

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 July 2008

Latin America

Southern Copper threatens to fire Cananea strikers

The Southern Copper Company has threatened to sack copper miners at the Cananea Mine in Sonora, Mexico, who have been on strike since July 2007. Southern Copper is controlled by the Mexican transnational Grupo Minero.

The company's finance manager, Genaro Guerrero, said management's intention is to rehire the sacked workers with new contracts by the end of this year. Grupo Minero used a similar tactic to break a strike at the Caridad copper mine, also in Sonora State.

In Perú, Southern Copper announced it has fired 17 workers, 10 at the Cuajone Copper mine and 7 at the Ilo metal foundry, allegedly for participating in illegal strikers.

Brazil: Airport employees to strike this Wednesday

Brazilian airport employees announced on July 25 they will begin a strike of indefinite duration this Wednesday against all of the country's airports in a dispute over wages.

The president of the airport employees' union, Franciso Lemox, assured management the union would provide a skeleton crew of workers to "guarantee airport operations and security."

The union is demanding a change in management at the Brazilian Airport Infrastructure Company (INFRAERO), which administers all national airports. It is also demanding increases in wages, meal allowances and Christmas bonuses.

Chilean supermarket strike

Three hundred and fifty employees of the Líder chain of Santiago supermarkets went on strike last Friday to demand decent wages and benefits.

The strike began after the union rejected management's last offer, which included a 25,000 peso (US\$42) bonus that depended on productivity goals,

which union officials said are impossible to achieve. The offer also included a 30,000 peso monthly raise, a "bizarre" offer, according to the union.

According to union officials, supermarket employees have received no raise since 2001. Cashiers with eight years' seniority, for example, only earn 118,000 pesos (US\$200) a month.

Teachers strike in Argentina

Teachers in three Argentine provinces went on strike this week following winter recess. In the northwestern province of Salta, educators are demanding a base monthly salary of 1,800 pesos (US\$600), 600 pesos above the government offer. In the Patagonian province of Río Negro, the demand is for a 2,000 peso base salary. Teachers are also striking in Entre Ríos province in the Mesopotamian region.

In addition, teachers in the provinces of Tucumán and La Pampa are also demanding wage increases.

United States

Verizon workers rally in New York

Thousands of telecom workers rallied July 26 in front of Verizon headquarters in Lower Manhattan to oppose management's attempt to force increased health costs on workers while outsourcing and subcontracting jobs.

The Communications Workers of America (CWA), which represents some 70,000 Verizon workers, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), which represents another 20,000, say Verizon wants to sharply increase healthcare costs and compel workers who retire after January 1, 2009, to pay for their own healthcare. The unions also charge Verizon with striving under the code word of "flexibility" to increase the outsourcing and use of contractors for technical support and the laying of new wires.

Workers have already authorized strike action, and both unions have indicated that a strike could begin as early as August 3.

Alaska national park bus drivers call for strike action

Drivers who chaperone tourists through Alaska's Denali National Park voted by a 110 to 2 margin July 21 to strike in the event that Teamsters Local 959 and Doyon/Aramark are not able to resolve long-term work issues. The Teamsters have been seeking to use a US Department of Labor rule called the Service Contract Act to compel Aramark to pay prevailing wages to the bus drivers who provide transport services in the park.

Pennsylvania-based Aramark Corp. launched a joint venture with the Alaska Native regional corporation in the 1990s to take over the administration of transportation, lodging and other services. They slashed drivers' wages from \$16 an hour to as low as \$8 an hour. An arbitrator has agreed with the Teamsters that Denali bus drivers are due back pay and a wage increase. Aramark says it has authorized a pay increase and compensation, but it is not clear it will correspond to the arbitrator's decision or meet the demands of the workers.

Canada

Toronto cemetery workers strike

Two hundred thirty workers at nine cemeteries in Toronto, Ontario, went on strike last Thursday after contract talks collapsed. Picket lines went up at cemetery gates across the city.

Although the two sides are reportedly far apart on issues such as wages and pensions, one of the main concerns voiced by the Canadian Service Workers Union, which represents the strikers, is the health of groundskeepers and other workers who are subjected to the regular spraying of pesticides on cemetery lawns.

While the use of pesticides has recently been banned in Toronto, cemeteries have been given special exemptions, which the union says puts groundskeepers and burial workers at particular risk. Management and non-unionized workers are being used to keep cemeteries open, but burials have nonetheless been affected by the strike. No new talks have been scheduled.

Winnipeg transit workers may strike

Bus service was disrupted last week in the provincial capital of Winnipeg, Manitoba, when the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) restricted overtime for its bus drivers after rejecting the latest contract offer from the city.

While a full strike is possible this week, the union has not indicated what its next actions will be, despite the

strike mandate given by its members in an overwhelming rejection of the contract offer last week. The ATU represents 1,000 bus drivers and 250 maintenance workers in the city of 650,000.



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