

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Mexican workers strike gold, silver smelting plant

Over 370 workers walked off their jobs on February 8 from the Peñoles mill owned by Met Mex Corporation in Torreón, in Coahuila state, México. The metal workers, members of the Metal and Mine Workers Union Section 64, are demanding a 9 percent raise in wages and a 4 percent rise in the value of their benefits.

The Peñoles plant is one the largest gold and silver refineries in Mexico. On a daily basis the plant refines between 11 and 13 tons of silver and 22 kilograms of gold.

Met Mex Corporation is the largest metal processor in Latin America. In 2007 the company produced 580,000 kilograms of silver and 54,000 kilograms of gold and 460,000 kilograms of zinc.

Met Mex management has taken a hard line. It insists that its offer of a 6 percent wage increase is final, and has demanded that the government outlaw the strike. The company has also stopped paying strikers' wages and is threatening to move its operations to other plants. The union responded by activating its strike fund. So far each worker has received US\$100, the equivalent of eight days pay.

The strikers are defying a no-strike pledge signed between the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) and the government of President Felipe Calderón, under the pretext of preserving employment during this economic recession. The leader of Section 64 of the miners and metal workers union, Daniel Cossío Ríos, declared that in this case Met Mex is provoking the strike with its "indifference to the workers' demands."

Production continues at other Met Mex facilities, including its gold and silver mines and its lead and zinc smelter.

Michigan: Three-month lockout continues at metal finishing plant

Locked-out workers at the Reilly Plating Company in Melvindale continue to picket against the company's attempt to extract deep concessions. Management wants to eliminate seniority and job classifications for the 29 workers, end contributions to the 401(k) retirement plan and require workers pay 30 percent for health care coverage that previously was free.

"They want to lay the older people off and keep the newer ones," United Auto Workers Local 174 President John Zimmick told the *News-Herald*. Zimmick also indicated, "We know the economy is bad and we're willing to take concessions."

In a statement, the company said, "Reilly Plating is a supplier to the automotive industry and is struggling from the effects of the depressed economy." There is little doubt the company will maintain its hard line, confident the UAW will keep the small strike isolated from the broad mass of workers, both inside and outside the auto industry, who also face similar attacks.

New Jersey: Innova nurses strike enters third week

Negotiations between striking nurses and Innova Health and Rehabilitation are now in their third week. About 100 nurses at facilities in Hammonton and Deptford went on strike on January 23 over issues of

pay, health insurance and pension benefits. Innova has brought in replacement workers in an effort to fill the striking nurses' positions.

A meeting was scheduled for February 13 to discuss the company's latest offers. Innova is seeking to impose a new, inferior health insurance plan similar to other rehabilitation centers in the area, while claiming it will increase wage rates to offset the change. But the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees says the company's proposal would slash the wages of some nurses by one-third.

well as a \$1,250 signing bonus. According to the workers' union, Local 1953 of the International Association of Machinists, the company's intention to contract out work remains a major issue.



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Washington state: Hospital backs off threat to replace workers for informational picket

Management at the Yakima Regional Hospital in the state of Washington backed off its threat last week to replace any hospital workers who might participate in an informational picket. The move came after the Service Employees International Union issued an unfair labor practices charge against the hospital, claiming it was seeking to intimidate workers.

The union claims it was impossible the hospital did not understand that workers were only going to participate when off-duty, during shift breaks or lunch hour. The picket was aimed at informing the public that the hospital has not been negotiating in good faith. The two sides have been involved in negotiations for the past five months.

Motor Coach Industries vote to strike

Workers at Manitoba's Motor Coach Industries have rejected a contract offer from the company and voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action. Ninety-three percent of the 700 workers, who include welders, painters and maintenance staff, voted for a strike.

The company, the largest producer of tour, charter and commuter transit coaches in North America, had offered wage increases of 11 percent over three years as