

News
From _____

Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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Rahall Urges Solidarity with Striking Colombian Coal Miners

Washington, D.C. -- U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) today announced his support of the striking Colombian coal miner union and urged all U.S. labor unions to join the Colombian miners in solidarity.

Members of the Sintercor union have been striking the El Cerejon coal mine owned jointly by Exxon and the Colombian government. According to reports received by Rahall's office, the union is seeking to bring production to a halt and Colombian police have moved in to militarize the area. It has also been reported the union is fighting for a 24% wage increase plus bonuses.

The El Cerejon mine is responsible for the recent increase in foreign coal purchases by several U.S. electric utilities and is displacing southern West Virginia coal markets.

"The Colombian government enforces no health or safety protections for these mineworkers and they have been working for what amounts to slave labor wages," Rahall stated.

According to Rahall, this lack of worker protection and decent pay is the primary reason Colombian coal is able to infiltrate the U.S. market as well as international markets once served by U.S. export coal. Rahall cited as proof of this situation statistics he has received from an as yet unreleased government study showing that the costs of complying with mine safety and health requirements in a southern West Virginia coal mine are 95% higher than those at the El Cerejon mine.

"The Colombian mineworkers in 1986 are facing the same situation coal miners in southern West Virginia were dealing with during the early part of this century," Rahall said. "This strike could very well be their version of the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain."

Rahall added: "Perhaps a Colombian 'Mother Jones' will materialize to assist these mineworkers, but in the very least, I think we can all join them in solidarity for better working conditions and wages."

Rahall noted that increased awareness of health and safety protections and higher wages at El Cerejon would also create a more equitable competitive situation between Colombian and West Virginia coal.