

Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 August 2014

Latin America

Auto workers protest mass layoffs in Argentina

Workers at the Lear auto parts plant blocked the Pan American Highway near Buenos Aires to protest the sacking of 330 workers by the company on May 27. The workers used their cars to create a barricade. Buenos Aires police broke up the demonstration.

The Buenos Aires governor, Daniel Scioli, defended the police repression. “We need to look out for companies that invest,” declared the governor. The next day, Lear management announced the lockout of workers at its Pacheco plant in suburban Buenos Aires, alleging “security concerns.”

Strike at the University of São Paulo

More than 1,000 workers at the University of São Paulo (USP) are on the third month of their strike. USP management is intransigent against the strikers, with the support of São Paulo governor Geraldo Alckmin of the Party of Brazilian Social Democracy (PSDB). The strike is affecting 13 of the 50 campuses associated with the USP. The striking workers are gaining support from educators and students, and a fund has been established to support the workers, who are not getting paid.

Workers at the USP Hospital (HU), are also on strike, forcing it to cut down on medical services. The strike at the HU involves nursing, radiology, nutrition, and janitorial workers.

Workers at the USP and two other public universities

walked off their jobs on May 27, and at the HU on June 16. The strikers are demanding a 10 percent wage increase to compensate for Brazil’s accelerating inflation.

Football players strike in Ecuador

Professional football workers went on strike in Ecuador this week over owed back wages. The players are owed \$12 million. The next-to-last game in this season was scheduled for this Wednesday and will not take place. Football players’ unions in Colombia, Perú and Venezuela have voiced their support for the strike.

According to the football players’ union, most of the 24 professional soccer teams owe players back wages. Some owe more than 11 months’ back pay.

Mass protest in the Colombian Department of Guajira

Mass protests began on Monday in the Colombian Department of Guajira on the Caribbean Coast over the lack of water and food. More than 70 percent of the region’s commercial establishments announced that they would shut down their operations. University students have organized protest demonstrations.

Inhabitants of the province charge that the administration of President Santos is ignoring the plight of this region of 80,000 inhabitants that is being affected by a severe drought. At least 15 children have died this year due to lack of food and water.

The United States

Locked-out Pittsburgh workers send roving pickets to nearby facility

Locked-out workers at the Pennsylvania-American Water Company in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, set up picket lines outside the company's facility in Indiana, seeking support for their two-month struggle over job security. Back in June, management submitted its final offer, which contains contract language that would allow the company to hire contractors to carry out work previously done by union members.

The workers at the Indiana facility are members of the same union, Utility Workers Union of America Local 537, but are under a different contract. A number of Indiana workers refused to go into work when locked-out workers from Pittsburgh set up picket lines.

The 144 locked-out workers recently won unemployment benefits after the Office of Unemployment Compensation Benefits determined that the struggle was a lockout. The National Labor Relations Board recently ruled that the Pennsylvania-American Water Company failed to bargain in good faith when it unilaterally implemented new policies from its last offer governing medical benefits, retiree health benefits plan and short-term disability.

Canada

Quebec metal workers locked out

Three-hundred workers at ArcelorMittal in Contrecoeur, northeast of Montreal, Quebec, were locked out last week after narrowly rejecting the company's last contract offer.

A spokesman for the United Steelworkers (USW), which represents workers at the plant, expressed surprise at the lockout, saying that the union was eager to continue negotiations following the rejection by the membership, pointing out that the union had not exercised its strike mandate. The company had offered a wage increase of 13 percent over five years, which workers deemed inadequate. A central obstacle in negotiations is the employer's demand to move from a fully funded pension plan to a defined contribution plan

for new hires.

ArcelorMittal, a company based in Luxembourg, is the world's largest steel producer and manufactures steel springs and other automotive parts at the Contrecoeur plant. The last contract expired at the end of July.



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