

Workers Struggles: The Americas

3 September 2008

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Paraná auto workers strike against Volkswagen, Renault and Nissan

A strike by 9,000 autoworkers at the Nissan, Renault and Volkswagen assembly lines in the southern Brazilian state of Paraná began on August 29. The strike is over wages. Two thousand workers at the state's Volvo assembly plant settled with the company for a wage increase of 7.44 percent this November plus a bonus of 1,500 reais (about US \$975 or € 623) on October 5.

The striking workers are holding out for an 8.5 percent raise this month plus a signing bonus of 800 reais. Alternatively, they will accept the raise to take effect in January plus a signing bonus of 2,000 reais.

Brazilian Oil workers threaten to strike

The Amalgamated Oil Workers' Federation (FUP), which represents Brazilian oil workers, threatened August 26 to organize a national strike if the government insists on signing new contracts with privately owned oil companies for the exploitation of new oil and natural gas deposits. The FUP holds that oil and gas should be wholly publicly-owned.

Since 1999, every Brazilian government each year has carried out competitive auctions in the oil and gas sector in an attempt to attract foreign direct investment and to increase known oil reserves. The practice was discontinued this year. FUP leaders are demanding that this practice not be renewed and that the national oil company, Petrobras, control oil and gas resources.

New offshore discoveries in the Santos trench, between Espiritu Santo and Santa Catarina Island, may add thousands of millions of barrels of so-called low risk oil to Brazilian Reserves that should be controlled by Petrobras, according to the FUP. Both the FUP and Brazil's Labor Union Federation (CUT) plan to meet this week to coordinate a campaign of workers' mobilizations that would culminate in a giant rally in Brasilia to press for this demand.

A FUP press release declared that: "The immense oil

and gas reserves discovered along the Brazilian coast create new fronts of struggle for the working class and for social movements, which bring to the fore the need and urgency of building a broad national movement to defend our sovereignty."

Dominican Republic: Doctors strike

Public health doctors walked off their jobs on August 28 demanding a wage increase and better working conditions. The strike is planned to last seven days if the government does not address the doctors' demands. This is the tenth strike by public health doctors this year. According to the Dominican Medical College (CMD) the association that represents the strikers, a record number of doctors are participating in the strike, paralyzing public hospitals across this island-nation.

The doctors are demanding a minimum monthly salary of 58,000 pesos (US \$1,700 or €1,100). In addition, they are demanding more modern hospital equipment and the preservation of the Dominican Social Security Institute (IDSS) that manages health benefits for the population. The strike began with a march and rally at the Health Ministry in Santo Domingo.

Teachers strikes across Argentina

Teachers strikes are taking place across Argentina over wages. Strikes are taking place in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Entry Ríos, Mendoza and Catamarca. Teachers in the Federal District and the city of Buenos Aires are scheduled to strike this Wednesday. Driving these struggles is the accelerating price inflation taking place in Argentina.

In Buenos Aires Province, the biggest school district in the country, teachers are demanding a 20 percent wage increase. The Province has offered 10.4 percent. On August 27 and 28 teachers and other public employees carried out Province wide protest strikes to press for their wage demands.

A similar wage demand is being made in the Catamarca Province, at the foot of the Andes. Teachers there were on strike on August 19 and 20. They have been forced back to work by the government while mandatory mediation

takes place.

In Entre Ríos, in Argentina's northeast, teachers defied a court order and carried out a three-day strike last week, on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The teachers there are demanding a base monthly wage of 1,359 pesos (US \$470, or €300). State authorities have offered 800 pesos.

In the city of Buenos Aires, teachers are demanding a cost-of-living raise. A wage increase of 24 percent granted earlier this year has been largely eaten up by inflation. Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri denounced the teachers as greedy and declared that the city has no money for raises.

One-day strike by California healthcare workers

Healthcare workers staged a 24-hour strike at five California hospitals August 28 over wages, benefits and staffing decisions. Pickets were put up at facilities operated by Daughters of Charity Health System in San Jose, Gilroy, Daly City, Moss Beach and Lynwood.

Negotiations between Daughters of Charity Health System and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) United Healthcare Workers-West have proved fruitless. The old agreement expired back in April.

The SEIU, which represents 2,400 nurses' assistants, radiology technicians, food service, housing and other hospital workers, has opposed the hospital's advancement of a manager's rights clause that would bar workers from having any say concerning patient care.

The SEIU's contract struggle at Daughters of Charity is one component of a set of negotiations during 2008 involving contracts representing 75,000 California healthcare workers.

Pennsylvania teachers strike

Teachers with the Pennsylvania State Education Association in the Tuscarora School District issued a strike notification over the weekend that has resulted in the canceling of classes for kindergarten through twelfth grade starting September 2. The 178 bargaining unit members, who serve Pennsylvania's Franklin County, maintain that increases offered by the school district will not bring them into parity with other school districts.

According to the union, school negotiators are offering wage increases of 3.75 percent for each year of a four-year contract agreement and are requesting that teachers pay 9 percent of their healthcare costs during the contract's first year and 10, 11 and 12 percent in subsequent years. The union recently revised upward its healthcare proposal to pay annually 7, 7, 8, and 8 percent.

Stella D'Oro Strike Continues

Since they walked off their jobs on August 15, 136

Stella D'Oro bakery workers are continuing their strike with 24-hour, seven days a week picket lines at the Bronx, New York facility. On August 29, Stella D'Oro notified the employees in writing that the company intends to replace them with non-union workers. Since then, the two sides have not held any negotiations.

Joyce Alson, local 50 president of the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International, which represents the strikers, was quoted as stating that the company is demanding that the workers "give up all of their sick days, four of their holidays, one week vacation, 20 percent of their health care, major reductions in salary, and a barrage of language in the contract designed to minimize employee protection." The last strike against the Italian biscuit company took place in 2003.

Ottawa cabbies vote to strike

Taxi drivers for BlueLine—one of the largest taxi companies in the nation's capital—have pledged to go on strike September 5 if the company pushes ahead with demands for increases to plate rental and dispatch service fees.

The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), representing the taxi drivers in negotiations, says that the rate hikes are well above inflation and, with increases in fuel costs eating away at their incomes, it is getting to the point where they can no longer afford to work.

Strike averted at Ontario colleges

A threatened strike by nearly 7,000 support staff at colleges across Ontario was averted by a last minute deal between the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), representing workers, and negotiators representing 24 Ontario colleges.

The deal will go to ratification this week, but details of the new contract have not yet been released. Workers had previously voted by a nearly 80 percent margin against the last contract offer in July, which offered a wage increase of only three percent. Without a deal, a province-wide strike could have begun as early as Tuesday.



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