

Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 May 2009

Strike continues at University of Sonora

Administrative workers at the University of Sonora in northern Mexico are ending the second month of their strike with no resolution in site. The strikers, non-academic employees, are demanding a 25 percent raise. A striking worker quoted in the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* said, "There has not been a proper strike since 1988; we are looking for an opportunity to make up for what was lost."

University authorities are accusing the strikers of "striking against the students." They also insist that the university is not going to raise its wage raise offer of 8 percent, claiming its budget depends on government appropriations.

Meanwhile, in Central Mexico, a 97-day strike by 590 academic employees at the Postgraduate College, with campuses in Montecillo, Tabasco, Cordoba, Veracruz, San Luis Potosi and Puebla, ended last Friday after the school authorities agreed to add to the wage parity fund. The fund, which is set up to make up for a salary gap between the Center of Advanced Research and the Postgraduate College, was raised from 12.3 million pesos to 17.3 million pesos. In addition, the professors received a salary increase of 4.3 percent. Professors at the postgraduate college earn 70 percent of the salary earned by those at the Center of Advanced Research.

Peruvian miners end strike

Three hundred miners at the Quenuales Casapalca copper mine in Central Peru ended a nine-day strike on

Friday. At issue is wages and profit sharing bonuses already accrued by the workers, and which the company refuses to pay.

Early on in the strike it became clear to the miners that the Quenuales management was refusing to negotiate. In response, the strikers barricaded the Central Highway on May 18. An ensuing confrontation with security forces resulted in the injury of four miners.

Last Friday, as strikers were threatening another blockade, the Labor Ministry intervened. The strikers agreed to lift their strike while the Labor Ministry mediates the dispute.

Argentine gastronomic workers lift their strike during holiday weekend

Workers at Argentina's restaurants bars, school cafeterias, and factory lunch rooms lifted a strike after four days in response to an order for mandatory arbitration by the Labor Ministry. The strike ended just in time to make way for the four-day Independence Holiday weekend.

Gastronomic workers, who are demanding a 30 percent raise, confronted police in Buenos Aires earlier this month. Seventeen workers were injured in the confrontations and 60 were arrested.

The gastronomic workers were joined on Friday by bank employees, who carried out a five-hour protest. The bank workers' job action was the third this month. Bank employees are demanding a 25 percent raise. Inflation in Argentina was officially set at 17 percent last year, although many analysts say that in reality it was considerably higher.

Negotiations ordered in Pennsylvania school strike

An appeal by the Crestwood, Pennsylvania School Board was quashed May 23 by the Commonwealth Court and weekend negotiations between the school district and the union representing 118 striking school support staff workers were to go forward. One day earlier, Luzerne County Judge Peter Olszewski ordered an end to a five-day strike by the Crestwood Educational Support Professionals Association and mandated immediate negotiations between the union and school district to arrive at a settlement.

The union, which represents maintenance workers, custodians, secretaries, aides and monitors, originally struck May 18. The following day the union went to court charging the school district with using strikebreakers in an illegal manner to perform work normally done by support staff.

On May 21, strikers and supporters in the community showed up in full force at the regularly scheduled Crestwood school board meeting, where they verbally lambasted board members for having stonewalled contract negotiations with the union for eight years.

Pennsylvania power workers strike

Workers at Pennsylvania Electric Company (Penelec) walked out on strike May 21 after talks between Akron, Ohio-based FirstEnergy Corporation and the union representing 517 maintenance workers broke down over safety language and working conditions. Some 93 percent of members of Local 459 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) who attended the ratification meeting rejected the contract and voted to strike.

In addition to other concession demands, the company wants to overhaul working conditions and eliminate specific language it claims is too cumbersome. The IBEW says that the language being contested in the safety manual came about as the result of an accidental death by electrocution.

The membership of IBEW Local 459 represents workers who service 590,000 customers in 31 counties of northwestern and central Pennsylvania. Two other IBEW locals have also had contracts expire. Local 272, which represents 374 workers at the Bruce Mansfield plant in western Pennsylvania, saw its contract expire in February of 2008. The contract for Local 777, which represents 580

workers at Metropolitan Edison, expired April 30.

Newfoundland windows workers on strike

One hundred twenty-five workers at ACAN Windows in the town of Paradise on the eastern tip of Newfoundland went on strike May 21, with a unanimous strike mandate in what is rapidly becoming a bitter dispute over a new contract.

On the second day of the strike, police were called after a car reportedly hit a picket. According to the union, the incident ended when management was forced to evacuate a busload of replacement workers who had been brought in for the morning shift. The picketer was not seriously injured and the union has filed a complaint with police.

The workers, who are represented by the Fish, Food and Allied Workers' union (FFAW), are employed making windows and doors for ACAN and have been without a contract since last November. The main issues in the dispute are wages, benefits, insurance and sick leave.

Ontario Steelworkers strike

Around 200 members of the United Steelworkers (USW), employed by Florida-based Gerdau Amersteel in Cambridge, Ontario west of Toronto, went on strike May 23 after voting overwhelmingly to reject the company's final offer.

The main issue is the company's demand for a two-tiered wage structure mandating reduced pay and benefits for new hires. In addition, Gerdau is asking for the merging of job classifications and other concessions in job placement rights.



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