

Workers Struggles: The Americas

26 January 2010

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

Mexico: University workers cancel strike call

A few hours after the closing of the polls a majority of university workers in Mazatlan, Sinaloa voted in favor of lifting the threat of a strike scheduled for January 22.

Authorities had offered a 4 percent raise and a 2.5 percent retroactive raise for 2009. The raise would cover over 1,500 workers in two categories: academic and administrative.

Among the principal issues were tuition payments, medical costs and housing.

Mexican pilots grant strike authorization at Aeromexico

The Airplane Pilots Association of Mexico (ASPA) agreed January 21 to give its executive committee authority to approve a strike at Aeromexico due to the airline's failure to honor various contract provisions. Fernando Perfecto, leader of ASPA, told El Universal that despite the unanimous vote for this measure, the executive committee, conscious of the situation that is affecting the country's airline industry, would put dialogue with the company first. "Calling a strike will not take place until all avenues of dialog have been exhausted," said Perfecto.

Over 830 pilots are involved in the controversy. Over the last three pay periods, Aeromexico has not made payments for life insurance, major medical expenses and loss of pilots' licenses, including contributions that the company deducts from workers' salaries that go to their retirement savings. Perfecto added that the firm did not hand over to the union dues of 3 percent of base salary collected from each pilot.

Unemployed organizations in Argentina demand inclusion in work program

Organizations demanding their inclusion in the Plan Argentina Trabaja (Argentine Work Plan) have warned that if they do not get a prompt response from the government they will carry out a new protest beginning Tuesday, blocking streets and roads throughout the country.

Among the groups demanding enrollment in the program are Teresa Vive, an organization of the unemployed, el Bloque Piquetero Nacional (National Picketers Bloc), Polo Obrero and Frente de Lucha (Struggle Front).

With an official unemployment rate of around 8 percent, the Argentine government launched a limited jobs program late last year. To qualify, a worker must be under the age of 24. The program pays 1,200 pesos (about US\$300) a month, while the minimum wage is 1,500 pesos (about US\$375) per month.

Activists from the various groups demanded that they be included in enrollment for the program, beginning in February. Gustavo Gimenez, coordinator of Teresa Vive, told Infobae.com that "in the face of the lack of response and uncontrolled inflation, the mood of the people couldn't be worse." He added that if the government does not respond by Tuesday, "We will go out to the plazas, the streets and the highways all over the country."

Peru: Haulage and bus drivers strike

Haulage drivers in Peru have declared an indefinite strike over the rising cost of fuel and the rejection of open talks by the Transportation Ministry. Spokesmen for the National Overland Transportation Council (Consejo Nacional de Transporte Terrestre) demand the elimination of the "Selective Tax on Consumption" (Impuesto Selectivo al Consumo) or the reduction of the price of Diesel 2 fuel. The Trade Union of Bus Drivers and Conductors also declared a 24-hour strike.

Alfonso Rivas, chairman of the National Overland Transportation Council, declared that despite the talks the government did not agree to meet its demands about the STC or fuel prices.

As has been the case in other strikes in recent years, the haulage and bus drivers' strike has been felt more widely in the country's provinces than in the capital of Lima. The media has reported that bus stations in Lima have been fully operational during the day while, in contrast, the strike has had a heavy impact in provinces such as Arequipa, Tacna, Arequipa, Cusco, La Libertad, Lambayeque and Huancayo.

Brazilian electrical workers end 24-hour strike

Electrical workers for the state-owned company Furnas in Sao Paulo have ended their strike and returned to work. The 24-hour work stoppage began January 21. A spokesperson for the electrical workers union told *BNamerica* that “all the workers have returned to their posts. The union and Furnas have not come to an agreement and the workers will soon vote on whether or not to call another strike.”

About 3,000 workers had gone on strike in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo over the company’s failure to honor some of the terms of the Charges and Salary Plan (PCS). The union and Furnas will go back to the bargaining table.

Symphony musicians face calls for concessions

Musicians at major symphony orchestras are facing demands for pay cuts as the economic crisis puts strains on arts and cultural organizations. Member of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra have given strike authorization as talks continue past the December 31 contract expiration. Musicians unanimously voted down management’s offer of a five-year contract, which included a 10 percent pay cut.

Last week members of the Cleveland symphony carried out a one-day strike over management demands for a 5 percent pay cut in the first year of a three-year contract. The settlement includes a pay freeze in the first two years and a small wage increase the third year. The 101 musicians agreed to donate 10 extra rehearsals or concerts without compensation in exchange for management withdrawing its pay cut demand. The value of the Cleveland symphony’s endowment has dropped from \$142.7 million in 2007 to \$97 million at present.

Musicians at a number of major orchestras have taken pay cuts over the past year. In Baltimore, musicians took a 12.5 percent pay cut; Cincinnati, 11 percent; Philadelphia, 10 percent. Musicians at the Atlanta Symphony orchestra will take a 5 percent pay cut this year and an additional 3.8 percent cut in 2011.

Other major orchestras face dire financial situations, including the New York Philharmonic, which faces a \$4.6 million deficit, and the Philadelphia Symphony, which says it is considering bankruptcy after seeing the value of its endowment fall by more than 50 percent.

New agreement ends Illinois teachers’ four-day strike

Teachers for the Kankakee, Illinois school district voted 307-19

January 22 to accept a revised contract and end their four-day strike. Neither negotiators for District 111 nor the Kankakee Federation of Teachers would discuss details concerning the dispute over pay and health benefits in the new agreement until the school board ratifies the terms on January 25.

As early as December 2, teachers voted by a 93 percent margin to strike the district. The union and district reached a tentative agreement, but on December 17 teachers voted 142-121 to reject that offer. When school resumed in January neither side could come to an agreement, leading to the launching of the January 19 strike.

Montreal city workers take strike action

Five thousand city workers in Montreal began rotating strikes on Monday in what their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), is calling a pressure tactic against the city.

The job action will affect garbage collection and snow removal in one-day strikes rolling across every district in the city for 40 days. The union has not called for a full strike, despite the fact that its workers have been without a contract since August of 2007, saying it does not want to provoke public criticism.

CUPE has said its members will only perform snow removal when accumulation is over nine centimeters, a measure approved by the Quebec Essential Services Council. The main issues in the dispute are contracting out of jobs and wage levels.

Journal de Montréal lockout at one-year mark

January 24, 2010 marks one year since the lockout of 253 employees of the French Canadian daily, the *Journal de Montréal*.

The newspaper’s owner, Quebecor Media Inc., a major media conglomerate in Canada, is demanding the cutting of at least 75 jobs, a 25 percent workload increase without compensation, and a 20 percent cut in benefits. More fundamentally, the employer is pushing for a significant increase in outsourcing and for the possibility to publish freely across all its platforms.

The *Journal de Montréal* continues to be published despite the lockout. The workers, meanwhile, have maintained the online publication of their own daily.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact