Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Illinois coal strikes settled

United Mine Workers of America voted to accept a contract proposal from the Freeman United Coal Company December 17 that brings the three-month strike at three mines in southern Illinois to a close. The UMWA struck the mines after Freeman United broke with the Bituminous Coal Operators Association's BCOA pattern agreement with the UMWA and sought to end the guaranteed lifetime healthcare benefits for retirees. No details were available on the settlement. Freeman United is owned by General Dynamics.

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New York Pops musicians strike over wages

Freelance musicians who comprise the New York Pops orchestra struck December 17, forcing management to cancel two scheduled holiday concerts at Carnegie Hall. Negotiations between the Associated Musicians of Greater New York Local 802 and the New York Pops broke down over wages after management presented its final offer.

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Teamsters continue strike against ANR trucking company

Teamsters are continuing to strike the Milwaukee-based ANR Advance Transportation Co. over the company's demand for a five-year wage freeze. More than 1,400 drivers, dock workers and office workers began striking December 15, saying they were upset with the company's attempt to unilaterally implement a contract. ANR Advance operates 41 freight terminals in 13 Midwestern states.

Company hopes that the two sides would resolve the issue 'faded quickly" when it received a counterproposal from the Teamsters on Friday that 'was essentially a rerun" of a proposal the company had rejected in November as too costly. No new talks are scheduled. Last week Coastal Corp. of Houston, an energy holding company that owns 50 percent of ANR, said it was evaluating whether to continue its investment in the trucking company.

The Teamsters say they have already given ANR $23 million in wage give-backs over the past two years and are resisting another concessionary contract. They said the company is seeking a five-year wage freeze, a cut in health coverage with higher deductible costs and elimination of negotiated work rules. The company said it needs to reduce its health costs and address job flexibility issues to compete with nonunion trucking companies.

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Steelworkers strike in West Virginia

Eight hundred forty workers, members of United Steelworkers Local 40, struck Special Metals Corporation's Inco Alloys International facility located in Huntington, West Virginia December 11. The strike followed unsuccessful negotiations as the collective bargaining agreement expired over the weekend. Special Metals is the world's largest and most diversified producer of high-performance nickel-based alloys. Its specialty metals are used in aerospace, power generation, chemical processing, oil exploration and medical devices.

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Pilots union reaches agreement with Federal Express

Federal Express Corporation and the FedEx Pilots Association, representing 3,600 pilots, reached a tentative pact after more than a month of bitter negotiations. The union is scheduled to bring the proposal before the full membership for a ratification vote December 22. The pilots rejected the company's initial offer of a 17 percent pay raise over five years, seeking instead a 5 percent retroactive increase and an additional 19 percent over the next four years, as well as retirement and benefit provisions. Reports indicate the final agreement fell short of the pilots' expectations.

The pilots association threatened to shut down Federal Express with a strike during the holidays, but backed down when Federal Express chairman Frederick Smith threatened pilots with the loss of their jobs and made contingency plans with other air cargo companies to weather a strike.

The agreement is the first labor contract with any section of Federal Express employees. The 25-year-old company is the world's largest air express package carrier.

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Grocery workers ready to strike Super Fresh

More than 1,000 grocery workers at 12 Super Fresh supermarkets in Delaware and Pennsylvania are slated to go on strike December 21 unless the company puts forward a new offer. Union members voted December 13 to reject the company's final offer by a 166 to 1 margin and proceeded to pass a strike authorization vote. The contract rejection centered on wage and benefit provisions.

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Philips-Van Heusen closes union shop in Guatemala

Phillips-Van Heusen, the apparel manufacturer, closed the Camisas Modernas (Modern Shirts) plant in Guatemala City December 11. Workers arriving for work found the plant surrounded by security guards and received layoff notices instead of anticipated Christmas bonuses.

Workers at Camisas Modernas waged a six-year struggle that culminated in 1997 with union recognition and a contract. It was the only *maquiladora* plant in Guatemala to have a collective bargaining agreement. The company claimed the closure resulted from a decline in business. But the union and its supporters point out that the company is maintaining production in its nonunion plants in Guatemala and charges the company's strategy is to concentrate production in the lower-wage facilities.

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Lockout of men's clothing workers continues

Four thousand workers at 25 Quebec factories that make men's clothes remain off the job, as the result of a lockout decreed by the provincial employers' association. The workers, who are mainly first-generation immigrants, earn on average $9.38 an hour. The lockout was imposed after they voted by 68 percent to reject a tentative contract endorsed by the leadership of their union, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Workers. The employers' association has complained that the workers voted on the contract at a mass membership meeting rather than at work under the eyes of management.

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Auto union bureaucrats denounce US GM workers

A leader of the Canadian Auto Workers union in Quebec has again condemned last summer's strikes by US General Motors workers, as part of the CAW bureaucracy's efforts to convince the automaker not to close its Ste. Thérèse, Quebec assembly plant.

A union delegation met with the president of GM of Canada earlier this month to lobby for the Ste. Thérèse plant to be given a new product line after its mandate to produce Camaros and Firebirds expires in 2001. Prior to the meeting, a CAW official said he feared GM 'won't dare' close a US plant in preference to the Ste. Thérèse facility, because of last summer's local strikes. He went on to boast that labor relations in Quebec are more peaceful than anywhere else in North America. At the conclusion of the 25-minute meeting Quebec CAW President Luc Desnoyers told the press, 'At least we had the chance to show the competitive advantages that make building vehicles at [Ste. Thérèse] cheaper than anywhere else.'