

US miners' union assaults dissident workers, then moves for their expulsion

Paul Scherrer
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In a flagrant attack on democratic rights, the United Mine Workers of America is moving to expel three dissident miners who were physically assaulted by union bureaucrats at a rally on April 1. The men, Richard Cicci, Mark Segedi and Ron Martos, face charges of disloyalty for organizing a protest against the policies of the UMWA leadership. If found guilty they face expulsion from the union and loss of their jobs. The union has also placed a Pennsylvania UMWA local in trusteeship and is threatening disciplinary action against 27 other miners if they do not cooperate in the victimization of their fellow workers.

The 'disloyalty' for which these workers stand accused is daring to speak out against the concessions granted to the coal operators by the UMWA. The workers were part of a group of about a dozen miners from West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio who attempted to leaflet the UMWA's annual Mitchell Day rally, held this year in Bentleyville, just south of Pittsburgh. The miners held up signs and passed out fliers opposing forced overtime, pointing out the erosion of miners' living standards, medical benefits and pensions, and condemning the attempt by the union leadership to exclude opposition candidates from elections.

Within minutes of their arrival, the miners were attacked by a group of union bureaucrats including 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. The union officials punched and kicked the miners and ripped leaflets from their hands. The attackers clubbed their victims with wooden poles. Cicci, a worker at the Pittsburgh and Rochester mine in

Washington County, Pennsylvania and a member of UMWA Local 1197, was hit on the head with a four-foot wooden stick and suffered a gash that required nine stitches.

In the wake of the attack five union officials including Hudson, Samms and Gibbs were charged with assault, riot and conspiracy. Despite compelling eyewitness testimony, including that of a police officer on the scene, a Pennsylvania magistrate threw out the most serious charges.

The charges against the three dissident miners were filed by a three-member commission appointed by UMWA President Roberts. The commission was headed by UMWA Secretary-Treasurer Carlo Tarley and included International Executive Board members Bernard Evans and Jackie Stump.

Twenty-seven other union members are named in the commission's report and warned that if they do not cooperate with future hearings they will be charged with disloyalty. Twenty-six of the miners are cited because they refused to appear at the commission hearing, and the twenty-seventh is cited because he attended but refused to answer questions about the April 1 events.

In addition, the commission ordered that the miners' home local be placed under trusteeship. The UMWA argued that the fact that some members of Local 1197 were dissatisfied with the International union (i.e., the central bureaucracy headquartered in Washington) was evidence of dereliction of duty on the part of the local leadership.

By putting the local under trusteeship the UMWA leadership ensured that the victimized miners would not be judged by their peers. According to the union constitution, rank-and-file miners are normally tried at the local level. As his first act the UMWA official

appointed by the International leadership to act as trustee of Local 1197 canceled a special meeting of the local called to try the dissidents.

A statement issued by Cicci, Segedi and Martos denounced the report of the UMWA commission. It declared, 'The report, which is 27 type-written pages, contains so many inaccuracies and so much misinformation that it would take us 100 type-written pages to correct it.'

The miners' statement cited provisions in the UMWA constitution that sanction the right of members to engage in opposition activities. 'What occurred on April 1 was an attempt to peaceably meet and assemble and to express our views upon the policies and business of the union. This is clearly protected under section 2. However we were not permitted to do so, but were subjected to physical assaults for exercising our rights under the Constitution.'

It concluded by appealing for support from rank-and-file UMWA members, declaring, 'It is clear that the top leadership wants to silence any criticism of its policies. Each and every member of the United Mine Workers of America should not permit this to happen since he or she may be the next person to be silenced.'

As these events demonstrate, there is little to distinguish the UMWA regime today from that of Tony Boyle in the early 1970s. If anything, it is more flagrant in the use of violence and frame-ups against rank-and-file members.

The use of gangster methods by the UMWA leadership is an indictment not only of the miners union, but of the AFL-CIO as a whole. The ranking union official on the scene at the Mitchell Day rally where the beatings took place was Richard Trumka, former president of the UMWA, now second in command of the AFL-CIO. His hand-picked successor, Cecil Roberts, is the official organizing the victimization of the dissidents.

The AFL-CIO has refused to issue a statement on the Mitchell Day assault or the subsequent persecution of the victimized miners. A spokesperson for the AFL-CIO, Debra Dion, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the federation is deferring all questions to the UMWA.

See Also:

Victimized miner denounces UMWA witch-hunt - 'The International is trying to silence us'

[9 July 1998]

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[3 June 1998]

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