

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Colombian President launches initiative to end judicial strike

Colombian President Álvaro Uribe presented on August 4 a new proposal to solve the one-month-long strike of employees of the national judicial system. Government sources estimate that the strike has cost the government US\$60 million and delayed more than 90,000 cases. The offer was rejected by the National Association of Judicial Branch Employees (ASONAL).

Uribe offered an aggregate sum of US\$64 million in wages, bonuses and benefits, US\$12 million above the last government offer, but far below the US\$142 million that the strikers demanded when the strike began September 3.

Perú: Cerro Verde miners walk off their jobs

Twelve hundred employees of the Cerro Verde copper mine, the third largest in Perú, went on strike last Thursday demanding better wages and working conditions. Cerro Verde is a consortium of Freeport-Moran Copper and Gold Inc., Sumitomo and Buenaventura of Perú. It is located in the Arequipa region in southern Perú.

Union leader Leoncio Amudio declared that the strike would last indefinitely. This June, Cerro Verde miners conducted an 11-day strike demanding that the company obey the terms of its contract.

The start of this strike coincided with protests in two other regions, Moquegua and Tacna, where hundreds of workers marched demanding a more just distribution of copper profits. The protest, which paralyzed commerce and transport across the region, was intended to pressure Perú's Congress, where a debate is taking place over the distribution of mining revenues.

Teachers strike in Honduras

Honduran public school teachers concluded a week-long strike Friday after their union reached a deal with Honduran President Manuel Zelaya on US\$15.7 million

in back wages owed to 5,000 educators.

The agreement would make up the teachers' pay over time. Teachers have missed 30 days so far this year due to strikes.

Perú: García administration threatens to fire striking public health doctors

The administration of Peruvian President Alan García threatened to fire striking doctors if they stop attending hospital patients, claiming to do so would represent a criminal act. The strike by 20,000 doctors began on September 15.

The strikers are demanding wage increases and higher medical budgets for public hospitals and clinics. They are also demanding wage parity between doctors in Lima and those in rural areas.

Oregon staff workers strike against teachers' union

Forty-two staff workers for the Oregon Education Association (OEA) went on strike against the statewide union organization October 29 over benefits and workloads. The Professional Staff Organization (PSO), which makes up 40 percent of the staff, comprises field representatives, lobbyists, communications staff and training professionals.

Workers objected to the OEA's "last, best offer" that cut retirement benefits, increased medical insurance premiums and eliminated compensation for overtime. The workers also complain of increased workloads when administering for the 48,000-member union.

The previous contract for the PSO expired on July 1. Workers charge the OEA initially tried to strong-arm them into an early agreement. The PSO felt compelled to file an unfair labor practice charge against the OEA, alleging the union refused to provide them with medical insurance claim information they considered necessary in order to provide a counter-offer.

PSO members with 10 years or more of experience earn an average \$110,000 a year. Some 75 percent of the workers fall into that category.

Milwaukee trash haulers end one-month strike

Trash haulers for six counties around Milwaukee, Wisconsin, voted by a two-to-one margin September 28 to end their one-month strike and accept the termination of contributions to union-controlled pensions and the substitution of a third-party 401(k) plan. The 240 members of Teamsters Local 200 had twice previously rejected the offer by Waste Management, the giant Texas-based garbage-collection company that holds the contract for the counties involved in the strike. But isolated by the Teamsters' bureaucracy, workers felt compelled to concede.

The deal ends employer contributions to the union's Central States Pension Fund. Waste Management rejected a Teamster counter-offer that advocated a plan modeled on the new pension fund that the union has set up with United Parcel Service.

Teamsters Local 200 Secretary Treasurer Tom Millonzi sought to shift blame onto workers' fear of current economic problems for the surrender of pensions: "No one ever wins in a strike, and in this case the continued financial and personal strain took its toll on our members. With this vote, our members decided that given the turbulent nature of our economy, their families' futures must take priority over holding out for a better offer from Waste Management."

Aerospace workers walk out for workplace safety

Four hundred workers employed by IMP Aerospace walked off the job in Halifax, Nova Scotia, October 2 due to concerns about exposure to hazardous substances such as asbestos and toxic fumes.

Members of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) including mechanics and technical staff refused to return to work the following day when their concerns cited in 78 safety orders against the company over the last two years had still not been answered. IMP has contracts with the Canadian and US military, and others, repairing and servicing aircraft.

Ontario copper workers on strike

Workers at Xstrata Copper Kidd Metallurgical operations, near Timmins in northern Ontario, went on strike last week over wages, benefits, seniority and other issues after voting 96 percent in favor of strike action.

The 675 workers involved in the strike are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), which has issued statements saying they want a fair

deal from the company that has benefited enormously from the recent spike in metal prices. Xstrata is the Swiss-based company that bought out Falconbridge two years ago and is the fourth largest of its kind in the world. Its Timmins facility refines metals such as zinc and cadmium as well as copper. No talks are currently scheduled in the dispute.

Alberta grocery workers on strike

After a last-minute deal averted a strike by thousands of employees of grocery giant Loblaws Companies Ltd. (LCL) in neighboring Saskatchewan, at least 20 stores in the province of Alberta will be on strike this week after delivering a 94 percent strike vote to their union.

Real Canadian Superstore in Edmonton and Calgary, owned by LCL, will be struck by locals of the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW). Even as the strike was called, union leaders were arranging vote meetings to ratify a proposed deal. While the union reports improvements in wages in the latest offer, the company is refusing to guarantee shift premiums, which could mean big rollbacks in total income for workers.



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