

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Brazilian autoworkers end strike at Renault-Nissan plant; strike continues at Volkswagen

Workers in the Brazilian State of Paraná ended their strike against the Nissan-Renault consortium on September 5, but a strike continues at VW. The workers accepted a 10 percent raise that, when discounted for inflation, represents a 2.5 percent increase in real wages, 2 percent above the company's initial offer. The 4,000 workers voted to accept the offer as long as the companies agreed not to discount wages for the four-day strike. A nearly identical wage offer was rejected by VW-Audi workers.

On September 4, autoworkers in the São Paulo industrial belt threatened to strike over wages. At the Toyota, Honda, Mercedes-Benz, and General Motors plants in São Paulo State, workers carried out a 24-hour sit-down strike last Wednesday.

National strike in Panamá

A national one-day strike on September 4 in Panamá against the government of President Martín Torrijos was called a "success" by its organizers, an alliance of construction, education, medical doctors, peasants, native Americans, ecology, and student groups that calls itself the Coordinating Committee in Struggle for Respect for the People's Life and Dignity.

The Coordinating Committee is demanding jobs, higher wages and food subsidies.

The strike began with a march in Panama City. Eight hundred people rallied at the National Assembly and delivered a petition with 16 demands. Among them is a call for the legislature to approve presidential decrees that suspend privatization of industry and that grant a 20 percent wage increase for all workers.

Argentina: Government employees protest the arrest of 10 union militants

Several state unions in Cordoba, Argentina's second-largest city, decided September 6 on job actions against

the arrest of 10 union members and leaders because of their participation in a protest march against pension reform. The march took place on August 20. The trade unionists were arrested at dawn in different parts of the city. They are accused of vandalism, assault on the police, and intimidation of the public.

When the arrests were made public, public employee leaders decided to mobilize their membership. Damian Bizzy, leader of the union municipal workers and employees, said that the members had declared themselves ready to strike essential services such as the transit police and public lighting.

In the municipal emergency hospital and the municipal children's hospital, there will only be skeleton crews. These measures will be extended throughout the week to various municipal agencies. Last Thursday, the 24 municipal unions approved rallies in downtown Cordoba for September 8 and 9. On September 10, there will be protest marches in the city of Rio Cuarto and Villa Maria.

Strike threat at Mexico's general hospital

The independent union of health workers (SINTS) declared last week that it would strike Mexico's general hospital on September 29. If realized, it would be the first strike in the hospital's century-long history.

Antonio Sanchez Arriaga, general secretary of the union, said the strike is for a collective bargaining agreement. The SINTS is also demanding a 90-day bonus, a new wage formula, and that the Christmas bonus be paid in cash.

Washington state teachers strike over wages and curriculum

Teachers in Bellevue, Washington, began a strike on Tuesday when the school district would not meet their demands for higher wages and more flexibility in the curriculum.

The school district claims that it doesn't have the money to match the teachers' pay demands. Under the latest offer, the district has proposed a mere 2.5 percent

raise over a two-and-a-half-year contract. The Bellevue Education Association, which represents the 1,200 striking teachers, is asking for 5 percent.

Teachers say the pay increases offered by the district are insufficient because the cost of living in Bellevue, a wealthy suburb of Seattle, is higher than other districts. “I feel sorry for the younger teachers who drive through Bellevue and can’t even buy a house in the area,” teacher Steve Mackie told KING5 news.

The latest reports indicate that both sides are working toward a compromise on a new web-based mandatory curriculum. Teachers charge that the proposal does not take into account the individual needs of students. Teacher Bryona Golding stated: “We’re required to use the same lesson for all students. In taking away our autonomy, taking away our ability to get to know our students, and then meet their needs, the district is making it impossible for us to be good teachers.”

Negotiations between the district and union are scheduled to resume Monday.

University of Victoria workers strike

Seventy-five members of the United Steelworkers (USW) went on strike September 5 against the University of Victoria Students’ Society (UVSS) at the student’s union building in the provincial capital of Victoria, British Columbia.

The striking workers, many of whom are themselves members of the UVSS, are employed as cleaners, servers, security and management by the UVSS which has itself been lobbying the provincial government to raise the minimum wage to C\$10 an hour. Currently, the striking workers are among the lowest paid on campus, many of them earning only C\$9.50 an hour.

The USW is asking for an increase of C\$1.50 an hour, noting that workers have received only one increase of 10 cents an hour in the last six years. The UVSS is citing financial constraints and has offered increases between 10 and 30 cents an hour. Most students have so far refused to cross picket lines.

Abitibi workers challenge job cuts

A recent vote at newspaper giant Abitibi-Bowater in Grand Falls-Windsor in Newfoundland saw 92 percent of workers reject a company proposal to cut more than one third of the 450 unionized workers, despite threats of even greater job losses.

Under a proposed “restructuring” plan, the company would contract out work now done by members of the

Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union (CEP), cutting 171 jobs at the mill that it says is necessary to remain profitable.

The union has said it is hopeful that new investment will be found that will minimize job cuts, and presented the company’s proposal in a series of meetings throughout August. Although Abitibi has not threatened to close its operations in Windsor, the current downsizing follows a previous shutdown in Stephenville, Newfoundland, in 2005.



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