

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

10 July 2007

## Latin America

### Airport employees threaten to strike in Brazil

Airport workers employed by the state-owned Enterprise of Airport Infrastructure (INFRAERO) in Brazil will decide Tuesday whether or not to walk out this Wednesday, on the eve of the Pan American Games. The voting will take place in meetings in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Among those who would strike are air traffic controllers, ground personnel and security officers. The Pan American Games are set to begin in Rio on Friday.

Fourteen hundred employees at the Guarulhos International Airport in Sao Paulo are demanding an 8 percent wage increase and the hiring of 1,800 additional workers. The latest management offer is 4 percent. Also on Tuesday, INFRAERO workers at the Galeao Antonio Carlos Jobim Airport in Rio de Janeiro will decide on a strike. On Sunday government officials, in an attempt to prevent a strike, upped the wage offer to 6 percent.

According to the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, INFRAERO has taken contingency measures in case of a strike.

### Military occupation in Santo Domingo in anticipation of general strike

Troops are concentrated in Santo Domingo, the Dominican Republic's capital city, with instructions to "maintain order" on Monday, July 9. The Alternative Social Forum (FSA) composed of trade unions and civic groups have called for a 24-hour general strike.

"If there is a general strike, we will apply our plan," said Raul Franceschini Ceballos, referring to "Huron II," a repression plan developed by the military. National Police Chief Bernardo Santana Perez warned that a full complement of police would be deployed.

Tensions were raised last week when the Dominican Republic's attorney general, Radhames Jimenez Peoa, declared that union and civilian leaders would be prosecuted if they carried out a strike. The threat has

not stopped the FSA from continuing to call on people to strike.

At issue are the government's economic policies. The FSA is also demanding a rollback in fuel prices, in addition to better water and electricity services.

## United States

### Lockport Delphi workers reject contract, face threats

Workers at the Delphi plant in Lockport, New York are facing threats from management to close the facility following their decisive vote against a national agreement containing unprecedented concessions. The tally at the plant was 1,107 to 274 against a contract negotiated by the United Auto Workers that included a nearly 50 percent cut in pay for senior workers and other takeaways. The contract passed by an overall 68 percent margin in voting conducted among some 17,000 Delphi workers nationwide.

"I am no longer confident that there is a commitment by joint leadership or the employees to make Lockport competitive," said Delphi Thermal Systems President Ronald Pirtle in an internal memo. He went on to note that the vote placed the future of the plant "in jeopardy."

The facility employs some 2,200 workers and is a mainstay of the local economy. The Lockport operation is only one of the four US plants that Delphi plans to keep open, out of a total of 29. Another 10 are being closed, and the rest are being sold or operated under third-party management.

Under terms of the national settlement, the UAW pledged to grant major concessions in work rules in negotiations to be conducted on a plant-by-plant basis. Agreements are supposed to be in place by the end of August.

In an emailed letter, UAW Local 688 Unit 1 President Paul Siejak attempted to reassure Delphi management that it could rely on the continued collaboration of the union, declaring that Pirtle, "should not be concerned

about the Lockport site's work ethic and our ability to meet challenges."

### **Tentative agreement in Oregon machinists strike**

Some 670 striking machinists at the truck manufacturer Freightliner in Portland, Oregon will vote on a new tentative agreement at the beginning of this week that will end retiree healthcare for many members and require up to 10 hours of mandatory overtime each week. Workers rejected those same issues when they went out on strike July 3.

The bargaining committee representing striking members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 1005 endorsed the tentative agreement. The current agreement protects the interests of the labor bureaucracy by including a clause that will impose the current agreement on any new owner should freightliner sell its Western Star Trucks brand. Another clause requires Freightliner to negotiate severance packages.

Freightliner has built trucks in Oregon for 60 years. Under DaimlerChrysler ownership it began to shift production to North Carolina and Mexico. Management is currently constructing a second plant in Mexico slated to open in 2009.

### **Transit workers strike in California**

About 1,100 bus drivers for Orange County, California walked off the job July 7 after a 30-day cooling off period requested by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger ran out. On May 30, 95 percent of the membership of Teamsters Local 952 rejected a three-year contract that provided a 14 percent raise but undermined the financing of workers' pensions.

The Teamsters union and management, supposedly 1 percent apart on the overall size of wage increases, are wrangling over how they should be distributed, with management insisting on giving lower paid workers a higher percentage than senior employees. Currently drivers' wages range from \$13.72 to \$21.42.

### **Management of garbage hauler locks out California workers**

The refuse hauler Waste Management locked out workers July 3 in 10 California cities including San Leandro, San Lorenzo and Oakland and brought in replacement workers. The action came after negotiations failed to resolve wage issues the previous day and Teamsters Local 70 declined to strike.

Company negotiators have called for a federal mediator to intervene in the discussions. The action is the first lockout or strike in Waste Management's 40 years of existence.

### **Canada**

#### **Saskatchewan health workers strike**

Twenty-eight health care professionals walked off the job last week in Saskatchewan, with the prospect that they could be joined by as many as 2,700 members of the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS) across the province if mediated talks do not yield an agreement.

Although HSAS served strike notice over a week ago, the union that represents therapists, technicians and other health professionals has pledged not to expand the job action while the dispute remains in mediation. In addition to wages, the main issues cited by the union in the stalled negotiations include the enormous workload faced by their members due to the refusal of the provincial NDP government to fund increased staffing.



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