

Workers Struggles: The Americas

1 August 2000

Six killed, 100 injured and 170 arrested in Peru protests

On July 27, about 200,000 Peruvians marched in protest on the eve of Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori's third term. The march through central Lima lasted several hours and included workers, Aymara and Quechua Indians, peasants and students. Many women marched with torches and empty pots. The demonstrations were organized by the March of the Four Suyos (a reference to the administrative regions of the Inca Empire). A spokesperson for the Four Suyos declared that more than a million had demonstrated across the country.

Following the march many conducted an all-night vigil to mark Fujimori's swearing in on July 28. When morning came they found themselves surrounded by 40,000 police under orders not to allow the marchers to interrupt the inauguration. The police carried out provocations and massive repression as demonstrators tried to break through their lines and block Fujimori's passage to his swearing in inside the Congress building. Six died at the Central Bank building in a fire which the opposition blames on Fujimori's agent provocateurs. The Supreme Court Building and the Elections Commission were also set on fire.

At last count, 190 people were injured. The Peruvian National Human Rights Coordinating Committee (CNDH) indicated that many of the injuries occurred when riot police purposely aimed and fired tear gas canisters at people's bodies. At least three protesters sustained gunshot wounds.

Costa Rican peasants block highways

Some 60,000 small farmers and rural workers blocked highways across Costa Rica on July 27. The protesters demanded the government address the situation facing peasants who find themselves at the mercy of banks that lend them money to save their crops.

This coincided with the opening of Costa Rica to agricultural imports that has driven down prices. Thousands now find themselves at the edge of bankruptcy as the banks auction off their land and machinery.

Agricultural workers also accused the government of benefiting only a small layer of agricultural importers and of neglecting small producers. The peasants appealed to the public to be vigilant against government repression of their protest.

Union mobilizations in Argentina and Chile

The United Workers Organization of Chile (CUT) will march on August 3 to protest the high levels of unemployment. Officially unemployment is above 10 percent. CTU President

Etien Moraga stated that the purpose of the protest will be to demand the right to a job for every worker in Chile.

In Argentina, 600 workers began a march against unemployment on July 26 in the industrial city of Rosario. The Argentine Workers Central (CTA), which organized "the great march," is calling for a "redistribution shock" to benefit the unemployed.

The protest will last 15 days, covering 350 kilometers (about 200 miles), ending in Buenos Aires on August 9. The marchers began in Plaza Las Heras in the heart of one of the hardest hit working class suburbs of Rosario.

They will present a petition to the Argentine Congress, signed by over a million people, calling for a popular referendum establishing unemployment insurance of \$380 a month and subsidies of \$60 for each unemployed worker's child.

Unemployment in Argentina has reached depression levels of over 15 percent, with four million workers having no steady jobs.

Stanford nurses accept mediator's proposal, end strike

Nurses at Stanford Medical Center and Lucile Salter Packard Children's Hospital in California voted to accept a mediator's proposal ending a bitter seven-week strike. The July 27 vote showed considerable opposition to the agreement, which passed by a margin of 825-551.

The agreement calls for five percent increases for nurses with less than 15 years seniority in each year of a two-year contract. Higher seniority nurses will receive an additional one percent per year. The union had originally asked for a 17.5 percent pay increase over the life of the agreement. Hospital management was initially offering a mere 8 percent.

A spokesperson for the Committee for Recognition of Nursing Achievement, the union representing the 1,730 striking nurses, admitted there was strong sentiment against the federal mediator's proposal and would not announce their position on the contract. The hospitals used 800 replacement nurses in order to continue operations during the strike.

Strikebreaker at Overnite admits being paid to defame Teamster strikers

A driver for the strikebound Overnite Transportation Company has come forward to admit that the company paid him \$10,000 to damage property and falsely attribute it to striking members of the Teamsters union, causing them to be fired.

During the nine-month strike Overnite has issued a torrent of

press releases charging the Teamsters with strike-related violence, such as shooting at company trucks and smashing windows, while bemoaning the cost expended on security.

The driver, Anthony Holly of Tennessee, claims in a sworn affidavit that the company became aware of his financial difficulties and wired \$10,000 to his bank account in exchange for his agreement to launch a false provocation against the Teamsters.

Holly claims that he did not actually damage property, but instead took credit for existing damage. He did, however, lie to the company and the National Labor Relations Board concerning two well-known supporters of the Teamsters union. Holly falsely charged drivers Kyle Brooks and Paul Holder with threatening him with violence for crossing a picket line. Overnite fired both Brooks and Holder.

"I'm ashamed for doing what I've done," Holly told the *New York Times*. "Overnite had me brainwashed." It is not clear how widespread the company's bribery actions were. In Minnesota several Teamsters officials and supporters who were not strikers were convicted of picket-line misconduct.

But what remains the most telling issue in the nine-month unfair labor practices strike is the inability of the Teamsters to win a majority of Overnite's drivers and warehouse workers to the side of the strike. The most serious bone of contention in the negotiations between the Teamsters bureaucracy and Overnite has been the union's demand to control the pension fund for workers as a major component of the unionization drive.

Strike over at seven Vancouver hotels

The three-week-old strike by more than 2,000 workers at the "big seven" Vancouver hotels ended last Friday, July 28 when workers voted to accept a new contract which provides small improvements over a recent offer rejected by the membership. While the strike by the Hotel Restaurant Culinary Employees & Bartenders' Union (Local 40) has ended, another by 500 hotel workers in the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), which began two weeks ago, continues.

The 40-month contract will give workers no more than 8 percent over the term of the deal, well below the 12 percent the union had been seeking. In addition they will receive signing bonuses of \$300 and increased pension and health care benefits. Workers accepted the contract with 81 percent in favor under pressure from the media and others who claimed the strike could damage tourism in the province. At the same time, B.C. Ferries workers could go on strike this week, which would also hamper the tourist industry. No talks are currently scheduled in the other strike by CAW workers at five hotels, but the latest settlement will bring pressure for them to accept similar terms.

Mediator appointed in Air Canada pilots dispute

A special mediator named by the federal government will preside over talks beginning August 7 between the Air Canada Pilots Association (ACPA) and the airline to resolve the impasse in contract negotiations. Bruce Outhouse, a Halifax

lawyer, was named as mediator under threats by federal Labour Minister Claudette Bradshaw to impose a settlement on both sides.

Pilots at Air Canada, who have been in contract negotiations since February, voted by an overwhelming majority to strike over a month ago. Under government pressure their union has been reluctant to carry out any action and has implicitly invited government intervention to end the dispute. Air Canada holds a virtual monopoly of air travel in Canada since acquiring Canadian Airlines earlier this year and pilots have particular concerns over wage parity and job security.

In related matters, the series of strikes by ground crews at airports across the country continues, with 120 workers at Edmonton International Airport staging a one-day wildcat action last week in protest of an illegal lock-out. Members of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) voted last week to strike and could begin their action as early as Monday.

Tories push for war with Ontario unions

A paper circulated within the Ontario Conservative Party, which proposes to gut the power of unions in the province, has revealed divisions within the party over dealing with the labor movement. Produced by Premier Mike Harris's "Red Tape Commission," the report, entitled "Enhancing Worker Democracy," recommends the repeal of longstanding labor law requiring all workers in a union jurisdiction to pay dues.

The elimination of the practice known as the "Rand" formula would amount to what Ontario Federation of Labour President Wayne Samuelson has called "a declaration of war" on trade unions. Ontario Labour Minister Chris Stockwell has distanced himself from the report saying, "I don't think much will come of it." The proposals nevertheless reflect pledges made in last year's Tory election platform, which stated their intention to "expand workers rights."

The union movement in Ontario poses no threat to the implementation of the Tories' policies. In every decisive struggle since the Tories took power in the province, they have demonstrated their commitment to avoid confrontation with the government, scuttling strike after strike, and in fact rescuing the Tories from political collapse in the 1997 teachers strike.



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