

Warrior Met Coal strike in Alabama reaches 100th day amid increased company violence

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Warrior Met Coal miners remain kept in the dark on negotiations by the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) as their strike reached its 100th day on Friday amid intensified violence by Warrior Met Coal employees. A rash of vehicular assaults in June sent more than one picket to local hospitals. Miners have alleged that scabs have pulled guns on them as they enter and exit the mine. On July 8, a miner's wife picketing on the side of the road was struck by a scab's car as he turned in at the Warrior Met Campus.

"He hit me on the right side of my body and just kept on going!" the victim said on a video provided by the union. "The sheriff told me that another sheriff would have to see it for there to be probable cause."

Another picket remarked: "They saw it! And she wasn't even in the road. He just literally hit her with his car. ... They mess us over with our jobs, with our insurance. They mess us out of our jobs, and our families are paying for it. And on top of that, they want us to be mistreated on the picket lines."

Warrior Met has refused to address the violence against the miners. The company alleges that transformers that power the mines have been shot out or otherwise damaged on three different occasions between May 15 and June 12, implying that these acts were carried out by pickets. On June 30, the Alabama Mining Association (AMA) announced a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of those responsible for the damage.

The AMA states on its website, "Damage to this equipment impacted public utility service and can seriously endanger the health and safety of the company's workers."

On the public Facebook page "What's Really Happening in Brookwood, Alabama," scabs and their supporters have claimed that the destruction of the

transformers amounted to attempted murder, saying that the transformers interrupted the power to the ventilation systems used by miners underground at the time. Others pointed out that the mines all have backup generators. None of these allegations were raised until June 30, despite the first incident occurring in May.

In the midst of these attacks against striking miners, the UMWA is continuing its efforts to isolate the Warrior Met strike while keeping workers in the dark about negotiations. "The union isn't telling us anything," a miner told the WSWS this week. The same miner also alleges that the union leadership was encouraging violence on the picket lines.

UMWA President Cecil Roberts has continued to perform acts of political theater. On June 15, Roberts had pickets and supporters park their trucks end-to-end to block company driveways as members shouted, "You ain't working tonight!" at the frustrated scabs. The police ordered the trucks towed and broke up the pickets.

This act followed a stunt protest Roberts organized in May, when he staged a sit-in, encouraging miners to walk onto Warrior Met property and sit down to block an entrance to Number 7 Mine. Eleven were arrested and held overnight in Tuscaloosa County Jail, with police warning that future arrests would result in being held until trial.

The entire labor bureaucracy has likewise attempted to spin gold from the miners' struggle. On July 9, Jacob Morrison, an AFL-CIO functionary in Alabama, penned an article for the UMWA's website, framing Roberts' theatrics as the democratic actions of the entire rank-and-file. He also stated that Warrior Met CEO Walter Scheller III was "negotiating in good faith."

Morrison finished with an account of the union's

stunt protest held on June 22 in Manhattan, when 14 UMWA members demonstrated against Warrior Met's investors. Morrison proudly pointed out that "labor leaders Stuart Appelbaum, president of the Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union [RWDSU], and Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, marched alongside them."

Last month, Morrison tweeted that miners' demands for higher strike pay would "liquidate" the UMWA's assets, characterizing the demand as "clueless."

Throughout the United States, union membership has dropped precipitously over the past decades. This is the direct result of tactics such as the UMWA has used at Warrior Met—protracted, isolated strikes, pushing unbearable contracts down their throats, and behaving as if picket lines are the personal pulpits of the AFL-CIO leadership. This is the reason the RWDSU failed in its push to unionize Amazon's Bessemer facility. This is also the reason that the entire AFL-CIO is using the Warrior Met strike to rehabilitate its image from that of a corrupt and pandering syndicate, a branch of management to which workers must pay dues.

Workers are not complacent; this is obvious in the resolve of Warrior Met pickets, and it is increasingly obvious throughout the US. Also on Friday, Volvo Trucks workers in Dublin, Virginia, powerfully rebuffed the third concessionary contract negotiated by the company and the United Auto Workers (UAW). In Topeka, Kansas, 600 Frito-Lay workers have gone on strike after rejecting four tentative agreements pushed by the company and the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers (BCTGM) union.

In 2016, the UMWA pushed a contract upon Warrior Met miners that resulted in the longest hours for the least pay of any unionized mine in the country. Certain terms of the contract echoed conditions miners faced 100 years ago, with miners' bonuses tied to their production rates and to the price of coal. These were terms the UMWA rejected militantly in its early days.

The union promised that they would negotiate better terms when the contract came up for renewal. Instead, the union, fully cognizant of all that the miners had given up, reached a tentative agreement with the company at the end of March that offered miners a mere \$1.50 per hour more over a three-year period. This pittance, coming after the \$6 pay cut miners took in 2016, would be eaten up by the skyrocketing cost of

living and was thus roundly rejected by the rank and file.

To take forward their struggle, Warrior Met miners must immediately form a rank-and-file committee to assert their own, independent interests in opposition to the UMWA bureaucracy, which is doing everything in its power to isolate and betray their strike. Warrior Met miners must follow the lead of the Volvo Workers Rank-and-File Committee (VWRFC), which has played a major role in defeating the three sellout contracts negotiated by the UAW, and has forged links with autoworkers and other workers throughout the US and globally.

A combined, cross-industry struggle by Warrior Met miners, Volvo workers, ATI steelworkers in Pennsylvania and other states, St. Vincent nurses in Massachusetts—all of whom are currently on strike and being isolated by their unions—would send shock waves internationally and galvanize broader sections of the working class to enter into struggle. We urge all Warrior Met miners to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* today to take up this fight. We will provide assistance in every manner possible to connect your struggle with those of the international working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact