Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Police shoot protesting Peruvian gold miners

Small-scale gold miners stopped their protest activities on Wednesday after clashes with police resulted in six deaths and around 30 injuries. The incident occurred in the southern region of Arequipa, where some 6,000 "artisanal" or informal sector miners were blocking traffic on the Pan American Highway near the town of Chala.

Five demonstrators were shot and a woman died of a heart attack when police attempted to clear the roadblock. In addition to the 30 injuries, 28 protesters were arrested. Leaders of the National Federation of Artisanal Miners of Peru (FENAMARPE), the organization of small-scale miners that called the protests, said between 10 to 20 people are missing.

The miners were protesting passage of a law that the government of Alan Garcia has characterized as protective of the environment; Garcia has previously called informal mining "savage." However, leaders of the 60,000-member artisanal miners union, FENAMARPE, claim that the small miners are protesting two other decrees which would favor large mining companies and make it more difficult for small miners to work.

The government had declared a state of emergency on April 1 in anticipation of the protests.

At present, among Peru's 300,000 small-scale miners, only around 5,350 have permits, according to an April 7 IPS report. "Most of them hold several concessions for operating mines, and hire informal miners under subcontracting arrangements," says the report.

The protests will be put on hold while the government and FENAMARPE negotiate.

Argentina: Media company to go to binding arbitration over fired workers

Grupo Uno, Argentina's second largest media conglomerate, has acceded to the Labor Ministry's call for binding arbitration (*conciliación obligatoria*) concerning its firing of 26 employees from its Rosario-based radio stations LT3 and LT8.

At midnight on March 30, the 26 employees of the stations, owned by Daniel Vila and José Luis Manzano, received telegrams terminating their employment. Immediately afterwards station employees, joined by workers at Grupo Uno's daily newspaper *La Capital*, began a work stoppage.

The minister of labor called for the *conciliación*, but Vila and Manzano ignored it. Instead they attempted to intimidate the workers with hundreds of threatening telegrams. In addition, they launched a propaganda campaign through their other media outlets, with one TV spot warning against "infiltrators."

Workers and their supporters marched on April 3 calling for the reinstatement of the workers and for the suspension of the stations' licenses. The march was supported by a large number of workers in the area.

On April 7, Grupo Uno agreed to submit to arbitration, and will meet with representatives of a number of unions including the CTA and CGT federations. The fired workers have been reinstated for the time being.

Argentina: Airline technicians, pilots vote for strike authorization

Members of two airline industry unions—the Aeronautical Technicians Association (APTA) and the Airline Pilots Association (APLA)—have given strike authorization to their negotiators in anticipation of talks with Aerolineas Argentinas and Austral. The votes were the result of two plenary delegate assemblies held almost simultaneously by the two unions. The APTA vote gave president Ricardo Cirelli "full power to take direct action measures at any time" during negotiations.

Wages are not APTA's main demand. The union wants "concrete investments" in the airlines' maintenance areas and a plan "of the Argentine state" for the *Area Material Cordoba*, a formerly state-owned military aircraft manufacturing center that was privatized in 1995. In addition, it wants the transfer of

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the air traffic controllers to APTA, a demand that is resisted by the current controllers union.

As the APTA meeting was drawing to a close in Ciudadela, about 300 members of APLA met in Almagro, where they gave their president, Jorge Perez Tamayo, a mandate to negotiate salaries with strike authorization. There was also a vote to let pilots that hold management positions renounce their posts if the president of Aerolineas, Mariano Recalde, designates Andres Fabre, formerly of low-cost Mexican airline Volaris, as CEO of the company.

Workers strike San Francisco Hilton over stalled negotiations

Some 850 workers at the Hilton Union Square hotel in San Francisco walked out on a three-day strike April 7, to protest the demands by the hotel industry to slash health care, retirement benefits and increase workloads. The strike involved only a portion of the 8,000 members of UNITE HERE Local 2 whose contract expired back in August 2009.

The strike is the fifth in a series of limited actions taken by the union during this eight-month period. Sam Singer, spokesman for the Hotel Council of San Francisco, lashed out at Local 2 president, Mike Casey, charging he "can no longer claim that his union isn't hurting the city of San Francisco as a whole." The San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau also reacted angrily to a boycott called for by the union against the city's hotels back in January, claiming the union had caused the hotel owners to lose more than $5.5 million.

The Hilton is the largest of the 61 venues covered under the expired contract that covers housekeepers, dishwashers, cooks and bell-persons. Talks have been deadlocked since November.

Louisiana salt miners go on strike

Over 100 workers walked off the job April 7 at the Cote Blanche Salt Mine in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana owned by the North American Salt Company (NASC). The United Steelworkers, which represents the underground miners, has not revealed all details in the contract, but NASC management has railed against what they claim is a demand by workers for a 24 percent pay raise and restrictions on the demand for schedule changes.

At a demonstration held before workers voted unanimously to reject NASC final offer, workers carried signs that read "raise our hazard pay," "lock in our insurance" and "no alternate shift." One worker complained to the *Daily Iberian*, "We work seven days a week together and spend more time here than at home."

The strike by NASC miners comes amid rumors that negotiations between workers at Morton Salt and Cargill are under way.

Strike looms at Newfoundland fishery

A strike may be called in the coming days at the six Ocean Choice International (OCI) processing plants across the province if contract talks, which broke off two weeks ago, are not resumed.

The Fish, Food and Allied Workers' union (FFAW), which represents 1,500 workers at OCI in Newfoundland, has said they will not agree to more rollbacks like the wage reductions and other concessions they accepted in the last contract.

The average worker at OCI earns just over $12 an hour and the company is reportedly demanding further cuts to wages and benefits.

Deal reached in University of Montreal strike

A tentative deal was reached last Friday between the Université de Montréal and striking faculty that could bring an end to a strike that began February 24.

The 2,400 teaching staff at the francophone university had been on strike for job security, salaries and class sizes. Classes could restart this week, although the semester will be extended into May and the summer semester delayed.

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