

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 August 2005

## Mexican university workers strike

Nearly 2,000 workers at the University of Michoacan in Morelia, Mexico, walked off the job August 25 and occupied the university offices to protest contract violations.

University employee leader Eduardo Tena said that the workers did not want to disrupt the beginning of classes in September, but they were forced to by the administration's stonewalling of negotiations. Tena declared that the workers plan to be on strike for as long as it takes to redress their grievances.

## Panamanian journalists protest Supreme Court decision

Scores of journalists rallied at the Supreme Court in Panama City on August 19 to protest fines against a fellow journalist and against a libel suit that, if allowed to proceed, would bankrupt an editorial company that owns three Panamanian newspapers.

Luis Polo, president of the Journalists Association, said that the action by Panamanian judge Winston Spadafora created an atmosphere of fear and represents a step backward in the expansion of freedom of speech.

Two journalists, Jean Marcel Chery and Gustavo Aparicio, have been charged with libel for an article about the judge. Polo said that questions of fairness are raised when one judge decides on a case brought on by another.

Journalists and human rights organizations across Panama and Latin America have protested the attack on the reporters.

## Massive march in Lima against privatizations

Thousands of workers marched in Lima, Peru, to oppose the appointment by President Toledo of Pedro Pablo Kuczynski to head up his cabinet. Kuczynski, formerly the economics minister, is an advocate of extreme laissez-faire policies and is expected to pursue the privatization of the Peruvian economy.

The march began in the historic Plaza Dos de Mayo Square and ended in front of Peru's Legislature

building.

Kuczynski's appointment is in line with the Toledo administration's free-market policies. The marchers interpret the appointment as a signal of the government's determination to dismantle state subsidies and social programs. Kuczynski favors so-called labor reforms that would make it easier for industry to attack workers' wages and job security.

## City imposes contract on California bus drivers; workers set strike date

The Metropolitan Transit District in Santa Cruz, California, has announced it will unilaterally impose a contract on its 160 bus drivers, sparking a strike threat. The drivers, members of United Transportation Union (UTU) Local 23, have set a strike date of September 1, when the new contract will take effect. Members earlier voted by a 126-4 margin to sanction a strike.

Transit management faces a \$1.4 million deficit and sought wide benefit cuts to balance their budget. In the lead-up to last week's impasse, workers had been refusing to work overtime, causing cancellations.

## California city workers hold one-day strike

More than 200 city workers in Modesto, California, held a one-day strike August 22 to protest the inferior benefits plan paid to them in comparison to police and firefighters. Workers carried placards and distributed leaflets downtown outside of city offices.

Contract talks between the city and the 550 members of the Modesto City Employees Association have been deadlocked since June over health and retirement benefits. The walkout was the first labor action taken by city workers in 30 years.

Meanwhile, the city has also reached an impasse in negotiations with 200 mid-level municipal managers. The city wants to increase medical coverage for family members by \$100 a month and raise costs for individuals by \$57.

## Steelworkers lose cases before bankruptcy court in Ohio aluminum strike

A US bankruptcy court ruled against the United Steelworkers (USW) union last week over suits relating to the Ormet Aluminum Company's drive to reduce retiree benefits. Ormet is getting rid of benefit obligations in an effort to reorganize the company and exit bankruptcy court.

About 1,200 workers struck Ormet in November 2004. Last April, the USW filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board over changes made to its collective bargaining agreement. The labor board dismissed those charges in July.

Last week, a contractor who provides river-towing service for Ormet allegedly pulled a shotgun on pickets. He is being held on \$500,000 bond.

### **New Brunswick pulp workers' strike settled**

Nearly 700 striking workers at a pulp mill in Miramichi, New Brunswick, voted 80 percent in favor of a new deal, thus ending a strike that started last December. The workers went on strike after the company that operates the mill, Finnish-based UPM-Kymenne, shut down a kraft pulp mill in a restructuring process, laying off 400 workers.

During the strike, the paper mill, which produces glossy paper for magazines, was closed, causing the closure of the company's groundwood pulp mill. The pulp mill's 150 workers have been laid off since January.

The new contract contains vaguely worded language that reportedly ensures the 400 workers that were laid off as the result of the shutdown first claim on any future job openings at the paper mill. They also got an increase in severance pay. The workers are represented by Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada Local 689.

### **College support staff vote to strike**

Support staff working at Algonquin College and 23 other Ontario community colleges voted on August 24 by a margin of 85 percent to strike September 7 unless a contract is reached between Ontario Public Services Employees Union (OPSEU) and management. The 450 workers include office, maintenance and computer staff.

The union members rejected management's offer of a four-year contract that included annual wage increases of between 2 and 3 percent. OPSEU is seeking the same benefits as those given to unionized faculty—a shorter contract and extra pay for workers with

seniority.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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