

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 unions threaten general strike

At a rally December 3 at the Revolution Monument in Mexico City, Agusti N. Rodrigues, leader of the Union of Autonomous University Employees (STUNAM) called on the trade unions to unite in a general strike. The rally, which involved several thousand workers, was billed by its organizers as a “symbolic public take-over of Mexico City.”

The December 3 rally included delegations from unions outside Mexico City, including thousands of public school teachers from Oaxaca in southwestern Mexico, where district 22 of the National Teachers Union (SNTE) shut down 14,000 schools so that its members could mobilize in Mexico City. The city of Oaxaca was the scene of massive labor protests in 2006.

Meanwhile, Amezcua Castillo, a union bureaucrat from the Electrical Workers Union (SME), confidently declared that the union would prevail in the courts this Thursday, reversing the closure of the Mexico City utility Luz y Fuerza Centro. In the event that the union does not prevail, Castillo vowed that SME would continue protesting in the streets of Mexico City.

Bolivian miners occupy mine

A group of fifteen silver miners in Potosi, Bolivia, occupied the offices of Manquiri Corporation, a subsidiary of Coeur D’Alene, a US mining corporation, and began a hunger strike. The main issues behind the protest are salary

demands and year-end bonuses.

Manquiri is the principal company that operates the mines in Cerro Rico, in Potosi, along with 30 mine cooperatives.

Ecuadorian tire workers end two-month-long occupation

Workers employed by the Ecuadorian Rubber Company (ERCO) ended the occupation of the company’s Cuenca plant December 4. ERCO management has accused the sit-down strikers of causing an increase in tire prices by preventing the production of 350,000 tires.

The occupation began two months ago when plant managers installed an ‘Integrated Manufacturing System,’ a system designed to intensify labor exploitation through speed-up. The plant workers rejected the system and took over the plant.

Railway workers strike in Chile

Last Wednesday 800 train operators in Chile walked off the jobs to protest the firing of one of their fellow workers. A few hours later the train operators were joined by stewards, conductors and technicians. The striking train operators insist that the fired worker was falsely blamed for an accident that was not his fault.

The walkout paralyzed passenger service between Santiago and the southern city of Chillan, and cities in between. Also interrupted was passenger service in the Biobio and Araucania regions.

A march and rally are planned for this Thursday.

Rebellion aboard Florida cruise ship

Crew members of a gambling cruise ship that operates out of Palm Beach, Florida came onto the deck to protest working conditions and pay issues December 2. The following day, management of the Palm Beach Princess, which flies the Panamanian flag to avoid US taxes and labor laws, claimed it had resolved the dispute.

The 150 foreign workers, many from the Philippines, say they labor under “Third World” conditions. Workers typically sign 10-month contracts that require 6 ½-day weeks and 12-hour days. Aside from their tips, waitresses earn \$50 a month and casino workers earn \$13 a day. Deck and engine workers earn about \$400 a month. Workers report late paychecks and trouble collecting overtime.

According to a manager, some crew members have worked aboard the Princess for decades. But the cruise operation has gone through three bankruptcies and management is constantly slashing costs in an effort to squeeze out profits.

Philadelphia Red Cross workers strike

American Red Cross workers who warehouse and deliver blood in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania went on strike December 4 when negotiations between management and Teamsters Local 929 failed to resolve complaints of understaffing and overwork by the 110-member bargaining unit. The Teamsters charge that pay cuts and 12- to 14-hour shifts, with workers forced to work seven or more consecutive days, are creating unsafe working conditions.

Management, which has suspended pay raises for non-union workers, is now seeking to impose cuts on Teamster members. Anthony Tornetta, a Red Cross spokesperson, declared, “We are simply asking union employees to make the same sacrifices that their non-union colleagues have already made.”

Workers are especially incensed at claims by Red Cross management that they are endangering people’s lives by picketing. Hospitals have not reported any blood shortages since the strike broke out.

Five-day CN rail strike ends

Within hours of the passage of federal back-to-work legislation, the five-day-old strike by 1,700 locomotive engineers at Canadian National Railway (CN) came to an end December 2 with an agreement to settle outstanding differences through negotiations or arbitration.

The engineers had been without a contract since the end of last year. They went on strike after CN arbitrarily imposed changes to their work rules that would have meant large job losses. According to the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC), which bargains for the strikers, the company agreed only at the last minute to withdraw those changes. It is unclear how many outstanding issues will still be sent to arbitration as demanded by the company.

Northern Union workers set to strike

Employees of the Union of Northern Workers (UNW) in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories could be on strike by the end of the week over the issue of job classifications after rejecting the territorial government’s final offer last week.

The 10 office workers affected are members of the United Steelworkers union and have been without a contract since March. A spokesman for the UNW, which represents government workers in the Northwest Territories, says it will be cutting pay to the workers next week to pressure them into accepting the deal it has offered.



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