

Unions promote nationalism as US copper miners strike approaches 100 days

Samuel Davidson
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The 1,800 Asarco copper miners at five mines and a processing plant in Arizona and Texas have been on strike for nearly 100 days against the company's demands for cuts to pensions and healthcare. Workers have not received a pay raise in over ten years.

The copper miners, who have been working without a contract since November 2018, have been on strike since October 13 after rejecting the company's "last, best and final offer." Asarco is continuing operations at its mines with strikebreakers guarded by armed private security.

Asarco has long been notorious for unsafe working conditions, poisoning mining communities and brutal labor relations, and together with the other major US copper companies faced strikes continuously between the late 1950s and early 1980s.

Miners in the American Southwest region have a long history of courageous struggle, including the 1917 Phelps Dodge strike, when armed vigilantes expelled thousands of striking miners and left-wing militants from the mining town of Bisbee, Arizona.

Asarco is based in Tucson, Arizona but is owned by Mexican conglomerate Grupo Mexico, which also owns railroads, shipping companies and movie theaters. The company is the largest mining company in Mexico and the third largest copper miner in the world, and its CEO, Germán Larrea Mota-Velasco is Mexico's second richest person, with a net worth of \$17.3 billion in 2018.

Grupo Mexico has an abysmal record for treating its workers. An explosion in 2006 killed 65 miners at the Pasta de Conchos mine near Nueva Rosita, Mexico. The bodies of 63 of the miners were never recovered.

The United Steelworkers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, of which most of the striking miners are members, are working to isolate the

strike. The USW has not even posted an update about the strike on their website for two months.

In several recent events, union officials pushed a diet of divisive nationalism and reliance on Democratic politicians. On Monday, the USW, Teamsters and some of the seven other unions on strike against Asarco held a rally outside the Arizona Capitol during the state legislature's opening session.

On December 29, International Brotherhood of Teamsters General President James Hoffa Jr., stopped at the Asarco picket line in Sahuarita, Arizona about 30 miles south of Tucson.

Hoffa repeated the argument that has been made since the beginning of the strike by the United Steelworkers that the strike is only happening because Asarco is owned by the Mexican company Grupo Mexico.

"This company is owned by a Mexican company that's exploiting the American workers," Hoffa said. "They haven't had a raise in 10 years ... and this is from a company; Asarco, that made a billion dollars last year."

In reality, if Asarco's ownership were American, things would be no different. Phelps Dodge, which lost in the bidding to buy Asarco, spearheaded the assault on copper miners during the bitter 1983-84 strike in nearby Morenci, Arizona. Phelps Dodge was only able to defeat the miners because of the assistance of the United Steelworkers which worked to isolate the workers.

Hoffa offered workers no strategy to win the strike, but instead told the workers to hold out for eleven more months until election day in the hope that a Democratic president will come to the aid of workers. "2020 is going to be a great year for workers. We've got all kinds of great things going on, we've got a national election and we've got to talk about workers," said

Hoffa.

To oppose this isolation and organize the fight for a decent living standard, benefits and safe working conditions, the World Socialist Web Site urges copper workers to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the USW and other corrupt unions, to expand the strike throughout the copper industry and beyond.

Instead of dead-end appeals to big business politicians, these strike committees should appeal to teachers, manufacturing, logistics, service and retail workers to launch an industrial counter-offensive against the relentless attack on jobs and living standards. At the same time, US workers must appeal to copper and other miners in Mexico and around the world for common action.

We urge striking miners who agree with this perspective to contact the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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