

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 April 2003

## **Striking teachers in Bolivia surround president's palace**

On April 3, teachers in the second week of their strike rallied around the president's palace in La Paz and battled police. The teachers are demanding an 800 percent wage increase. Union leader Jose Luis Alvarez declared that the teachers are standing firm on a demand for a wage of \$830 a month.

Alvarez said that the wage increase could be paid for if the government defaults on Bolivia's foreign debt and shuts down Congress.

The government has offered a 2.35 percent wage increase. Education Minister Victor Hugo Carvajal insists that only some of the country's 120,000 teachers are on strike and that the police will be used to protect scabs.

## **Peruvian nurses on strike**

Seven thousand two hundred public health nurses walked out in Peru on April 1. The nurses are demanding their union be granted professional status and a wage increase. The strike is being observed across Peru, except for emergency services.

If their union is granted professional status, their wage would increase to \$630 each month, up from the current \$400.

## **Brazilian autoworkers demand wage increases**

Following a wave of strikes by metal workers in Sao Paulo, metal workers employed by Renault, Volkswagen-Audi and Volvo are demanding a 13 percent wage adjustment to compensate for five months of inflation. Workers are to meet this week to set the date for a strike if their demands are rejected on April 7.

The Parana metal workers have lost 23 percent in purchasing power since the last wage adjustment last September.

## **Salvadoran workers march against privatizations and war**

Thousands of union members and supporters marched in San Salvador April 2 against a free trade treaty, privatizations and the war against Iraq.

The marchers rallied in Plaza de las Americas, in a

wealthy section of the capital city, and marched on the hotel where the treaty negotiations are taking place. The demonstrators say that the new treaty will result in a collapse in agriculture and in an increase of migrations by young people to the United States.

The marchers also solidarized themselves with a hunger strike by six doctors protesting the privatization of El Salvador's public health system.

## **State doctors slow down in El Salvador**

Doctors employed in state-run clinics organized a slowdown on April 3 in support of six of public-health clinic doctors, on hunger strike against the privatization of the public health system. The public health clinics have been on strike for more than six months.

State hospitals cancelled all office visits and elective surgeries, performing urgent tasks only. The hunger strike began April 1.

The government of Francisco Flores claims the public health clinics are operating normally and that the striking doctors have been replaced.

## **Pilots union helps bail out United Airlines**

The Air Line Pilots Association approved a tentative agreement with United Airlines that gives the bankrupt carrier \$1.1 billion for each year of a six-year agreement. All pilots will take a 29 percent wage cut. In addition, the pay scale will shrink from five steps to three with the result that pilots flying Airbuses and 747s will have an additional 7 percent and 15 percent deducted from their pay. Other concessions, still not made public, are to cut into work rules and flight schedule practices affecting the airlines' 8,200 pilots.

In return for the concessions, the labor bureaucracy obtained an agreement that pilots employed at United's new low-cost airline will be represented under the same tentative labor agreement, albeit governed by the lower end of a two-tiered pay scale.

United is still seeking yearly concessions totaling \$445 million from ground workers. Their union, the IAM, has so far agreed to \$423 million in cuts. Flight attendants have agreed to \$167 million in cuts out of the company's

demand of \$314 million. Mechanics have not yet disclosed where they stand in relation to the \$349 million in annual concessions requested by United. The unions have until May 1 to fulfill United's concessions demands in order to head off a decision by a bankruptcy judge to void all labor contracts.

### **Two-day protest strike by Nevada gold miners**

Nevada gold miners held a two-day work stoppage March 27-28 to protest the failure of Newmont Mining to reach an acceptable agreement over contract terms and the company's past unilateral actions that contravene the old agreement that expired in September of last year.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 3, which represents about 550 of the mine's 960 workers, says the company refuses to provide workers with an arsenic-free place to eat lunch. "There is arsenic in the air and [the miners] feel they are unsafe when they eat," said union negotiator Frank Herrera. In October of last year the company unilaterally increased prescription drug co-pays without consulting the union, something Herrera says constitutes an unfair labor practice.

Newmont has offered wage increases of 3 percent in the first year and 2 percent in the subsequent two years of their proposal. Newmont is the largest gold mining company in the world. In its latest fiscal quarter its net profits nearly quadrupled.

### **One-day hospital strike at Minneapolis**

Minnesota hospital service workers in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area began the first of what they say will be a series of one-day rolling strikes when workers at Mercy Hospital walked out April 3-4 after endorsing the action by a 318-31 vote. Over 5,900 members of the Service Employees International Union Local 113 have been working without a contract since February 28 with the union and company management deadlocked over health care costs.

According to the union, the average monthly premium for family coverage is presently \$488 while hospital executives and other high-level managers pay half that amount. Local 113 members' pay averages only \$12.96 an hour. The union wanted to cap employees' health premiums. Instead management has capped the hospitals' share of premiums, meaning employees will continue to pay more as health insurance costs increase by 20 percent per year. In addition to health care issues, the two sides have not agreed on wages and pensions. The hospital also has declined to allow other workers to unionize through a card-check neutrality agreement.

The SEIU represents radiology and therapy aides,

nurses assistants, patient escorts, instrument and equipment operators, cafeteria and food service, housekeeping, maintenance, transportation, telephone operators, admitting clerks and laundry workers.

### **BC government to intervene in SFU strike**

The BC liberal government will intervene shortly to shut down a strike by 750 clerical, technical and support staff at Simon Fraser University. In so doing, the Campbell Liberals are repeating their antidemocratic imposition of a 20-day "cooling-off" period on striking workers at the University of British Columbia.

The SFU workers have been engaging in rotating job actions since March 24 in support of demands for a wage increase of 6 percent a year in each of the next three years. The workers, represented by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 3338, are the lowest paid workers at the university. The university administration, following a mandate provided by the BC government's Public Sector Employers Council, has insisted on a wage freeze and a reduction in benefits.

It has been reported that some SFU instructors have supported the striking workers by refusing to cross picket lines.

### **Support workers in Sunrise School Division vote to strike**

Two hundred support workers employed by Manitoba's Sunrise School Division have voted to strike, rejecting the employer's most recent offer. The workers, who include custodial and maintenance staff, bus drivers and teaching assistants, have been without a contract since December 2002.

The workers are represented by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1618, and are demanding wage increases (including pay equity following an amalgamation) and the creation of a defined-benefit pension plan. According to the union, the employer's offer is still 12 percent short of the workers' demands.



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