

**INTERNATIONAL
LONGSHORE &
WAREHOUSE UNION**
AFL-CIO



1188 FRANKLIN STREET
SAN FRANCISCO
CALIFORNIA 94109
(415) 775-0533
(415) 775-1302 FAX
www.ILWU.org

ROBERT McELLRATH
President

RAY A. FAMILATHE
Vice President

WESLEY FURTADO
Vice President

WILLIAM E. ADAMS
Secretary-Treasurer

MEDIA ADVISORY FOR:
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CONTACT: Craig Merrilees
510-774-5325

600 locked-out families score victory against corporate giant Rio Tinto: Company agrees to withdraw demands that are central to illegal lockout

BORON, CA - Workers at Rio Tinto's borax mine in California's Mojave Desert scored an important victory late Friday afternoon when company officials suddenly and unconditionally agreed to withdraw a series of illegal demands that figured prominently in the employer's unlawful lockout against nearly 600 employees that began on January 31, 2010.

Rio Tinto's withdrawal of the illegal demands came after union members filed charges against the company with federal officials at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Workers allege that the employer committed a host of serious labor law violations, including a series of unlawful demands and ultimatums that led to the illegal lockout.

"Today's action by the company constitutes an implicit admission of illegal behavior that won't protect Rio Tinto from past violations or future liabilities arising from their illegal ongoing lockout," said Craig Merrilees, spokesperson for the locked out families.

Serious allegations now pending against Rio Tinto at the NLRB include charges that the lockout remains illegal and must be ended by the company before negotiations can resume in the fair and good-faith manner required by federal law. The pending charges are being investigated by labor law enforcement officials at the NLRB.

"This victory is an important step in holding Rio Tinto and all abusive employers more accountable for the way they're taking advantage of working families and communities here in Boron and all over America," said Dave Liebengood, President of ILWU Local 30, the union representing the 600 locked out families. "We're standing up for good jobs and challenging corporate greed that's hurting working families everywhere."

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