

Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 September 2007

Latin America

Peruvian miners set to walk out this week

Local unions at three Peruvian copper mines owned by the Southern Copper Corporation set a strike date of September 12. The main issues are wages and benefits. Union leaders also accuse the company of union-busting tactics.

Workers point out that Southern Copper has refused them a decent wage hike despite windfall profits last year of 4.7 billion soles (about US\$1.5 billion), offering just a daily raise of 5.6 soles (US\$1.6) over three years. In addition, miners at the Toquepala mine report that management has illegally imposed a 12-hour workday.

A strike would shut down the Ilo and Cuajone mines in addition to Toquepala.

Meanwhile, 800 employees at the Shougang Iron mine in southern Peru, owned by Shougang Group, a Chinese government-run company, are threatening to strike September 17. The miners are demanding an immediate daily raise of 5.7 soles, company-paid uniforms and clean drinking water in the mine.

Flight attendants to strike Argentine Airlines

Flight attendants announced last week that they would conduct a 24-hour strike against Aerolíneas Argentinas on September 10. Following the announcement, Aerolíneas management announced that it would cancel all domestic flights for the day and postpone international flights.

The purpose of the protest is to call attention to the airlines' mistreatment of passengers and workers. The flight attendants point out a history of inefficiency, late flights, arbitrary flight cancellations and bad service.

"In the same way that management routinely disregards its commitment to passengers, it also mistreats its employees," declared the flight attendants in a press release, "by keeping wages frozen and below those of other transportation workers, not just in the airline business, but also in other occupations."

Management rejected the flight attendants' demands

and insisted that its wage offer of 23 percent for the flight attendants is consistent with the offers it is making to its other employees.

United States

Rhode Island judge orders striking teachers back to work

Teachers in East Greenwich, Rhode Island, voted to return to work September 7 after a Superior Court judge ruled their three-day strike was illegal. Judge Jeffrey Lanphear sided with the school district against the teachers, charging their strike would do "irreparable harm" to students. Rhode Island state law forbids strikes by public teachers, but requires a hearing before a back-to-work order can be issued.

The contract covering East Greenwich's 235 teachers expired August 31. On that same day, the school district refused to issue paychecks to teachers in what the union called a "blatant act of coercion." Members of the East Greenwich Education Association responded by striking September 4, the opening day of classes, after the school district failed to put an acceptable offer on the table.

The contract stalemate centers on salaries and healthcare benefits. New talks are to resume this week between the district and union.

Workers strike DaimlerChrysler bus manufacturer in New York State

Some 400 members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) walked off the job September 6 after negotiations with bus manufacturer Orion Bus Co. in Oriskany, New York, failed to produce an acceptable contract. UAW Local 2243 President Myron Kuchera declined to reveal terms of the company's offer except to say they were "economic in nature."

Workers at the plant had rejected an earlier offer by a 64 percent margin on August 31 when the old contract expired. Last week, workers rejected a revised offer by a similar margin before walking out on strike.

The Orion plant in Oriskany is owned by

DaimlerChrysler and is part of its Commercial Buses North America division. Two other plants, one in Greensboro, North Carolina, and a second in Mississauga, Canada, also are part of the unit. Two years ago, DaimlerChrysler contemplated closing the Oriskany plant and transferring work to its other operations. After workers walked out, DaimlerChrysler issued a press release that stated, "During this action, we will respect the rights of our workers to strike, but will also continue with our production plan at our other facilities in Mississauga and Greensboro."

Two-day strike by New York taxi cab drivers

The 8,000-member New York Taxi Workers Alliance called a two-day strike September 5-6 to protest a decision by the city to foist credit card and tracking technologies on cab drivers. Earlier this year, the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission called for the installation of credit card readers and a video screen for passengers to watch a digital map using global positioning technology, or watch television programs.

Taxi drivers are opposed to the new systems on the grounds that the credit card fees will cut into their salaries and the benefit will go to companies implementing the technologies and advertisers using the new screens as billboards. Some drivers believe the GPS technology could be even used to issue citations against them. Installation of the technology had been slated to start October 1.

Canada

Carleton University staff begins strike

Seven hundred professional, technical and office staff at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) began walking the picket line September 5 after working without a contract since June of this year. The members are fighting for improvements in wages, benefits and job security. The strike will affect all office work, IT support, libraries and other technical support functions at the university.

Administrators at the school have said there will be no disruption to classes or student services in the event of a strike, and that students will be asked to cross the picket line to attend classes. The union has said that management is offering them less than half the raise they granted to faculty this year and are demanding other concessions as well. CUPE negotiators offered to continue mediated talks through the Labor Day

weekend, but school officials refused.

Intervention in Montreal cemetery workers strike

Maintenance workers at the Notre Dame-des-Neiges cemetery have voted to accept a proposal offered by their union to suspend their strike for four out of five days of the workweek. The 129 workers, organized by the Confederation des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN), have been without a contract since December 2004. They went on strike shortly after management locked them out on May 16.

Last week, the Liberal government of the Province of Quebec ordered the two parties to resolve the dispute within seven days or have a deal imposed on them by a state arbitrator. The workers, whose strike has been largely isolated by the CSN bureaucracy, were compelled to accept an agreement that would permit the large backlog of bodies to be interred Monday through Thursday, with Friday being maintained as the token strike day.

With the CSN concession in place, a spokesman for the Montreal cemetery indicated management was in no hurry to negotiate a contract, expecting the dispute to be resolved "between now and Christmas."



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