

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

18 November 2008

for its 500 guests.

## Chile: Public employees' strike

Four hundred and fifty thousand federal workers carried out a 48-hour strike November 12 and 13. The government employees are demanding the government of President Michele Bachellet grant a 14.5 percent wage increase.

Raúl de la Puente, president of the National Association of Fiscal Employees (ANEF), a coalition of 15 public unions, pointed out that the rate of inflation in November was 9 percent.

On November 15, the workers, who had returned to work on Friday, declared that the strike would resume November 17. Among the strikers are teachers, health workers, government clerks, and customs employees. Refuse collection stopped and more than 1,000 trucks were blocked from crossing the Argentina-Chile border.

## Hotel workers strike Acapulco Hotel

About 170 employees of the Crown Plaza hotel in Acapulco, México walked off their jobs November 13. Management at the Crown Plaza, one of Mexico's most well-known hotels, provoked the strike by refusing to address workers' demands for a 5 percent raise.

The strikers are demanding the resignation of Elvia Zavala Jiménez, the hotel's manager, for harassing the union. The strikers rejected a 2 percent increase proposed by hotel owner Humberto Saba. This is the first hotel strike in the Acapulco region in 10 years. Hotels in the region are mostly owned by foreign firms.

The strike began at 2 p.m. on Thursday when hotel workers took over the lobby and set up red and black flags, the traditional strike sign in Mexico. Management had to find other accommodations

## New protests by Mexican teachers

Ten thousand members of the Rank and File Teachers Movement (MMB) in Morelos state marched in Cuernavaca, the state capital, to protest the refusal of the state government to comply with an agreement that ended an 84-day strike on November 5. MMB members also accused the government of carrying out a campaign of vilifications and retaliation against the teachers. MMB leaders indicated that as soon as the teachers had returned to work, strike leaders and union activists were threatened with dismissal.

Three columns of teachers converged in downtown Cuernavaca from different directions, jamming traffic. Demonstrators also blocked the Mexico-Acapulco highway and occupied the Morelos Basic Education Institute.

MMB leaders declared that mobilizations and protests will continue this week, after school hours.

## Colombia: More than 500 students march on Bogota

A contingent of 540 students marched on Bogota on November 16. The march began in the city of Tunja four days earlier. The protesting students are demanding that the national government increase funds for the Pedagogic University of Tunja, the only public university in the Department of Boyaca, providing educational opportunities to working class and lower middle class students.

Students point out that the university's enrollment has gone from 7,800 students in 1993 to 24,000 this year. Its budget, however, has not gone up, except for adjustments for inflation. Consequently the university has built up a debt of more than 14,000 million pesos.

The march was the culmination of a month-long protest by students to raise public awareness about the state of their university.

Officials of the administration of Alvaro Uribe claim that the university's deficit is the result of corruption.

### **Lockout at Minnesota foundry**

Management negotiators for Progress Casting Group walked out of a negotiating session last week as the lockout of 160 workers at its Plymouth, Minnesota foundry entered its fourth week. Progress Casting entered into negotiations last July demanding a wage freeze, lower pay for new employees, caps on vacations, an end to employer contributions to pensions, and changes in work rules and overtime.

On September 30, the old agreement expired and members of the Glass, Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers International Union (GMP) voted to reject the company's last offer, but did not strike. On October 15, the company unilaterally imposed a \$2.50 an hour wage cut and other takeaways that resulted in an overall \$5.00-an-hour reduction in compensation. On October 27, the company locked out the workers.

Among the clients of Progress Casting Group are Boeing and Harley-Davidson. The recent strike at Boeing led to a layoff of 50 workers at the Plymouth facility before the eventual lockout of the remaining 160 workers. Progress operates another plant in New Hampton, Iowa.

### **Industrial accident at Ohio warehouse injures worker**

A worker was seriously injured November 11 at the Peyton's Southeastern shipping and receiving warehouse in Cleveland, Ohio. According to workers, a crane crushed 46-year-old Alan Green, a 26-year employee.

Workers report that as long as one-and-a-half hours may have elapsed before an ambulance arrived to take Green away. His wife has indicated he faces a long period of recovery.

The Occupational, Health and Safety Administration had not been contacted about the accident. Companies are only obligated to report accidents under conditions where three or more workers are injured or the accident results in death. Peyton's Southeastern provides warehousing for the Kroger's grocery chain.

### **Canada Post set to strike**

Twenty-four hundred workers at Canada Post Corporation are to begin strike action this week after delivering an overwhelming mandate to their union, the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

Among the main issues in the dispute is management's intention to introduce changes that would require employees to rely on federal employment insurance instead of the current contract provision for disability and sick pay. In addition, there are longstanding issues over pay equity for female workers, which Canada Post has dragged out for decades.

Those affected by the strike include administrative staff, technicians and call centre workers who have been without a contract since August 31. Other unions at Canada Post have pledged to support the strike action. PSAC filed complaints against Canada Post over unfair practices when the corporation mailed out information to union members stating that it would unilaterally implement contract changes.

### **Metal workers locked out in Brantford**

Workers employed by Alumetco in Brantford, Ontario, west of Hamilton, were locked out by the company on November 10. The 85 workers have been represented by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW) since last June. The company has yet to sign a contract and, to date, the union has not threatened strike action.

Outstanding issues include seniority rights and job security. The CAW says the company, which has a unionized facility in nearby Burlington, is out to break the union. Alumetco is a division of Burlington Technologies Inc. It makes aluminum castings for the auto industry and says it cannot afford any improvements due to the industry's dire condition.



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