas to low-income [read: black] people.

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HISTORY / Bob Feldman : A People's History of Egypt, Part 12, Section 1, 1947-1948 by Bob Feldman / The Rag Blog. More in Bob's series on the continuing movement to democratize Egypt, this time covering the period from 1947-48 when an anti-imperialist left made experienced growth -- and the Muslim Brotherhood collaborated with the Egyptian regime.

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Harry Targ : My Nelson Mandela by Harry Targ / The Rag Blog. An irony of 21st century historical discourse is how real historic figures -- like the late Nelson Mandela -- get lionized, sanitized, and redefined as defenders of the ongoing order rather than activists who committed their lives to revolutionary change.

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Michael James : Back to Uptown, 1965-1966 by Michael James / The Rag Blog. Mike continues his remarkable memoir, accompanied -- and inspired by -- photos from his upcoming book. His adventures -- and the making of an activist -- continue as he heads back to Uptown Chicago, "progressing along my path with another left turn and a big step into America."

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Alan Waldman : 'Last of the Summer Wine' Has Kept Millions Laughing for 37 Years by Alan Waldman / The Rag Blog. British national treasure, Roy Clarke, created and wrote all 295 episodes of this droll Britcom about three elderly Yorkshiremen with too much time on their hands.

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Alice Embree : Chile and the Politics of Memory by Alice Embree / The Rag Blog. Chileans went to the polls Sunday and appear to be reelecting Socialist president Michelle Bachelet on the 40th anniversary of the bloody U.S.-supported coup against Socialist president Salvador Allende. Alice writes about the dramatic contradictions in Chilean politics and history.

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**Paul Krassner : A Tale of Two Alternative Media Conferences** by Paul Krassner / The Rag Blog. Paul remembers the original Alternative Media Conference in June 1970 at Goddard College in Vermont -- and it was a wild and wooly affair headlined by the likes of Ram Dass, Harvey Kurtzman, and Art Spiegelman -- as the college hosts another conference keynoted by progressive radio host Thom Hartmann.

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RAG RADIO / Thorne Dreyer : Singer-Songwriter Slaid Cleaves in Interview and Performance Interview by Thorne Dreyer / Rag Radio. Acclaimed musician Cleaves talks about Woody Guthrie's influence on his work, reflects on his time as a busker on the streets of Ireland, and spins some yarns. He also performs live for our audience. Read the story and listen to the podcast.

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**Harry Targ : STEM and the Tyranny of the Meme** by Harry Targ / The Rag Blog. From the fear of "falling behind the Soviets" to the missile gap and, more recently the wars on drugs and terrorism, the fear of falling behind some fictional adversaries is an ongoing "meme" used by economic, political, and military elites. The latest? Now it's the "STEM crisis" and the fear that we're falling behind other nations in science and technology .

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Alice Embree : Anne Lewis' New Website Brings Austin Movement History to Life by Alice Embree / The Rag Blog. Noted documentary filmmaker Anne Lewis has created a website called Austin Beloved Community that uses audio, film, photos, maps, and personal recollections to create a "digital collage" about the struggle for social and economic justice in Austin from the 1880s to the present. Alice interviews Lewis about the unique project.

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**BOOKS / Ron Jacobs : Marc Myers Tells Us 'Why Jazz Happened' by Ron Jacobs / The Rag Blog.** Ron reviews a new book on America's own music in which Marc Myers "provides the reader with a deep, rich, and broad perspective on the confluence of jazz and U.S. history in the decades following World War Two."

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**INTERVIEW / Jonah Raskin :** Novelist Beverly Gologorsky Was Shaped by Sixties, Feminism, and The Bronx by Jonah Raskin / The Rag Blog. Another unique interview from Jonah with novelist Beverly Gologorsky, whose latest book, "Stop Here," "the title of which nearly shouts its presence. Gologorsky, "a novelist shaped by the New Left," edited anti-war publications Viet-Report and Leviathan in the '60s and '70s.

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**Bob Feldman : A People's History of Egypt, Part 11, Section 2 by Bob Feldman / The Rag Blog.** The latest in Feldman's series on the "movement to democratize Egypt" covers the period of 1945-6 when Egyptian communist and labor grew and faced government retaliation.

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**David McReynolds : We Are All Wounded Veterans by David McReynolds / The Rag Blog.** Long-time pacifist writer and activist McReynolds says there's something "infinitely sad" about the recent celebration of Veterans Day. "In



the bad wars -- which are the only wars we have fought for some time now -- there is the terrible knowledge that the enemy was never really the enemy," he says.

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**RAG RADIO / Thorne Dreyer :** October Interviews with Poppy Northcutt, Maneesha James, Seth Holmes, and Thomas Zigal Interviews by Thorne Dreyer / Rag Radio. In October Rag Radio guests addressed Texas feminist history, issues involving death and dying, the plight of migrant farmworkers, and the post-Katrina craziness captured in fiction. Read about our guests and listen to the podcasts here.

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Michael James : Going Off Campus, 1965 by Michael James / The Rag Blog. Mike continues to share experiences and images from his rich history as an activist and adventurer -- that will be published in an upcoming book, "Michael Gaylord James' Pictures from the Long Haul." Here Mike reports on the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, community organizing in Oakland, and his travels across the country in a 1957 Plymouth station wagon "drive-away."

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**Alan Waldman: 'Keeping Up Appearances' Tops Second Tier of My Favorite Britcoms** by Alan Waldman / The Rag Blog. Waldman has been reviewing vintage, mostly-British television series now available on DVD, Netflix, and YouTube. "Keeping Up Appearances" "is a very funny sitcom with a brilliant cast," starring Patricia Routledge as social-climbing snob Hyacinth Bucket.

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