

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 June 2009

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

Argentinean teachers strike

The six unions that represent teachers in Corrientes Province in northeastern Argentina issued a call on June 19 for a walkout to press for wage increases. Teachers rallied the same day at the Education Department in the city of Corrientes. The strikers are demanding base pay for teachers of about \$300 per month. While most teachers get paid a premium over base pay, retirement pensions are calculated based on that amount. They are also demanding the return of wages deducted from them during a previous strike.

Mexican gold miners return to work

On June 15 striking miners at the El Cubo gold mine in Guanajuato, Mexico voted to return to work and end a two-week strike against demands by Canadian-owned Gammon Gold to lengthen the working day to ten hours over 15 days, followed by five days off. Four hundred twenty miners walked off their jobs April 29, also demanding an eight percent wage increase.

Workers voted 300-120 for the deal, with many miners reporting they were pressured in order to keep their jobs.

Union officials ignored the substantial opposition from workers and collaborated in the passage of the new work schedule "The union has decided to allow this experiment to see how things work out," declared union leader Teodoro Landin,

Colombia remains the most repressive nation against union activists

According to a report released on June 10 by the Brussels-based International Union Confederation (IUC), more union activists were executed in Colombia than in any other country for the second year in a row. The report indicates that 49 union leaders were killed in 2008, ten more than in 2007.

Among those assassinated was Guillermo Rivera Fúquene who was the president of the Bogota Public Employees Union. His body was discovered three months after he was kidnapped in the Colombian capital. José Omar Galeano Martinez, a leader of the lottery workers union and an active campaigner against the privatization of the state-run lottery, was gunned down on August 23, 2008. A third leader, Leonidad Gómez Roso, head of the Citibank employees union, was assassinated in Bogotá the day after a national day of protests against paramilitary violence, a movement in which he had a leadership role.

The UCI report points out, that employers have institutionalized strikebreaking and union busting. It also described how the right-wing government of President Álvaro Uribe, a close ally of the Bush and Obama administrations, utilizes the war on drugs as a pretext for the repression of labor struggles, including last September's strike by 15,000 sugar cane cutters in the Cauca Valley. Uribe, who had declared that "dark forces" had infiltrated the strike movement, sent troops to occupy the valley and began judicial proceedings against the strikers. The report also denounced transnational corporations operating in Colombia, including US-owned Goodyear and Spanish-owned Unión Fenosa, for assisting in the repression.

Aerospace workers strike Texas helicopter manufacturer

Workers at Bell Helicopter plants in the Fort Worth, Texas area walked out on June 15 after rejecting a new three-year contract that threatened jobs and imposed heavy cuts in health care. Despite offers of three percent wages increases in the second and third year of the contract, a \$4,500 signing bonus and an 11 percent cost-of-living adjustment, 2,500 members of United Auto Workers Local 218 voted down the agreement by a 1,177 to 680 margin.

The rejection came despite the endorsement of the deal by the Local 218 leadership. “We all were surprised,” 20-year veteran Marty Krantz told the *Dallas Morning News* of the union’s endorsement. Krantz opposed contract language that would have allowed Bell Helicopter to outsource 44 janitorial jobs, believing it would open the door to more job cuts. “First it was janitorial; then it’s something else,” he said. Workers also said the attempt to shift health care costs onto their backs would largely wipe out the bonus.

Bell Helicopter is a division of Textron, Inc., and manufactures the V-22 Osprey and H-1 military helicopters.

Two-day strike by Minnesota roofers to protest safety conditions

Non-union workers installing a green roof on top of the Target Center arena in Minneapolis, Minnesota ended a two-day strike June 15 against unsafe working conditions. The list of complaints of workers against Stock Roofing included a failure to provide proper safety harnessing, lack of masks to protect against hazardous dust, working night shifts with no artificial lighting and the use of layoffs, demotions or threats of firing against workers who complained about safety issues.

A third of the predominantly immigrant workforce joined the strike, which was joined by sympathizers from Roofers Local 96. Celso Alvarado, a foreman with five years at Stock Roofing, went to the union to discuss the safety issues. “Enough was enough. I was afraid one of us was going to get hurt or killed. I had to let someone know how Stock Roofing was treating us.”

A union representative told the local media, “Underfunded projects are putting workers at risk. It’s a disgrace that economic times are so tough that Minneapolis allows contractors to reduce costs by dangerously cutting

corners.” According to Local 96, Stock Roofing’s bid for work on the Target Center came in \$1 million less than other contractors.

***Globe and Mail* workers threaten strike action**

Nearly 500 editorial, circulation, and advertising workers at the *Globe and Mail* have voted to go on strike as early as July 1 to counter the concession demands of the newspaper’s owners, the billionaire Thomson family.

Management is demanding a six-year contract including what management calls a compounded salary increase of 7.2 percent over the life of the contract. In fact it is seeking to impose wage cuts. The *Globe* is demanding an unpaid half-hour per day lengthening of the workday, overtime paid at straight time for the first half-hour, and that all employees take one week off per year without pay. Even leaving aside these concession demands, the *Globe* is proposing to cut the pay of 125 non-editorial employees.

Brad Honywill, the president of Local 87-M of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, which the represents *Globe* workers, has indicated the union is ready to settle if management withdraws its concession demands or even some of them. “The *Globe* [union] bargaining committee,” said Honywill in announcing the 97 percent vote in favor of strike action “recognizes that we’re in difficult economic times. They have very modest proposals.”

Based in Toronto, the *Globe* is one of Canada’s two nationally distributed newspapers and is generally considered the country’s “newspaper of record.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact