

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 April 2005

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature by e-mailing information to: [editor@wsws.org](mailto:editor@wsws.org)

## Latin America

### Nissan workers on strike in Morelos, Mexico

Negotiations broke down April 1 between automaker Nissan and the union representing 1,570 workers at the company's Morelos assembly plant in Cuernavaca state. Saturday morning, pickets had raised the traditional red-and-black strike flag at the plant's gates. At issue is the company's refusal to grant an 8 percent wage increase and guarantee that there will be no layoffs.

On Thursday, Nissan workers turned down an offer by management of a 3.5 percent raise, a zero-percent increase in real wages taking into account expected inflation for the year. At a March 31 general meeting to vote on the offer, workers declared that the Nissan offer was "laughable" and sharply criticized union general secretary Gabriel Martinez Hernandez for failing to defend their interests. Martinez declared on Friday that he would accept a 5 percent wage increase; at the same time, Nissan upped its offer to 4.5 percent.

Before the strike, Nissan management had threatened to lay off 130 workers. Management has also raised the possibility that the entire plant will be closed and production shifted to its Aguascalientes plant, also in Mexico. The Aguascalientes union signed a contract for a 4.75 percent wage increase.

Nissan is the second-largest car manufacturer in Mexico, with 20 percent of the domestic market. It exports the Nissan Sentra model to the United States. Nissan also manufactures Renault cars in Mexico as well as advanced transmissions used in its European models. The Morelos plant assembles the popular Tsuru model and pickup trucks.

### Petrobras workers protest

Employees of the Brazilian oil company Petrobras carried out a 24-hour protest on March 31 to press the company to negotiate improvements in its profit-sharing program. On Thursday morning, day-shift workers did not

report for duty, forcing Petrobras to keep the night shift on overtime pay.

Petrobras management declared that the workers' demands were proper and that it was waiting for an upcoming stockholders' meeting to decide how to proceed.

### Argentine workers mobilize in defense of striking teachers

Public school teachers in the Argentine Province of Salta are in the fifth week of a strike over increases in their base pay. The teachers have set up tents in the main cities of this impoverished northwestern province insisting on their demand for a monthly minimum base pay of 750 pesos, in opposition to Governor Juan Carlos Romero's offer of "700 pesos in their pocket," without raising base pay.

On April 1, hundreds of striking teachers battled police in the streets of the city of Salta. As a result of brutal attacks by the police, more than 10 people have been hospitalized, including a five-year-old girl struck by rubber bullets. Scores of marchers were arrested, including two legislators, both members of the Workers Party (PO); teachers; reporters; and passersby. Demonstrators seeking refuge in the city's cathedral were chased down and beaten. When Salta's archbishop, Monsignor Dante Bernacki, intervened in defense of one of the protesters, he was shoved aside. The object of the rioting police was to arrest and beat everyone in their path. Police excused the repression, saying that the strikers had erected an unauthorized shelter, which they were using to protect themselves from the rain. The attacks continued throughout the evening. Finally, at 11 p.m., a delegation of legislators and Monsignor Bernacki negotiated the release of the arrested education workers.

On April 2, several thousand workers marched to protest the repression of the night before. At least two reporters were singled out and attacked by the police. Five hundred police using tear gas and rubber bullets confronted them violently. Later that evening, many workers mobilized at the city's main cathedral. The

workers assembled at a mass commemorating the late Pope John Paul II to denounce the repression. Public-sector workers have declared a one-day strike on Monday, April 4, in support of the striking teachers.

Teachers interviewed by <http://saltalibre.org> defiantly declared that they would not surrender their struggle to police repression. Two of the injured teachers reported being dragged by their scalps while being pummeled by police using their nightsticks and shields.

Provincial authorities are resisting incorporating raises into teachers' base pay because of its impact on retirement benefits. Many teachers cannot retire because it is impossible to live on a teacher's pension of about 135 pesos (less than \$US45).

The Romero administration refuses to negotiate with the strikers, banking on a strategy of wearing the teachers out. School authorities claim that 50 percent of the students are already attending school.

### **United States**

#### **Northwest suspends president of mechanics union**

Northwest Airlines suspended the president of the union representing mechanics for declaring that the company's plan to outsource plane repairs would affect airline safety. Northwest, like other airlines facing increased costs, has announced plans to slash as many as 930 mechanics' jobs and outsource them to third-party vendors.

Ted Ludwig, head of the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, ignored a warning from Northwest about linking outsourcing to passenger safety and held a press conference where he displayed the remnants of an exploded aircraft brake that had been outsourced for repairs. Ludwig told reporters that the danger of a "fatal crash" increases with "every takeoff."

One day before Ludwig's suspension, Northwest announced it would increase the amount of concessions it needed from \$950 million to \$1.1 billion and would freeze employee pension plans. The freeze would bar any new participants in the plan and end future contributions.

#### **California garbage workers strike against union busting**

Workers in El Dorado County, California, went on strike April 1, charging Waste Management Inc. with a concerted plan to break their union. "Essentially, a multibillion-dollar company is engaging in union-busting in our own community. Our members work hard to earn a living for their families and have a right to be represented by a union. But Waste Management would rather ignore this tradition and force employees to give up their only

voice," said Frank Herrera, vice president of Operating Engineers Local 3.

The contract for the 86 striking workers expired in December, and the union filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board last week. Waste Management was a small Houston-based company that launched an IPO in 1998, allowing it to go on a buying spree that brought many sanitation operations under its control. In February, the company announced its revenues for the fourth quarter were \$3.21 billion, up 7.4 percent from the previous year.

### **Canada**

#### **Toronto transit union postpones strike**

Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) employees who operate transit in the city were in legal strike position as of April 1, but the union has sought to avoid a strike with ongoing talks. The main issues for the 8,400 workers represented by Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 113 are pensions and work schedule.

TTC contributes to its workers' pension fund at about a 30 percent lower rate than the city of Toronto contributes to its employees' fund. According to ATU Local 113 President Bob Kinnear, bus drivers can be fired if they are just four minutes early on two occasions in any two-year period. The union has postponed strike action indefinitely in hopes of reaching a deal in contract negotiations scheduled for April 5.

#### **Sault Sainte Marie school staff vote to strike**

About 200 trades, custodial and maintenance staff with the Algoma District School Board in Sault Sainte Marie, 400 km northwest of Toronto, voted 95 percent in favor of strike on March 31 after talks between the board and Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 16 broke down. The workers are demanding a wage increase equal to what the board awarded to teachers in the previous round of negotiations.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**