

Charges brought by dissident US miners

UMWA officials named in assault

Paul Scherrer
30 April 1998

Charges have been filed against three high-ranking officials of the United Mine Workers of America for their role in an April 1 assault on a group of dissident miners protesting the policies of the UMWA leadership.

The attack took place at the UMWA's annual Mitchell Day celebration, held this year in Bentleyville, just south of Pittsburgh. Rank-and-file miners and local UMWA officials from Pennsylvania, Ohio and West Virginia were holding up signs and distributing leaflets outside of the social hall where the union's official rally was being held.

Within minutes of their arrival, the miners were set upon by supporters of the national union leadership, including a number of UMWA officials. The goon squad surrounded the miners, ripped leaflets and posters from their hands, and physically assaulted them.

The miners were protesting the UMWA's sanctioning of forced overtime in the five-year contract signed with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association (BCOA) last December. Under the agreement, miners are forced to work nine or more hours per day. The dissidents pointed to the hypocrisy of UMWA officials holding a rally to honor the winning of the eight-hour day in 1902, when these same officials had signed away the eight-hour day for current miners.

In addition, the dissident group, "UMWA Rank & File," criticized the BCOA contract for combining job classifications and cutting medical benefits and pensions.

One of the miners, Richard Cicci, financial secretary of UMWA Local 1197 and a worker at Rochester and Pittsburgh's Eighty-Four Mine in Washington County, Pennsylvania, was struck on the head with a stick and suffered a gash over his ear that required nine stitches.

Charged in the assault were three officials on the

payroll of the UMWA International: James Gibbs, director of organizing and administrative assistant to UMWA President Cecil Roberts; Donnie Samms, organizing director for Region Four, which covers the western US; and Marty Hudson, a trustee of the union's Combined Benefit Fund and 1992 Benefit Plan. Warrants for two other, as yet unidentified assailants were also issued.

Gibbs was charged with attacking Cicci and another opposition miner, Russell Walker, with a four-foot wooden stick, causing serious bodily injury. The affidavit filed with the charges states that Gibbs ran towards the protesting miners, knocked one miner to the ground, took his sign and "began to beat" him with it. Among the charges against Gibbs are two counts of aggravated assault, simple assault, riot and criminal conspiracy.

Hudson and Samms are charged with assaulting opposition miner Mark Segued, causing minor bodily injury. Samms faces simple assault charges and Hudson faces charges of harassment, disorderly conduct, riot and criminal conspiracy.

The individuals in the John Doe warrants are charged with assaulting miners Glenn McClure and Ed Bell. A hearing will be held in three to ten days in front of the district magistrate.

In a video shot immediately following the attack, Gibbs, Hudson and Samms can be seen escorting UMWA President Cecil Roberts and former UMWA President and current AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Richard Trumka into the meeting hall.

In the immediate aftermath of the Mitchell Day attack, UMWA President Roberts issued a statement which, in effect, sanctioned the assault on the miners. He told the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, "...you can't curse the union and its leadership and expect that no one will

take exception to that.”

Earlier this month the UMWA organized its own hearing into the April 1 incident. This, however, became the occasion for a witchhunt against the dissident miners, who were blamed for the violence.

UMWA lawyers brought to the hearing a prepared statement which was presented to the president of Local 1197 for his signature. The statement named Richard Cicci as the leader of the opposition group. This was apparently part of a plan to isolate Cicci and other dissident miners and lay the groundwork for their expulsion from the union. In a further move in this direction, the International union told Local 1197 that it would be placed under trusteeship if it used any of its funds to pay for lawyers to defend members of the opposition against UMWA charges.

In the wake of the indictments, the UMWA bureaucracy is continuing its tactic of blaming members of the opposition group for the April 1 assault. A spokesman at the office of Mike Healey, the attorney representing the indicted UMWA officials, characterized the incident as a “scuffle” and said it was being “blown out of proportion.”

On April 28 a WSWS reporter spoke to Trumka, who was attending the Pennsylvania state AFL-CIO convention in Pittsburgh. The former UMWA President and current second-in-command of the AFL-CIO refused to comment when asked about the Mitchell Day attack.

The Socialist Equality Party has had many experiences with the goon-squad tactics of the UMWA bureaucracy. During the 1989-90 Pittston strike one of the three UMWA officials charged in connection with the Mitchell Day beatings, Marty Hudson, helped instigate a campaign of slander, red-baiting and physical intimidation against reporters from the *Bulletin* newspaper, forerunner of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The aim of this campaign was to prevent any criticism of the policies of then-UMWA President Trumka. On May 8, 1989 and again on May 15, Hudson and other UMWA officials attempted to prevent *Bulletin* reporters from speaking to miners at the Moss No. 3 preparation plant in Virginia. Hudson tore up copies of the *Bulletin* in front of miners and called on the state troopers protecting the scabs to drive away or arrest the *Bulletin* reporters. Hudson had

earlier played a leading role in attempts to bar the *Bulletin* from miners’ picket lines during the 1984-85 strike against A.T. Massey.

The Socialist Equality Party reiterates its solidarity with the victims of the Mitchell Day assault. In an editorial board statement issued shortly after the April 1 attack, the WSWS wrote: “The Socialist Equality Party in the US emphatically condemns this hooligan attack and calls on miners and all workers to protest this assault on their democratic rights. Whatever Roberts and Trumka may think, their union sinecures do not give them a license to bully and intimidate workers who oppose their policies.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact