Workers Struggles: The Americas

3 February 2009

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

Tens of thousands march in Mexico City

Over 50,000 people marched in Mexico City on Saturday, January 31. The march was part of a day of protest that included demonstrations across the country. The massive march along historic Paseo de la Reforma boulevard, began in the morning at the Angel of Independence and concluded with a rally at Mexico City's huge Zocalo square at 5 p.m. Traffic along the route was blocked for 10 hours.

The demonstrators, which included students, workers, peasants and agricultural workers, rejected the economic and social policies of the Calderón government and demanded an end to layoffs and subsidies to the poor, in addition to measures that would help agriculture. The protesters also demanded lower fuel prices and an end to labor reform legislation that, in the name of flexibility, gives carte blanche to employers to increase the exploitation of workers.

Agustín Rodriguez, leader of the union of university employees, declared that if the government continues ignoring the marchers' requests, the protests would escalate and close off roads and Mexican border crossing airports and other ports of entry. He also called for a general strike in June.

Peru: Miners call for a national strike in March

Peru's National Federation of Mine, Metal and Steel Workers (FNTMMS) announced last Saturday that it was calling for a national strike for March 15. The purpose of the strike is to defend jobs and to demand an end to a government cap on benefits.

FNTMMS leader Luis Castillo declared that the date is definite. A rash of sackings in the mine industry is taking place all across Latin America, the United States and Canada.

Hardest hit have been miners in Chile, Peru and Mexico. Chile has lost 10,000 mining jobs. At least 2,000 jobs have been eliminated in Mexico and over 5,500 in Peru. In all three countries mine union leaders anticipate that the sackings will continue despite government pleas that management find other ways of cutting costs.

Mining is crucial to Peru's economy. The country is the world's leading producer of silver, second in zinc and copper, and fifth in gold.

Guayana air traffic controllers threaten strike

Fifteen air traffic controllers in Georgetown, Guyana, have declared their intention to strike this week. The strike would affect domestic and international flights.

On Friday the air traffic controllers gave the government 72 hours to activate wage increases for 2009. The workers currently earn US$16,875 annually. They are demanding a wage of $22,500 from agreements that date back to 2007.

Argentine Labor Ministry suspends dockworkers strike

A strike by dockworkers in Argentina's southern port of Ushuaia was suspended by the Labor Ministry for Tierra del Fuego province, which imposed mandatory arbitration. Government authorities claim that the strike is invalid because it is "political, not economic," because dockworkers are protesting the appointment of a new vice president for the Provincial Ports Agency.

Labor Minister Echazú insisted that the dockworkers were exceeding their constitutional right to strike. "Under these circumstances," he added, "the labor ministry must intervene and find a solution."

Silvestre Ojeda, who represents the National Ports

© World Socialist Web Site

Workers Union (UPCN), declared that the strike action was decided by majority vote to protest the deterioration of the port and to demand that workers elect the vice president of the public port agency.

The strike began on the evening of January 29 and ended at noon the next day, when the ministry's decree was made known to union leaders.

Massachusetts teachers fined for illegal strike

A judge ordered a teachers' union to pay the city of Quincy, Massachusetts, $100,000 in damages last week for a four-day strike in June of 2007. Massachusetts law bars teachers from striking, and the walkout by the Quincy Education Association was the first strike in more than a decade.

The settlement amount was reached as a result of negotiations between the Quincy School Committee and the union in November 2008. It was $50,000 less than the amount a Superior Court judge ordered in the waning moments of the strike.

The union has argued that the $100,000 fine exceeds the actual amount of lost compensation by staff, wasted food and the costs to the city for use of police to patrol picket lines.

Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra management cancels concert, disrupts contract talks

The management of the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra (WCO) cancelled a concert set for February 27 after musicians declined to answer an ultimatum from management to give an "unqualified assurance" that they would perform the concert. The ultimatum was accompanied by WCO management's withdrawal of a number of previously agreed upon contract terms.

The musicians union said it had believed that the long drawn-out negotiations were nearing a conclusion. The union filed an unfair labor practices charge January 29, saying the demand that musicians guarantee the performance before a binding contract was in place denied them the right to strike.

Montreal newspaper locks out workers

Two hundred fifty workers at Montreal's largest daily paper, *Le Journal*, were locked out January 24 in a dispute over the merging of the paper and electronic media.

The workers, who are represented by the Syndicat des travailleurs de l'information du Journal de Montréal, include photographers, journalists and editors, have been without a contract since the end of December. *Le Journal* is owned by media giant Quebecor, which says it is determined to increase profitability by merging content in some of its 300-plus publications, which the union says would mean layoffs for many of its members. The union has said it is willing to make significant concessions and the company has said it will continue to publish using management staff.

In a related matter, workers at the only English-language daily in Montreal, the *Montreal Gazette*, also face lockout after overwhelmingly rejecting the company's latest offer. They have been without a contract since last July.

Montreal snowplows idled in overtime dispute

Over 600 Montreal municipal employees parked their vehicles at the end of their regular shift last Wednesday to protest the city's failure to pay them overtime in their last pay period.

The rush hour work stoppage came in the middle of a snowstorm, which brought traffic to a crawl across Montreal. The workers, who have been without a contract for two years, refused to perform overtime as required during a snowfall, saying they are fed up with "irresponsible" managers. Their union intervened to reach a deal with the city by 10 p.m. the same day, with officials saying the dispute was caused by a glitch.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site