

Workers Struggles: The Americas

31 October 2006

Latin America

GM workers to strike in Arica, Chile

Workers at the General Motors plant in Arica, in northern Chile, will strike this Tuesday barring a last-minute agreement with the company. At issue are wages and the amount of a signing bonus. On Saturday, 97 percent of the employees that attended a union meeting rejected management's offer of a 2 percent wage increase and a 320,000 peso bonus. Management's offer is short of the workers' demands of an 8 percent raise and a million peso bonus.

Employees also rejected management's proposed changes in working conditions. The company plan reduces the number of job categories and allows management to easily move workers from one job assignment to another.

Dockworkers strike in Costa Rica

Port workers employed by the state-owned JAPDEVA Company in the port of Limon, returned to work on Friday after a five-day strike. The strike coincided with a 48-hour national protest strike against the Free Trade Treaty with the United States.

The issue for the workers, however, was a demand of US\$900,000 in compensation for benefits eliminated from the current collective bargaining agreement. Workers also demanded that the government not outsource their jobs to private contractors.

In return for concessions on those demands from the Costa Rican government, the port employees agreed to new work rules demanded by port authorities under the guise of labor discipline to meet higher labor productivity quotas.

Costa Rican President Oscar Arias insisted, however, that he intends to partially privatize two other ports on the Caribbean Sea, Moin and Aleman.

Together with Limon, the three ports constitute Costa Rica's principal ports on the Caribbean Sea. The ports are a major destination for cruise ships and facilitate exports to Europe and North America.

Communications workers protest in Argentina

Buenos Aires communications workers initiated industrial action on Wednesday, October 25. The strike affected the Argentine capital and its suburbs. This week workers plan to extend the strike throughout the country.

The job action is against the Argentine branch of the Spanish Telefonica & Telecom Group and consists of the imposition of work-to-rule and a refusal of overtime by the workers.

The union representing full-time employees denounced the company's use of 2,000 part-time employees as irregular, indicating that they are not members of the Communications Workers Union. It is demanding that the workers leave the other union and join the Communications union. Management's position is that the company is being caught between a dispute of two unions for which it has no responsibility and is demanding that the Labor Ministry intervene to resolve the situation.

United States

Houston janitors strike for higher pay and healthcare

Hundreds of janitors who clean office buildings in Houston, Texas walked off the job October 23 demanding higher wages and health insurance. Contract talks between the Service Employees International Union and cleaning contractors broke off October 17 without an agreement.

Houston janitors are among the lowest paid in the nation, working part-time for \$5.30 an hour and without health benefits. Workers are demanding a raise of hourly pay to \$8.50 and a benefits package. Cleaning companies, such as ABM Janitorial Services and OneSource, pay wages to janitors in other cities more than double what Houston janitors receive.

According to the SEIU, the strike has swelled from 700 janitors at the beginning of the week, to more than 1,700 workers by the third day, as strikers went to other office complexes calling on workers to join the strike.

Seven-month Pennsylvania strike ends

Workers at the ESAB Welding and Cutting Product's plant in Hanover, Pennsylvania voted to accept a new

three-year contract that ends a seven-month-long strike by United Auto Workers Local 1968. Details of the new agreement were not available but, according to the company, a new 24-hour, seven-day-a-week schedule will be implemented along with a reduction in mandatory overtime—a major issue that led to the strike.

Whether or not this is the case, the company says it will expand the factory workforce from 255 to 340 workers. The company also indicates that the healthcare plan was modified to include worker contributions and a 401(k) plan was also included.

Pennsylvania coal miner dies in explosion

A 42-year-old coal miner died in an explosion October 23 at a mine run by the R&D Coal Company near Tremont, Pennsylvania. Dale Reightler, a miner with 20 years experience, placed explosive charges into drilled holes in a coal seam and it is believed one of the charges is what killed him. Four other miners in the underground mine at the time of the accident were able to escape without being hurt.

The mine has been closed while state and federal inspectors begin an investigation. In December of 2004, four miners were injured in an explosion at the same mine. To date, some 40 workers have been killed in coal mine accidents this year compared to 22 in all of last year.

Canada

FirstOntario Credit Union employees strike

On October 20, over 70 full- and part-time employees of FirstOntario Credit Union walked out after six months of negotiations failed to bring results. The workers, represented by Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union Local 343, are fighting the employer's demands for concessions. These include: elimination of employees' accumulated sick leave benefits; elimination of post-retirement benefits; reduction of pension benefits; elimination of floating holidays; reduction in vacation entitlement; and increased ability to hire part-time employees and students in place of full-time employees.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact