

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: 24-day strike by gold miners

Three hundred gold miners employed at the La Coipa mine, property of Canadian company Kinross, went back to work on Saturday after 24 days on strike over wages. The strikers accepted a one-time bonus of US\$9,000 and a 3 percent wage increase. The open-pit mine, located in the Atacama region of northern Chile, 1,000 kilometers north of Santiago, produced 66,000 ounces of gold last year.

Kinross made the offer after a Chilean court nixed on July 9 its plans to fire the strikers and replace them with nonunion workers.

Dominican public health doctors strike

Sixteen thousand doctors employed by the public health system in the Dominican Republic went on strike last Wednesday. The issue is the government's refusal to address the doctor's demands for higher salaries and additional permanent jobs. The strike is scheduled to last a week.

The public health doctors' demands include a raise in the monthly minimum salary to 58,000 pesos, about US\$1,600, that temporary workers be made permanent and an improvement in the retirement pensions of all public health employees. Current salaries for public health doctors are as low as US\$500 a month.

Doctors have also denounced government plans to do away with the Social Security Institute that administers the public health system as part of a government plan to

downsize health care in this impoverished nation.

The public health doctors decided on the walkout after the police forcibly removed 34 nurses and doctors who had chained themselves at the Labor Ministry.

Panamanian port workers strike against union-busting

Panamanian port workers have been on strike since July 23 against the privatized port of Balboa, owned by Hutchinson Whampoa Limited and by Ports Outsourcing Service, two transnational companies.

The struggle began with the firing three months ago of 70 workers who were seeking to form a union at the port. Eighteen of the workers refused to accept a company severance offer and blocked the entrance to the port. Five of the 18 initiated a hunger strike at the time.

The workers are demanding that all the fired employees be rehired and that management stop interfering in union activities. The strikers point out that part of the agreement with the government when the port was privatized included union rights. The strikers charge the new port managers with attempting to channel the workers into a company union.

The Panamanian Ministry of Labor Development has imposed fines of US \$150 per day on the company until the 18 strikers are rehired. Strike leaders have proposed that the fines be suspended and that port managers be jailed instead.

One of the hunger strikers, Lauren Vargas, is now in the St. Thomas hospital and reported to be in stable condition.

California lawsuit charges state fails to protect farm workers

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court July 30 charging California does not do enough to protect farm workers from heat-related sickness and death. The suit represents five workers who suffered illness from working in the sun without shade protection, sufficient water or breaks.

The suit alleges that 15 workers in California have died from the heat during the past four years. Three years ago the state implemented rules on water and rest breaks for farm workers, but the ACLU charges the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health does not have enough inspectors to ensure that agricultural growers comply with the rules.

Missouri mechanics strike enters fourth month

The strike by 120 workers at the Fabick CAT plant near St. Louis, Missouri, continues into its fourth month with no prospect of settlement. Members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 513 struck Fabick CAT on May 2 after workers rejected a new agreement that would allow the company to expand the use of the category “utility worker,” comprised of employees who earn wages that are a mere 58 percent of those of striking mechanics.

Experienced mechanics at the plant earn \$23.20 an hour manufacturing parts for heavy equipment. “We’re fine with the company’s financial offer,” Local 513 business agent John Henry Smistik told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. “We’re worried about job preservation.”

Utah worker killed in industrial accident

A 63-year-old worker at the Brody Chemical plant near Salt Lake City, Utah, died July 24 when a pressure mechanism on a 55-gallon drum malfunctioned and blew the lid and chemical onto his face and chest. Co-workers heard the explosion and called emergency services.

Frank Guzman, a former coal miner, was pronounced dead by a rescue crew upon their arrival at the industrial facility due to blunt force trauma. The heavy and thick chemical cleaning solution requires pressurization in order to be extracted from the drums.

Vale Inco strike expands

Four hundred fifty workers at Vale Inco in Voisey’s Bay, Newfoundland, joined the strike by over 3,000 workers begun three weeks ago in Sudbury, Ontario, against the Brazilian-based mining giant after voting 99 percent against the company’s offer in early July.

Vale Inco, which is the second largest nickel producer in the world, posting profits of \$13.2 billion last year, is demanding a raft of concessions including a wage freeze, a rollback in bonuses, expansion of its temporary workforce and cuts to pensions.

The United Steelworkers union, representing the strikers, sent a delegation to Brazil last week to establish ties with their union counterparts there as part of what they are calling an escalation of their worldwide campaign against the company.

Hundreds rally in support of Zellers strike

Hundreds of protesters gathered at the Zellers warehouse in Brampton, Ontario, west of Toronto last Friday in support of the strike by over 300 workers that began two weeks ago.

The striking workers, who are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), are facing company demands for wage and benefits concessions, including an \$8-an-hour wage rollback, and the use of more temporary workers. The giant retailer broke off negotiations before the strike began and has refused to reenter talks since that time.



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