

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 February 2010

Brazilian teacher strike

Public school teachers in the city of Ipaumirim decided in a general assembly February 18 to strike, delaying the start of the school year. At issue are salaries and working conditions.

After the vote, groups of teachers marched through the streets of this northeastern city in Brazil. The teachers are demanding a full 40-hour week, up from the current 20 hours. The base monthly salary for an Ipaumirim teacher is 505 reales (about US \$300).

Perú: Weeklong mineworkers strike ends

After a strike begun on February 13 was declared illegal by Peru's Labor Ministry, workers at the Buenaventura gold and silver mines returned to work. However, according to Luis Castillo, head of the nation's mineworkers union confederation, the workers could walk out again on March 3.

The main issue precipitating the strike was the demand by workers that Buenaventura show them its financial records for the period 2006 through 2009. According to Peruvian law, mining companies must share 8 percent of profits with workers. The mineworkers say the company underreported its earnings for those years.

Other issues in the walkout included the ventilation system and safety. Three workers died last year in the Uchucchacua silver mine.

The declaration by the Labor Ministry, which routinely sides with mine owners, came as no surprise. With the company now able to start firing workers, the approximately 4,380 miners decided to go back to work.

Meanwhile, Buenaventura is awaiting a determination by Peru's tax agency Sunat on its compliance with tax law. He is confident Sunat will rule in the company's favor. According to *Reuters*, "Castillo said workers' assemblies were planned for the next few days, and if workers vote in favor of the strike again, the union could go out as early as March 3.... He was confident workers would vote to walk out."

Argentine Unions pledge to limit pay raises

Héctor Daer, the press spokesperson for the Argentine General Labor Confederation (CGT), declared last week that the union federation would limit its demands in this year's wage negotiations in order to quell inflation. However, he denied that there would be hard caps on what each union will demand.

For his part, CGT chief Hugo Moyano suggested that the unions would make sure that at the conclusion of negotiations both sides would settle this without plant closures or strikes. "What matters is that neither of those things takes place and, as in the past, a settlement is reached."

For its part, the Argentine Industrial Union (a management association) has called for a wage cap of 15 percent. Most experts, however, predict that, despite global deflation Argentina will have an inflation rate of 2 percent per month.

Argentina's main industrial trade union contracts are usually negotiated around this time of year. The depression of 2001 produced a layer of nonunion and

informal sector workers whose wages are not covered through annual negotiations, increasing poverty levels and economic inequality.

Strike at Illinois auto parts maker

Members of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 1268 went on strike February 19 at the Johnson Controls plant in Sycamore, Illinois, over job security. The 200 workers at the plant are opposing the company's attempt to remove a clause from their contract that bars the outsourcing of jobs.

According to striking workers, the Sycamore plant is the only plant that makes seats for Chrysler vehicles, and if the strike drags on, production at some Chrysler assembly plants will be affected. Negotiations between Johnson Controls and the UAW began in mid-January. The local contract expired February 5.

Disney workers resume protests at company headquarters

The 2,150 members of UNITE HERE Local 111 moved their protests over to the company's headquarters in Burbank following the end of a weeklong fast by eight hotel workers to protest stalled contract talks at the Disneyland Grand Californian Hotel and Spa in Anaheim, California. The workers are opposing management's drive to require them for the first time to pay a portion of health care costs.

The union says that workers, the majority of whom make less than \$13 per hour, cannot assume the additional burden of paying premiums. Last week Disney reported first-quarter profits of \$844 million.

Restaurant workers strike Vancouver airport

Three hundred food service workers employed by restaurant giant HMSHost went on a one-day strike last week in what the union says was a necessary action to forestall threatened job losses. The company responded the following day by locking workers out.

The workers affected are members of Unite Here and have been without a contract for almost a year. Strike action was taken only after it became apparent that at least 60 workers would lose their jobs when the Olympics end and some restaurants at Vancouver International Airport will either lay off workers or close altogether. Eighteen outlets are affected, including Tim Horton's, Milestones, Palominos, Harvey's, Stanley's, Pacific Grill among others.

The decision to call the strike was taken after workers voted over 90 percent in favor of strike action and over a month after the company locked workers out on January 4.

British Columbia credit union hit by strike

Around 50 members of the United Steelworkers Union (USW) in Nelson, British Columbia, east of Vancouver went on strike February 16 against their employer, the Nelson District Credit Union (NDCU), after last minute talks failed to produce an agreement.

Their last contract expired in May of 2008, and in December of last year workers returned a vote of 98 percent in favor of strike action. The main issues in the dispute include job security, vacation pay and benefits. This is the first time the workers at NDCU have gone on strike since they unionized 32 years ago.



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