

Workers Struggles: US & Canada

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United States

Strikers jailed in Ohio picket line confrontation

Striking aluminum workers, their families and supporters protested outside the Monroe County Sheriff's Office November 27 after 10 workers were arrested in front of the strikebound Ormet Corporation in Hanibal, Ohio, the previous day. Workers were outraged at the decision by a Monroe County judge who threw the strikers in jail for violating a newly applied restraining order, imposed \$250 fines, refused to allow a bond hearing for three days and declared the incarcerated workers might not get out of jail for 30 days. In contrast, on November 22 when the strike began, the driver of a truck crossing the picket line was arrested and quickly released after running down a striker on the picket line.

The strike by 1,300 members of United Steelworkers Locals 5724 and 5760 at two Ormet plants in Hanibal began after the company refused to delay its bankruptcy court hearing where it is seeking to save \$23 million by voiding labor agreements, freezing pensions, raising workers' health care contributions and tearing up work rules. The USW bureaucracy objected to the company's plan to transfer ownership to creditors and preferred the company be put up for bid. The union also agreed to the wiping out of 220 jobs at the Hannibal plants providing the company agreed to cut 80 salaried positions.

The arrest of the strikers came shortly after a new restraining order was put in place that limited picketing to 10 and ordered other strikers to stay at least 2,000 feet away from the plant entrance. Strikers had formed lines to stop six vans entering the plant when Monroe County Sheriff's Department deputies, backed up by police from other areas, moved in. In addition to violating a restraining order, the 10 strikers will face

additional charges of resisting arrest and assaulting law enforcement officers.

Pilots union exchanged concessions for access to company executives

The Airline Pilots Association (ALPA) has obtained greater access to the boardroom of Delta Airlines in exchange for a 32.5 percent cut in pilots' wages. ALPA originally sought a voting seat on Delta's board of directors, where it presently holds a nonvoting seat. But when negotiations threatened to collapse and force the airline into bankruptcy, the union relinquished the voting position on the board and settled for a broader access to information and management decisions.

In the past, ALPA's representative only had access to quarterly meetings. The union now claims it can go to all board meetings except those where "the subject matter concerns compensation and personnel matters," that is, it will have no input on the working conditions and living standards of its members.

Farm implement company locks out workers

CNH Global locked the doors of its plants in four states after the United Auto Workers ended its three-week strike and attempted to return to work. About 650 workers who manufacture agricultural implements at CNH plants in Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota and Illinois went on strike November 3 against a wage freeze, increased health care costs and a cap on retiree health insurance coverage.

CNH has reopened its Racine, Wisconsin, and Burlington, Iowa, plants where the bulk of its operations reside using salaried employees and temporary replacement workers. On November 22, the company declared an impasse in negotiations, which will permit it to hire permanent replacement workers, something the company denies.

Increase in denial of overtime by companies

The Labor Department issued a report November 24 revealing that complaints by workers over denial of overtime rose to the highest level in four years while

penalties for violations and awards of back pay fell. The department's Wage and Hour Division received 31,786 complaints in 2004, compared with 31,123 in 2003.

The department's fines, however, amounted to \$9 million, down from \$10 million in 2003. It also collected \$196.7 million in back wages, also down from \$212.5 million for the previous year. The number of workers receiving back pay declined from 342,358 in 2003 to 288,296 this year. New rules, put in place by the Bush administration, took effect last August and data is not yet available, but their purpose was to frustrate workers attempting to file suit to recover overtime pay.

Workers at San Francisco elder care center hold one-day strike

Three hundred workers at the Jewish Home in San Francisco walked out on strike November 22 to protest the unilateral implementation by management of a contract that was rejected by workers on three separate occasions. The move allows management to hike workers' portion of health care costs. Service Employees International Union Local 250 says it will hold a meeting with workers to determine the union's next step.

Canada

Canada Post workers prepare strike

It was announced November 26 that 2,600 Canada Post employees voted 73 percent in favor of a strike that could begin December 8 unless disagreements are resolved. A representative of the Union of Postal Communications Employees (UPCE), a component of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), said that management was seeking a series of rollbacks on health and dental benefits, severance pay, and various leaves, while refusing to discuss the workers' priorities, including job security and work within the bargaining unit, staffing of positions and treatment of surplus employees. Workers are also concerned about wages, benefits and working conditions. The previous contract expired at the end of October and negotiations have been ongoing since July.

Union staff vote to strike

One hundred seventy-two employees of Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) rejected the employer's final offer and voted by a 73 percent margin to go on strike November 29 unless the

employer returns to the bargaining table and an agreement is reached by midnight November 28. The workers employed by PSAC are members of Alliance Employees' Union (AEU).

According to AEU vice-president Loren Crawford, PSAC is trying to force its staff to work between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. and refusing to apply to the staff the same principles they are defending in public. One key issue is the lack of health-care protection after the age of 65.

Brampton hospital workers picket

More than 100 employees of William Osler Health Centre (WOHC) in Brampton, Ontario, near Toronto, who are members of Services Employees International Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, held a picket November 26 to protest looming job cuts and pay reductions. Workers are concerned that the government of Ontario is planning to replace 307 full-time jobs with contracted-out positions over the next two years out and possibly cut wages to less than \$10 an hour. WOHC's management team has already been reduced by 45 percent in the last 12 months.

Members from the Brampton Health Coalition joined clerical and service employees protesting the public private partnership (P3), a euphemism for privatized health care, that is being used to finance Brampton's new hospital.



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