

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 January 2002

Municipal strike in Nicaragua

Managua city workers struck January 21 in Nicaragua's capital to oppose the firing of 360 employees by Mayor Herty Lewites. Half of the 3,000 municipal employees are participating in the walkout, including drivers and refuse collectors. About 20 workers were injured when police attacked workers occupying a municipal building.

Among those losing their jobs are many expectant mothers and high seniority workers, according to union officials. City officials have also threatened to fire another 600 workers from among the strikers.

Death squad kills Brazilian Workers Party official

On January 22, the body of Celso Daniel, mayor of the Brazilian city of Santo Andre, was found in dense vegetation. He had been kidnapped earlier by the FARB (Brazilian Revolutionary Armed Forces), an organization that has vowed to assassinate leftist politicians. Daniel was a member of the reformist Workers Party (PT). Last September another PT mayor was executed under similar circumstances. After the assassination of Andre, the organization continued to receive death threats, according to PT officials.

Scores wounded and arrested in Argentine protests

Tens of thousands of Argentine workers and middle class people marched through the streets of Buenos Aires and other major Argentine cities January 25 to demand jobs. In the city's May Square, 25 demonstrators were injured when police attacked the rally with tear gas and rubber bullets, claiming the protesters had been slow to disband.

TV images depicted heavily armed police moving in with water trucks, armored personnel carriers and motorcycle squads. Many of the protesters carried signs demanding work and denouncing the International Monetary Fund.

Chilean dock workers threaten to boycott fruit shipments

On January 21 dock workers at Chile's main port in Valparaiso threatened to strike to demand the payment of government benefits promised to them when the port was privatized. Over 200 laid-off workers have yet to receive government subsidies to set up small businesses. On January 22, dock workers established a soup kitchen at one of the docks to dramatize their plight.

United Airlines backs presidential board recommendation for mechanics

United Airlines agreed to accept the terms for its mechanics proposed by a presidential emergency board appointed by the Bush administration. The 15,000 mechanics have been working without a contract for nearly 18 months. The package includes wage increases of 47 percent over a four-year period, but is predicated on a future rollback of wages for all employees.

The International Association of Machinists (IAM), which represents the workers, expects to announce results of a mail ballot on the proposal in another week or so. Should the deal be ratified a similar pact is expected to be submitted to United's 24,000 ground workers, who are also represented by the IAM.

In its decision, the panel said it understood that "difficult adjustments must be made, including wage concessions ... if United is likely to survive." The problem, the board said, was "the company's initial bargaining position placed the brunt of this formidable task on the shoulders of the machinists." A plan to reduce labor costs for all bargaining units is currently being set into motion by CEO Jack Creighton.

Wages for senior workers will go from \$25.60 an hour to \$34.14, and will reach \$37.54 by the middle of 2004. United will only have to pay one-third of machinists' back wages retroactive to July 2000, when the old agreement expired. Furthermore, the back pay will only be paid to mechanics starting in 2003, and will be strung out over a two-year period.

Job cuts at New Jersey newspaper

Negotiators for Jersey City, New Jersey's newspaper and the Professional Employees International Union reached an agreement that will eliminate 18 of the union's 42 sales and office workers. The union and management of the *Jersey Journal* then took out an ad in the paper calling on the drivers union to also agree to concessions. Management is seeking to wipe out 18 jobs from the ranks of the Newspaper and Mail Deliverers Union.

Falling subscriptions and advertising revenues plague the paper and management has threatened to close the newspaper by February 1 unless its unions grant concessions. The paper is demanding that the Newspaper Guild agree to slash 17 of the papers 36 reporters, editors and photographers.



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