

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

4 July 2006

## Latin America

### Buenos Aires teachers strike

Six of the 16 unions that represent city of Buenos Aires teachers carried out a 24-hour walkout June 27. The teachers are demanding a 19 percent increase plus improvements in working conditions, particularly a reduction in class size. Municipal authorities said that since teachers received salary increases last year, raises for other municipal workers would have priority.

### Mexican miners' union bureaucracy postpones national strike

Citing scare tactics by the campaign staff of the National Action Party (PAN), leaders of the United Front for Labor Unity and Autonomy (FNUAS) postponed a June 28 national strike in support of the National Mine and Metal Workers Union (SNTMM). No new date has been set. The FNUAS comprises many unions including the communication workers, public employees, electricians and pilots. Its leadership stated that the strike has been postponed at the urging of the SNTMM and because "political conditions were not conducive to mass mobilizations."

The strike had been originally proposed in the wake of the death of 65 miners at the Pasta de Concho coal mine in Coahuila last February. The mine disaster led to protest strikes at mines and mills across Mexico. Copper miners at Grupo Mexico's "La Caridad" copper mine in Sonora State have been on strike continuously since March 24, together with steel workers at the Lazaro Cardenas steel mill in Michoacan State.

The bodies of most of the Pasta de Conchos victims have yet to be recovered. On June 29, relatives and friends of the victims marched and rallied in the town of San Juan de Sabinas to protest the slow pace of recovery efforts and the fact they are being given little if any information from management and government officials.

### Santiago Philharmonic artists hold protest

On June 29, musicians and singers from the Santiago Philharmonic and Chorus protested across from Chile's government house, the La Moneda Palace, to demand that Socialist Party President Michelle Bachelet intervene in their month-long strike with management. The demonstrators handed the Bachelet a letter accusing Municipal Theater management of authoritarian practices that include single-handedly abrogating musicians' contracts.

Musicians and singers gave a free open-air concert as part of their protest. "We can no longer play in the theater, so we will play on the street," declared Cristian Navarrete, spokesperson for the artists. Members of the Chilean Symphonic Orchestra and music faculty and students from various Santiago universities joined the protest by the Philharmonic musicians.

## United States

### New Jersey nurses strike to defend pensions

Six hundred sixty nurses at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center in Bergen County, New Jersey, walked off the job June 30 after negotiations reached an impasse over pension benefits. Hospital management is insisting on abolishing the old guaranteed monthly pension plan and substituting in its place a 401(k)-style plan.

"We have met every demand the hospital has given us. We have given back money off our wages and off our benefits," said Stephanie Orrico, president of Health Professional and Allied Employees union. Despite the continued concessions by the union, management continues to insist on pension changes.

Englewood locked out nurses for three days at the beginning of June when the contract expired. Currently, the hospital is paying \$900,000 a week for professional strikebreakers to replace striking nurses.

### Pennsylvania legislator proposes bill to ban teachers' strikes

Will Gabig, a Republican state representative in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, announced he would

introduce a bill to ban state teachers' strikes. "Our school age children deserve a strike-free education," said Gabig. "Strike-free education is not only pro-education and pro-children, it is pro-teacher." Gabig's bill calls for unilateral implementation of management's contract if no agreement is reached 365 days after an impasse is declared. Teachers who strike will face penalties ranging from fines amounting to twice their daily pay up to termination. However, school boards that lock out teachers would face no serious sanctions.

### **Hawaii nurses strike in second week**

No new talks are scheduled as the strike by nurses at Wilcox Memorial Hospital in Kauai, Hawaii, heads into its second week. The 140 nurses walked off the job after mediated talks failed to resolve the issue of nurse-to-patient ratios.

### **Canada**

#### **Lockout ends at Ontario truck parts maker**

Members of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 1941, employed by parts manufacturer ArvinMeritor, accepted a new three-year deal last week ending a lockout at the plant in Tilbury, Ontario, 300 km southwest of Toronto. The company had imposed the lockout on June 5, the day after the previous agreement expired. The main point of contention was the outsourcing of assembly operations to a non-union plant in Frankfurt, Kentucky, last year. The new agreement requires the company to bring work back to the Tilbury plant, according to the union, which did not divulge what concessions it granted to keep work at the plant for at least three more years.

The 250 workers at the Tilbury facility produce brakes and brake assemblies for heavy-duty truck manufacturers Navistar and Sterling. ArvinMeritor has another five factories in Canada and employs 29,000 workers worldwide.



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