

Workers Struggles: The Americas

4 December 2007

Latin America

Mexico: Yucatan flight attendants on strike

Flight attendants employed by *Click de Mexicana* airlines walked off their jobs on December 1. The workers, who are represented by the Sindical Association of Airline Stewards (ASSA), rejected a company demand for an extended contract. ASSA General Secretary Francisco Villarreal indicated that Mexican law provides for two-year contracts with an annual wage re-opener followed by a bi-annual wage and benefit re-opener. Instead, said Villarreal, management is seeking a four-year contract. ASSA leaders consider that Click management provoked the strike when it tied one more vacation day per month to the approval of the four-year contract.

In terms of wages, the flight attendants are demanding one percent over inflation, or 4.74 percent, in line with all the other employees at *Mexicana de Aviación*, Click's parent company. The airline employs 155 stewards and flies to tourist destinations such as Cancún, Cozume, Oaxaca, Guadalajara and Monterrey. Stewards have not had a wage increase since 2006.

Panama public health doctors strike

Doctors employed by the National Oncological Institute (ION) will join a 28-day strike by doctors employed by Panama's public health system this week. The hundred ION doctors decided on this measure after the government cut their wages. The strikers are demanding a 50 percent wage increase.

President Martín Torrijos has resisted the strikers' demands, claiming they could only be met if the government raised pension taxes on workers and employers. Torrijos also denied a rumor the government was looking into bringing doctors from other countries to replace strikers. The Torrijos administration did, however, contract services with 10 private clinics last week.

Mexico: Zacatecas miners to spend Christmas on strike

The four-month old strike of miners at the San Martín mine in Zacatecas State shows no sign of ending. The mine is owned by the transnational corporation Grupo México. Miners say management is refusing to address health and safety conditions at the mine. The mine, located in the city of Sombrerete, produces copper and zinc. Grupo México has threatened to shut the mine down completely, citing labor problems. The miners consider the facility highly unsafe.

United States

Oregon school district workers strike over pay and benefits

The 381 workers of Portland, Oregon's Multnomah Education Service School District walked out on strike November 30 over pay and health care benefits. The district's board unilaterally imposed a contract on workers November 20 that called for an immediate 2 percent wage increase and a 6 percent increase in contributions towards health care.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 1995, which represents the striking workers, wants 3 percent wage hikes in each year of a new two-year contract and has requested the district contribute \$825 a month toward health insurance for every employee working over 30 hours a week. Currently, the district makes contributions ranging between \$191 and \$768 a month.

The strike involves a variety of employees, including educational assistants, technical workers, janitors and health workers. The district has hired temporary replacement workers in an attempt to break the strike. The two sides have been involved in contract negotiations since January 24. The old agreement expired July 1.

Dresser-Rand Corp imposes contract on New York strikers

Dresser-Rand Corporation declared an impasse November 29 in the 16-week strike by 400 members of the International Union of Electrical Workers Local

313 at its plant in Painted Post, New York. The Houston-based oil and gas equipment supplier imposed the latest terms of its contract offer and asked the union for a list of all workers willing to go back to work.

Late on Sunday, Dresser-Rand said the union offered to end the strike and return to work under the terms of the implemented offer. The contract struggle involved conflicts over work rules and company demands to impose increased medical costs on workers. Dresser-Rand rejected a November 19 offer by the union to return to work.

About 400 workers walked out on strike in early August. The company hired about 90 permanent replacement workers and another 130 temporary replacement workers during the strike. The company said it has released its temporary workers and would replace them with returning employees.

Lockout at New York grocery chain

PSK Foodtown locked out workers at ten of its New York locations when workers attempted to return to work, November 20, after striking the company. Members of United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 342 struck the grocery chain October 25 over disagreements concerning pensions.

The union charges that the company, which operates non-union stores in upstate New York and two in Brooklyn, rejected all attempts to come to an agreement and used tactics such as promising benefits if they turned against the UFCW.

Canada

Victoria library workers walk out

Over 250 library workers at all nine branches in Greater Victoria on Vancouver Island walked out last week over the issue of pay equity for the mostly female employees organized under the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

Picket lines went up at the Central Branch library with the union alleging that the Greater Victoria Labour Relations Association (GVLRA), with whom they are negotiating, refused to budge on the issue of pay equity for library workers, pointing out that over the last 15 years they have continued to increase wages for male workers. As a further tactic, the union announced that in addition to the walkout, its members will forgive overdue fines in exchange for donations to a local food bank. The union received a 90 per cent strike vote last July and has been using such tactics since September.

Saskatchewan union locks out workers

Support workers and staff employed by the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU) in Saskatoon, Regina, and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan were locked out last week, with their union employer claiming it was necessary to protect confidential files and a situation where management would have to cross a picket line.

The 60 workers affected are members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) who have been trying to negotiate a new contract for over two years. The most recent round of talks broke off on November 6. The main issues in dispute are wages and funding for pensions. SGEU president Bob Bymoen called the dispute "just a little blip in the history of our organization."



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