

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

## **Chile: Gold miners go on strike**

Two hundred ninety miners employed by Minera Mantos de Oro, owned by Kinross Gold Corporation of Canada, walked off their jobs July 9. Wage negotiations are at an impasse. The miners are demanding a 6.8 percent wage increase. The mine, an open-pit mine located in the Atacama Desert, 1,000 kilometers north of Santiago, normally produces 800 ounces of gold per day.

## **Peru: Iron miners threaten to strike**

Miners employed by Shougang Hierro Peru, the country's sole iron mine, threatened to strike this week unless their wage demands are met. Shougang Hierro Peru is a subsidiary of Shougang Group, which is owned by the Chinese government. The mine employs 1,184 union miners.

The workers are asking for a raise of 10 soles on top of the 55 soles senior workers earn and the 33 soles earned by new workers. Union leader Meliton Huacasi Condori declared that Shougang miners are the most poorly paid in the country.

## **Argentina: Chemical workers' strike in Bahia Blanca**

A 24-hour protest strike took place on July 9 in the city of Bahia Blanca. The strike affected plants belonging to Dow, Profertil and Solvay Indupa. The purpose of the protest was

to demand a 25 percent wage increase and a monthly minimum wage of US\$800. During the strike, union pickets blocked access to the plants and to the roads leading to the port and the industrial park.

Management accused workers of violating rules they had agreed to by not letting white-collar workers access their offices. Management also accused workers of stealing plastic containers from some of the plants.

## **Chile: Public employees strike in solidarity with prison guards**

On July 9, Chilean public employees carried out a 24-hour protest strike in solidarity with prison guards who are demanding better working conditions and higher salaries. The walkout involved 70,000 public employees. The government of Michelle Bachelet indicated it had reached an agreement with two unions that represent the prison guards. However, two other unions rejected the agreement.

## **Puerto Rico: Public employees threaten a national strike**

On July 10, the unions that represent Puerto Rican public employees warned that if the government insists on a plan to lay off 30,000 workers, they would walk out. Luis Pedraza Leduc, spokesperson for the Broad Front Solidarity and Struggle (FASyl), indicated in a press conference that if any workers get laid off, the government should prepare for a general strike of indefinite duration.

Leduc blamed Governor Luis Fortuno for the crisis. He indicated that some of the workers scheduled to be laid off have threatened to commit suicide. He also indicated that the government layoff plan is spilling over to private industry, which is also eliminating jobs and attacking labor rights. "The announcement of the layoffs provided an opportunity for employers to reengineer their places of work to reduce

the workforce,” Leduc said.

A few months ago, Fortuno announced his plan to sack 30,000 workers in response to a \$3.2 billion annual government deficit under conditions where 15 percent of Puerto Ricans are unemployed. As of last week, 13,000 public jobs had been eliminated.

### **Boeing wants no-strike clause**

Washington state Democrat congressman Norm Dicks revealed last week that the state’s giant aerospace manufacturer, Boeing Corporation, is threatening to move its 787 jetliner production to Charleston, South Carolina, unless the International Association of Machinists (IAM) grants the company a no-strike clause.

Dicks, the third-ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee and an assertive lobbyist for the firm, said that “high-ranking people in the Boeing Company” issued the ultimatum to the state’s congressional delegation. “The message was that we need to get a resolution of this [strike] problem. We can’t live with this.”

The IAM in the Puget Sound region has struck Boeing four times during the last seven contract cycles, extending back over the past 20 years as the company has slashed jobs with the collaboration of the Machinists union. The company has also faced resistance from its engineers and technical workers organized in the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace.

While IAM District 751 President Tom Wroblewski said, “I can’t see ever taking our power away,” international president Tom Buffenbarger indicated, “The union’s ears are always open. Talk to us about it.”

### **Talks fail in Texas aerospace strike**

Two days of talks between United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 218 and Bell Helicopter ended July 9 without resolving the strike by 2,500 workers at the company’s plants in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. It was the third set of talks since the union struck on June 15 against the company’s demand to increase healthcare costs and outsource 44 janitorial jobs.

No new talks are scheduled. Bell Helicopter has brought in 1,000 replacement workers in an effort to meet deliveries to its customers.

Meanwhile, the UAW reached a three-year agreement covering 340 of Bell Helicopter’s office and clerical workers organized in Local 317.

### **Sudbury Steelworkers reject final offer, set to strike**

More than 3,300 nickel miners at Vale Inco in Sudbury, members of the United Steelworkers, Ontario, were set to strike July 13 when their last three-year contract expired and workers rejected the company’s final offer by an 85 percent margin.

Contract talks between the Brazilian-based mining giant and the United Steelworkers union, which represents the striking workers, had been ongoing since the beginning of April, but the union says that the latest offer contains concessions demands that it cannot recommend.

Vale, which is the second largest mining company in the world, purchased the nickel giant Inco in 2006 and is trying to revise a deal with workers that ties wage bonuses to the price of nickel. In addition, the union is resisting demands to exempt new hires from the existing pension plan and make their pension earnings dependent on investment returns.

Because the company’s Sudbury operations are shut down for maintenance until August, the strike is not expected to have much immediate impact. In the meantime, Vale has announced cuts to management staff, eliminating 400 jobs across Canada, including 60 in Sudbury.



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