

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 VW workers threaten to strike

Victor Cervantes, president of the Independent Auto Union of VW Workers (SITIAVW), declared last week that union members will walk out on August 18 if the company maintains its zero-percent wage offer. The company is claiming it is facing financial difficulties as a result of the economic crisis. “We are prepared to strike if the company does not change its mind,” said Cervantes. SITIAVW is demanding an 8.25 percent wage increase.

Jose Antonio Lopez Malo Capellini, who heads the Ministry of Economic Development in Mexico, called on Volkswagen and its workers to avoid a strike or a lockout this year. Lopez acknowledged that, given the current global economic crisis, VW may find a short strike in its interests as a way of reducing inventory.

Volkswagen employs about 10,000 union workers in its assembly plant in the city of Puebla. Lopez estimates that 40,000 families depend on the VW plant and related parts plants and suppliers.

Oil workers’ strike in Argentina in second week

On August 16, a strike by 6,000 oil workers in the Patagonian province of Santa Cruz entered its second week. The strikers are confronting a group of oil

companies—Repsol YPF, Occidental, Petrobras and Sipetrol—and are demanding a 25 percent wage increase. The companies—which have offered 20 percent—are threatening to shut down production and leave the province entirely.

Mexico: Acelor Mittal strike in second week

Workers at the Acelor Mittal steel plant are in their second week on strike. The strike, which began on August 1, is at an impasse with management demanding the sacking of 750 workers—20 percent of the labor force—in return for a wage increase.

Bemis workers reject offer, continue strike

Workers at the Bemis Company packaging plant in Terre Haute, Indiana, rejected a new company offer August 13 and will continue their nearly four-week strike. Workers continue to oppose a Bemis demand for the maintenance of a temporary, seasonal workforce at lower pay and reduced health care benefits.

Bill Kirby, president of Workers United Local 1426, told *mywabashvalley.com* that the contract was rejected by a “large majority” and “They decided to take a little bit of money away from us. They decided to increase our premiums on the health care. They decided to keep in the temporary workers.... They need to hire them full time, pay them full wages and benefits that job earns.”

The company has also insisted on health screenings for both workers and their families, but union members “feel it is too intrusive in people’s private lives and family history,” said Kirby.

No new negotiations have been scheduled. Bemis, which operates 61 plants in 11 countries and employs more than 15,000 workers, had sales of \$3.8 million in 2008.

Union calls off scheduled BART strike

A few hours before a 12:01 a.m. Monday deadline, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 1555 announced it had reached a settlement with the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) authority and was calling off a planned strike by 900 BART workers in the San Francisco-Oakland area. A strike would have affected some 330,000 riders who use the nation's fifth largest rail system on weekdays. Operators and ticket agents—who rejected a concessions contract last week—still have to ratify the pact.

Facing a \$310 million deficit over the next four years, BART is seeking \$100 million in labor cost savings, including \$38 million from Local 1555. The ATU announced its members would strike Monday after BART's board of directors imposed work terms that the union says amount to a 7 percent pay cut. BART officials said the new deal will allow them to meet their cost-cutting target.

Sudbury nickel workers' strike enters second month

More than 3,300 workers at Vale Inco are continuing their walkout at one of the world's largest nickel mines in Sudbury, Ontario, and a smaller operation in Port Colbourne, Ontario. The strike began July 13 after workers—members of the United Steelworkers union (USW)—turned down a contract that demanded concessions in pension benefits, bonuses tied to nickel prices and seniority. Vale Inco spokesman Steve Ball insisted, “until the USW accepts the need for change in our business to help us secure a long-term and sustainable operation, then there is little possibility of the resumption of negotiations, let alone any possibility

of mediation.”

Toronto airport janitors strike

Three hundred janitorial workers at Toronto's Pearson International Airport walked off the job August 14, and another 100 are in a position to join them later on. Janitors and cleaners at Terminal 1—who have been without a contract since June 30—walked off the job after rejecting the latest contract offer.



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