

# **Workers Struggles: The Americas**

25 November 2009

## **College employees strike in México**

Members of the Independent National Union of Bachilleres School Workers (SITBC) have been on strike for over one month at 20 campuses across Mexico. Negotiations are at a stand-still. Strikers say that no deal will be struck until the school authorities present a 'more flexible' proposal.

The network of Bachilleres Schools provides post-secondary school education for 120,000 students across Mexico.

SITBC leader Francisco Anaya declared that management intends to level off salaries rather than reclassify teachers in a higher pay scale. The union plans to mass picket government offices and the presidential palace.

The government has threatened to declare the strike illegal on December 1.

## **Mexican unions prepare for general strike**

Last Saturday, the National Assembly of Popular Resistance, composed of unions and community organizations in solidarity with the Electrical Workers Union (SME), announced that it is creating committees at the national and state level to plan out a general strike.

It also approved a plan of action that includes the 'symbolic occupation' of Mexico City on December 4 and a Social Congress on December 12 and 13. The ultimate purpose of the Congress is to amend the

Mexican Constitution.

The Assembly opposes the closure by President Felipe Calderón of Luz y Fuerza Centro, the electric utility that served Mexico City and Central Mexico, as well as the process that has led to the privatization of enterprises linked to the distribution of electricity across México.

On November 11 hundreds of thousands of Mexicans protested the closure of the utility and denounced the Calderón administration.

## **Chilean teachers return to work**

On November 19 public and private school teachers in Chile returned to work after nearly a month on strike without winning their main demand. The strike began October 23.

The main issue was money owed the teachers since 1981, when the Pinochet dictatorship transferred the schools from the central government to municipal control. The transfer prevented teachers from receiving wage increases that they would have otherwise gotten.

## **Ohio bakery workers protest concession demands**

Bakery workers in Zanesville, Ohio picketed three Wendy's fast food restaurants to bring pressure against their employer, New Bakery, which is attempting to take away pensions, reduce vacation time and axe seniority rights. New Bakery, which employs 150 workers who belong to Local 57 of the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers & Grain Millers International Union, supplies buns to Wendy's.

Doug McQuaid, one of the pickets, told the *Zanesville Times Recorder*, “If the company has its way, there will be no seniority and the new guys will never be able to move up. Or what they’d like is to see the old guys go away and give the new guys the position with less pay and no benefits.”

Brad Dudley, another picketer, said, “We understand that times are tough and each and every one of us appreciates having a job. We’re not asking for a raise. We’re just asking that our pensions stay safe and our benefits stay in place.”

### **American Airlines flight attendants protest stalled contract talks**

Hundreds of American Airlines flight attendants set up informational pickets at 12 airports last week, including Dallas-Fort Worth and San Francisco, to protest the failure of 18 months of mediated talks to reach an agreement. An American Airlines spokesperson declared that 72 percent of contract issues have been resolved.

But Laura Glading, president of the Association of Professional Flight Attendants (APFA), has charged that the airline has yet to make an offer on wages and benefits. “The company has been preaching that any new contract must be zero sum, meaning that any improvements must be offset by further concessions,” Glading told the *Dallas Morning News*. “This is unacceptable.”

The two sides are scheduled for a new round of bargaining in January. The APFA said that if talks fail, they would request the National Mediation Board to release them from talks, paving the way for a cooling off period and a possible strike.

Flight attendants suffered a 33 percent pay cut in 2003 as part of a concessions package surrendered by all airline workers when American Airlines went into bankruptcy. Since then, flight attendants have been only receiving annual 1.5 percent annual raises.

### **Auto workers blockade Windsor plant**

At least 200 members of the Canadian Auto Workers union, set up a blockade at Aramco, a closed auto parts plant in the southwestern Ontario city of Windsor, to prevent the sale of assets at the plant where many of them were formerly employed.

Aramco was closed along with its sister plant, Aradco, by Catalina Precision Products last spring, and the workers who lost their jobs occupied the plant to get outstanding monies in excess of \$2.5 million owed to them under Ontario law. While Chrysler Canada finally agreed to contribute a small portion of that debt to the workers, the remainder is still unpaid.

With the imminent auctioning of the remaining machinery and equipment, workers have again directly intervened to bring the company to account. In addition to blockading the two plants, workers demonstrated outside the Radisson Hotel, forcing a postponement of the auction originally set for November 17.



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