

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Argentine bank employees to strike this week

Bank employees in Argentina last week rejected a 5 percent wage increase. Union leader Juan José Zanola called the offer a provocation. He also accused the banks of hiring goons to frighten bank employees into resigning. Over 1,500 employees have been forced to resign that way; a procedure that the union calls 'disguised sackings.'

"In any case," he said, "we will strike on December 11 and 12, and we decided to add the 15th and 16th to continue to press for our wage demands." Contract negotiations are at a standstill, despite a government imposed cooling-off period and the intervention of a government mediator.

Argentine banks have been hit hard by the world financial crisis. This is now taking the form of capital flight. Over US\$4 billion left the country in October. The total for the year is expected to top US\$25 billion.

Mexico: Protesters demand information on victims of political disappearances

Members of the Eureka Committee protested in front of the Mexican Supreme Court on December 6, demanding that Mexican authorities release the names and provide information on political prisoners that have been disappeared in the 40 years since the Tlatelolco Massacre of October 2, 1968.

Protesters held photographs of many of the missing, read their names aloud, and demanded that they be released alive. A spokesperson for the Committee declared that political opponents are systematically detained and made to disappear in Mexico and that this is a common practice to this day.

The protesters also denounced the National Human Rights Commission, a government entity, for doing nothing on behalf of the disappeared.

Mexico: Silver miners protest arrest of two of their leaders

Workers at the world's largest silver mine in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, went on strike December 4 following the arrest of Carlos Pavon and Juan Linares, leaders of the miners union. The authorities allege that both are guilty of embezzling union funds.

Also on strike for the same reason are miners at two other mines in the same state, the zinc mines in Madero and Sabinas. Miners plan to escalate their protest strikes until their leaders are released.

Carlos Pavon is the union's second in command after Napoleon Gomez Urrutia, who is also accused of embezzlement and is currently in exile.

On December 6, the Electricians Union declared itself in solidarity with the miners and called on three other organizations—the Mexican Union Front, the National Education Workers Coordinating Committee, and the Cardenista Peasants Front—to march in Mexico City on December 9.

Oregon truckers protest termination of retiree benefits

Truckers rallied outside Oak Harbor Freight Lines in Portland, Oregon, last Thursday to protest the company's abrupt decision to strip retirees of health care benefits. The termination of retiree benefits is the company's latest maneuver during a strike involving about 600 truckers from Oregon, Washington, and Idaho that is now in its 12th week.

Bob Anderson, a 14-year driver at the Portland terminal, stated, "We believe our retirees have upheld their part of the bargain, and now the company is abandoning them. The retirees are the people who built Oak Harbor Freight. It seems as if the company is done with them now and wants to get rid of them."

Retiree Marv Deegan added, "What the company has done to us is making it difficult to eat. When you are on a fixed income and you have to pay a huge amount just to keep your health care, there is hardly enough money left for food."

Picket line clash at struck Missouri plant

Pickets on strike at the Smurfit-Stone Container Corporation in St. Joseph, Missouri clashed with security guards December 5 as tensions escalated in the week-old strike by 86 members of Teamsters Local 235-M. Police intervened and two strikers have been identified, but no arrests have been made.

Workers at the plant, who make cardboard containers and are paid an average \$14 an hour, are angry that they are not being compensated at the same rate as workers at other Smurfit plants. "The new management team simply wants to manage by convenience and totally ignore seniority and personal needs," Local 235-M president Byron Austin told the St. Joseph *News-Press*. A worker on the picket line told the paper, "This is the first management team we've had that didn't regard us as people."

Union members have been without a contract since March of this year. In September a strike was authorized and on December 1 workers walked off the job after rejecting a third offer from the company. Since the strike began, Smurfit has notified workers that their insurance has been cancelled and they will not receive holiday pay.

Ottawa transit poised to strike

Following a strike vote of 98 percent last week, 2,200 transit workers in the national capital could be on strike as early as Wednesday of this week after delivering a 72-hour strike notice on Friday.

Affected workers include drivers, dispatchers and maintenance workers represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). They are seeking improvements in wages and provisions for sick leave in a new contract. Although details of negotiations have not been made public, the union says it is only asking for the roughly 3 percent wage increases awarded to other municipal employees.

The workers have been without a contract since last March. Talks are expected to continue up to the strike deadline.



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