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Brazil: Metalworker Unions On Strike

by Barbara Khol

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On April 14, members of the powerful metalworkers union were participating in a sit-down strike affecting big companies in the Sao Paulo industrial belt ("ABCD"), such as General Motors, Otis, TRW and COFAP. ABCD represents abbreviations of the industrial belt's four cities Santo Andre, Sao Bernardo do Campo, Sao Caetano do Sul, and Diadema. Union spokespersons said the strike may be extended to smaller-scale firms in the region. The metalworkers union is demanding a 216% across-the-board pay hike. Through the Sao Paulo state industrial federation, company managers had offered an 89.75% increase, paid in three installments. Observers and union members told reporters that some of the companies are prepared to negotiate with their employees separately. In statements to reporters on April 14, metalworker union president Luiz Antonio Medeiros said unions affiliates are willing to organize staggered walkouts affecting the entire industry. He added that other unions in Sao Paulo state are expected to join the strike. On April 15, 185,000 workers in the ABCD industrial belt were on strike. Union spokespersons said they opted to stagger the walkouts to cause financial losses to automotives and other metal industry firms without risking exhaustion of the labor movement via a general strike. In a telephone interview with Notimex, Francisco Llelis, spokesperson for General Motors, said that some GM operations were functioning normally, while others were closed down. General Motors do Brasil employs 23,000 people at two complexes. The 11,000 workers at GM's Sao Caetano factory suspended production of the high volume Monza and Opala models. An average 700 units leave the assembly lines on a monthly basis. At Volkswagen plants, 4,500 workers were on strike. Total output of the automotives industry in Brazil last year came to 914,000 units. (Basic data from Jornal do Brasil, Notimex, 04/15/91)

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