

Year-long strike in Arizona, USA

FOR over a year, 2 500 copper workers from Arizona in the United States of America have been on strike.

The strike began in July 1983 when Phelps Dodge Corporation issued an ultimatum demanding that the workers accept a wage cut, give up their cost of living allowance and accept cuts in medical benefits.

During the year-long strike the workers and their families have faced the kind of police and army harassment which is common in South Africa.

On June 30 at a rally held to celebrate the strike's one year anniversary, more than 200 armed state troopers in riot gear attacked a group of 40 men, women and children.

An observer said the troopers 'became irritated by some remarks from the gathering and went trigger happy with tear gas grenades'.

'The cops were edgy for a fight and they had to show off their power,' the observer added.

But military strike-breaking is not the only weapon that Phelps Dodge has at its disposal.

Many of the small towns are 'company' towns where everything from the grocers shop to the hospital is owned by the

company. The workers' houses are also company-owned and selected strikers have been evicted - a tactic that the unions are fighting in the courts.

Phelps Dodge has denied strikers use of the company hospital, even refusing to allow 'striker' babies to be delivered there.

In the town of Morenci a 'Peoples Clinic' has been set up by Jorge O'Leary, a company doctor fired for his pro-union stand.

But in spite of the tremendous hardships faced by the strikers and their families, they have remained solid.

'We intend to secure a just contract (agreement) from this company,' said Angel Rodriguez, the local president of the United Steelworkers of America.

'We have seen two systems of justice imposed on us - one for the strikers and one for the scabs. But they won't bust us if we stay united,' he added.

Despite the multi-million dollar losses that Phelps Dodge has experienced this year, so far there are no indications that the company is willing to change from its strike-breaking position.

Coal Board offers 'bribe' to strikers

AS the British miners' strike enters its ninth month, the National Coal Board has offered 'a bribe' in an attempt to lure miners back to work.

The NCB has offered miners who come back to work between 1 400 and 1 600 pounds (about R3 200) as a sort of Christmas bonus.

A number of strikers have been attracted by this offer but the majority of miners are determined to continue the strike.

The British miners began their strike towards the beginning of this year when their employers, the government-owned National Coal Board, announced that 20

pits would be closed by February 1985 - an estimated 20 000 miners would lose their jobs through the pits closures.

Backed by their union, the National Union of Mineworkers, the miners are striking in support of their demand for the pits closure plan to be withdrawn.

Recently, Britain's trade union federation, the TUC, pledged its support for the striking miners.

But so far, support from British unions has been patchy.

One of Britain's biggest unions, the Transport and General Workers Union, however, recently decided to step up its support for the miners.

Giant German metal union tackles high unemployment by reducing working hours

THE 2,5 million-strong German metal union, IG Metall, has decided to tackle the country's high unemployment by fighting for a 35-hour working week.

The union argues that if the 35-hour week was introduced it would create enough jobs to reduce Germany's unemployment by 1,5 million over a two-year period.

At present over two-million workers are unemployed in West Germany.

So far the union has had the working week reduced from 40-hours to 38,5-hours without any loss of pay.

This was achieved earlier this year when close on 450 000 metal workers went on strike in support of the 35-hour week demand.

The strike, which was described by IG Metall as 'the severest struggle since the last War', began on May 14 when 13 000 workers walked off their jobs at 14 plants in the state of Baden-Wurttemberg.

The union focused its strike on the car-components industry

which effectively cut off the flow of parts to the motor assembly plants.

As a result all the major manufacturers like VW, Daimler-Benz and Opel were forced to close their plants.

In May alone the strike cost the auto industry 88 000 vehicles.

Shortly before the strike the metal employer's chief negotiator said that they would defend the 40-hour week with 'tooth and claws'.

And a director of the employers' association said, 'Rather a three to four weeks' strike than one minute less than 40.'

However, the mounting production losses forced the employers to back-down.

In the settlement, workers won a 38,5-hour working week plus a 5,3 percent wage increase - 3,3 percent from July and a further 2 percent from April next year.

The IG Metall said the settlement was 'certainly not grounds for jubilation'.



On a wall painting, Guatemalan workers change Coca Cola's slogan 'The Spark of Life' to 'Spark of Death'

Guatemalan workers fight for union rights at Coca Cola factory

IN SPITE of gruesome killings of unionists, workers at a Coca Cola plant in Guatemala, Central America, have persisted in their struggle for trade union rights.

Attempts were first made in 1954 and 1968 to form a union at the EGSA bottling plant but both times these were violently suppressed.

When a new attempt was made in 1975 to form STEGAC (their union), the company tried to crush the union by introducing scab labour and by meeting worker protests with police beatings and jailings.

From then on the unexplained murders of unionists began.

When the body of union leader Anulfo Gomez was found by his friends, his lips had been slashed with razor blades, his tongue cut out and put in his pocket, and his toes and fingers were broken.

His killing had followed that of union general secretary, Manuel Lopez Balan, who had been warned three times by management of his impending death.

Union activists have also been falsely imprisoned and others threatened with death unless they sign a petition against the union

In order to give support to the courageous struggle by the Guatemala workers, the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF) launched an international campaign against the American multinational giant Coca Cola in 1979.

In 1980, Coke executives negotiated a settlement with the IUF.

However, from 1981 Coke began to run down the Guatemala plant by transferring the work to non-unionised areas.

And in February this year, the plant declared itself bankrupt and retrenched its entire workforce.

Immediately, the union members occupied the plant to prevent damage and the removal of machinery.

Once again, the IUF stepped in to aid the Guatemalan workers and unions worldwide pledged support.

In Denmark, the Brewery Workers Union told its members not to handle any empty Coca Cola bottles.

In Sweden, Australia, New Zealand and Venezuela Coke boycotts were organised.

Meanwhile, in Mexico ten different Coca Cola plants held

three-day solidarity strikes.

Trade unions worldwide also sent messages of condemnation to Coke - including the Sweet Food and Allied Workers Union.

In his letter, SFAWU general secretary Jay Naidoo urged Coke to 'offer the necessary safeguards to prevent any attacks on the rights of workers'.

On May 27, an agreement was signed between the Coca Cola workers in Guatemala and management from the company's head office.

Coke has agreed to pay the salaries of the workers from the time they occupied the plant until it is reopened under new ownership.

Coke also said it would ensure that the new owners recognise STEGAC as the representative of the workers and that the union is given bargaining rights.

Within Guatemala the struggle of the Coke workers has been regarded as crucial to the continued existence of independent unions.

As a STEGAC leader put it, 'the leaders of other trade unions say that if we don't stand up to the employers their own unions will be destroyed within two months.'



German metal workers on strike at a small spare parts factory in Laufen