

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 June 2006

## Latin America

### Peruvian educators strike

Public school teachers and administrators in Peru's southern region of Arequipa carried out a 48-hour strike June 8 and 9 over wages and benefits. Union leaders charged that the outgoing government of President Alejandro Toledo has failed to carry out an agreement signed months ago that would increase wages by 200 new soles.

### Mexican school teachers mobilize against governor's 'hard line'

Public school teachers in Oaxaca state in southwestern Mexico reacted to an announcement by Governor Ulises Ruiz of his intention to pursue a 'hard line' with teachers. The teachers, members of the National Syndicate of Education Workers (SNTE), are threatening to respond by organizing a statewide general strike.

This week teachers will mobilize to protest the governor's intransigence by blocking the road to the Benito Juarez airport that serves the city of Oaxaca. SNTE leaders are also threatening to organize a boycott of Mexico's July 2 presidential elections. Last week, protesting teachers blocked a fuel distribution complex owned by PEMEX, Mexico's state-owned oil company.

Ruiz claimed the state is out of money and indicated he is considering rescinding current contracts to pressure educators into accepting management's conditions.

### Chilean students end biggest strike in three decades

On Friday, Chilean high school students declared an end to the biggest public education strike in 30 years and handed occupied high school buildings back to public school administrators. The students had mobilized to demand subsidies for transportation and for university studies.

The strike began a month ago with the occupation of a handful of high schools in Santiago, and quickly spread nationwide. On June 5, 600,000 high school students and 300,000 university students, with the support of teachers and parents, mobilized across Chile, clashing with security forces in Santiago.

Chile's main trade union federation, the CUT, which supports the Socialist Party administration of President Michelle Bachelet, refused to support a call by the students for a general strike that day.

The announcement by student leaders of the suspension of the strikes and protests took place in the wake of a draft proposal sent to congress by the government that commits the government to a so-called quality education for all and partially accedes to some student demands.

### Mexican mine owner threatens to close copper mine

The transnational corporation Grupo Mexico announced last week that it would shut down the La Caridad copper mine in northern Mexico—a sprawling open pit mine—after striking miners return to work.

In the wake of the collapse of the Pasta de Conchos mine last March, which resulted in the death of 65 miners, the Caridad workers walked off their jobs demanding better, safer working conditions and an end to government intervention into the internal affairs of their union.

On June 2 miners at the Cananea copper mine, an open-pit mine near La Caridad, also walked off their jobs after Grupo Mexico management refused to allow workers a day off to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the historic 1906 strike by Cananea miners.

Grupo Mexico considers both strikes to be illegal. A national strike in solidarity with the miners is being planned by one of Mexico's labor federations for June 28.

## United States

### State contract drug counselors seek wage parity

Drug counselors at the Sheridan Correctional Center in Illinois walked out June 6 to protest the failure of contract talks between union representatives and the state contractor, Gateway Foundation.

The 53 striking drug counselors voted for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local as their bargaining agent in February of 2005. Workers are seeking to close the 45 percent pay gap that exists between them and other state workers.

### Indiana factory strike into second month

Some 75 workers at the Dietrich Metal Framing facility

in Hammond, Indiana are into their second month on strike over unfair labor practices. Among the complaints filed by Teamsters Local 142, which represents the striking workers, is the refusal of management to permit employees to leave their workstations, even to use the restroom.

Dietrich, a division of Worthington Industries, manufactures steel studs and continues operations at its Hammond facility using management personnel.

### **Former Texas Teamsters president arrested on fraud, embezzlement charges**

The former president of the largest Teamsters Local in Texas was arrested June 9 for accepting a \$20,000 kickback from a union vendor and stealing elections. Charles Crawley headed Local 988 until 2003 when he was removed by the Teamsters international after a corruption investigation.

Crawley became reviled after he used nonunion labor to construct new offices for the Teamsters. The kickback came from the company that obtained the contract to install the union's telephone system.

In 2002 Crawley used 362 mail ballots of workers he suspected would not vote to steal the union's presidential elections. In his subsequent reelection bid he is accused of using Local 998's computer system to generate phony ballots.

### **Contract negotiations set to resume at AK Steel**

Negotiations are set to resume in the lockout of 2,700 steelworkers in Middletown, Ohio at the AK Steel Works. Members of the Armco Employees Independent Federation have been locked out since Feb. 28.

Management has imported some 1,500 strikebreakers to maintain production during the lockout. AK Steel employs about 8,000 workers in plants in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and Pennsylvania. The Middletown works is the only facility affected by the lockout.

Meanwhile, the International Association of Machinists is seeking a National Labor Relations Board sponsored vote on union representation at the Middletown works. The AEIF is supporting affiliation with the IAM. It has rejected an offer of affiliation with the United Steelworkers.

### **Canada**

#### **Montreal newspaper employees walk out**

On June 5, about 115 employees of *Le Journal de Montreal*, members the Teamsters union, went on strike following the collapse of six weeks of contract talks on June 1. According to local union president Michel Cote, management is trying to reduce the number of press

operators from ten to two, while the union is offering a reduction to six. Management is also looking to have mechanics carry out tasks previously performed by electricians and press operators, which Cote called a health and safety issue for the union.

In the words of publisher Lyne Robitaille, "*Le Journal* needs more flexibility in its pressroom assignments so its new plant can operate efficiently." Management has accused workers of sabotage in the pressroom, a charge workers deny. They are asking the provincial labor minister to name an arbitrator.

### **Toronto area educational assistants end strike**

The 1,100 educational assistants at the Thames Valley District School Board west of Toronto, who went on strike on May 11, voted 83 percent in favor of a new contract in June 3. The contract gives them an extra half-hour of paid time over the current six hours a day and a 6 percent wage increase over three years. Educational assistants, members of Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 4222, work with about 600 high-needs children.

### **Strike ends at Ontario salt mine**

The strike at the salt mine in Goderich, Ontario, about 200 km west of Toronto, ended on June 8 after almost two months. About 350 members of Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) ratified a new contract. Details of the contract have not yet been released, but according to the union's web site only 65 percent accepted it.

The Goderich salt mine is the largest rock salt mine in the world and is operated by Kansas City-based Compass Minerals International, the second-leading salt producer in North America and the largest in the United Kingdom.



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