

Workers Struggles: The Americas

22 January 2008

México: Chihuahua miners on strike

On January 15, miners at the Maples de Naica mine in northern Chihuahua state walked off their jobs over wages. The miners, members of Section 30 of the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union, are demanding a 10 percent wage increase. Management claims that the increase is not justified by Mexican inflation rates. However, according to official figures, high world metal prices have increased company profits by 30 percent.

Three hundred and fifty union miners are involved in the strike along with 210 workers employed by outside contractors. Ores extracted from the Maples mine include zinc, lead and silver.

Meanwhile, at the Nukay gold mine in central México, miners threatened to go on strike this week. The workers are also demanding a 10 percent wage hike. The Nukay mine produces 30,000 ounces of gold each year and is owned by Luismin, a subsidiary of Goldcorp, a Canadian firm.

A representative of the Miners and Metal Workers Union also indicated that workers at a silver mine owned by AHMSA, the third largest steelmaker in México, are also poised to strike.

Mexican teachers protest attacks on health benefits reform

Tens of thousands of teachers marched in Mexico City last Friday to protest attacks on public employee health benefits. Teachers came from across Mexico to present the Justice Ministry a petition, signed by over a million teachers, in defense of health benefits for working and retired public employees. The march began at the Social Security building, where the teachers have set up permanent picket lines, to the Palace of Justice.

Artemio Ortiz Hurtado, secretary general of Section 18 of the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE—a dissident faction of the National Education Workers Union, SNTE), threatened to call a national

education workers' strike if government authorities decline to rescind the new Social Security health benefits law. The CNTE is also demanding the removal of SNTE leader María Esther de Gordillo.

Congress approved the new legislation nine months ago, which downgrades health benefits for public employees. The CNTE demands that the law not be enforced. Instead, it demands a reconsideration of the legislation in Congress.

CNTE leaders are calling for a national coalition of trade unions and citizens' groups to lead a national movement of protest strikes against the legislation. In addition to the protests in Mexico City, other CNTE demonstrations took place in the states of Tlaxcala, Zacatecas, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Jalisco, Hidalgo Morelos, San Luis Potosí, etc.

Mexican miners' one-day protest strike in solidarity with copper miners

Last Wednesday, the Mexican Mine and Metal Workers Union led a 24-hour strike in solidarity with the Cananea copper miners. Striking copper miners were attacked by security forces on January 12 at the Cananea mine in Sonora State. The Security forces acted on behalf of Grupo México, the owner of the Cananea mine.

The strike involved 25,000 miners and shut down all mines that are represented by the Mine and Metal Workers Union. The protesters are demanding that police abandon their occupation of the giant open pit mine.

Cananea miners went on strike in July 2007 demanding better health and safety at the mine and protesting the removal of miners' leader Napoleón Gómez Urrutía.

A report in the Mexican daily *La Jornada* declared that the court ruling declaring the Cananea strike "inexistent"—based on the dubious excuse that some work was still going on at the mine—exposes the Labor Ministry's acquiescence to demands by Grupo México

that the government break the strike and restart production at the mine.

“This is not a simple illegal act,” said *La Jornada*, “but an arrangement carried out in concert.”

The article detailed a relationship of several years between the Labor Ministry and Grupo México, a mining transnational with properties in Peru, the United States and México.

Unions reach tentative agreement with Amtrak

Nine unions at Amtrak, the federally funded passenger rail carrier, have reached a tentative agreement in advance of a threatened January 30 strike deadline. The unions covered include the American Train Dispatchers, the Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen, the Transportation Communications International Union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and the International Association of Machinists & Aerospace Workers. The contract is subject to rank-and-file ratification.

The threatened strike, which would have been the first in the 36-year history of Amtrak, would have affected some 71,000 daily riders. It would have had a particularly significant impact in New York City and other major urban centers where it is involved in commuter service.

The 10,000 Amtrak workers covered by the agreement have not had a contract since January 2000. The contract reportedly includes the recommendations of a presidential emergency board and provisions for back pay based on an average 3.1 percent annual wage increase from 2000 to 2009. A spokesman for the Transportation Communications International Union said that the contract did not include changes in work rules demanded by Amtrak.

Support staff strikes Pennsylvania school district

Cafeteria workers, secretaries and custodial personnel walked out January 21 in a contract dispute with the Danville, Pennsylvania, schools after overwhelmingly rejecting the district’s final offer. The proposal included raises of \$2.45 over the term of a five-year contract.

The 137 workers are members of the Professional Support Personnel at Danville. The walkout affects 2,600 students at five schools.

Victoria, B.C., library workers walk out

More than 300 library workers in the greater Victoria area on Vancouver Island walked off the job on two

separate days last week in an ongoing contract dispute with management. The walkout stemmed from the suspension of a worker for participating in a program where late fines are waived in exchange for a donation of food to a charitable organization.

Library workers have been in a legal strike position since September of last year, and their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 410, has engaged in a number of job actions, but this is the first actual walkout. A central issue in their dispute is pay equity for the mostly female staff at all nine branches of the Greater Victoria Public Library.

The “food for fines” program was initiated by management in December, but the union is claiming that they have continued it as a form of legal strike action. They have made an appeal to the Labor Relations Board over the suspension and have not ruled out further strike action.



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