# Workers Struggles: The Americas

**6 April 2010**

### Argentina: Port blockades spread

Building on their protest from the week before, the Argentine dockworkers union SUPA and the Dockworkers Cooperative have extended their blockades of all terminals in Puerto San Martín and Timbúes, near the city of Rosario. The number of terminals now blockaded has risen from three to eight.

The blockades coincide with this year's soybean and corn harvests. As of March 30, over 5,000 trucks carrying soybeans for export were waiting to unload, according to the MercoPress news agency. Argentina is the world's third largest exporter of soybeans and leads in the production of soy oil and meal. Only the USA exports more corn.

The strike and blockade are supported by the truckers union, which is part of the CGT (General Labor Confederation). Port workers are demanding that export firms in the terminals raise tariffs to support a 100 percent salary hike. They also want improved working conditions.

### Argentina: metal workers set to strike

Antonio Calo, secretary general of the metal workers union UOM, announced March 31 that the union would stop work on April 9 if talks over salaries remain stalled. The UOM has asked for a salary increase of 25 percent, while industry negotiators are offering 20 percent.

Calo complained to Página 12 that after last year's crisis, "all economic indicators, including those of the Association of Metallurgical Industries, speak of an important expansion of metallurgical production, so we don't understand this policy of not wanting to improve the purchasing power of our workers, who have to juggle to cover their necessary expenses."

The union and management have already met three times, with the last offer calling for a 10 percent raise in April, 5 percent in August and 5 percent in January 2011. The union claims that these raises would not cover the rate of inflation.

### Peru: mineworkers call for strike, government declares state of emergency

On Thursday, April 1, the Peruvian government decreed a 60-day state of emergency in seven provinces, authorizing the armed forces to intervene in response to an indefinite strike that the National Federation of Artisanal Miners of Peru (Fenamarpe) and the Mining Federation of Madre de Dios (Fedemin) called for April 4. About 7,000 miners are set to take part.

Citing the possibility of violent protests and attacks on public and private places and public transport, the decree authorizes the Interior Ministry to call in the military to aid the National Police. The provinces are in the south and southeast of the country.

The strike was called to demand that the government revoke a recent decree that reordered mining in the informal or artisanal mining sector. The government claims that the earlier decree was necessary to counteract deforestation and pollution. However, Teodulo Medina, president of Fenamarpe, told Correo Piura that the Emergency Ordinance "seeks to confiscate and destroy only equipment of small artisanal miners."

Fenamarpe and Fedamin have arranged for special teams of security personnel to be on the lookout for provocateurs.

### Former paramilitary member sentenced in murder of two Colombian unionists

On Wednesday, a Colombian court sentenced José Ospino, a former member of the paramilitary group AUC, to 30 years in prison for his role in the killing of two unionists in 2001. The two union officers, Valmore Locarno Rodríguez and Victor Hugo Orcasita Amaya, were president and vice-president of the union at Drummond Coal's La Loma coal mine.

In March of 2001, a group of armed men stopped a bus

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carrying about 50 mine workers and forced the men off the bus. They shot Locarno on the spot and took Orcasita with them to torture and kill later.

Unions and human rights groups have sued Drummond Coal several times in attempts to link the US-owned corporation to a number of murders of union members, including Locarno's successor, Gustavo Soler, who was killed seven months after the deaths of Locarno and Orcasita. Their efforts have been unsuccessful.

As an EFE article reported, "Colombia remains the world's most dangerous country for members of organized labor, the CUT labor federation said early last month in the northwestern city of Medellin.

"More than 40 labor activists were killed in Colombia in 2009, and 2,700 have been slain since 1986, according to the CUT. The vast majority of those killings have gone unpunished."

Another AUC member, Rodrigo Tovar, was implicated in the same slayings, according to the Attorney General's Office. Tovar, also known as Jorge 40, was extradited to the US in 2008 on drug charges.

**Indiana workers strike over doubling of health care costs**

Nearly 600 workers at Jeffboat in Jeffersonville, Indiana, went out on strike April 2 over the company's demand that workers pay greater out-of-pocket health care costs. According to strikers, Jeffboat, the manufacturing division of American Commercial Lines, Inc. (ACL), wants to double workers portion of medical coverage while only offering wage increases of 1 percent and 2 percent in years two and three of the contract.

The walkout followed expiration of the old contract. Workers were scheduled to meet over the weekend and formally vote on the company's final offer.

In 2009, ACL, which is the largest inland shipbuilder in the United States, lost $12.06 million. According to Teamsters Local 89, which represents the striking workers, Jeffboat currently employs only half the number of workers that worked at the facility in 2007. No talks between the two sides are scheduled.

**Philadelphia nurses strike**

Some 1,500 nurses and technical staff at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, walked out on strike March 31 over issues relating to health insurance, wages, random drug testing and over benefits. Among the benefits that the hospital is slashing is a popular tuition program for dependent children.

The old agreement for members of the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses & Allied Professionals (PASNAP) expired six months ago. Hospital management immediately contracted with HealthSource Global Staffing of California. The agency has helped the hospital recruit many of the 850 strikebreakers currently filling in for PASNAP members at a cost of more than $10,000 per nurse per week.

The union claims it has received dozens of reports concerning problems with patient care and has requested the Department of Health investigate. Although a state-appointed mediator has become involved in the strike, no new talks have been scheduled.

**Quebec grocery workers locked out**

Four hundred workers were locked out last week by their employer, grocery giant Provigo, Inc., which is owned by Loblaws, at its distribution center in Quebec City only hours after their contract expired April 3.

Provigo claimed that the union representing the workers, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), did not take its last offer seriously. The company had asked for a vote on the proposal with only 48 hours notice. Workers had rejected a previous offer by 99 percent only two weeks ago, giving their union a powerful strike mandate. The main issues in dispute are contracting out, wages and work hours.

The company has indicated that it will take measures to ensure that stores in the province continue to be supplied despite the lock-out. The union has set April 7 as the date for a vote on the latest offer.

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