

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## **Teachers' strikes continue in Argentina**

Teachers from across Salta province, in northwestern Argentina, have set up tents near the Government House in the city of Salta. As of March 24, police attempts to evict them from the area had failed after teachers appealed to the courts and the legislature. The teachers, who are now on strike, have struck and protested since the school year began on March 1.

On March 23, more than 12,000 teachers and their supporters marched 15 kilometers (9 miles) into the city of Salta to petition Governor Romero for a minimum monthly base wage of 750 pesos (US\$250.) They were met with a “no” from the provincial education minister, who promised that no teacher would earn less than 700 pesos, much of that as a bonus. This is unacceptable to teachers because it does not add to the base wage. The current base wage is 250 pesos.

In the oil center of Tartagal, more than 2,000 strikers marched to press their demands. The teachers later met and decided to intensify their struggle. Another protest took place in the city of Oran. In response to attempts by Romero to replace the striking teachers—a letter was sent to school principals to begin the process of hiring strikebreakers—on Saturday, March 26, hundreds of teachers carried out a “march of silence” through the city.

## **Hermosillo, Mexico, water system workers strike**

Employees of the water system in Hermosillo, in Mexico's Sonora state, have been on strike since February 3. Striking workers have called on the 180,000 water users not to pay their water bills, saying they will turn the water back on for anyone whose water is shut off. Water authorities have decided, however, to limit water supply to eight hours a day to most residential customers.

The workers are in struggle against threatened layoffs. They are also pressing for a 6 percent wage hike.

Hermosillo is an industrial city 120 miles from the US border. It is the site of a Ford assembly plant and 33 auto parts plants.

## **Court employees' strike in Ecuador exposes constitutional crisis**

A two-week-old strike by court employees coupled with rumors about the possible return of former President Abdala Bucaram, presently in exile in Panama, have exacerbated a crisis in governance in Ecuador.

The Ecuadorian Federation of Judicial Associations (FENAJE) leads the court strike. FENAJE leaders have announced they will cease their job action only if all 31 judges of the country's Supreme Court resign. The election of the 31 judges in December 2004 created a constitutional crisis between the government of President Lucio Gutierrez and his opposition in Congress. FENAJE leaders accuse Gutierrez of having orchestrated the election of judges, all of whom are linked to a political coalition that supports Gutierrez.

FENAJE has allied itself with opposition parties, the Democratic Left (ID), The Social Christian Party (PSC) and the Pachacutik Indian movement.

The opposition and FENAJE indicated that that Gutierrez would use his control of the Supreme Court to whitewash an investigation of former President Gustavo Noboa for alleged kickbacks in negotiations with foreign creditors and the annulment of the impeachment of former President Bucaram, on charges of embezzlement of public funds.

## **Tentative resumption of talks in Indiana industrial lockout**

Management at Wabash Alloys plant in Wabash, Indiana, have tentatively agreed to new talks with Local 12 of the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers to resume negotiations in the 10-day-old lockout. The

contract covering 190 workers at the scrap metal recycler expired March 14. When the union refused to present workers with management's "last, best and final offer," the company locked workers out two days later.

Alloys has said it is seeking \$3.5 million in wage and benefit cuts. The boilermakers' union says that the last offer actually calls for \$4.5 million in cuts that include vacation reductions and mandatory overtime, resulting in the lowest wages of any of the company's plants across the United States.

At present, the company is maintaining inside operations through the use of management and nonunion personnel. Delivery of metal products is accomplished by shuttling cargo to an off-site location where Teamsters' drivers assume control and deliver to customers.

### **Truck drivers strike postal mail delivery contractor**

Some 100 truck drivers went on strike March 22 against Mail Contractors of America, which provides delivery services for the United States Postal Service in 20 midwestern and western cities.

Local 44 of the American Postal Workers Union, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, says the contractor stopped paying a portion of workers' health insurance, eliminated short-term disability insurance, and cut vacation, personal days off and breaks.

### **Manufacturer to close in Pennsylvania after workers reject concessions**

Thor America announced it would close its Middleburg, Pennsylvania, manufacturing operations after members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) voted 89-4 to reject drastic concessions. The company insisted on cutting pay from \$13.40 to \$9.00 an hour, reducing benefits and increasing workers' share of health care costs as the basis for continuing operations.

The company plans to close down the plant on April 15, affecting 160 workers. Thor manufactures recreational vehicles and trailers under the brand names Citation, Chateau and Corsair. Around one week ago, the company reported record sales for the second quarter ending January 31, as RV sales went up by 13 percent.

### **Ontario phone workers on strike**

About 1,400 telephone installation and repair

technicians employed by Bell Subco in Ontario walked out on March 24. The main issue is the Subco technicians' demand for wage and benefit parity with the technicians employed directly by Bell.

Bell Subco was known as Entourage Technology Solutions Inc. until Bell bought it back earlier this year as part of the "strategy to further improve customer service, a key differentiator in a highly competitive consumer market," as Bell announced. Entourage was formed as a spin-off of Bell's service in 1996, when Bell sold 75 percent of its stock to Fonds de solidarité for \$2 million. Bell Subco employees are represented by Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP).

### **Ontario school teachers join work-to-rule action**

Public elementary school teachers at 18 Ontario school boards began a work-to-rule campaign on March 21, thus increasing the number of Ontario school boards working to rule to 30, leaving only 2 school boards not involved in the action. The teachers, members of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, are demanding more classroom preparation time. As a result of the job action, they are not performing administrative, secretarial-clerical or custodial functions, organizing any new field trips or attending staff meetings.

The teachers voted overwhelmingly in favor of the job action last January and February to support the demand for 200 minutes of preparation time per week.



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