

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Mexican miners union threatens national strike

The National Miners and Metal Workers Union (SNMMS) declared October 23 that it would paralyze all unionized mines and mills in Mexico if the Calderon government insists on apprehending its union president, Napoleon Gómez Urrutia, or any member of the union's national executive committee.

The declaration was a response to news that the Mexican government may extradite Gómez from his Canadian exile. The union claims that the Mexican government has allied itself with the mine owners to break the union. Gómez Urrutia was removed from office by former President Vicente Fox in February 2006 after the Pasta de Concho mine disaster. The Mexican government accused the miners' leader of embezzling \$50 million in union funds. Sixty-five coal miners were buried alive in Pasta de Concho.

Gómez, a corrupt bureaucrat, has become a symbol of the miners' resistance to the Calderon government and to Grupo Mexico, the transnational corporation that dominates the Mexican mining industry.

## Brazil: Strike by employees of Radio Brasil

Workers at the Brazilian Communications Corporation (EBC) went on a 48-hour strike last week, the first in the company's history. The workers returned to work on Friday but voted to remain on strike alert. EBC, formerly known as Radiobras, is a government-owned radio and TV network that transmits within Brazil. EBC also transmits internationally via short wave. EBC workers agreed to return to work after a government commission agreed to intervene

in the dispute.

The radio employees suspended their job action until this Thursday. After that, the strike will resume unless their demands have been sufficiently addressed by the EBC and the commission.

EBC management was able to maintain transmissions by using previously taped material to minimize the disruptions to radio broadcasts. EBC workers are demanding a wage increase and changes in the way employees are promoted. The strikers are also protesting the fact that outside managers were hired at very high salaries when EBC was formed out of Radiobras, bypassing senior Radiobras employees.

The strikers are demanding a monthly wage minimum of \$R3,900 for top-level workers and \$R1,800 for middle-level workers. The latest EBC offer is \$R2,050 for top-level workers and \$R1,200 for middle-level workers.

## Argentina: Technical school teachers to strike this week

Vocational teachers at technical public schools in the Argentine city of Tucuman resolved last Friday to strike for 24 hours November 6. The teachers assembled and voted in favor of the strike in the wake of the collapse of negotiations mediated by a government arbitrator. Nonvocational teachers are expected to join their colleagues for the protest strike as well.

Both groups of teachers are demanding a 20 percent rise in base pay and an increase in family benefits. Provincial authorities have so far refused to negotiate on the salary issue. They had agreed on an increase in family benefits in September, but have yet to comply with the agreement.

## Healthcare workers strike 10 California hospitals

Members of the Service Employees International Union

(SEIU) launched a one-day strike October 29 against five hospitals owned by Sutter Health and another five under ownership of the Daughters of Charity Health System (DOCHS). The affected hospitals are located in Los Angeles and in Northern California and involve some 6,000 caregivers.

Hospital workers at DOCHS are opposing the increase of health insurance premiums along with a “management rights” clause that would allow hospital administrators to make unilateral changes in any hospital procedure not addressed by the contract and without negotiating with the union. DOCHS workers are also seeking a uniform contract covering all five hospitals.

Sutter Health, the largest and most profitable hospital corporation in California, has maintained its position through substandard contracts. Striking workers want increased staffing levels, more training and education, and protection from arbitrary layoffs.

### **Neil Young cancels concert at struck Los Angeles venue**

Songwriter and musician Neil Young cancelled an October 30 performance at the Inglewood Forum in California in support of striking members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the International Union of Operating Engineers International Union (IUOE), who are picketing the facility. Young, a lifetime member of IATSE, issued a statement that said, “I am extremely disappointed to have to choose between satisfying my fans or backing my brothers and sisters of the IATSE.”

Workers at the forum were terminated from their jobs last April after two years of fruitless bargaining. Back in 2006, Faithful Central Bible Church purchased the Forum and hired the management firm SMG to take a hard line against workers. Pay cuts of 35 percent were imposed and, when workers rejected new concessions contracts, replacement workers were bussed in. Some 120 workers were left without jobs.

### **York University facing strike**

Teaching staff at York University, north of Toronto, were set to strike November 2, but that deadline was postponed until November 6 as union leaders sought to avoid a strike that would disrupt classes for 50,000 students at the school.

The 3,250 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) include graduate students working as part-time teaching and research assistants as well as full-time contract faculty who are seeking greater job security and improvements in wages and benefits. The union says they fear being locked out before a strike is called, which could send the dispute to binding arbitration.

### **Lockout at Petro-Canada sparks boycott**

The Canadian Labour Congress has launched a national boycott of Petro-Canada as a result of “piled-on” demands by the company, which locked out workers at its Montreal refinery more than a year ago.

Two hundred sixty members of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) remain off the job in Quebec, with the company demanding a six-year contract to break with a pattern established in three other provinces. The CLC is appealing to its 3.2 million members to “avoid buying gas and heating oil from Petro-Canada” until the dispute is settled.

### **Winnipeg Free Press strike ends**

After 16 days on the picket line, a strike by 1,000 newspaper carriers, pressmen, journalists and inside workers at the *Winnipeg Free Press* ended with the ratification of a new contract last week.

Although workers won modest pay increases, there are certain to be job losses following the strike, as the *National Post* announced it will no longer be printing its paper for distribution in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.



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