

Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 June 2009

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

Chilean teachers end three-week strike

On June 6, striking teachers in Chile voted to end a three-week strike. The 80,000 strikers will return to work this week.

The back-to-work vote took place after school authorities agreed to bonus payments. Teachers employed for 19 hours a week or less will receive 300,000 pesos (US\$535), while those who teach for 20 hours or more will receive 500,000 pesos (US\$892). While the agreement was approved in Chile as a whole, it was rejected in some communities. Most notably, teachers in the port city of Valparaiso voted against it. The Valparaiso teachers had been on strike for two months, one week more than the rest of the strikers.

The agreement is quite a bit less than the US\$2,080 that the teachers were demanding. The central government presided by Michelle Bachelet allegedly handed the bonus money to municipalities. Instead of paying the teachers, the money was diverted and never went to the public school teachers.

Mexican employer holds workers hostage to prevent strike

On June 5, managers and security guards forcibly held some 60 technical and blue-collar workers at a Ciudad Juarez sweatshop to prevent them from walking out in strike action. According to Jesús José Díaz

Monarrez, leader of the Northern Workers Front (FTN), the employer, Midland Company, intended to prevent workers from demanding better working conditions, a cafeteria, health services and better pay. Midland produces machine equipment for the oil industry.

The workers are contracted out to Midland by RJ Machine, are paid 672 pesos per week (about US\$52), and receive neither benefits nor bonuses. Furthermore, according to Monarrez, the plant lacks air conditioning, fire exits and a sprinkling system. It also lacks the medical services required by law for machine shop workers. In case of injury, the workers only have access to a single nurse, who is also a machine operator, and is only available to treat workers one hour per shift.

Peruvian miners to strike June 15

The National Federation of Peruvian Miners, Metal and Steel Workers (FNTMMSP) announced Saturday that there would be a national miners' strike June 15. The dispute is over three main demands: profit sharing, better pensions and the rehiring of workers sacked as a result of the global financial crisis.

The union is pressing for approval of pension legislation setting the retirement age for miners who work underground at 45 years. Those who work above ground would be able to retire at 50. It is demanding that the 9,750 miners laid off by Peruvian mine companies since November 4, 2008, be rehired.

Nurses locked out at New Jersey hospital

Nearly 700 nurses at a hospital in Englewood, New

Jersey, continued picketing after being locked out June 3. Local 5004 of the Union of Health Professionals and Allied Workers and negotiators for the Englewood Hospital and Medical Center failed to reach an agreement on economic issues and the union's request to increase nurse-to-patient ratios.

Negotiations resumed briefly June 3 but broke off despite the intervention of state and federal mediators. A hospital spokesperson claimed it was compelled to lock out workers after having contracted replacement workers in the expectation of a strike. One day before the contract expiration, however, the union withdrew its strike notice and asked for a contract extension that was refused by management.

Kellogg's is one of the largest multinationals of its kind with sales in excess of \$11 billion annually. In London, it produces more than half a million cartons of cereal a day for worldwide distribution.



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Workers picket Michigan construction sites

Members of Laborers Local 1075 picketed two construction sites in Port Huron, Michigan, after the contractors extended contracts with eight other unions but failed to do so with the Laborers. "They don't want to sit down and talk," said Local 1075 business agent Dan Husted. "It's up to them."

Work on the Port Huron Hospital project continued despite picketing. But when pickets showed up at the Marysville High School construction project, work by other trades came to a halt.

Kellogg's workers locked out

Around 480 workers, employed by Kellogg Canada Inc. in London, Ontario, were locked out June 5 after rejecting the company's final contract offer only hours before.

The company has sought to justify its refusal to raise wages and benefits by comparing its situation to that of the auto sector. The workers are represented by the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union (BCTGM). Negotiations for a new contract have been ongoing, and the contract has been extended twice since it expired in April.