Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Uruguay: Football players threaten strike

The Uruguayan Mutual Association of Professional Football Players (MUFP) have called for all members to attend a mass assembly March 2 to vote for a strike in case players are not paid their back wages. The strike would begin on Wednesday, March 4. Several football games are scheduled that day.

The decision was made after MUFP received complaints from at least 10 players that they have not been paid. The case made the front pages after Montevideo's Wonder Team and Juventud de Las Piedras demanded default wins against Peñarol and Nacional.

The two teams alleged that both Peñarol or Nacional should not have been allowed to play because of unpaid wages to their players, which goes against tournament rules. Another team, Villa Española, was expelled from the tournament for owing $60,000 to its players.

Argentina: Buenos Aires teachers unions to strike this week

Teachers in Buenos Aires, Argentina's most populous province, announced strikes for March 2 and 3. The Buenos Aires Educators Federation Union (FEB) called on its members to strike for eight hours. Another union, the Buenos Aires Education Workers Union (SUTEBA), announced that it would strike for 24 hours on March 2. Both organizations declared that they would repeat the protest on March 9. The strike call took place after teachers rejected a 3.1 percent wage increase that had been offered by education authorities.

In addition to Buenos Aires, teachers in seven other provinces announced strikes this week. These include the industrial province of Córdoba plus the Patagonian provinces of Chubut and Nekuen.

Mexico: Durango teachers strike

Durango teachers went on strike March 1 after having received no response to a 10 percent wage increase demand. The 1,000 striking teachers are represented by the Union of Academic and Administrative Employees (STAACOBAED) at Durango's state high schools (CBED).

STAACOBAED leader Evangelina Esparza declared that there has been no response either from the Durango state government or from the federal government, "We know that our wages depend on money that the state receives from the federal government and that no money has been received since the beginning of the year. We also know that it takes months for federal money to reach the states. However, we are demanding that this time the wage increase be effective no later than the end of March."

Paraguay: Electric workers out on strike

Workers at the Paraguayan-Brazilian Hydroelectric plant at Itaipu went on a limited strike February 26 demanding that management follow the contract. Workers are stopping two hours each day for 10 days.

The workers are represented by 4 of the 7 unions at the hydroelectric plant. Modesto Rojas, general secretary of

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the Union of Itaipu Workers (STEIBI), indicated that 95 percent of the workers are on strike.

Itaipu, the world's biggest hydroelectric plant, sits over the Paraná River and the Paraná Brazilian border. Most of the electricity it produces goes to southern Brazil.

Mexico: Peñoles strike continues

A strike by 300 workers at the Met-Mex Mill in Peñoles, the largest ore processing center in Latin America, are in their third week of strike. Met-Mex management indicated that it is sending ore to other countries for processing. It also announced that there is no solution in sight to the walkout. The strike began on February 8 when workers rejected a 6 percent wage offer. Last Monday Peñoles announced that it was sending 1,000 tons of ore to South Korea for it to be processed it into gold and silver.

Washington State: Trucking company accused of preparing to victimize strikers

The Teamsters union alleged last week that Oak Harbor Freight Lines planned to suspend 13 workers in the wake of the union's decision to make an unconditional return to work after more than four months on the picket line. In a February 27 news release the union also said Oak Harbor would "reserve the right to terminate more employees for union activities" and "is preparing to illegally eliminate returning workers' health care plan, switch returning workers to a substandard plan administered by the company and abolish workers' retirement fund."

The Teamsters announced its decision to abandon the strike against Oak Harbor Freight Lines on February 12. During the strike the union bureaucracy limited its efforts to toothless appeals to corporations, like the Gap, Inc., to boycott the company's transportation services. It also sought to pressure Ohio-based Keybank—a recipient of $2.5 billion in Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) funds—to withhold operating loans to the strikebound company.

Indiana: Toll road construction workers end strike

Members of the International Union of Operating Engineers and the Carpenters Union ended their weeklong strike February 27 over unfair labor practices by contractors working on an expansion project on the Indiana Toll Road. The unions charge that two contractors, Ferrovial Agroman Indiana LLC and Rieth-Riley Construction Company, terminated one worker for union activity and refused to hire another based on affiliations with the Operating Engineers. The walkout involved some 50 workers.

The strike occurred under conditions where the Operating Engineers have been certified as bargaining representative for six laboratory technicians who test concrete and other construction processes. The union is currently involved in first-time contract negotiations for the new members.

Autoworkers blockade plant

Workers at Bauer Industries in Waterloo, Ontario, west of Toronto, blockaded the company plant for five days last week after management told them they would have no more work until further notice.

The 35 workers, who are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers, set up the blockade to prevent products from being shipped and in a bid to force the company to pay them back wages, vacation and termination pay. The union called off the blockade after receiving assurances from the company that it would pay outstanding wages and vacation pay. The union says it will go to court to seek severance pay.

The company, which produces textile and insulation products for the auto industry, is expected to declare bankruptcy in the near future.

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