Workers Struggles: The Americas

16 May 2006

Latin America

VW workers to strike in Brazil

Workers at VW assembly plants in Brazil are preparing to launch random strikes to protest management's plan to sack 5,773 workers, 26 percent of its Brazilian labor force of 22,000. Unions representing VW workers—the Only Workers Congress and Union Force—also announced they would hold rallies and marches to oppose the mass layoffs by the German car giant. According to one estimate, the loss of jobs would affect 600,000 other workers and their families.

VW management blames the layoffs on the rapid appreciation of the real with respect to the US dollar and the Argentine peso, which has eroded profits. According to a management statement, the company's goal is to lower production costs by 25 percent.

Panamanian construction workers to strike

Construction workers, represented by the Single Construction Workers Union (SUTC), are meeting this week to vote on a strike date in the wake of the collapse of negotiations with the Panamanian Construction Chamber (CAPAC).

The main issue is wages. SUTC is demanding a 60 cent wage hike; the employers' best offer so far is 12 cents. CAPAC made any agreement conditional on increases in productivity, particularly at companies that would be involved in a Panama Canal expansion project. The SUTC has rejected that condition.

Colombian court employees on strike

Thirty-eight thousand employees of Colombia's justice system walked off their jobs on Wednesday, May 10. The strike is over the government's failure to carry out contractual agreements arrived at last February to compensate workers for the loss of purchasing power over the last several years.

In response to the strike, officials of President Alvaro Uribe's administration promised that, beginning in 2007, budgetary measures would be put in place that would increase real wages for court employees.

Fabio Hernandez, president of the Association of Functionaries and Employees of the Judicial Branch, said that the measures proposed for 2007 are "unrealistic" and ignore the February promises. According to Hernandez, court employees in Colombia are the worst paid in all of Latin America.

Grupo Mexico demands that Sonoran government arrest copper strikers

The Mexican mining transnational Mexicana de Cobre, a subsidiary of Grupo Mexico, demanded that the Sonora state government issue warrants for the arrest of striking miners, members of Section 298 of the Mexican Miners' Union, at the La Caridad copper mine near the Arizona border.

The miners have been on strike for 47 days. Management claims that a small group of miners is preventing the majority from returning to work. Grupo Mexico also announced the closure of the San Martín zinc and copper mine in Zacatecas State to pressure state authorities to "impose order" by forcing striking miners back to work at that facility. The announcement came as an assembly of miners was voting to continue the 70-day strike at the mine.

In both strikes, workers are demanding an end to government intervention in the miners' union and improvements in health and safety as well as wages. Grupo Mexico owns the Pasta de Conchos mine in Cahuila, where 65 coal miners were killed in a methane gas explosion on February 19.

Hospital employees strike in Argentina

Nurses at 320 public hospitals and clinics have been on strike in the Argentine Province of Mendoza for 25 days over wages. Julio Cobos, governor of the province, announced last week that 50 million pesos (US$17 million) have been reallocated in the budget to meet workers' demands. Strikers are insisting that Cobos himself sign the pay raise agreement.

United States

© World Socialist Web Site

Worker killed, three injured in New York gas drill accident

One worker was killed and three others taken to an Elmira, New York, hospital after a gas drilling rig collapsed. The worker who was killed was tethered to the rig some 30 feet off the ground when the structure gave way and fell on him. The accident occurred around 2 a.m. on May 12. The gas rig was owned and operated by Union Drilling of Buckhannon, West Virginia—the town where 12 coal miners were killed at the Sago Mine in January.

Pennsylvania company hires permanent replacements

ESAB, a British-owned welding products manufacturer located in Hanover, Pennsylvania, has announced it will make 100 strikebreakers permanent in the seven-week-old walkout by United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1968. Two hundred and sixty workers struck the plant on March 27 over company demands for mandatory overtime, work-rule changes concerning vacation and sick time, the combining of job classifications, and the termination of retiree health insurance.

Vermont teachers strike against increased health care premiums

Three hundred teachers in Chittenden County, Vermont, have gone on strike to demand a two-year agreement with 4 percent annual raises and no increase in the 10 percent share they pay for health care premiums. Negotiators for the school district are calling for a four-year agreement that incorporates 4 percent salary increases, but are insisting that teachers' portion of health care premiums rise to 15 percent by the final year of the proposed contract.

Strike ends at New York aircraft parts manufacturer

The 150 workers at Goodrich Corporation's Rome, New York, plant ended their nine-day strike May 7 after ratifying a new five-year labor pact. Jim Montana, president of United Steelworkers Local 4831, declined to reveal the vote tally when telling the *Observer-Dispatch*, "Nobody wants to be on strike," and that the workers were "eager to go back to work."

The new agreement calls for combined annual wage and bonus increases of 2.5 to 3.0 percent per year. Medical premiums will increase by 8 percent in the first year of the new contract and rise to 14 percent by the fifth year.

Canada

Ontario educational assistants strike

Almost 1,100 educational assistants at the Thames Valley District School Board went on strike on May 11, one day after the breaking off of negotiations. Thames Valley is located west of Toronto and covers urban, suburban and rural communities, including the city of London. The main issue in the dispute is workloads, which have increased due to added duties.

Educational assistants currently get six hours' pay for each day of work. Their union is demanding that they be paid for seven. The assistants, represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4222, work with about 600 high-needs children.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site