

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Puerto Rican unions threaten an indefinite national strike

Puerto Rican unions and community organizations have threatened to organize a national strike of indefinite duration as part of the fight against the sacking of at least 17,000 public employees.

On October 15 the unions carried out a one-day general strike to protest the layoffs. Several demonstrations have also taken place in the capital San Juan, including one last Saturday through the old part of the city.

Governor Luis Fortuño has postponed until January the layoff of 7,191 workers that was supposed to take place last Friday.

Chilean teachers continue strike as public employees stage walkout

Public school teachers in Chile, on strike since October 23, announced on Sunday a set of conditions that, if met by the government, would end their walkout. The proposal includes a one-time payment of US\$1,500 to each of the 84,000 strikers and the payment in installment over the next two years of the so-called “historic debt,” owed to teachers since the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. The Chilean government, which has refused to recognize that the debt exists, offered the strikers a one-time payment of US \$18.86 if they returned to work.

In addition strike leaders are demanding that teachers be

paid their salary for each day that they were on strike.

Meanwhile, the National Fiscal Employees Union (ANEF) has organized a 24-hour strike for November 9. The union is demanding an 8 percent raise and 10 percent for the lowest paid public officials. This is considerably higher than the government offer of 2.5 percent. Last week 450,000 ANEF members carried out a 48-hour strike.

Mexican electricians to strike this week

The National leader of the Mexican Electricians Union (SME), Martín Esparza Flores, declared on Sunday that union and peasant federations will strike on November 11 as the first step toward a national strike to protest the closure of Luz y Fuerza Centro, the government utility that provided electricity to Mexico City and Central Mexico. The utility was shut down by government troops on October 11.

At the time, President Felipe Calderón offered severance pay to the 44,000 sacked employees, SME members, that accepted their dismissal. Esparza estimates that about 40 percent of the workers have taken the severance offer. The Mexican government claims that over 50 percent of the workers have accepted the deal.

New talks following 3-day strike by San Francisco hotel workers

New talks are scheduled this week between negotiators for San Francisco’s Grand Hyatt Union Square and the union representing some 300 hotel workers who carried out a three-day strike beginning November 6 over health

care issues. Workers want to defend the past policy whereby the hotel pays all health care insurance costs for single workers and workers with families can insure dependents for ten dollars a month.

Hyatt, citing a tripling of health care costs in the past ten years, is seeking a five-year contract that will cap its costs per worker per month at \$1,235 and impose all charges above that amount on the backs of workers.

The 300 striking workers at Hyatt are only a fraction of the 6,000 San Francisco hotel workers represented by UNITE HERE Local 2 whose contracts expired back in August. The union has targeted Hyatt in an effort to establish a contract that can be used as a pattern for other hotels. The strike was launched on the same day that Hyatt stocks became eligible for trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

Vancouver area transit workers on strike

Four hundred and fifty drivers and about 50 office and maintenance staff with HandyDart went on strike at end of October against concession demands by their employer, an American based company bus company, which recently transformed the service to for-profit from non-profit.

MVT Canadian Bus Inc., which runs HandyDart in the greater Vancouver area providing transportation for the sick and the disabled, is offering wages well below those of other transit operators. It is also trying to cut benefits and contract out work now done by unionized employees.

HandyDart workers delivered a vote of 97 percent in favor of strike action to their union, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) after eight months of negotiations with MVT.



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