

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 February 2001

Public sector workers to strike in Colombia

Public workers in Colombia's capital of Bogota are scheduled to strike February 22 to protest the layoff of 6,000 of their fellow workers. "This strike cannot be reversed," said Luis Eduardo Cruz, leader of the public employees' union (SinDistrital). The union leader also there would be a mass rally at Bogota's District Administrative Center.

The layoffs are taking place pursuant to the government's Law of Fiscal Recovery, which orders city authorities to drastically reduce public spending. Colombia's official unemployment rate of 19 percent is already the highest Latin America.

Teachers strike in Venezuela

Venezuela's teachers launched a 48-hour national strike February 21 to demand higher wages. Jesús Ramírez, the president of the Federation of Education Workers (Fetraenseñanza), estimated that 168,000 teachers from five different unions joined the strike.

This is the second teachers strike in 15 days against the government of Hugo Chavez. Ramirez explained that the teachers decided on a strike to protest government inaction on a \$159 increase that has already been approved, but not enacted. Government teachers currently average about \$700 a month.

Teachers protest for jobs in Chiapas, Mexico

Hundreds of newly qualified teaching applicants demonstrated for jobs February 20 in the Mexican city of Tuxla Gutierrez. Earlier in the day police expelled over 100 protesting teachers from in front of the government palace, where they had been staging a blockade for the past 20 days.

The young teachers then surrounded Chiapas Governor Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia, as he was having his shoes shined on the street, to protest the eviction. In an attempt to free himself from the group of teachers, the governor promised to seek federal aid. Unconvinced, the irate teachers continued their protest, calling Salazar a liar.

The protesters, recent graduates of local teaching colleges, indicated that more than 700 of their peers have no jobs.

Union orders Delta Pilots to end job action

The Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) ordered its members at Delta Air Lines to comply with a federal court injunction halting a no-overtime work campaign, a union spokesman said February 15. Pilots have been involved in drawn-out negotiations for a new contract and are demanding higher wages and improved benefits from the nation's third largest carrier. The pilots union has voted to strike as early as April 1 if negotiations fail and the National Mediation Board releases both sides from talks.

The injunction, which was issued by the US District Court for the Northern District of Georgia in Atlanta, prohibits ALPA from refusing to request or accept overtime flying work, and from engaging in any other actions which interfere with Delta's operations. In a posting on its web site, ALPA told its members to cease any unlawful activity, including harassment of pilots who request overtime work.

Delta sued its pilots union in December, accusing it of orchestrating a campaign to decline overtime flying requests in violation of the federal Railway Labor Act. When the district court judge hearing the case declined to enjoin the pilots, Delta appealed the decision to the 11th Circuit US Court of Appeals in Atlanta. Last month, a three-judge panel sided with the airline and ordered the lower court to issue an injunction. A pilots union request for a rehearing before the full 11th Circuit court was denied.

Labor Secretary Chao recuses herself in Northwest Airlines dispute

Labor Secretary Elaine Chao removed herself February 20 from involvement in Northwest Airlines' labor dispute because she previously served on the company's board. Northwest's 9,600 mechanics, members of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal

Association (AMFA), are threatening to strike March 12 unless they have a new contract. President Bush has said he would intervene and stop a strike for an additional 60 days by convening a presidential emergency board, which the union opposes.

Chao resigned from the board of the nation's fourth largest carrier shortly before joining the Bush administration. Chao, who had also been on the board of Clorox, Dole Food Co. and HCA-Healthcare Corp., said her recusal would not limit the Labor Department's intervention in the airline dispute.

At Northwest's main hub in Minneapolis and at other airports AMFA members have been conducting informational picketing. The National Mediation Board declared talks between the union and Northwest at an impasse after almost 100 days of mediation. The two sides were about \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion apart on wages, retroactive pay and pensions issues.

Disputes are also brewing at the nation's biggest carrier, United, which is in contract talks with its mechanics, and No. 2 American Airlines, which is negotiating with flight attendants, and at No. 3 Delta Airlines, which is negotiating with its pilots. Airline workers who gave up major concessions when the airlines faced economic difficulties in the early 1990s are seeking to recoup their losses from the airlines, which have recorded big profits.

Teamsters members authorize strike at BP Amoco plant in New Jersey

Members of Teamsters Local 877 have threatened to call a strike at BP Amoco's Bayway Turbo Oil plant in New Jersey to fight wage cuts and protect contractual rights. A strike could come as early as next week, said Curt Greder, president of Teamsters Local 877.

Local 877 represents 12 workers at the BP plant. But Greder said a walkout could also affect operations at Tosco's Bayway refinery and the Infineum Chemical Plant which is jointly owned by Tosco and Dow Chemical Co, where another 1,000 Local 877 members are employed.

Union pushes toothless contract with Magna

The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) have proposed a first contract with Magna International, the country's largest independent auto parts supplier, which has thwarted three organizing drives by the CAW over the last decade. The deal at Integram Windsor Seating does not allow workers to strike for at least six years. The

CAW has told their members that this is the only way they can get a contract in the face of fierce resistance by Magna.

Magna International has 60 plants across Canada, none of which are unionized, although some of their US operations are. The no-strike provision has been sought by the company in exchange for guarantees not to lock out workers. The CAW has been negotiating for a contract since workers narrowly voted for union representation in October 1999. The Integram plant provides seats for DaimlerChrysler's minivan operation in Windsor, which is also organized by the CAW.



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