

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

2 November 2004

## Latin America

### Nicaraguan teachers to strike on Fridays

Nicaraguan public school teachers will strike every Friday to press demands for a wage increase. The National Educators' Association (ANDEN) calls for teachers' wages to match cost-of-living increases.

The monthly salary for elementary school teachers is \$72 and that of secondary school teachers \$85—less than \$100, the poverty line in Nicaragua. ANDEN has rejected a \$25 offer from the government.

### Chilean copper miners vote to strike

Five hundred miners at the El Abra copper mine on October 27 rejected management's latest wage offer and will strike this week against the mine, largely controlled by the Phelps-Dodge Corporation.

Phelps-Dodge is offering a 3.5 percent wage increase plus an unspecified signing bonus, which one miner described as "bread today, hunger tomorrow." The miners have asked for a 6.5 percent raise.

Some 99.5 percent of the 450 miners that attended the assembly voted to strike. Given the strength of the vote, the Chilean miners' union (SCM) declared that the miners will hold out for all of their demands. SCM leaders indicate that wages at El Abra are well below the industry average.

In the wake of the vote, El Abra miners received messages of solidarity from the other copper mines in the region: Escondida, Codelco, Zaldivar, Cerro Colorado and Quebrada Blanca, as well as from the Chilean Miners' Federation.

SCM President Julio Ramos called for a national movement of miners and called on the Lagos government to re-nationalize the El Abra copper mine.

### Argentine telephone workers protest

Argentine telephone workers, members of the Telephone Federation (FOESSITRA), are participating in two-hour strikes per shift against Argentina's two telephone companies—Telecom and Telefonica Argentina. The ongoing strikes, which began two

weeks ago, will continue through November 1.

At issue are delays in negotiations that, according to FOESSITRA leaders, are a result of a conspiracy by both companies. The workers are demanding wage increases, job security and an end to the outsourcing of jobs.

The Kirchner government has imposed a 10-day cooling-off period on the union, scheduled to begin November 2. Union leaders have threatened to resume protest strikes with a one-day strike following the government-mandated cooling-off period.

### Peruvian miners set to strike

Miners at the Cuajone Mine, owned by Southern Peru Copper Corp., have agreed to strike November 3 to press for the reintegration of a sacked worker.

In September, Cuajone and Toquepala miners carried out a two-week walkout over wages. The strike ended when the Toledo government banned it and threatened to allow mass layoffs. The workers were demanding an increase of \$1.60 per day. Currently they earn \$24 daily.

Negotiations broke off when a worker was sacked at the Cuajone and have yet to resume.

## United States

### Washington, D.C., officials fire bus drivers in alleged sickout

School officials for Washington, D.C., school districts fired 23 bus drivers and attendants in response to an alleged sickout by 262 union members October 25. The firings were based on workers' failure to notify a supervisor about their action.

District Council 20 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) denied that there had been a work stoppage, although it argued that there had been ongoing payroll problems concerning drivers.

The sickout embraced about 20 percent of the city's 692 school bus drivers and 714 attendants, who shuttle special education students in the district. David

Gilmore, the school transportation administrator, indicated that other workers may be fired and has demanded that all workers produce a doctor's slip.

### **Illinois school clerical workers strike**

Clerical workers in the Peoria School District 150 walked out on strike October 28 after a breakdown in negotiations. Members of the Illinois Federation of Teachers charge the district violated labor laws and will file unfair labor practices charges if new talks over the weekend fail.

The union says the district initially offered a 3 percent wage increase back in July, but then regressed to 2 percent in September. The union also charges that the district used negotiators who did not have the authority to bargain.

### **Illinois student leader charges administrators retaliate for pro-strike stand**

William Steward, City Colleges of Chicago student government association president, charged the administration with victimizing him in retaliation for his appeal to students to boycott classes and support teachers during the ongoing faculty strike. "I believe there are things happening to me because of the position I have taken," said Stewart.

Steward, a nursing major at Kennedy-King College, was selected as interim leader by other student government representatives in September until new elections could be held November 12. But the college's associate vice chancellor for student affairs, Cynthia Armster, sent an e-mail last week warning Steward that his predecessor, Deon Lopez, was still "officially" president. After Steward challenged Armster, she backtracked. But Steward says the school failed to inform him of a meeting last week between administration officials and student representatives that discussed the faculty strike.

Steward also charges that City Colleges chancellor Wayne Watson "nudged" students into attempting an abortive anti-strike protest and picketing his office.

### **Canada**

#### **Sudbury Hydro strike ends**

On October 25, the 82 striking workers at Greater Sudbury Hydro Plus Inc. in Sudbury, Ontario, voted by an 88 percent majority to accept a deal reached by their representative, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

The issues in the 17-week strike centered on a list of

21 concession demands by the employer affecting new hires, including the elimination of retirement benefits and an increased workload. The new contract includes retirement benefits only beyond age 65 for new hires and a wage increase of 11.5 percent over four years, retroactive to April 1 of this year.

### **Kamsack town workers hold rally**

Thirteen civic employees in Kamsack, Saskatchewan, held a rally October 25 outside the town office to urge the mayor and council to accept the appointment of a conciliator in their strike. The workers, members of the CUPE Local 1881, walked off the job October 6, and management locked them out two days later.

Workers rejected management's final offer after almost three years of negotiations. That offer contained a list of concessions, including removal of the employees' seniority rights and granting the employer the right to terminate probationary employees without cause.



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