

Workers Struggles: the Americas

13 May 2009

Miners' strike in Chile

Three hundred eighty-five copper miners at the Lomas Bayas in northern Chile walked off their jobs last Wednesday as a result of an impasse in wage negotiations with management. Negotiations are continuing with the participation of government authorities.

Lomas Bayas is owned by the transnational company Xstrata Copper. It produces 75,000 tons of copper annually.

The strikers are demanding a 6 percent increase in monthly wages. The company's final wage offer was for 4 percent plus improvement on some benefits. A management spokesperson indicated that this last offer was the best they could do, in the context of the world financial crisis.

Colombian banana workers' strike

Some 17,000 banana workers in the northeastern Uraba region in Colombia walked off their jobs last Thursday demanding an 8.5 percent wage increase plus improvement in benefits and working conditions. Work stopped at 296 plantations owned by 90 companies.

In addition to the wage increase the strikers are demanding the creation of social funds for education, housing, cultural activities, and sports.

Hernan Correa, vice president of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (SINTRAINAGRO), declared, "We know very well that the owners are able to provide the additional wage and benefit increase, but it seems that

what is dominating is an arrogant attitude." Herrera pointed out that workers took the decision to begin the strike following 46 days of unsuccessful negotiations with management. Luis Sanin, who represents management, claimed that the company's latest offer of 7.8 percent is, "Very substantial based on the macro-economic reality of the country." Sanin has asked for government mediation to reach an agreement.

According to Colombian law, the minimum wage must go up based on inflation for the previous year. Inflation in Colombia for 2008 was 7.67 percent.

Colombian truckers strike ends

The Colombian Truckers Association (ACC), which represents 90 percent of Colombian truck operators who own and operate their own trucks, announced on Saturday the end of their strike, which began April 22 over fuel costs. Pedro Aguilar, president of the ACC, declared the union had decided unilaterally to end the strike.

The end of the strike is a consequence of internal divisions within the ACC over a negotiated settlement between Aguilar and Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. The agreement provided some debt relief to the many owner/operators who owe money on their trucks. The sum total of that debt is estimated at \$5.2 billion dollars.

Byline strike at Maryland newspaper to protest layoffs

Reporters at the *Baltimore Sun* staged a byline strike May 7 to protest the layoffs of 61 newsroom workers. The strike, whereby writers forbid the paper to print their names atop their stories, was organized to show the

“strong displeasure and distaste with the way Tribune Co. and The Sun management conducted the layoffs,” said *Sun* reporter Gus Sentementes.

The Tribune Co. acquired the *Baltimore Sun* in 1999. Since then, the newsroom has been reduced from 400 employees to 150. Many of those laid off last week had more than 20 years of experience.

Workers strike against Missouri manufacturer

Some 90 workers at the Fabick CAT’s plant in Fenton, Missouri went on strike May 4 after management insisted on contract language that would allow non-union workers to do work currently done by members of International Operating Engineers Local 513.

Management offered Local 513 members a five-year contract with annual increases in wages and benefits that added up to increases of 3.3 percent each year. But the contract also included language that would allow Fabick CAT management and customers to take over work done by Local 513 members in its tractor, power systems and rental division. The contract also imposed new language that would implement staggered start times.

The Operating Engineers had offered to continue working under the old contract agreement that expired on April 30, but management insisted that the union either accept the new agreement or strike.

Ottawa media workers strike

Twenty-five employees of Cision Canada, a media transcription service, went on strike May 5 setting up picket lines in downtown Ottawa. The workers are members of the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW) and are fighting major concession demands from the Swedish-based company.

The union has stated that wages and benefits are not issues in negotiations but that, along with rollbacks in bonuses and sick leave, the company is seeking to eliminate cost of living provisions in any new contract.

Engineers strike at University of Toronto

On May 2, 84 workers at three University of Toronto campuses across the city went on strike after school negotiators ended talks with a demand that the workers accept a one-year contract with only a 1.5 per-cent wage increase.

The strikers work on maintaining environmental systems, including heating cooling and air conditioning in over 160 buildings. They are represented by the CAW.

Old Dutch locks out workers

One hundred seventy workers employed by Old Dutch Chips in Calgary were locked out last week over issues such as sick leave and food safety. The company is also refusing to require that all workers pay union dues.

The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) said its members are being forced to go into work sick to avoid losing wages. The union has launched a toothless boycott of Old Dutch, which produces a variety of food products for some of the largest grocery retailers in the country.



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