

Following assault on left-wing podcasters, UMWA president arrested in publicity stunt at Warrior Met

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The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) President Cecil Roberts and ten other officials were arrested on Tuesday during a civil disobedience publicity stunt outside of Warrior Met Coal's No. 7 mine in Brookwood, Alabama. The UMWA organized the impotent protest as miners reach the two-month mark in their strike and are increasingly angered over UMWA's conduct of the struggle.

The protest took place just three days after UMWA officials violently attacked left-wing podcasters at the "strike fest" fundraising event outside of the Local 2397 hall on Saturday. Top UMWA District 20 officials Larry Spencer and James Blankenship physically assaulted two members of the "Dixieland of the Proletariat" podcast, falsely believing them to be representatives of the *World Socialist Web Site*. Both Spencer and Blankenship are members of the executive board of the Alabama AFL-CIO.

During the assault, Spencer told the podcasters to "get the f**k out of here" and flipped over their table. Blankenship threatened to kill one of the podcasters, who is black, shouting: "'I'll beat your mother f**king brains out, boy!"

Roberts' stunt at the No. 7 mine was staged for two purposes: First, to distract attention from last Saturday's assault, which has been denounced by miners and other workers, leading to demands that the UMWA immediately get rid of Spencer and Blankenship. Second, it is aimed at refurbishing the reputations of the discredited UMWA bureaucrats as they prepare to ram through the same sell-out contract that was already voted down by the miners.

Nearly 1,100 Warrior Met miners walked out on April 1. On April 9, coal miners rejected a UMWA-

backed proposal from the company, which would have restored only \$1.50 an hour, by a vote of 1,006 to 45.

The UMWA and the Alabama AFL-CIO have forced the miners to fight Warrior Met alone, even as the company receives backing from its Wall Street investors, pro-company judges who have issued court injunctions limiting pickets, and Alabama state troopers and county sheriffs who have protected the strikebreakers.

Hundreds of miners looking to defy the court injunctions and block the scabs from entering the No. 7 mine marched to the mine Tuesday afternoon. But they were greeted by Roberts and other UMWA officials who ordered them not to take any further action.

Standing on a concrete barricade and shouting on a bullhorn, Roberts told the angry miners, "The past few days we've shifted to nonviolent civil disobedience. If we go in there and tear things up, they are going to come in here with the cameras. They are going to shoot somebody. They are going to send somebody to prison for the next 20 years."

Shortly afterwards, in a theatrical performance prearranged with the Alabama State Police and Tuscaloosa Sheriff's Department, Roberts and 10 other officials, including District 20 Vice President Spencer and Local 2397 President Carl White, sat in the road on Warrior Met property and waited until the deputies carefully zip-tied their wrists and gently guided them into awaiting police busses.

The pacifism the UMWA bureaucracy employs towards Warrior Met and the police stands in sharp contrast to the violence against the two podcasters Spencer and his gang thought were affiliated with the WSWs. The UMWA has a long record of targeting the

WSWS and its predecessor in the United States, the *Bulletin* newspaper. Such threats, however, have always been aimed at intimidating and silencing the miners themselves and suppressing their long history of militant struggle.

This is underscored by Roberts' comments before the staged arrests. Nearly 40 years ago, in 1982, Richard Trumka (now president of the AFL-CIO) and Roberts took over the UMWA. In the name of bringing "stability" to the coalfields and making US-based coal operators more "competitive," i.e., profitable, they sought to destroy the miners' long traditions of class solidarity and militant defiance of the coal bosses and the government. This included the "selective strike" policy, which overturned the miners' long-standing principle of striking all the mines—union and nonunion—until every operator signed a national contract.

Trumka and Roberts oversaw the betrayal of the 1985-86 AT Massey and the 1989-90 Pittston strikes. During this time, small, isolated groups of striking miners faced brutal violence from the coal operators, private security thugs and the government. Miners were framed up and imprisoned for decades. Others, including AT Massey miner John McCoy, were murdered on the picket lines. In the face of these attacks, Trumka and Roberts did nothing to oppose the corporate and state violence against the miners. On the contrary, they welcomed it to crush the resistance of the most militant section of the American working class.

Thirty years ago, Roberts ordered the Pittston miners to carry out civil disobedience stunts like sitting in the middle of mine entry roads until state troopers hauled them into jail. This was a deliberate attempt by the UMWA bureaucrats to undermine the class consciousness and militancy of miners and instill the debilitating methods of middle-class protest and futile appeals to the conscience of the ruling class.

The defeat of the AT Massey and Pittston strikes led to the virtual disappearance of industry-wide contracts, the hollowing out of the UMWA in former strongholds like eastern Kentucky and southern West Virginia, and a wave of bankruptcies used by companies to gut the jobs, wages, working conditions and pensions of tens of thousands of miners.

After overseeing the loss of three-quarters of the members of the UMWA, Trumka was awarded the top

position in the AFL-CIO and Roberts the president-for-life position in the UMWA.

Since the rebellion by the Warrior Met coal miners and their overwhelming rejection of Roberts' sellout deal, the UMWA has followed a well-worn path. It has isolated the miners, put them on starvation-level strike benefits, sought to demoralize them with impotent protest stunts, and carried out thuggish threats against the WSWS aimed at intimidating miners and silencing their opposition. All the while, it is no doubt keeping back channels open with Warrior Met over when it is best to try to ram through another pro-company deal.

For hobnobbing with corporate bosses and politicians in Washington D.C., Roberts is paid an annual salary of \$210,000. That is \$4,038 a week, compared to the \$325 a week in strike benefits for the miners who are forced to go to food pantries to survive.

The Warrior Met Coal strike is at a crucial turning point. Everything depends on the independent initiative of rank-and-file workers themselves.

It is time for the most militant and class-conscious miners to form their own rank-and-file committee to outline the miners' demands, including the restoration of all pay cuts, fully paid health and pension benefits, and the elimination of the punitive attendance system.

This committee, democratically controlled by workers themselves, must repudiate the UMWA's program of class collaboration and revive the powerful class-struggle traditions of the miners and the whole working class. The miners cannot win this strike unless the UMWA's deliberate isolation of the strike is ended. Their struggle must be supported by spreading the walkout throughout the coalfields and to steelworkers, Volvo and other autoworkers, educators, Amazon workers and other sections of workers throughout the United States and internationally.



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