

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

4 December 2012

## Mexican educators occupy university administrative office over salary nonpayment

About 80 members of the Michoacan University Professors Syndicate (SPUM) took over the administrative offices of the University of Michoacan of San Nicolas de Hidalgo (UMSNH) on November 30. The professors took the action to demand overdue salaries as well as payment of their *aguinaldo*, the traditional end-of-year bonus.

The action was a response to an announcement by the state government to the University Council a few days before. Claiming fiscal difficulties, the government stated that it would not make the deposit on time. Some 3,200 workers and retirees would be affected by the delay.

The occupation began in the early hours, as both active and retired professors dislodged the personnel and took over the offices. In addition to the salary and bonus payments, they demanded the cessation of violations of their collective bargaining contract.

The UMSNH director told reporters that the government would deposit the resources for the payments for the second half of November by Monday. The professors warned that they would cease all activities if they did not receive their payments by then.

Meanwhile, the legal team for the SUEUM University of Michoacan employees union has initiated legal action to demand an investigation to determine penal action against the parties responsible for the delays.

## Argentine metro workers hold rotating stoppages over parity talks

On November 29, workers in Buenos Aires's Subte and Premetro subway systems held rotating strikes in various sites around the city. Between 5:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., in three-hour turns, workers interrupted service.

The Subte and Premetro Workers Union Association (AGTSyP) called the actions to protest their exclusion from a parity agreement signed between the privatized Metrovias concession and the Tramway Motor Coach Union (UTA)

following a meeting at the Labor Subsecretariat.

According to the *Argentina Independent*, the UTA "is the official union, but represents a small percentage of the subtle workers. AGTSyP is a breakaway union with majority representation, which is also demanding to be recognized by the government as the genuine representative of the subtle workers."

AGTSyP's counterproposal, which was ignored by the Labor Secretariat, includes a salary increase of 28 percent and an improved escalating increase for long-term employees, retroactive to last March. AFTSyP has scheduled to extend the rolling strikes into this week.

## Argentine state workers strike, protest social security reform

State workers in Argentina's Cordoba province held a 24-hour strike November 29 over recent changes in the provincial retirement system. The actions were called by the Cordoba Province Educators Union or Uepc. Other participating unions included the SEP public employees union, the Bank Employees Association, the Light and Power Union and the State Employees Association (ATE).

The protesters assembled at Uepc headquarters and marched downtown to rally.

A less well attended march and rally was held the next day, followed by a resolution to reject the law, which defers raises in payments for retirees by 180 days.

## Venezuelan cookie factory workers defy judgment, continue strike

Workers for the Venezuelan cookie manufacturer Galletera Carabobo continued their strike despite a labor tribunal judgment against them December 1. The strike, which has had picketers at the factory entrance, was in its 88th day at the time.

The workers' union will appeal the decision, saying that it goes counter to the legal right to strike and that "it was not

proven that access to work was denied,” according to Adriana Miotto, the union’s general secretary.

The 128 Carabobo workers decided to go on strike to demand the approval of the collective bargaining contract and the recognition of retroactivity as well as freedom to organize. The company took an application to reactivate operations to the Labor Tribunal at the beginning of November, while a business group complained about a supposed violation of the “right to work.”

According to a report in *El Universal*, “From Caracas, the National Workers Union solidarized with the strikers and demanded that the 4th circuit labor tribunal in the state of Carabobo reconsider the decision.” The union called for a nationwide solidarity strike, including a march to Galletera Carabobo headquarters, on December 3.

### **Boeing union seeks to curb threat of wildcat strike**

The union representing Boeing Corporation’s 23,000 engineers and technical workers is attempting to block rank-and-file anger that is threatening a wildcat strike this week. According to reports, workers sent emails from fake accounts calling for a one-day walkout.

Ray Goforth, head of the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), which represents Boeing workers, indicated, “We don’t know whether such an action will happen December 5” because it was unable to measure the support for a wildcat strike nor “how many people will heed SPEEA’s call to not participate in this action.” The union has declared any such action is unsanctioned by SPEEA and will not be legally protected.

SPEEA members, comprising Boeing workers in Washington state, Oregon, Utah and California, rejected the company’s original offer back on October 1 by a 96 percent margin. Boeing had proposed annual wage increases of between 2.5 and 3.5 percent over the course of a four-year agreement. In current talks, management has raised that to between 3 and 4.5 percent.

But apparently more critical to workers is the company’s demands involving medical and retirement benefits, including a proposal to take away pensions from new hires and offer the inferior 401(k) plan. The atmosphere is further poisoned by Boeing’s compensation to top executives. CEO Jim McNerney received \$23 million in 2011, while Commercial Airplanes chief Jim Albaugh pulled down \$8.5 million and now retired CFO James Bell raked in \$7.1 million.

Locked out American Crystal workers in Minnesota and North Dakota rejected a fourth contract offer, which means the 16-month lockout of members of the Bakery, Confectionary and Tobacco Workers union will continue. A majority of 55 percent voted no against the company’s insistence on a health care package that would double out of pocket costs for workers.

Some 96 percent voted against the company’s original proposal back at the beginning of the lockout in August of 2011. Last June, 63 percent opposed the offer. American Crystal, in a provocative statement, declared it had offered a “solid and generous package” similar to that currently defined for replacement workers who are “creating a productive and successful new workforce for our company.”

Some workers have retired and declined to cast a ballot during the recent vote. Some workers who voted “yes” said they would not go back to work and only did so because other workers are hurting from the sustained lockout.

### **Ontario school union threatens job actions**

Facing growing pressure from their membership, the union representing elementary teachers in Ontario are threatening job action up to and including a full-scale strike in the coming days which, if carried out, would be a direct challenge to ant-union legislation recently passed by the provincial Liberal government.

Under the new law, Bill 115, the government could legislate an end to any job action and unilaterally impose a contract on teachers. The recent threat of a strike by the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) comes in response to government refusal to recognize agreements reached with the union and a number of Ontario school boards.

Education Minister Laurel Broten has already said she would order teachers back to work in the event of a strike. Union leaders have said that they will give parents at least 72 hours notice before striking, although many union locals are already in a legal strike position.



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