

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Mexico: Electrical workers vow hunger strike

More than 2,300 members of Mexico's electrical workers' union, SME, plan to go on a hunger strike in Mexico City's central plaza, the Zocalo, as part of an ongoing protest against the liquidation of the country's Central Light and Power Company (LFC) by the Felipe Calderon government on October 10. The union announced on April 11 that over 5,000 workers volunteered, and that a medical laboratory has declared 2,300 of them fit to participate in the hunger strike.

More than 17,000 of the 44,000 LFC workers that were laid off refused to accept the government's severance package and are demanding that the government either reopen the LFC or give them jobs at the Federal Electrical Commission, which now operates the former LFC.

The hunger strike is set to precede a march to Mexico City's Zocalo on May 1, International Workers Day, in which other unions will participate.

Attorneys for SME have challenged the decree that liquidated the LFC, and thousands of workers have filed complaints of unjust termination to the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Board. In addition, workers have held sit-ins, marches and demonstrations, as well as attempts to barricade roads on which LFC equipment was removed, actions that were not sanctioned by the SME bureaucracy. The government has not budged.

## Venezuela: Oil workers stage strikes and protests

Some 2,000 workers at PDVSA, Venezuela's state-owned oil company, and Pequiven (Petroquimica de Venezuela) carried out protests, work stoppages and blockades on April 13 to demand unpaid wages and bonuses. According to *EFE* news service, they "also demanded the dismissal of top executives from both companies and a visit by a delegation from the Comptroller General's Office."

National Workers Union leader Alexis Polanco told *El Universal* that union negotiators had presented a list of demands to representatives of the state-owned firms and have entered negotiations. "We're giving both Pequiven and PDVSA until Friday to pay everything they owe...we're tired of this government continuing to mock the working class."

In the northwestern state of Monagas, around 800 workers at Punta de Mata have carried out staggered strikes on drilling rigs run by US, Chinese, and English firms in tandem with PDVSA. The workers are demanding that PDVSA pay them according to a recently agreed contract. Oil industry activity in the region has ground to a halt, and the drillers have vowed to broaden the strike if no resolution is reached soon.

Jorge Esteves, a top official of PDVSA, claimed the delays have been caused by the transition between the old and new collective bargaining agreements, and called the strike "illegal."

## Brazil: Bridgestone tire workers strike

On Friday, April 16, tire workers employed by Bridgestone in Santo Andre, a suburb of São Paulo,

voted to authorize strike action. The purpose of the strike is to pressure management into making a profit-sharing agreement with the 3,500 plant workers. The union is demanding a R\$10,000 bonus (approximately US\$3,500.)

Negotiations between the company and the union are scheduled for April 20. If no agreement is reached, the walkout would begin six days later.

Management sources reacted with surprise at the strike authorization vote. A spokesperson declared that negotiations had been proceeding routinely. The tire contract at the Santo Andres plant expires June 1.



### **Connecticut health care workers strike over wages and victimizations**

Health care workers at four nursing home facilities owned by Spectrum Healthcare in Connecticut walked off the job April 15 after management negotiators refused to agree to a similar agreement signed by other providers in the state. Spectrum has refused to come to terms since the old contract expired in March 2009 and is insisting on pushing a 2.5 percent wage back to July 2011 instead of conforming to the pattern agreement that calls for its implementation in July 2010.

Workers at Spectrum are also angry over management's firing of six pro-union workers and intimidation against others in the period since the old contract expired and the New England Healthcare Employees Union District 1199, which represent the 400 striking workers, has responded by filing charges with the National Labor Relations Board. Spectrum also began bringing in replacement workers on the first day of work in an effort to break the strike.

The strike affects Spectrum nursing homes in Derby, Ansonia, Hartford and Laurel Hill, Connecticut. No new negotiations have been scheduled between union and management.

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