

Workers Struggles: The Americas

15 December 1998

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Teamsters strike ANR Advance Transportation

Some 1,400 Teamster drivers and warehouse workers in several Midwest, southern and eastern states went on strike December 8 after the Milwaukee-based ANR Advance Transportation Co. implemented its final offer after talks broke off in November.

ANR claims it has been unprofitable despite the Teamsters' surrender of \$23 million in wage concessions over the last two years. 'We have given and given,' said Richard Nelson, co-chair of the Teamsters negotiating committee. ANR is presently demanding a five-year wage freeze, reductions in health and welfare coverage with higher out-of-pocket costs, reduced benefits and elimination of work rules. It also wants to pay overtime only after 40 hours of labor a week, instead of after eight hours a day, as well as reductions in vacation pay.

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Chicago UPS workers protest supervisors doing union work

The 11,000-member Teamsters local of Chicago UPS workers staged an eight-hour strike December 9 to protest the company's use of supervisors to do union work. Picket lines came down after union and company officials agreed to meet in the latter part of the day. IBT Local 705 charged UPS with refusing to honor grievances over the issue which claims 1,000 supervisors were being used to do bargaining unit work in the

Chicago area.

The policy prevents part-time workers from obtaining the needed hours to qualify for full-time positions, an issue that was central to the 1997 nationwide strike against UPS. The company was to have created 2,000 full-time jobs a year once its business recovered from the strike. UPS claims it is still one percentage point below the 1997 pre-strike level of 11 million packages.

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Philadelphia, South Jersey Red Cross workers strike

Teamsters Local 929 struck the Red Cross in Philadelphia and South Jersey December 7. Red Cross is using supervisors to replace strikers who normally drive vehicles used in the collection of blood and to make deliveries to hospitals.

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Michigan fireworks factory explosion kills 7 workers

Seven workers were killed in an explosion December 11 at the Independence Professional Fireworks Company in Hillsdale County, Michigan. Six women and one man were killed in the second major blast at the factory in the last 10 years. Twenty-two people were working at the factory, located in a rural area, when the explosion occurred, leveling a building and sending up a mushroom-shaped cloud that could be seen for miles. The company produced an estimated 1.3 million fireworks shells last year.

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NBA talks stall

No meetings are scheduled between NBA management and players representatives after a December 12 negotiating session ended after less than 30 minutes. The NBA owners led by Commissioner David Stern walked out charging the latest concessions by players were not enough. The resumption of the 1997-98 basketball season 'doesn't look good,' said Stern.

'The issues we raised were extremely significant and pertinent,' said union director Billy Hunter, 'but they continue to be intransigent.' It is believed that the NBA players union moved to limit the amount of money that the highest-paid players can make. The two sides remain far apart on what percentage of revenues should be devoted to salaries. In a secret meeting held December 10, the NBA owners were to have withdrawn a proposal that altered free agency.

'We explored where we can go, they felt that it wasn't enough and the meeting ended,' said player-rep Patrick Ewing, who attended the meeting. 'I think there will be a season. It's in no

one's best interest to blow the season up. The repercussions of them doing that would be severe.'

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Police attack Panamanian workers' protest

Riot police fired tear gas and rubber bullets into a crowd of several thousand demonstrators outside of the Congress in Panama City December 10. Workers and students responded with rocks and bottles. The protest followed days of violent clashes over President Ernesto Perez Balladares's economic policies, which include sweeping privatization of state-owned industries, restructuring of the national debt, and the opening of the nation's traditionally protected domestic markets.

The day before police stormed the campus of Panama University and fired tear gas and rubber bullets at students, who were protesting in sympathy with workers who demonstrated elsewhere in Panama City against government plans to privatize the water treatment sector. Reports said 25 people were injured, four of them seriously, while 30 others suffered the effects of tear gas.

Genaro Lopez, president of the National Construction Workers Union, criticized the government's show of force around Congress, which was ordered after an angry demonstration when legislators refused to hear the crowd's complaints. 'We denounce the militarization of the Legislative Assembly.... There were hundreds of police, dogs and helicopters around, and all of this provoked the demonstrators,' he said.

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Workers die in Brazilian fireworks explosion

An explosion in an illegal fireworks factory near Santo Antonio de Jesus in the state of Bahia on December 11 killed more than 30 workers and injured another 60. Most of those killed were child laborers and women. The fireworks factory was situated in a home. Three nearby houses were also damaged.

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Workers killed in Argentine pipeline explosion

At least seven construction workers were killed and one seriously injured December 11 in the Argentine city of Salta when a gas pipeline exploded. The immediate cause of the explosion was unknown.

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Quebec garment workers locked out

Quebec's men's clothing industry has locked out 4,000 workers at 25 factories, most of them in Montreal. The workers, who make on average just over \$9 an hour, are demanding increases in hourly and piece pay rates and the inclusion in their collective agreements of minimal work standards. Currently, the industry is governed by a provincial decree that sets the standards, but the employers and the Quebec government want to abolish the decree and deregulate the industry.

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Teamsters gain union accreditation through sweetheart

deal

The Teamsters Union has won the right to represent 2,500 workers at the Peerless men's suit manufacturing plant in a Montreal suburb after helping quell a unionization drive.

Three years ago, dozens of Peerless workers were victimized by management when they supported an organizing drive by another Quebec Federation of Labor affiliate, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE). To counter the unionization drive, Peerless's in-house employee association entered into a service contract with the Teamsters union, whereby the association paid the Teamsters for providing it with legal and technical assistance.

The QFL leadership endorsed the Teamsters' sweetheart deal with the employers' association, although it had hitherto denounced it as a company union. Needless to say, neither the QFL nor the Teamsters lifted a finger to defend the workers who had been victimized as a result of their support for the UNITE organizing drive.

Now the Teamsters, with the support of the employees' association and QFL hierarchy, have won legal accreditation as the Peerless workers' bargaining agent. According to QFL President Henri Massé, UNITE was too radical: 'They want to undertake a campaign to demolish the company's public image and call for a boycott [of its products].' According to Teamsters official Aline Lachapelle, conditions in the Peerless plant are 'not bad.' Workers on the factory floor receive the minimum wage and those working at piece rate earn between \$8 and \$9 per hour.

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Phillips to close last Canadian plant

Phillips, the Dutch-based electronics manufacturer, will permanently close its St-Jérôme, Quebec plant December 23, throwing 135 workers onto the unemployment line. Representatives of the United Steelworkers, local investors, and the Parti Québécois Member of the National Assembly (the provincial parliament) traveled to Amsterdam in a vain effort to convince Phillips to keep the company open, presumably by cutting jobs elsewhere.

The St-Jérôme closure will mean that Phillips no longer has any production facilities in Canada. Since 1982 the company has closed six plants in Canada, four of them in Quebec, which employed 3,000 workers. Under a recently announced, worldwide restructuring scheme, Phillips plans to close 244 plants by the year 2002.



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