

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 November 2007

## Latin America

### **Uruguay: Strike by public employees and bank employees in Montevideo**

Employees of public agencies and of the government bank in Uruguay carried out a 24-hour strike last Thursday, demanding a wage hike and participation in proposed “reform” of the public sector being proposed by the country’s social democratic president Tabaré Vázquez. Over 300 workers protested in downtown Montevideo and rallied at the Economics and Finance Ministry.

### **Peruvian dock workers strike**

Dockworkers in the Peruvian port of Callao walked off their jobs on November 20 despite a last ditch effort by the Labor Ministry to prevent the strike. The action is being led by the Callao Port Union of Maritime and Port Employees (SUTAMPOR.)

SUTAMPOR General Secretary David Saavedra denounced port authorities for blocking negotiations. “We are willing to dialogue and will negotiate, but our bosses are taking extreme positions,” Saavedra said as he appealed to the administration of President Alan García to mediate the strike.

Two employer associations, the Peruvian Association of Maritime Agents (APAM) and the Peruvian Association of Port Operatives (ASSPOR), are demanding separate negotiations, both by craft and by employer. According to that plan, each employer would negotiate with their own workers, either with individual workers or with small groups of workers.

Meanwhile the Association of Exporters is demanding that the government protect the export trade from the effects of the strike. Silva Martinot, who heads the Association of Exporters, also appealed to the strikers to end their job action, reminding them that “we are at the gate of the Free Trade Treaty with the United States.” The value of exports that go through the Port of Callao each day is US\$26 million.

### **University workers escalate their strike in Peru**

About 1,100 administrative employees at Arequipa University in southern Peru, on strike for nearly a month, announced they would escalate their job action if the government of Alan García does not comply with their demands for a wage increase of 300 soles a month. Helber Herrera Juárez, secretary general of the San Agustín National University Employees Union (SUTANSA,) declared that the union is prepared to occupy public buildings and the city’s airport, unless university officials addressed the workers’ wage demands. The university remains blocked by picketing workers. Workers have also blocked bridges that lead into downtown Arequipa.

### **Supreme Court prohibits court employee strike in Peru**

The Peruvian Supreme Court banned a strike by the National Federation of Judicial Workers that was scheduled to take place this week. The decision claims the union has not met the legal requirement to walk out, making the strike ‘illegal’ in the eyes of the court. The Supreme Court’s decision is based on the pretext that the union did not follow proper procedure on informing the court of a workers’ assembly, including the number of participants, and that it failed to inform the courts of the strike decision 10 days before it was to take place, as required by law.

## United States

### **Navistar strike enters second month**

The strike by 3,700 truck assembly and parts workers against Navistar International Corporation has entered its second month with negotiators scheduled to return to the bargaining table this week for the first time since the walkout began on October 23. The workers, members of the United Auto Workers union, are on strike at nine facilities in Indianapolis; Melrose Park, Illinois; Springfield, Ohio; Atlanta; York, Pennsylvania; Dallas; and Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The UAW called the strike three weeks after a contract expired, citing what it characterized as unfair

labor practices at International Truck and Engine unit, the company's major operating unit. The UAW says the company violated the law by shutting down a UAW-represented assembly plant in Springfield and is withholding information in negotiations.

Navistar had announced in September that it would shift production of medium-duty trucks from Springfield to two nonunion plants until a contract was ratified. The walkout comes in the middle of a sharp downturn in truck and engine orders that Navistar claims has allowed it to meet orders by simply moving production to nonunion plants in the United States and Mexico.

### **Amtrak workers vote in favor of walkout**

Members of Transportation Communications Union (TCU) have expressed support for a strike against Amtrak if a settlement is not reached with the national commuter railroad before a December 1 strike deadline. Some 15,000 unionized workers—members of the TCU and eight other unions—have been working without a contract for almost eight years. Amtrak is seeking concessions in health care and work rules, while union workers are seeking pay raises back to 2000.

In late October, the National Mediation Board released Amtrak and eight unions from statutory mediation, and the parties began a 30-day cooling-off period on November 1. A strike could be stopped or delayed by the appointment of a Presidential Emergency Board by the Bush administration and a new contract could be imposed on workers by the Democratic-controlled Congress.

In January TCU officials reached a five-year agreement that imposed concessions on reservation sales agents, including longer pay-rate progression and lowered starting rates for new reservation sales agents.

## **Canada**

### **Petro-Canada workers locked out in Montreal**

Two hundred and sixty oil refinery workers, members of Local 175 of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union (CEP), have been locked out of the company's east-end Montreal facility since November 17. The workers had been working without a contract since last February.

Last summer, the membership voted to authorize the union leadership to call a strike. However, the negotiators for the local opted to continue bargaining even while the company began training their managers

in September to run the refinery. Once this replacement workforce was fully trained, Petro-Canada, the third largest oil company in the country, made the decision to implement their lockout strategy.

Although the union claims that bottlenecks in refining production will begin to appear within around 10 days of the initial lockout, management has issued reports showing that production quotas have so far remained stable, despite the fact that only 150 managers can be deployed. With the price of oil skyrocketing, Petro-Canada's two refineries (the other is located in Calgary) have proven to be cash cows for the company. About 13 percent of Canada's refining capacity is accounted for in the two facilities.

Local 175 President Daniel Cloutier says his bargaining committee has not even put Petro-Canada's earlier offers to a vote due to the "horrible" givebacks demanded by the company. The oil refiner is demanding that the traditional three-year agreement be extended to six years. Since safety clauses are crucial in a refining industry subject to rapid technological development, the longer contract term would allow the company to fast-track employees into higher risk jobs without adequate safety protection written into the contract. Petro-Canada is also demanding concessions in seniority rights and the break-up of the national bargaining pattern.



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