

Workers Struggles Around the World: The Americas

1 December 1998

The *World Socialist Web Site* urges workers and others to contribute to this feature by sending information to editor@wsws.org

South America

- Brazilian port workers protest anti-labor law
- One-day strike hits Paraguayan capital
- Mexican copper miners strike

United States

- Machinists strike at Air Force bases settled
 - Wilksburg, Pennsylvania teachers scheduled to strike December 2
- Duluth Teachers strike averted
- Disney World management and union warn workers not to strike
- Contract reached in Peterbilt strike
- Gas workers strike New Jersey utility

Canada

- British Columbia nurses cancel plan to escalate job action
- Canadian National bargained in bad faith, union charges

Brazilian port workers protest anti-labor law

Port workers in Santos, Brazil returned to work November 27 after a three-day strike to protest a congressional law that would take away the union's right to assign workers to load and unload cargo. A simple congressional majority voted November 25 to place the power of work assignments for all of Brazil's ports in the hands of the port administration. Such a move would allow management to slash jobs and manipulate wages. The Santos port authority agreed not to implement the new procedure until February 28, 1999, which allows the union to challenge the law at the regional workers court. The strike at Santos, the largest port in Latin America, paralyzed shipment of 250,000 tons of sugar along with other cargo.

One-day strike hits Paraguayan capital

A 24-hour strike engulfed Paraguay's capital city of Asuncion to protest policies being pursued by President Raul Cubas. The strike was backed by rural organizations which are protesting the murder of agricultural workers by paramilitary squads last month. Main roads leading into the capital and other major arteries throughout the country were barricaded by workers protesting the loss of 30 percent of their purchasing power. Ten strikers were arrested. Cubas's own Colorado Party, which is second only to the Mexican PRI in terms of continual rule, claimed to support the strike as a way of opposing the new president's pro-capitalist measures,

which aim to sell off many state-run services to the private sector.

Mexican copper miners strike

Miners at Mexico's Cananea mine in the state of Sonora went on strike November 21 in a dispute over a productivity bonus. The mine is Mexico's largest, producing 100,000 tons of copper per year out of 400,000 tons nationally.

Machinists strike at Air Force bases settled

An 86-day strike by 260 members of the International Association of Machinists Local 2515 at Air Force bases in New Mexico, California and Missouri ended November 25 after workers ratified a new agreement by an 80 percent margin.

In 1994 Lockheed Martin took over Air Force Service contracts from DynCorp and forced 80 percent of the work force into lower job classifications, resulting in pay losses of anywhere from \$2 to \$10 an hour. The settlement called for \$1,000 cash bonuses and yearly pay raises of 5, 4.5 and 4.5 percent for lower grades and 3.5, 3.5 and 3 percent raises for higher classifications.

Wilksburg, Pennsylvania teachers scheduled to strike December 2

One hundred fifty-nine teachers in Wilksburg, Pennsylvania, outside of Pittsburgh, are expected to strike December 2. This is the fifth year that the teachers have worked without a new contract. Over 2,000 children attend grades K-12 in the district. Teachers are members of the Wilksburg Education Association and the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Wilksburg is where APS (Alternative Public Schools), a private education enterprise, took over a public school, fired its 24 teachers and replaced them with those hired by APS. A year later the union won a legal ruling which allowed the teachers to return to work in other schools and awarded them a year's back pay. APS's three-year control of Turner Elementary School drained much needed resources from other schools. Earlier this year a court ordered APS to release the school and it returned under the jurisdiction of the school board. Teachers' pay levels have been frozen for four years, and a two-tier wage introduced in the 1997-98 school year reduced new teachers' pay from \$35,000 to \$25,000 a year.

Negotiations on November 16 allowed for wage increases, but the district is asking for concessions in health benefits that would shift teachers to a managed care insurance plan.

The last contract expired in August 1994 and teachers have been voting each year to renew the old contract. A strike in 1991 lasted for 18 days.

Duluth Teachers strike averted

Union and school officials in Duluth, Minnesota reached agreement on a two-year contract that provides a 2 percent retroactive raise for the 1997-98 school year and a 4 percent raise for the present year. The contract with 1,000 members of the Duluth Federation of Teachers will expire next summer, leading to a new round of negotiations.

Disney World management and union warn workers not to strike

Union officials and Disney World management in Orlando, Florida joined forces to threaten 22,000 workers against voting to strike December 10 after the corporation gave them a take-it-or-leave-it contract offer. Workers twice previously rejected Disney's wage package of 5 to 8 percent hourly raises, and increased health insurance premiums.

'A strike has very little chance of succeeding,' declared Harvey Totzke, president of the Services Trades Council, which represents six unions at Disney World. 'If this contract is voted down, Disney will just selectively implement the contract.' Disney spokesperson Bill Warren added, 'If the contract is voted down, at that point, our view is that we could implement all, part or none of it.'

Strongest opposition to the contract has come from costume workers who dress up as Disney cartoon characters. They oppose a contract proposal that would cut back on break time. Fewer breaks, combined with wearing costumes in the near tropical heat of Orlando, would create unsafe working conditions. Union officials are upset that low voter turnout has allowed about 10 percent of the work force to topple the two previous contract votes. Totzke further threatened, 'Disney could replace a couple of thousand workers if they walked out.'

Contract reached in Peterbilt strike

United Auto Workers Local 1832 and PACCAR, the maker of trucks sold under the Kenworth and Foden brands, reached an agreement November 24 for a new four-year labor contract covering 1,200 workers at its Peterbilt assembly plant in Nashville, Tennessee. No details of the agreement were made available.

The settlement came after a bitter 25-week strike in which PACCAR, the world's number three truck maker, hired scabs, contracted Vance Security guards and ringed the plant with surveillance cameras. In September the UAW unconditionally surrendered and offered to order the workers back to work while negotiations continued. PACCAR responded by locking out the workers. The company had been demanding takeaways on health insurance and refused to negotiate workers' demands for a 401(k) plan to supplement pension benefits and a lowering of the retirement age. During the past five-year period stockholders at PACCAR received a 242 percent return on investments.

Gas workers strike New Jersey utility

Utility Workers of America Local 424, representing 300 meter readers, service mechanics and construction crews, struck Elizabethtown Gas Company November 20 after the company's final offer was rejected. The offer contained yearly raises of 2.5 to 3 percent over a three-year contract with reductions in holidays and sick time. The proposal also aimed to separate the company's appliance repair services from distribution operations and contract out the former service. Management suspended all non-emergency services and has drafted nonunion personal to work the jobs of

striking employees.

British Columbia nurses cancel plan to escalate job action

The British Columbia Nurses Union bowed to a request from a provincial government-appointed mediator late Sunday evening and abandoned its plan to escalate a campaign of rotating strikes from five to forty hospitals.

The 25,000-member BCNU is demanding the immediate hiring of 1,400 additional nurses to reduce overtime and improve healthcare. The Hospital Employers' Association has reportedly offered to hire up to 600 new nurses, which works out to about two hirings per health facility in B.C. Many B.C. nurses routinely work 12- and 14-hour shifts.

Canadian National bargained in bad faith, union charges

The Canadian Auto Workers union is demanding that Canadian National Railways reopen a recently signed contract, saying the company negotiated in bad faith by keeping secret plans to slash its work force by almost 15 percent. In October, just weeks after the CAW and CN initialed a new three year-contract, the railway announced it was cutting its 21,000-strong work force by 3,000. 'We would not have ratified the agreement if we had known they would turn around and stab us in the back,' complained CAW President Buzz Hargrove.

It is highly unlikely that the federal Labour Minister will forward the CAW's complaint to the Canada Labour Relations Board, and if he does, that the CLRB will accept it and order the contract reopened. Hargrove's protests are meant to mollify rank-and-file anger over the union's failure to defend jobs. When the latest round of job-cutting is complete, CN will have slashed its work force in half since privatization in the early 1990s.

See Also:

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

[28 November 1998]

Workers Struggles: Europe, Russia, the Middle East and Africa

[26 November 1998]

Workers Struggles: The Americas

[24 November 1998]



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact