

Workers Struggles: The Americas

16 March 2010

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

Argentina: Food industry workers march for wage raises and reinstatements

On Friday, March 12, some 400 workers at Kraft and PepsiCo marched to demand salary increases and the reinstatement of workers suspended last year. The marchers blocked the corner of Avenida 9 de julio and Corrientes, causing traffic delays. They demanded that union directors ask the owners for a 35 percent increase.

In September 2009, Kraft acquired a plant from food company Terrabusi in the Buenos Aires suburb of Pacheco. Shortly afterward Kraft expelled 162 workers, with police using especially violent tactics to force them out. Some workers suspected the union bureaucracy was involved in collusion with the authorities, since many of the employees were among the most militant.

Workers responded with an attempt to block the Pan American Highway. They were met with heavy police violence and arrests. Some of the sacked workers accepted early retirement, but this recent action includes the demand for the reinstatement of 86 who did not.

Javier Hermosilla, a Kraft delegate, said that the company recently paid \$19 billion to buy Cadbury, “equivalent to 800 years of the salaries of all the workers of Terrabusi.”

“We demand that they reopen parity talks and an emergency wage increase,” said Leonardo Morneilla, a

delegate of PepsiCo. “We want parity talks that are democratic,” added Hermosilla.

Workers from other enterprises such as Fel-Fort and Bonafide joined the protest, which marched from the obelisk at Avenida 9 de julio to the headquarters of COPAL, the Coordinator for Food and Beverage Industries.

Brazil: Public School teachers continue strike in São Paulo

Striking teachers at São Paulo schools voted on March 12 to continue a strike that began March 8. The teachers voted at a mass assembly of 15,000 at the São Paulo Art Museum. Following the assembly the teachers marched down Avenida Paulista in central São Paulo and rallied at the Education Secretariat.

The strike will continue until March 19. At that time there will be another assembly to decide what to do next.

The teachers are demanding a salary increase of 34 percent and a base salary that reflects the value of all benefits. They also want increases for pensioned teachers, more job security, transparency in hiring and promotions and the revocation of laws on absenteeism.

Union leaders report that 80 percent of the São Paulo teachers have joined the strike.

A spokesperson for the São Paulo Education Secretariat denounced the strike as “political” and “an enemy of education.”

Brazil: Employees of Schmidt Ceramics on strike

Workers at Schmidt Ceramics in Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, remain on strike. On March 12 a meeting of ceramic workers, members of the ABC Do Grande Ceramic Workers Union, rejected a company proposal and decided to continue on strike.

The workers are on strike over back wages. The workers rejected a company proposal to pay February 20 wages on March 15, March 5 wages on March 22, and March 20 wages on March 29.

Workers will vote again this Tuesday.

Prison services contractor locks out California health workers

A contractor of health services for two jails in California's Alameda County locked out 143 health care workers March 10, one day after the workers called a one-day strike to protest a new proposal that would significantly hike workers' portion of health insurance costs.

Prison Health Services (PHS), a Tennessee-based private corporation that raked in \$610 million in earnings during 2009, is demanding that members of the Service Employees International Union pay an additional \$300 to \$500 a month in health care costs. According to the union, this demand came after the company had initially agreed to pay a 10 percent increase for healthcare provisions.

The contract covering nurses, physician's assistants and dental assistants who provide healthcare at the county's Santa Rita Jail in Dublin and the Glenn Dyer Detention Facility in Oakland expired in December of last year. The lockout is expected to continue through March 16. During that time, PHS will be bringing in strikebreakers to perform the jobs of union members.

Survivor of refinery explosion charges management with neglect in death of two workers

A lawsuit filed by the survivor of a storage tank

explosion in Artesia, New Mexico, charges Navajo Refining with failure to follow reasonable safety procedures and negligence in the deaths of two other workers—Natividad Andajo of Odessa, Texas, and Victor Villa of Midland, Texas.

Juan Carlos Hermosilla, who filed the suit, suffered multiple fractures to both arms, a broken hip and back, as well as several facial cuts. According to Hermosilla, another worker returned to his welding job March 2 on a 40-foot tank that produces asphalt. When he ignited his welder the tank exploded.

In addition to naming Navajo Refining's parent company Holly Corporation, the suit alleges that representatives of Houston-based Total Safety, Inc., failed to inspect the worksite.



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