

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Striking metalworkers rally in Mexico

Striking metalworkers from the Peñoles smelter and their supporters rallied last Friday at the state government house in Coahuila, Mexico, in solidarity with the Peñoles strike.

The strike against the Met Mex mining corporation began on February 8 and involves 344 workers. The main issue is wages. The miners are demanding a 13 percent increase in wages and benefits, 6 percent more than management's best offer.

Teachers protests continue in Argentina

Argentine teachers in Corrientes province in Argentina's Mesopotamian region will strike for 72 hours this Wednesday. The unions that represent public and private school teachers issued a joint call this weekend for the mobilization of their members to protest the government's lack of response to their wage demands. In addition to the walkouts, teachers intend to march and rally this Thursday at the Ministry of Education and the provincial government house.

Teachers in the province of Buenos Aires declared a truce, at least until this Wednesday, from their protest strikes last week, the first week of classes in provincial schools. In the Patagonian province of Río Negro, the teachers' strike is now on its third week. The Río Negro educators have also mobilized to block the main roads in and out of the province.

Hospital strike in Honduras

March 6 was the sixth day of a strike by public health workers at hospitals and clinics in Honduras. The main issue is

wages. Public health workers are demanding a wage increase of 2,000 lempiras (HNL), nearly twice the government offer of 1,200 HNL. Strike leaders indicated that the government has ignored the workers' demands. In response, they intend to escalate mobilizations and protests this week.

The strike by more than 10,000 nurses, technicians and clerks has affected all 20 public hospitals and 982 clinics across the country. The government of President José Manuel Zelaya Rosales has sent in army personnel in an attempt to keep the clinics open and break the strike. The government also plans to assign Red Cross volunteers and boy scouts to serve as strikebreakers.

Autoworkers walk out in Venezuela

Sixteen hundred autoworkers in Venezuela walked out of their jobs on March 6 from the Toyota assembly plant in the western state of Sucre. The strikers are demanding that Toyota management obey the collective bargaining agreement by assigning 4 percent of the plant's output to the workers, provide a decent health plan, and improve conditions at the company cafeteria. The Sucre plant assembles 120 automobiles a day.

The strike caps months of negotiations that began last November. The company provoked it when it tried to prevent a union official from meeting with top management to discuss the issues.

Redmond, Washington: Microsoft temporary workers protest compensation cut

Temporary workers protested against a 10 percent cut in pay outside the headquarters of Microsoft Corporation in Washington State last week. Phil Palios, a 23-year-old temporary worker, sent out emails to 2,000 Microsoft workers who are employed by temp agencies.

The previous week, temp agencies that provide Microsoft with workers agreed to lower the rate they charge the software company for their services by 10 percent. Many of the agencies

plan to pass this cost on by cutting temp workers' wages.

Volt, one of the agencies, sent an email to its temporary workers, declaring, "This is mandatory in order to continue your assignment at Microsoft and to respond to this economic environment." The cuts are due to take effect March 16.

Philadelphia: Economic stimulus money used for subcontracting

With a contract deadline of March 15, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) workers continue to negotiate over wages, benefits and pensions. In addition, at issue is SEPTA's policy of subcontracting out its track and station rehabilitation work, which includes several massive projects funded by the agency's \$200 million share of the Obama administration's economic stimulus plan.

According to union spokesman Willie Brown, "SEPTA's decided they're not going to spend one dime of the stimulus money paying us to do the things we know how to do. They're going to subcontract everything out. That's a top issue in these negotiations, and it won't come off the table."

Wichita, Kansas: Boeing engineers reject contract for a second time

Boeing engineers rejected the company's offer of a 3 percent salary increase, higher out-of-pocket medical costs, and elimination of pensions for new employees last week, but did not authorize a strike. The Wichita engineers seek higher pay, improved pension funding, better health care and additional vacation days. Fewer than 300 of the 700 workers represented by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace participated in the vote.

The contract was rejected by a 68 percent margin and represented the second time workers have voted down a company offer. However, only 45 percent of the workers voted to strike the aerospace company. The previous contract expired on December 5, 2008.

Last year, the 27,000-member International Association of Machinists went on strike against Boeing for nearly two months. Shortly after the strike ended, Boeing announced that 10,000 workers would be laid off. The engineers union states that Boeing hasn't provided any protection for them in the event the plant is sold or divested.

Michigan paper workers end strike

The union representing workers at the White Pigeon Paper Company in St. Joseph County offered an "unconditional return to work" March 3, ending a four-day strike. A company official declined to say whether the company had any interest in permitting workers to return to work.

The International Paper and Steelworkers Local 1034, which represents 79 workers at the plant, called the initial walkout an "unfair labor practice strike." Local President Dan Davis said, "They were bargaining in bad faith, taking advantage of hard economic times. They are a financially sound company." Among the issues the two sides have been unable to reach a contract on are job security, pensions and health care. The union declined to give any reason for the return to work.

Steelworkers occupy Toronto plant

Around thirty members of the United Steelworkers union (USW) occupied a Price Mattress plant in north Toronto on March 5 after 22 workers walked off the job in protest over unpaid wages.

The workers are owed up to six weeks of pay, which the company has explained is a result of a change in its payroll account arising from the credit crisis. Although the company has offered assurances that they are not in financial difficulty, they have laid off 12 workers in the past six months

A union spokesperson has only said that the workers will remain off the job until they get a letter from the new finance company saying they will be paid. Many workers are owed in excess of \$3,000, and have had to borrow money to make ends meet.



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