

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Mexican firefighters on strike

On June 11, a hundred firefighters went on strike in the city of Naucalpán, in the state of México, over wages, benefits and working conditions. The strikers are demanding a 20 percent raise in wages, life insurance and medical insurance. Workers charge that Naucalpán mayor José Luis Durán has ignored their request despite promising five years ago to provide firefighters with regular hours of work and insurance policies.

Firefighters report that because they have no medical insurance, some have had to wait months recovering from work injuries, citing the case of Fernando Cervantes who never properly healed from leg injuries and now must walk with a cane.

Cervantes was injured in February at a fire at a retail store in Cuautitlán Izcalli. That fire resulted in the death of a female firefighter from the city of Tutitlán. A second firefighter, Onorio Gomez, spoke to reporters about a face injury that he sustained in March at a fire. He is still waiting for reconstructive surgery.

Carlos Gómez, who represents the civil protection unit of Naucalpán, denounced the strikers, claiming they are among the highest paid in the state of México. He charged the strike with being politically motivated and related to the coming congressional election.

Argentine metal workers to strike this week

The Metallurgical Workers Union (UOM) will launch a national strike on June 16. The union is demanding an increase of 22 percent in wages retroactive to April 1; the increase would apply through April 2010. Alternatively, union sources indicated that they would accept 2,000 pesos (US\$540) in five installments, as long as management agrees to no layoffs. According to a UOM press release, “Management is hiding behind the international crisis and does not agree to a raise.”

Chile: Retail workers strike in Santiago

Two hundred retail workers at the Falabella stores in downtown Santiago went on strike on June 10 over wages and working conditions. The negotiations are at an impasse. Strikers say management is ignoring their demand for better wages and working conditions, instead offering a one-time bonus.

Earlier this year, Falabella cited the global financial crisis to get employees to accept a wage cut and a reduction in hours. Falabella is an upscale retail firm with stores in Chile, Argentina, Perú and Colombia.

Chile: Police attack striking miners

Copper miners in the town of Tambillo in northern Chile, on strike for six weeks, face attack from Peruvian security forces, who last week evicted them and their families from a camp they had erected. Eyewitness reports indicate that the Carabineros used excessive force. Six women were arrested and tents were destroyed. Children and elderly people were chased through the hills by motorcycle-mounted

Carabineros, recalling the days of the Pinochet dictatorship.

The strike began on May 1, when 100 workers, who had not been paid for April, walked off their jobs. Since then, mine managers have refused to negotiate. In addition to their back pay, the strikers are demanding a 10 percent wage increase on top of a cost-of-living increase for this year, and a series of safety measures.

Strike at Oklahoma air force base continues

The strike by 770 aircraft maintenance workers at Vance Air Force Base in Enid, Oklahoma, continued over the weekend as negotiations between the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and CSC Applied Technologies LLC failed to resolve the walkout. IAM Local 898 struck CSC and three of its subcontractors on June 8 after failing to reach an agreement on issues such as vacations, paid time off, seniority and forced overtime.

The forced overtime issue came to the forefront after 23 percent of the base's workers were laid off during 2008. The two sides also failed in an attempt to get a 30-day bridge agreement that would allow strikers to return to work while a new contract could be worked out to replace the previous three-year agreement.

The strike has brought flying operations at the base to a halt.

Union charges Wisconsin officials with harassment

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 139 alleged that Swiss Township personnel harassed a union member over participation in a strike at a construction site in Danbury, Wisconsin. Other union members witnessed the harassment, claiming that officials were attempting to single out the worker, claiming he instigated the strike.

Tensions on the picket line heightened last week when SJ Louis Construction, the company managing a project to provide water and sewer services for the local

village, casino and reservation, attempted to bring in nonunion workers to replace strikers. The union filed unfair labor practice charges against SJ Louis after launching their strike on June 1.

Montreal cemetery workers on strike

In the latest in a series of job actions, 29 workers at the largest cemetery in the country, Notre Dame des Neiges Cemetery in downtown Montreal, went on strike June 12 after being without a contract since December of last year.

According to the union representing the mostly female office workers, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), the strikers are seeking equal treatment with their male counterparts, including improvements in job security and pensions. Although the strike was only set to last three days, further actions are planned in the coming weeks.

Vancouver library workers win first contract

After nearly a year of negotiations, 135 workers with three branches of the North Vancouver District Library have won the right to a collective agreement with their employer.

Terms of the new contract have not been released pending a ratification to be held at the end of the month. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which now represents the workers, says the deal is comparable with similar ones in the region.



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