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Chile: Update On Strike At Chuquicamata Mine

by Barbara Khol

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On July 3, union leaders of 7,500 striking employees at Chuquicamata mine said management's statements about employees' high wages are "false and prejudiced," part of a "campaign" aimed at presenting them as a privileged labor sector which makes extravagant demands. Chuquicamata, located 1,600 km. north of Santiago, is administered by the state-run mining company, CODELCO. The strike commenced July 1 after a break-down in negotiations over workers' demand for a 9.5% wage hike. CODELCO president Alejandro Noemi said Chuquicamata workers receive 360,000 pesos per month (slightly more than $1,000), and enjoy many "guarantees." Mine manager Holger Bannach said the collective labor agreement currently being negotiated was one of the best in Chile. He accused union leaders of presenting "demands based on principles that have no solidarity." Union leaders denied the accuracy of pay rates given by CODELCO, and asserted that company executives maintain "a confrontational policy" providing no room "to resolve the conflict." CODELCO also administers the Andina, El Salvador and El Teniente mines. Employees at El Teniente are currently negotiating with CODELCO, and are expected to decided July 26 on offers made by the company. On July 3, Mining Minister Juan Hamilton said the government will not interfere directly in the conflict and expressed confidence that the strike "will be short." Copper exports from Chiquicamata represent 13% of the country's total export revenue. Estimates of lost income at Chuquicamata mine for every day of shut-down range from $2.5 to $3.5 million. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, EFE, 07/03/91)

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