Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 October 2002

Mexico: National University employees to strike this week

Agustin Rodriguez, general secretary of the Autonomous National University Workers Union (STUNAM) declared on Friday that a strike will take place at the National Autonomous University (UNAM) in Mexico City on November 1.

None of the economic issues have been resolved, said Rodriguez. He indicated that STUNAM is demanding a 40 percent wage increase over the two-year life of the contract. The STUNAM leader pointed out that university workers have lost 70 percent in purchasing power in the last decade.

Bus Strike in Sao Paulo

Bus operators carried out a 48-hour strike in Sao Paulo against the Viacao Tiradentes company, which operates 298 buses along 25 routes on the eastern side of this metropolis. The main issues in the strike were unpaid back wages and the firm's failure over the last three years to make payments to the Seniority Fund (FGTS), a national retirement fund. Viacao Tiradentes provides transportation to about 97,000 travelers every day.

City workers strike in Montevideo

On October 24, Montevideo municipal workers declared a strike of indefinite duration. The workers are demanding that the city pay wages in the amount stipulated in the contract. Municipal authorities argue that the city can no longer do so, due to a drop in tax revenues caused by Uruguay's financial crisis.

On Thursday, pickets of the Association of Municipal Employees (ADEOM) blocked buildings, linking hands in a effort to prevent entrance into City Hall and other municipal offices. There were confrontations with the police. Only top officials were allowed in. ADEOM leader Eduardo Arbes declared that the mass picketing would continue. He denounced the city's outsourcing of garbage service and the massive police presence as attempts to break the strike.

On Friday, ADEOM workers attended a mass rally, and the entrances to buildings were not blocked. The municipality has requested Interior Ministry troops to "escort" scabs into the buildings this week.

Up until now, ADEOM had been carrying out two weeks of partial protest strikes.

Buenos Aires subway workers strike

On October 24, transit workers employed by Metrovias on Buenos Aires's five subway lines began a two-day work stoppage. The strike was unexpected; it began on Thursday afternoon, and ended on Friday at midnight. More than 400,000 riders use the Buenos Aires metro every day.

The strike was sparked when two workers were injured in confrontations with police during a mass rally at the Legislature protesting a new subway law that would extend working hours for transit workers. Subway workers have been working under a no-strike injunction since October 10. The injunction ends November 1.

Metrovias is calling for sanctions against the strikers for violating the injunction, including the firing of militant workers.

Chilean health workers call for new strikes

The Congress of Health Service Unions (CONGRESS) announced on October 23 that there will be a national health workers strike beginning in the second week of November to protest the AUGE Plan—a government proposal to outsource health services.

Last week, health workers carried out protest rallies at Santiago hospitals and clinics. The week before, doctors and health workers had closed hospitals in Santiago and Valparaiso.

Settlement in Boston janitors' strike

The three-week-long strike by Boston janitors ended October 23 with some partial gains won by workers, although complete details are not known. At the high point of the strike some 2,000 of the 10,700 janitors were on the picket lines, accompanied by widespread demonstrations and civil disobedience actions by their supporters.

According to the *Boston Globe*, the cleaning corporations and the Service Employees International Union hastened to reach a compromise to head off a planned "day of chaos" scheduled for the following day. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino wanted the settlement in order to avoid an escalated level of protests and civil disobedience that might jeopardize the city's endeavor to secure the 2004 Democratic National Convention.

The new agreement brought 30 percent wage increases. Janitors formerly made wages of $9.95 for part-time and $10.20 for full-time. Workers falling within a central geographical area will receive $13.15 for those with 5 years seniority or more and $12.95 for those with fewer than five years. The cleaning companies agreed to extend health care coverage to 1,000 part-time workers who work in the largest building complexes. In the past, only full-time workers qualified for health care and a mere 1,900 union members held full-time positions.

The union had initially asked that companies consolidate part-time jobs into full-time positions. Union and company negotiators have agreed to continue negotiating whether part-time workers will be allowed to purchase family benefits for a premium.

Teamsters call off three-year strike against Overnite

The Teamsters union ended its three-year strike against Overnite Transportation Company last week. The Teamsters called the strike on the basis of unfair labor practice allegations against company for heavy-handed victimizations against truckers and warehouse workers who wanted to unionize. The bureaucracy

© World Socialist Web Site

hoped to use support from the Clinton administration, and later that of George Bush, to obtain bargaining rights for all Overnite employees.

In 1999 a former Overnite operations manager testified that the company used a hit list to fire hundreds of pro-union workers and that he himself had fired over 40. An NLRB judge's 56-page report cited incidents where knives were used to threaten workers on the job.

In February of this year the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit vacated an earlier ruling that would have paid Overnite workers $3 million for unlawfully withheld wages. On October 17, the Teamsters received another rebuff from the NLRB when the board denied an appeal by the Teamsters of an earlier unfair labor practice charge of bad-faith bargaining. The NLRB denied the appeal despite the fact that an NLRB regional director had backed the union on the allegation.

With the Teamsters' legal strategy in a shambles, the union called off the strike, declaring, "It is clear, given the current appointees at the NLRB, the Overnite workers will no longer get a fair hearing in that forum." In the initial stages of the strike some 2,000 Overnite workers out of 8,000 walked out. By the end only 600 workers continued to strike.

Navistar workers vote on contract

Over 7,000 workers at the truck-maker Navistar International plants in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Texas and Maryland began voting this past weekend on a 5-year labor agreement. Neither the company nor the United Auto Workers (UAW) union would disclose the contents of the tentative proposal until the ratification vote had been concluded.

Navistar went into negotiations with the UAW three months ago seeking concessions to help bolster the company in the wake of a two-year slump. It lost $23 million in 2001 and another $76 million through the first three quarters of 2002. The company took a provocative stance in the last week of bargaining, refusing to grant a contract extension with an eye to locking out workers.

Earlier this month the company closed its Chatham, Ontario plant with a loss of 2,200 jobs and last week the company idled 900 workers at its Ohio plant.

GE union threatens nationwide strike increase in health care costs

The conference board of the International Union of Electrical Workers-Communication Workers of America voted unanimously October 25 to authorize strike action at all General Electric plants in the United States if the company proceeds to increase co-payments for one of its major health care plans starting in 2003. "The events of the next year are in GE's hands," said IUE-CWA President Edward Fire.

The previous week the IUE-CWA warned GE management that it would also strike over company plans to cut 1,000 jobs by the end of the year and possibly up to 1,800 over the next two years, transferring them overseas. Some 35,000 workers make up the IUE-CWA bargaining unit at GE.

Teachers strike in Minnesota

Some 220 teachers in Red Wing, Minnesota went out on strike last week in the city's first-ever teacher's strike. Members of the local Education Minnesota are demanding a 14.6 percent wage increase in comparison to the school district's offer of 9.6 percent.

The School's superintendent said the school would remain closed this week but school officials have indicated that they wanted to reopen classes with substitute teachers. The district faces a $1.3 million deficit and expects to lose 60 to 100 students a year over the next four years, which will decrease state funding. Last month teachers from International Falls, Minnesota concluded the first teachers' strike in over a decade.

Strike preparations begin at Telus

Bargaining between Telus, the second largest telecommunications company in Canada, and the union representing 13,000 unionized employees in British Columbia and Alberta was halted last week pending the outcome of a strike vote.

The Telecommunications Workers Union (TWU), which represents workers in western Canada, called the strike vote after nearly two years of unsuccessful negotiations. A key issue in the dispute is the company's plan to cut up to 6,000 jobs from its workforce by offering early retirement and severance packages directly to the membership. The company is further seeking to cut costs through other measures such as refusing to pay overtime during evening hours when many of its customers request service calls.

At the same time the union has been fighting to organize workers in the company's wireless division, Telus mobility, who have remained non-union since Telus merged with BC Telecom in 1999. In the hope of avoiding a strike, the company has made application to the federal government for a conciliator to settle the dispute, and a legal strike could not be held until early next year.

Teachers bolster food workers strike in Edmonton

The Alberta Teachers Association has cancelled three conventions at the strike-bound Shaw Conference Centre in Edmonton, Alberta in support of a strike which began last May by 250 service and food workers. They are fighting for a first contract.

The move by the union representing 17,000 teachers came following a decision by Edmonton city council, which owns the centre, not to allow binding arbitration to settle the dispute. Through its arm's length agency, The Edmonton Economic Development, the city has refused from the outset to recognize the union. The striking workers are members of the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW). The UFCW has done nothing to stop the centre from continuing to use scab labor throughout the strike, prompting some workers to seek decertification. The action by the mostly low wage workers has attracted widespread support and has caused the cancellation of numerous other bookings at the conference center.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site