

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 electricians' union threatens to strike next month

Officials of the electrical utility workers union (SME) met over the weekend to plan out a national strike against the labor policy of President Felipe Calderon. On October 11, Calderon shut down the Central Utility Company that supplied Mexico City and Central Mexico with electricity, sacking 44,000 SME members. The displaced workers have been offered a severance package. Since then, the SME has appealed to the courts and organized massive demonstrations in Mexico City.

The attack on the SME workers is taking place in the context of proposed labor reforms favored by the Mexican ruling class that, in the name of labor flexibility, will reduce living standards and job security.

Argentine oil workers protest

Hundreds of oil workers, formerly employed by the Spanish energy company YPF, barricaded National Highway 40 in the Andean Province of Mendoza on December 21. The workers are demanding payment of a historic debt that the federal government owes them. YPF workers have fought for years over this debt.

The debt stems from YPF's privatization in 1997. Workers were never compensated for their ownership share in YPF when they were laid off as a consequence

of the merger between YPF and Spanish oil company Repsol. The 3,800 former YPF workers are each owed 220,000 pesos, about US\$10,000.

Chile: copper workers strike

Union workers at the Altonorte copper smelter are on strike this week. The metal processing plant employs 274 workers and processes 232,000 tons of copper each year. The main issue in the strike is wages. Strikers indicated that the company has reduced its wage offer, perhaps as a way of provoking the strike.

Altonorte management announced that it was taking advantage of the strike to carry out maintenance activities in the plant, a procedure done every 30 months. The smelter is owned by Xstrata, a Swiss transnational. Earlier this year, Xstrata shut down a similar facility in Canada, claiming overcapacity in copper inventories.

San Diego taxi cab drivers strike

Non-union Yellow Cab drivers launched a strike over the weekend of December 19-20 to protest weekly leasing fees of up to \$865. By the beginning of the week, some 150 out of the city's 1,000 taxis had been parked.

Striking taxi driver Hakeen Kalif told *SignOnSanDiego.com* he is fortunate if he can make \$50 during a 12-hour shift. A Yellow Cab driver since 1996, he said, "You could make good money driving a cab then. Our job now is tough."

Yellow Cab has sold most of its cars to private

operators. In turn, the operators lease the cars. But Yellow Cab still operates its dispatch service. Some cab owners are calling on Yellow Cab to reduce its radio dispatch service fees in order for them to reduce leasing fees to drivers.

Massachusetts's linen plant strike ends with new contract

Workers at Angelica Corp. textile plant in Somerville, Massachusetts, have returned to work after voting December 15 by a 231-3 margin to ratify a new three-year contract and end their six-day strike. The new agreement, negotiated by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445, called for wage increases of 45 cents in the first year and 40 cents in each of the two remaining years that will augment the current average wage of \$9.46 an hour.

The company agreed to raise its portion of coverage for the family health plan from 73 percent to 80 percent, short of the 85 percent that workers were demanding. Angelica also agreed to boost hourly payments to pensions from the current 10 cents to 20 cents in 2010 and 30 cents in 2012. The company agreed to 12 weeks of paid maternity leave at \$250 per week.

Some 400 predominantly immigrant workers struck the Somerville facility December 10. Angelica operates more than two dozen facilities and provides linen services for the health care industry.

Workers occupy closed plant

At least 100 workers briefly occupied an air conditioning plant in Mississauga, west of Toronto, on December 21 when they were handed news of a company shutdown with pay still owing.

The company did not reply to inquiries from the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW), which represents the workers at M&I Air Systems, a company that manufactures air-moving systems for buildings.

The company had apparently refused to pay workers for the previous week unless they agreed to work over the weekend to deliver a final contract for a customer.

The CAW brought the occupation to an end after a few hours. According to the union, workers have not been told what will become of overtime, severance and holiday pay they are owed.



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