

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 May 2007

Latin America

Peruvian iron workers will not suspend strike

Employees of Shougang Hierro Peru voted on Saturday to continue their strike, rejecting government assurances that the Chinese-owned company had agreed to make concessions. The strike is in its fourth week.

Peru's labor minister, Susana Pinilla, brokered an agreement between the mining companies and the workers. The mining companies agreed to give workers economic data about the industry and to set up a committee to review pensions.

Last week, the iron workers joined a national miners' strike that shut down copper, gold and zinc mines across the country. The strike ended as a result of an agreement made between the largest mine and workers. However, the Shougang workers declined to abide by the national agreement on the grounds that it is being imposed without their participation.

The iron workers are demanding better working conditions for part-time and temporary workers and that management give up plans to sack 11 employees. The company cynically responded that all they did was request that the labor cooperative that actually employs the workers not send them to their plant anymore for allegedly behaving "incorrectly."

Bolivian president to sack 6,000 striking health workers

Bolivian President Evo Morales declared on Friday, May 4, that he would fire 6,000 striking public health workers who went on strike on April 27. Public school teachers are also on strike. A government spokesperson indicated that Morales was "going to enforce the law so that the people are safe."

Morales was elected president in December 2005 as the candidate of the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) promising to improve conditions for "national majorities," the workers and peasants of Bolivia. From his first day in office, however, he has defended property rights and the Bolivian capitalist class.

Argentina: Petroleum workers strike

Thirty-five thousand Argentine oil workers went on strike for an unlimited time on Friday, May 4, to demand a wage increase. Alberto Roberti, national secretary of the Union Federation of Private Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers, indicated that the strike has stopped production in all oil wells and that the strike will only end once oil company managers agree to negotiate with the union. Argentina exports about 65 percent of its hydrocarbon production.

The workers are demanding a 20 percent raise. Management

has yet to make an offer, said Roberti.

Central Bank workers in Brazil vote to renew their strike

On May 3, employees of Brazil's Central Bank voted to renew a strike that began a month ago over wages. Union leaders declared that the strike will end only when the workers' demands are met.

The Central Bank strikers are demanding an increase in their average monthly wage from 7,000 to 10,000 reales (US\$5000).

United States

Move to decertify union at struck plant in Indiana

A petition is being circulated at the Vincent Bach plant in Elkhardt, Indiana, to decertify United Auto Workers (UAW) local 364 as the strike by more than 200 workers goes into its 13th month against the manufacturer of musical instruments.

At the start of this week, strikers are to vote on a new contract whose passage, according to the UAW, will do little more than make it possible for strikers to collect unemployment. Should the decertification pass, the UAW would be relieved of providing picketing workers with strike benefits.

Steinway Musical, which is the owner of the Elkhardt plant, provoked the strike more than a year ago by demanding mandatory overtime of 20 hours each month, higher health insurance deductibles, and a reduction in pay averaging \$4.25 an hour combined with a cap in wages. Failure to accept these terms, said the company, would result in the shifting of production to China.

UAW forces contract revote at North Carolina Freightliner plant

After forcing a revote, the leadership of the United Auto Workers (UAW) secured ratification of a contract previously rejected by workers at the Cleveland, North Carolina, Freightliner plant by an 89 percent margin. Workers at the facility launched a wildcat in April in response to mass layoffs and deteriorating working conditions. Last December, the company, which is a division of DaimlerChrysler, announced it was cutting 1,200 of 3,400 jobs at the plant.

In mid-April, workers rejected a contract endorsed by the UAW leadership by a 749-to-621 margin. According to reports, bargaining committee members who were fired following the walkout called for rejection of the contract. The UAW has made no serious effort to win reinstatement of 11 workers victimized as a result of the wildcat.

Workers were also dissatisfied with the small wage increase, pointing out that the facility is the most profitable Freightliner

plant but has the lowest pay. The contract also dropped health benefits for temporary workers. Others were angered that the vote was held at a location 35 miles from the plant. "It's just a deterrent to have us vote," remarked one worker.

The UAW browbeat workers into accepting a revote by making it clear they would do nothing to fight for any improvement. "This is a great contract for our members," UAW Local 3520 President George Drexel told reporters.

ILWU members rally for Rite Aid workers

About 90 members and supporters of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) rallied in front of a Rite Aid pharmacy in the Southern California port city of San Pedro on April 28. The rally was called to protest unfair labor practices at the company's distribution center in Lancaster, a desert town about 70 miles north of downtown Los Angeles.

The \$90 million, 914,000-square-foot facility employs 600 workers and services stores in California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Colorado; it is the target of an organizing drive by ILWU Local 26 that started in 2006. Among the issues that have triggered the unionization drive are a policy of forcing employees to work at management's whim; mandatory overtime added to 10-hour shifts; arbitrary production standards used to speed up production; and the facility's lack of heating or cooling in a region where summer temperatures climb to 100 degrees and winter temperatures often plunge into the low teens.

Management has responded to the drive with firings, suspensions and harassment that includes the threat that year-end raises will be canceled if the union is certified. Employees have been interrogated about their attitudes toward the union. Supporters of the union are labeled thieves, thugs and vandals, while workers who toe the company line are given freedom to carry out anti-union propaganda.

Second round of talks fails to end Illinois strike

A second round of talks collapsed May 3, as the strike by 50 workers at the Fox Valley Forge in Aurora, Illinois, concluded its second month. Company negotiators refused to abandon their insistence on a two-tier wage system that pays some workers by the hour and others on a piecemeal basis.

Workers walked out on March 5 after first forming a new union late last year under Boilermakers Local 1600. A new round of talks has been scheduled for June 7.

Ohio workers strike over unfair labor practices

Workers at Ted Bolle Millwork, Inc., near Dayton, Ohio, voted to go on strike May 2 after the two sides could not come to an agreement on wages and benefits. According to the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Local 684, which represents the 23 striking workers, management came back with an agreement that contained a lower pay increase and no change in healthcare coverage—something that constitutes a lesser offer and an unfair labor practice.

The rejected agreement calls for 5 percent wage increases in

each year of a three-year contract. Workers would also be required to pay a deductible that would amount to \$1,000 for single coverage and \$2,000 for a family.

Canada

Calgary transit set to strike

Transit workers in Calgary, Alberta, voted last week to go on strike, which means they could be in a strike legal position with three days' notice. More than 8 percent of those who cast ballots voted in favor of strike action. The 2,265 drivers, mechanics and administrative staff are represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU).

The union is seeking a 13 percent wage increase over 30 months, while the city is only offering 12 percent over 36 months. Since the union went on strike six years ago for 50 days, the population in Calgary has grown by 13 percent to more than 1 million people with a parallel increase in transit ridership. The city has already applied for a lockout in the dispute, and the union has said it may take more modest action before declaring a full strike.

B.C. teachers' union staff in strike/lockout clash

Unionized workers employed by the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) were locked out last week in an increasingly heated contract dispute. Forty-one staff at the union are represented by the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) and were locked out only hours after CEP agreed to halt picket lines in front of their offices.

The administrative staff, which includes accountants and communications specialists, are fighting contract stripping and other concession demands by the teachers union. The dispute has forced the postponement of the annual general meeting of the BCTF, which was scheduled to begin last Friday.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact