

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 October 2007

Latin America

Peru: Gold miners threaten to strike

Union miners at the Pierina mine, one of the two gold mines administered by Barrick Misquichilca, a subsidiary of the Canadian-based Barrick Gold Corporation, will meet this week to discuss and vote on a strike. The workers are demanding a monthly pay raise of US\$200; management has offered US\$13. Currently Barrick miners earn about US \$865.

Peru is the world's second largest gold producer. Pierina employs 107 union miners. Peruvian miners have scheduled a national strike for November 5 over wages, retirement and working conditions.

Uruguay: Municipal employee strike

The Association of Municipal Workers and Employees (AOEM) in the city of Concepción announced the mobilization of its members for Monday, October 22. There will be a rally and a strike to pressure government authorities on a new contract. As part of the protest the AOEM will also set up a soup kitchen at the city's civic center. The Concepción employees rejected a contract proposal last week.

Argentina: Catamarca teachers protest over wages

Teachers in the northern Argentine Province of Catamarca, are on a slowdown this week to press for their demand for a wage increase. The strike follows last week's 72-hour stoppage. The slowdown will last until Catamarca's Governor Eduardo Brizuela del Moral addresses their wage demands. Teachers are demanding a 60 peso increase in their 600 peso monthly basic wage, plus the preservation of current family breadbasket subsidies.

Mexican teachers call for a national protest on November 9

The National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) called on the entire country to join a protest against the neo-liberal policies that threaten workers' past economic gains. The CNTE called on participants to bang pots during this day of protest to repudiate draft

legislation that deals with economic security and social services. In addition the CNTE denounced recent increases in the price of gasoline, which affect all Mexicans, particularly the poor.

Teachers have set up a picket line in front of the headquarters of the Institute of Security and Social Services for Government Employees (ISSSTE) to protest the new legislation.

The draft law makes government workers pay for their own pensions and raises the number of working years needed to collect a pension to 30, up from 27 and 28. Currently government workers pay a very small quota that goes toward their pensions and collect relatively generous benefits. All of that will be eliminated in the draft program.

The Calderón government claims that the current system is too expensive and will run out of funds in 15 years. The CNTE and other unions claim the Social Security agency has mismanaged funds and paid very high salaries to its executives. The funds director has a monthly salary of US\$10,000.

Mexican miners strike continues after 11 weeks

The Reuters press agency reports that the strike by 1,500 miners at the Cananea copper mine in Sonora state shows no end in sight. That strike, together with a strike by 483 miners in Zacatecas state and 405 miners in Taxco, began July 30 to protest government intervention in their union and to demand better safety and working conditions.

The owner of both these mines, Grupo Mexico, has broken off negotiations with the miners' union, and is demanding that Mexican courts declare the strikes illegal.

A faction in the Mexican Miners and Metalworkers Union, loyal to former President Napoleón Gómez, is demanding that the Calderón administration allow Gómez's return from exile and that he be permitted to resume leadership of the union.

Despite the strikes the Gómez forces seem to be

losing steam. Last week miners at eight Mexican mines abandoned the miners' union and joined a so-called independent union, considered to be more willing to compromise with the mine owners.

La Crónica, a Mexico City daily, reported last week on the plight of the San Martín miners in Zacatecas, who have been surviving on a strike fund of less than 500 pesos a week, a collective loss of 1.2 million pesos compared to the income workers normally receive. A shortage of food and medicine is evident in the town that depends on the income generated by the mine. "We do not intend to allow hunger defeat us," said a Zacatecas miner. "There is no alternative; we cannot go back; we must win."

United States

Pennsylvania legislature seeks to abolish teachers' strikes

Two bills aimed at barring strikes by Pennsylvania teachers have been introduced in the state legislature. Republican House member Bob Bastian, whose district was roiled by one particular contract struggle that took five years to resolve, has introduced a bill calling for a constitutional amendment that would ban strikes by teachers. A second bill brought forward by another House Republican, Todd Rock, would ban strikes and compel teachers to forfeit two days of pay for every day on strike. Individual teachers deemed responsible for inciting the strike would be fined \$5,000.

Pennsylvania is one of only 13 states where laws permit teachers to strike. Currently, 76 school districts have not concluded agreements with teachers whose contracts expired earlier this year. State law governing teachers' strikes was last amended in 1992. That legislation barred selective strikes, required a 48-hour notification by teachers before they could walk out, and introduced so-called third-party intervention. The result was to lower the number of strikes from a pre-amendment high of 52 during the 1980-81 school year to a range of 5 to 17 in the post-amendment period.

California workers strike Waste Management

Some 450 drivers, welders and mechanics went on strike October 19, against Waste Management sites in Long Beach, Compton and Sun Valley, California, affecting the area's 225,000 inhabitants. Members of Teamsters Local 396 have repeatedly rejected agreements reached by the company and union negotiators. They voted down the most recent proposal

by a 247-115 margin.

Company spokeswoman Kit Cole complained to the *Daily News*, "Frankly, I think it's shocking and it's disappointing that the workers chose to strike when their leadership was recommending ratifying this deal with Waste Management."

One worker told the *Los Angeles Times*, "All we want is for the company to share the wealth." Another worker complained the long hours prevent him from spending time with his family. A third said, "It's not about the money, it's about the insult," charging management ridicules and belittles workers.

Waste Management is the largest corporation involved in trash collection and recycling in North America. Starting in the 1960s, Waste Management began acquiring garbage collection services, transfer stations, landfill disposal sites, recycling operations and power plants.



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