

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

Ecuador: Unions threaten to strike in January

Santiago Yagual, president of the Workers Confederation of Ecuador (CTE), warned over the weekend that unless the government raises the monthly minimum wages from US\$218 to US\$320 there will be a national strike. The so-called “unified wage” is based on a measure of living standards. The trade unions are demanding that the unified wage represent at least 60 percent of the estimated US\$522 that is minimally required for an Ecuadoran family.

Yagual indicated that on December 19 a national labor convention will set the strike date. He also said that the CTE would entertain no lesser wage offer.

Parallel trade union organizations, the Workers United Front (FUT) and the Workers General Union (UGT), also echoed the strike call.

Mexico: Electricians union postpones strike until 2010

The Mexican Electricians Union (SME) has postponed until January 2010 setting a date for a national protest strike against the November 10 closure of Central Mexico’s Electricity Company by President Felipe Calderón that resulted in the layoff of 44,000 workers.

The decision took place on December 12, the same day that Supreme Court Judge Guillermina Coutino

Mata denied the union’s demand that the decision be reversed on the constitutional ground that the national government had usurped powers that belong to Mexico City. SME leaders declared that the court’s decision did not come as a surprise, and that it would not stop the workers from continuing to mobilize and escalate their struggle.

Despite massive support for the fired electrical workers from workers and students from every corner of Mexico, the SME and the Mexican union bureaucracy have repeatedly postponed a national strike call. Instead, the SME leaders have declared their willingness to arrive at a negotiated solution with Calderón’s Ministry of Government.

Copper miners strike in Chile

Miners at the Chuquicamata copper mine—property of the state-owned Codelco Corporation—walked off their jobs at 4 a.m. last Wednesday in response to a Codelco announcement of a list of takeaway demands. The ensuing 25-hour wildcat strike, which ended when Codelco management withdrew its proposal, was a signal, according to union leader Victor Gualleguillos, that the workers are ready to strike once their collective bargaining agreement expires on December 31.

Chilean labor law, much of it imposed by the Pinochet dictatorship before 1989, restricts so-called legal strikes to the period following the expiration of a contract. Even then, the miners are constrained by state mandated arbitration rules. Codelco negotiators are expected to make their final offer on December 24.

The Chuquicamata copper mine is Codelco’s largest. It is located near the border with Peru and employs 6,500 miners. During the strike the miners set up

roadblocks barring access to the facility.

Arkansas school district escalates attack on teachers following decertification

The Pulaski County Special School District Board covering areas of the county outside of Little Rock, Arkansas, escalated its war against the district's 1,380 teachers December 11 by boosting pay for substitute teachers. One day earlier, nearly 700 teachers launched a one-day walkout to protest the board's 4-2 decision to decertify the union.

In response to the walkout, the board moved to raise pay for substitutes to \$100. Previously regular substitutes received \$55 per day, and certified substitutes collected \$75. The board also is considering paying a \$50 bonus to teachers who did not join the walkout.

The union's current contract contains language that the union is certified providing a majority of the district's teachers are union members. Currently, about 70 percent of the teachers maintain union cards. This is the third time the union has been decertified since 2004.

If the union decertification holds, the only Arkansas teachers covered by union contracts would be in the Fort Smith and Little Rock districts.

Toronto welfare offices occupied

Amid a media campaign condemning the practice by some doctors of supplementing the intolerably low welfare payments by prescribing a Special Diet Benefit to recipients of social assistance, 150 people occupied the municipal offices of Toronto's Metro Hall last week for several hours.

The welfare recipients were joined by social activists from the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), who said that they were trying to bring pressure on the Ontario government to raise welfare rates that were slashed over a decade ago and never restored.

The occupation took place as the ranks of the poor and the use of food banks in the country's largest city continue to grow in what is being called a jobless recovery.



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