

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

24 December 2007

## **Argentina: Casino workers protest**

Fifteen protesting casino workers demanding the rehiring of 70 of their colleagues chained themselves to a historic pyramid across from Argentina's Government House. The workers plan to continue their protest through Christmas. They employed by Casino Buenos Aires at the Puerto Madero floating casino, anchored in Buenos Aires harbor.

The chained workers are accompanied and supported by dozens of other casino workers.

The workers, including some union delegates, were suspended as a result of a confrontation in the casino that took place last November 9 in a jurisdictional dispute between rival unions. On December 12, a Buenos Aires judge ordered that 81 workers not be allowed entrance into the facility and shut down the casino until the dispute is settled. Some 300 workers are employed by the Puerto Madero Casino.

## **Veracruz municipal workers protest**

City workers took over the municipal buildings in the Mexican State of Veracruz to demand payment of their traditional end-of-year bonus. The workers are occupying city halls in the cities of Paso de Ovejas, Catemaco, Colipa, Martínez de la Torre, Nanchital, Tierra Blanca, Las Choapas, Tlapacoyan, Tuxpan and San Juan Evangelista.

State Government Secretary Reynaldo Escobar Pérez declared that at least eight cities in the state have run out of money to pay the bonus and salaries for the last two weeks of the year. The state legislature voted to ban the cities from borrowing funds to pay the employees. According to Laura Correti Ascencio, general secretary of the Paso de Ovejas Municipal Employees Union, the workers are demanding end-of-year bonuses of 47 and 50 days, as stated in the collective bargaining contract.

## **Montevideo post office employees protest in Plaza Cagancha**

Last Friday, post office employees assembled in

Cagancha Plaza in central Montevideo to protest management policies. At the assembly, the workers voted to stop delivering letters and packages in the Uruguay capital. The workers are demanding that the government pay 1,300 pesos that the government owes per worker to the postal retirement fund. At the rally, workers criticized the government for dragging its feet for three years on the passage of postal legislation favored by their union.

The demonstrators demanded that post office director Cristina González resign for neglecting the post office. The union pointed out that US\$3 million were lost due to misapplications of international postal rates.

## **Surinam: Teachers and air traffic controllers on strike**

The Suriname Air Traffic Controllers Association struck Saturday in a dispute over wages and working conditions. The walkout shut down airports in Paramaribo, Zorg & Hoop, and Nickerie

The workers met on December 20 and voted to strike, but the government failed to respond. Airlines serving the country, such as KLM, Suriname Airways, Insel Air and Caribbean Airlines, were taken by surprise and were forced to cancel flights, creating chaos in the nation's airports. The strike will harm the tourist industry, this South American country's main source of dollars and euros.

In a related development, Surinam's secondary school teachers declared an impasse last Monday in negotiations with government authorities. The teachers had been on strike for four weeks.

The job action by 1,000 teachers began on November 27. Teachers are demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Union leader Wilgo Valies indicated at the teachers' assembly that voted to strike that the situation had become intolerable. He described a decaying school system that is failing students with outdated books and decrepit facilities. The decision to strike followed several weeks of student

demonstrations, demanding better schools and jobs and housing for secondary school graduates.

Union leaders have accepted an offer by the Caribbean Congress of Labor to mediate in the strike.

### **UAW betrays Navistar strike**

The United Auto Workers union (UAW) ended a seven-week strike against International Truck and Engine Corp. December 16 with a complete betrayal of the company's 3,700 UAW members International Truck and Engine, a unit of Warrenville, Illinois-based Navistar International Corp., imposed increases in out-of-pocket healthcare costs on workers, as well as a new hire package that lowers wages and benefits.

The company also said it got "significant improvements in operational flexibility and cost structure," by eliminating minimum employment level requirements, winning the ability to increase outsourcing and to close or sell operations. The UAW also has dropped all unfair labor practice charges filed with the National Labor Relations Board, a company release said.

Workers at local unions in six states were on strike against the company since October 23. The strike affected nine International Truck and Engine facilities in Melrose Park, Indianapolis, and Fort Wayne, Indiana; Springfield, Ohio; Atlanta; York, Pennsylvania; and Dallas.

### **Temporary workers rally in Hamilton, Ontario**

Temp workers and their supporters rallied in downtown Hamilton December 17 to demand the Ministry of Labour treat temporary workers equally under the Employment Standards Act. At issue, specifically, is holiday pay, whereby these workers lose three days' pay over the Christmas holidays, according to local news accounts.

Deirdre Pike of the Temp Workers' Rights Group says many temp agencies routinely violate employment standards by refusing to pay holiday pay or by making up their own unfair rules.

### **Safeway workers vote to strike in Alberta**

Workers at Safeway stores across Alberta have voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action. Theresa McLaren, spokeswoman for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), says three locals, representing 7,000 grocery and retail workers, cast ballots December 15. The results ranged from 92 to 97 percent approval for a strike. Workers are seeking to

recoup losses dating back to 1993, when the UFCW imposed a wage rollback supposedly to save the company.

Bargaining talks broke off between the union and Canada Safeway Ltd. over wages, said McLaren. Safeway is offering a C\$1.50-per-hour wage increase over three years—or 50 cents-an-hour extra each year. The union wants wage increases of more than C\$4.00 over the length of the agreement.



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