

Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 November 2007

Latin America

National miners' strike in Peru

Julio Pinto, general secretary of the National Metallic Miners and Steelworkers Federation (FNTMMS), announced in a statement to the *La República* daily that 65,000 miners would walk off their jobs Monday November 5. He brushed aside attempts by the government of President Alan García to declare the strike illegal.

The miners' unions are demanding the elimination of caps on benefits, the restoration of pension rights and the elimination of subcontractors. The strike will be of indefinite duration.

On Thursday, the General Peruvian Workers Confederation, which represents all of the nation's unions, will mobilize its members in a day of protest.

Mining represents 62 percent of total exports in Peru.

Panama: Medical doctors set to strike

Five thousand public health doctors will strike this week in Panama. The doctors are demanding a wage increase of US\$1,500 that President Martín Torrijos says will cost the government US\$98 million.

Torrijos denounced the strike plans, saying the government is willing to continue negotiations to reach a compromise with the doctors that would gradually raise wages in tandem with improvements in health services. Torrijos claims that the strike is not popular among rank-and-file doctors, only with the union leadership.

Secondary school teachers strike in Mexico City

The Independent Preparatory School Workers Union (SITCB) announced that it plans to escalate its job actions beginning on Monday of this week by mobilizing and leafleting in Mexico City to inform people of its demands. The workers have been on strike at 20 high schools in Mexico City since last Thursday. The workers will also march and rally in front of the Education Secretariat (SEP).

SITCB leaders say that the SEP has so far been deaf

to teachers' wage demands. The teachers have charged SEP officials with ignoring legislation that increases their wages.

United States

New round of bargaining in Pennsylvania teachers' strike

Negotiators for striking teachers and the Seneca Valley school district will meet this week in another attempt to settle the three-week-old strike over wages and healthcare. The 575 members of the Seneca Valley Education Association, who teach at schools throughout Butler County, Pennsylvania, have gone without a contract since June 2006 and are seeking a 6 percent raise as opposed to the district's offer of 4 percent.

Last week, the union filed unfair labor practices charges against the school district, alleging that Tom King, chief negotiator for the district, threatened teachers back in August with a reduced offer if they went on strike. In a written notice to the union, King stated the district would "regressively amend its 'Best Offer'" if the union struck. According to the union, the school district would reduce its wage proposal by \$43,019.45 for each day that teachers strike.

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry has scheduled a hearing for December 3. According to the departments' head, Christopher Manlove, the procedure "can take some time to complete."

Talks continue in strike by nurses in Kentucky and West Virginia

Union and management representatives will meet again November 7 in mediated contract talks as the strike by 650 nurses against nine Appalachian Regional Healthcare (ARH) hospitals in Kentucky and West Virginia enters its fifth week. The two sides concluded a round of talks last week with ARH CEO Jerry Haynes denouncing the nurses' proposal as "additional costs that ARH, or any health care provider, could not absorb."

Haynes railed against the nurses' demand for a 7 percent salary hike and increases in shift differentials, sick pay and ambulance-run compensation. Hospital management is proposing 2 percent in the first year followed by 3 percent in the subsequent four years. This is combined with 10- and 12-hour work shifts.

The ARH hospitals were originally established by the United Mine Workers (UMWA) in 1947 as a result of an agreement by the coal bosses to contribute 5 cents per ton of coal mined toward the UMWA's Welfare and Retirement fund. Construction of the first of 10 hospitals was begun in 1953, and the first patients were admitted in 1955.

In 1963, the UMWA transferred ownership of the hospitals to the non-profit ARH.

Canada

Toronto hotel strike gains support

A strike/lockout by 135 workers at the Holiday Inn on King Street in downtown Toronto has gained wide public support. Those backing the workers include actor Danny Glover, who was charged with trespassing while appearing at a rally in support of the hotel workers' union, UNITE HERE.

The strike, which began September 28, has become embittered since management refused to agree to the same contract expiration date as all other Toronto hotels. UNITE HERE represents more than 6,000 hotel workers in Toronto and more than 450,000 in North America.

In addition to the issue of contract dates, the union is seeking pay equity with other Toronto hotels, many of whom went on strike last year to win pay hikes of up to C\$2 an hour. The hotel denies there is any difference in pay, and has instituted a limited lockout against unionized food service workers.

Acadia University faculty on strike

More than 300 members of the University Faculty Association (AUFU) in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, walked off the job on October 15 after talks with the board of governors collapsed.

Teaching staff at the school have been without a contract since June. In September, a government conciliator declared that future talks would be pointless. Outstanding issues include staffing levels, pay equity, working conditions and pay rates for part-time workers.



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