

Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 April 2009

Peru: Silver miners strike

Workers at the Morococha silver mine in Peru have been on strike since April 2 to press wage demands. Production at the subterranean mine, owned by the Canadian-based Panamerican Silver Corporation, has been greatly reduced since the strike began. Peru's minister of labor is now mediating the negotiations between the strikers and management. Panamerican Silver also operates mines in Mexico, Bolivia and Argentina.

One-day hospital strike in Argentina

The Association of Health Professions of the Province of Entre Rios voted on

April 12 to join a one-day strike called by the Argentine Federation of Health Professionals. The strike is expected to affect public hospitals and clinics across the province. Union leaders decided on the measure in the wake of an impasse in negotiations.

Colombia: Municipal workers protest firings

Two union leaders and four fired workers are on hunger strike in Cali to protest the firing of 54 union members at the municipal utility (EM Cali). In addition to demanding the rehiring of the 54 workers, the union

militants are demanding an end to attacks on the utility workers' unions.

Since 2004, 16 union members have been assassinated and paramilitary death squads have wounded many more. Five union leaders are now in exile due to death threats. EM Cali recently cancelled the right of union delegates to take time off from work to represent utility workers. In addition, EM Cali has refused to hand over to the unions all union dues discounted from workers' paychecks since October.

The violent campaign against the municipal unions is the direct result of the gradual privatization of public utilities in the city. Workers have accused EM Cali management of trying to create a union-free environment in order to facilitate the transfer of the utilities to private hands.

A typical example is what happened to EM Sirva, the municipal entity that formerly handled trash collection for the city. It was "restructured" last year. The city was then divided into four zones. Three zones were given to private contractors, and EM Sirva retained one zone.

On March 26, EM Sirva was permanently shut down. Workers who attempted to enter the company were violently attacked by police. Four hundred workers lost their jobs.

Hawaiian Airlines pilots protest stalled negotiations

Pilots at Hawaiian Airlines picketed Honolulu International Airport April 6 to protest two years of stalled contract negotiations. Other pilots from United, Island Air and Mesa Air Group joined the informational picket.

"We have been in negotiations since April 2007, and feel management currently shows no intention of

wanting to achieve a fair agreement with our pilot group,” said Captain Eric Sampson, who is chairman of the Hawaiian section of the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), which represents the 400-pilot bargaining unit. In 2008, Hawaiian was ranked the number-one airline in service quality.

The pilots last negotiated a contract with Hawaiian in 2005 when the airline was in bankruptcy. At that time, they made a series of contract concessions, including a 20 percent cut in overall pay. Pilots are currently seeking to recoup some of those losses, including cost-of-living adjustments. ALPA and Hawaiian negotiators are scheduled to meet with a federal mediator this week.

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Drivers for Veteran Cab Company in Windsor, Ontario, went on strike April 6 in their fight to win lease rates that would allow them to support their families.

The 300 drivers, who are represented by the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), say falling ridership and increased costs are making it impossible to make a living. It is the second time the drivers have been on strike in the last three years.



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Hamilton steel workers strike

More than 600 workers at National Steel Car Ltd. in Hamilton, Ontario, went on strike last week after rejecting the company’s final contract offer by more than 95 percent.

The company is demanding a 25-cent-an-hour wage cut and other rollbacks that amount to a 25 percent reduction in overall labor costs. More than 1,700 workers have been laid off at the freight rail car assembly plant since 2006, with the remaining 660 workers on a four-day week. The United Steelworkers union, which represents the strikers, has accused National Steel Car of preparing to move its operations to a new plant in Alabama.

The strike comes amid growing layoffs in the steel industry in Ontario. The company cites fallout from the financial crisis that requires it to drive down manufacturing costs to meet new “market realities.” Union leaders commented that they had no appetite for a strike, but the latest company offer left them no choice.

Windsor cabbies strike