

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

17 October 2006

## Latin America

### Perú: Teachers strike against “municipalization”

Teachers in the Peruvian city of Tacna have announced they will organize a national teachers strike if the government persists in putting education in the hands of municipal authorities. At an assembly of the Tacna section of the Union of Education Workers (SUTEP), the teachers rejected unanimously a pilot project that would municipalize education beginning in March 2007

The teachers claim that the government pilot program will ensure inequality in education and will end with the privatization of education. Holding signs calling for equal and free education for all, teachers denounced the fact that Peru only budgets a paltry US\$80 per student compared to Chile’s US\$1,100. SUTEP is demanding that between 6 and 8 percent of the government’s annual budget be dedicated to education.

### Perú: Shougang Iron strikers demand quick resolution of strike

Temporary workers at the Shougang iron mine in Perú are in the second week of a strike and are calling on the company to resolve the conflict quickly. The workers are demanding better working conditions and living quarters, promises that management made at the time of their last strike.

Workers also accused Shougang management of attempting to fire strikers and of breaking the labor contract. Management claims that it should not be the target of the strike, since the workers are contracted by private temp agencies and not directly by the company.

### Gas station operators strike in Argentine interior

Gas station employees in the interior provinces of Santa Fé, Córdoba, Mendoza, Chaco and San Juan ignored a government 15-day back-to-work order and walked off their jobs on Friday. The workers are demanding a 19 percent wage increase and the rehiring of 196 laid-off employees.

Buenos Aires workers obeyed the back-to-work

order, but many stations were blocked by protesting members of the oil workers union.

### Argentine teachers strike

Teachers in the Argentine Mesopotamian Province of Corrientes walked off their jobs on Friday demanding that an agreed-to 19 percent wage increase be extended to all teachers to achieve parity with federal teachers’ salaries. They are also calling for a 14.5 percent increase in the primary school budget.

This is the third teachers’ strike this year in the province.

## United States

### North Dakota Bobcat workers strike

About 780 workers at Bobcat’s manufacturing plant in Bismarck, North Dakota, walked out on strike October 7 after rejecting the construction equipment maker’s last offer. Members of United Steelworkers Local 566 are seeking a 5 percent increase per year over the course of the next four years and lower out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

Bobcat’s offer amounts to an average 3 percent per year and reduces healthcare costs by only \$20 a month. Currently, a Bobcat worker pays \$270 a month for family healthcare insurance. Other issues that workers want addressed are mandatory six-day workweeks, pensions, benefits and the current attendance policy.

The company is using salaried personnel in an attempt to keep operations going. Bobcat, a unit of Ingersoll-Rand Corp., is based in West Fargo and has a second plant in Gwinner, North Dakota, whose contract expires in December.

### Worker dies in Minnesota Taconite plant explosion

One worker died and two were injured October 12 after two electrical explosions at the United Taconite Mines plant located on the Iron Range in Forbes, Minnesota. Andrew Dale Reed, a 24-year-old worker at the plant who was performing electrical troubleshooting, died in the explosion, while two other

workers suffered smoke inhalation.

The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) is investigating the cause of two explosions—one of which occurred at a building that houses the concentrator motor control room and a second at the main power substation outside the plant. The blast knocked out power in a 15-mile radius from the Forbes plant. Some workers were temporarily trapped in elevators due to the power outage. Firefighters from three cities and some townships were called in to fight the resulting blaze, leaving one firefighter injured.

The Forbes plant processes ore that is mined 10 miles away in Eveleth, Minnesota. The plant has received 144 citations from MSHA in the past year and is currently undergoing \$46 million in upgrades.

### **Alabama coal miner dies from falling rock**

A coal miner working for Jim Walter Resources died October 12 when rock from the roof of the No. 4 mine fell on him. Jerry McKinney, a 56-year-old ventilation technician with 24 years' experience, was found under a pile of rocks in the underground mine located near Brookwood, Alabama.

McKinney was the second miner to die this year from falling rock at the mine.

The No. 4 mine was Alabama's most productive underground mine in the second quarter, having produced 1.5 million tons of coal. Earlier fatalities at the Jim Walter mines include the deaths of two miners at the No. 7 mine in 2004 and the deaths of 13 miners in 2001, when coal dust and methane gas ignited, causing a fire and two explosions.

## **Canada**

### **British Columbia health workers vote to strike**

Workers at the Vancouver Island Health Authority facility voted October 13 in favor of strike by a 96 percent margin. The 700 workers, employed by Compass Group and represented by the Hospital Employees' Union (HEU), have been in first contract negotiations since April. The key issue is wages—the current salary of most workers is only C\$10.56 an hour. A union representative says that this is causing high turnover, short staffing and workplace injuries. Last year, HEU succeeded in reaching first contracts with Compass's competitors Aramark and Sodexo, corporations with cleaning and food service contracts with the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Health authorities. The agreements will bring workers' wages

to more than C\$13.00 an hour by 2007.

### **Nova Scotia hospital workers set to strike**

Two unions representing hospital workers in Nova Scotia are preparing for a strike that could close hospitals in that province. Eighteen hundred workers in the Cape Breton District Health Authority, represented by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), will start a 14-day countdown to a strike after the provincial conciliator files his report. The workers are employed as X-ray technologists, pharmacists, social workers, therapists and licensed practical nurses, and in laundry, housekeeping, dietary and skilled trades. The main issues are wages, pensions, benefits, and retention and recruitment rules.

The second union preparing to strike in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, is the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 2431, which represents 450 clerical staff at the island's regional hospital. They will be in a legal strike position on November 1.



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