

Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 February 2010

Argentina: Press workers reach agreement with newspaper

On February 4, workers at the daily newspaper *Crónica* approved an agreement-backed by the Union of Press Workers of Buenos Aires (UTPBA)—regarding the firing of 20 journalists on January 9. On January 29, according to *Indymedia*, Grupo Olmos, which owns the paper, sent termination notices to 25 workers, who received only half of their severance pay.

A delegation of *Crónica* workers went to the Ministry of Labor on Monday, February 1, to demand “the active intervention of the state for a definitive solution to the conflict” brought on by sackings and forced retirements at the paper. Three months ago the paper fired 130 workers in the graphics department and pressured 31 journalists to “voluntarily” retire.

On its website, UTPBA said that the principal points in the agreement were the reincorporation of workers who fought for their jobs, the reopening of salary parity (frozen for 16 months), work stability for a year for all workers and a promise that there will be no reprisals.

Colombia: Protests over health care decrees

Thousands of Colombians demonstrated in cities around the country against measures decreed by President Álvaro Uribe regarding health care. Doctors, nurses and other health workers, as well as housewives, students, union members and patients, voiced their opposition to Uribe’s decrees, which the president

claimed were necessary to save the health care system. The decrees, which still must be examined by Colombia’s Constitutional Court (CC), include a wide range of measures. These include restricting doctors’ autonomy to prescribe medicine, mandating that well-off customers pay for more expensive treatments and raising taxes on beer, liquor, tobacco and games of chance.

The protesters pointed out that despite government claims to the contrary, the measures “harm essential rights and strengthen the privatization of a basic service,” according to a February 7 *Miami Herald* article.

Protest by striking Brazilian teachers

Eight hundred striking teachers in the city of Cajazeiras in northern Brazil marched on Friday through the city streets to protest the salary policies of Director Leonildo de Sousa Abreu. The teachers have been on strike since January 29.

The striking teachers are demanding a base monthly salary of R\$768 (US\$440) for a 30-hour week plus 25 percent more to those who have taken specialized courses.

The school year was set to begin on February 4. Director Abreu, who belongs to the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), has indicated that negotiations will continue.

Striking Sao Paulo LG workers reject wage offer

A mass meeting of 2,400 striking workers at the LG electronics plant in Taubate, Sao Paulo State, rejected the latest wage offer from the Regional Labor Court (TRT). The TRT has intervened in an attempt to settle the job action. The walkout began on January 29. The strike includes blue-collar and white-collar employees of the firm.

The Taubate plant produces some 240,000 electronic units per week, including mobile phones, notebook computers and computer monitors. The TRT has asked that the workers return to work while a new deal is negotiated. The assembled workers also rejected this demand.

In addition to fighting for better wages, the strikers are demanding an end to excessive overtime hours, which they insist have become abusive.

Pennsylvania teachers strike against imposition of increased health care costs

The 415 teachers of Penn Hills, Pennsylvania, launched a strike February 4 over wages and benefits, closing schools for some 5,000 students. The Penn Hills school district, while offering wage increases, is attempting to force through an increase in teachers' health insurance contributions from the current 1.2 percent to 8 percent.

The result would wipe out the board's proposed wage increases of 3.26 and 3.5 percent in the last two years of a three-year contract and actually set teachers back financially. Teachers, for their part, are fighting for a five-year contract with approximate annual wage increases of 6 percent.

Pennsylvania state law limits the duration of teachers' strikes to seven days. The strike by the Penn Hills Education Association was the first in 15 years.

Wisconsin Foundry workers strike over successor clause

Workers at the Wisconsin Aluminum Foundry in

Manitowoc, Wisconsin, walked out on strike February 1 to protest management's attempt to remove a successor clause from their contract. The clause requires that wages and benefits of members of Local 301 of the Glass, Molders, Pottery International Union be protected in the event the company is sold.

Local 301 shop chairman Cory Nimmer told *WBAY* Channel 2, "Years ago this was always in their successor clause. Your forefathers fought for it, for the union to have that in there to cover your rights, and we just wanted to keep that in there." Local 301 represents 38 of the foundry's 300 workers. Another 150 belong to the United Steelworkers Union.

Vancouver Hertz workers on strike

Fifty workers at four locations of Hertz Rental Cars in Vancouver including two at Vancouver International Airport went on strike last week after rejecting the company's final offer.

The workers have been without a contract since last October. In December they voted 100 percent for job action. The strikers are represented by the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE) whose leaders have indicated that they are not trying to disrupt Hertz operations at the airport on the eve of the opening of the Winter Olympics next week but want to get the company's attention.

The main issue in the dispute is job security, rather than wages. The company has been replacing full-time workers with part-timers while laying off workers with higher seniority.



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