

United Mine Workers executives assault left-wing podcasters in Alabama

Jerry White
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On the afternoon of Saturday, May 22, United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) officials, headed by District 20 Vice President Larry Spencer, physically assaulted and threatened the lives of two members of the “Dixieland of the Proletariat” podcast, falsely believing them to be representatives of the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The attack took place during a “Strike Fest” fundraising event for 1,100 striking Warrior Met coal miners in Brookwood, Alabama. The entire incident was recorded by the podcasters. In their initial Twitter post reporting on the incident, the Dixieland of the Proletariat podcast stated that “some miners believed we were another unwelcome group” and confronted them.

These were not, however, “some miners.” In addition to being the UMWA District 20 Vice President, for which he receives an income of \$140,000 a year, Spencer is on the Executive Board of the Alabama AFL-CIO, where he serves as a vice president at large for the southern district. Also involved in the assault was James Blankenship, a UMWA District 20 Representative. Blankenship is also on the Alabama AFL-CIO Executive Board.

That is, the assault was led and directed by top-level executives in the Alabama AFL-CIO and the UMWA.

The attack comes six weeks after miners delivered an overwhelming rejection, by a vote of 1,006 to 45, of a contract brought back by the UMWA. Next to UMWA President Cecil Roberts, Spencer was the leading force in trying to push the agreement through. Miners responded by denouncing Roberts as a “sellout” and burning copies of the contract.

In their assault, Spencer and Blankenship repeatedly refer to the “World Socialist Party,” referring to the WSW. Articles exposing the betrayals by the UMWA

have won a wide following among mine workers.

At 4:29 in the video, Spencer and Blankenship walk up to the podcast booth with two other men. Spencer asks, “Are y’all with the World Socialist Party?” One of the podcasters, Nelson, replies, “I’m with the DSA [Democratic Socialists of America],” but Spencer immediately thrusts his fingers towards Nelson’s chest and shouts, “Get the f**k out of here. No questions. Get the f**k out. I’m not asking you. I’m telling you. I run this. I’m Larry Spencer.”

The two podcasters begin gathering their equipment while the podcast co-host Tommy asks, “You don’t like socialists?” Spencer says, “Exactly!” Spencer rails against “What y’all are doing. What y’all are posting and stuff,” referring to *World Socialist Web Site* articles.

Spencer threatens again, saying, “Keep slowing down and we’ll find out what car you’re driving and fold it up too.” Thirty seconds later, Spencer and other thugs toss over the table, damaging equipment, and tell the podcasters to “shut up” and get off of their “private property.”

The UMWA officials continue to menace Tommy as he heads back to his car and then accost three youth who were previously at the table for trying to assist Tommy in carrying the equipment. Spencer shouts, “Get the f**k out of here” and tells Tommy, “You better erase that off your phone.”

Tommy, who is black, is clearly concerned about his safety and asks if he can retrieve his electric charger from the union hall. As he enters the hall, he informs Jacob Morrison, secretary-treasurer of the North Alabama AFL-CIO and former programs director of the Alabama College Democrats, that “we just got kicked out, and it was racist.” Asked by Morrison who threw them out, Tommy identifies Blankenship who has

followed him into the hall.

Blankenship lunges at Tommy, saying in openly racist language: “I’ll beat your mother f**king brains out, boy!” This violent assault is only stopped by Morrison who stands in Blankenship’s way and gets threatened too.

Nearly a dozen UMWA officials then follow Tommy and surround the podcasters’ car. With the thugs railing against the “World Socialist Party” and clearly intent on beating up the podcasters or worse, Morrison tries to stop them by declaring that the podcasters have no association with the WSWs, saying, “They’re not them.” The two podcasters also say, “We’re not with the World Socialist Party.”

The attack must be seen by all workers as a serious warning with grave implications. The fact that top leaders of the AFL-CIO and the UMWA assaulted and threatened to kill individuals they identified as left-wing and socialist is directed not only at the individuals themselves and at the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Above all, it is a threat directed against all workers who oppose the betrayals of the UMWA and want to develop a real struggle against the corporations and the ruling class.

The UMWA has a long history of out-and-out gangsterism, violence and murder. On December 31, 1969, Joseph “Jock” Yablonski, who had run against UMWA President Tony Boyle, was murdered in his Pennsylvania home, along with his wife and 25-year-old daughter. The day after the bodies were found, tens of thousands of West Virginia miners conducted a wildcat strike protesting Boyle, who would be convicted for ordering the murders.

Under conditions of growing working-class opposition, the UMWA is again resorting to out-and-out gangsterism. It is particularly significant that the attack took place less than 30 miles from Bessemer, Alabama. The Amazon workers at Bessemer are certainly aware of the thuggery of the AFL-CIO, which was a significant contributing factor in the massive defeat for the RWDSU at the warehouse last month.

Despite our differences, the WSWs defends the right of DSA members to campaign for their ideas free from threats of violence. But this incident proves the bankruptcy of the DSA’s efforts to promote these pro-company, gangster trade unions as “workers organizations” when in reality they exist today to

suppress the class struggle and protect corporate profit. In recent weeks, DSA leadership has also legitimized a culture of violence against socialists and helped create conditions for incidents like the one in Brookwood by celebrating the assassination of Leon Trotsky by Stalinist secret police. Morrison, the AFL-CIO official who was also threatened by Blankenship, denounced the WSWs as “wreckers” on May 11, employing the language of the Stalinist Great Terror.

The actions of Spencer and Blankenship are not only thuggish, they are also criminal. The behavior documented in the video constitutes, under the legal definition of the term, assault and battery.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on miners and all workers to oppose and denounce the actions of Spencer, Blankenship and their cronies. Workers should demand the immediate dismissal of Spencer, Blankenship and all those involved in Saturday’s actions.



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