

Workers struggles: The Americas

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The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Brazilian auto workers strike continues

Eight thousand five hundred union employees of Renault and Volkswagen assembly plants in Parana state assembled on Wednesday and voted to continue their strike. The workers are demanding a 10 percent wage increase and a bonus of US\$1,090.

The strike began as both auto companies were increasing production in anticipation of the end this month of a tax exception for the purchase of a new automobile. The next strikers' assembly is scheduled to meet this Monday.

Elsewhere, in the state of Sao Paulo, 7,200 workers at the Volkswagen, Ford, and General Motors auto plants walked off the job on Tuesday and Wednesday to protest the lack of progress in negotiations.

Mexico: Economic crisis forces workers into occasional prostitution

Non-governmental organizations and unions have denounced the effects of the economic crisis in Aguascalientes, in central Mexico. Aguascalientes is an important center of industrial production, including auto parts and assembly, textiles and electronics. Most employees average US\$44 a week. Workers report that they have been forced to turn to prostitution, sometimes once or twice a month, which allows them to earn another US\$20.

Monica Pedroza, coordinator of the Center of Community Development and Training, a non-governmental organization, stated, "Poverty no longer impacts only workers, but also secretaries, store clerks, and even students. All are forced to turn to occasional prostitution. During this time this phenomenon has become much more visible."

A worker at a poultry plant declared, "More than pointing at us, our bosses and our leadership should be

ashamed, because they eat and live lives of luxury, while one has to do these kinds of things to buy food." Aguascalientes' factories export about 70 percent of their output to the United States. Since the beginning of this year, 14,000 jobs have been lost as a result of the economic crisis.

Transit strike in Buenos Aires

On September 10, Buenos Aires' six subway lines were paralyzed for two hours by employees demanding that the government recognize a new subway workers union. The employees, who currently belong to the Street Car Union (UTA), have declared that this organization does not represent their interests. A year ago, they petitioned the Labor Ministry to be represented by a new union. The Labor Ministry has yet to respond.

Union delegate Roberto Pianelli described the situation: "Things were unacceptable with UTA. The people had decided to build their own union. We are striking today because a year has gone by and nothing has been resolved."

Michigan: Teamsters strike Aunt Millie's bakery

Some 30 workers in Watertown Township, Michigan ended their strike September 12 against Aunt Millie's bakery after the company modified its concession demands. Meanwhile, members of Teamsters Locals 580, 164 and 51 in Battle Creek, Adrian, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Lansing, Kalamazoo and Temperance, all in Michigan, continue to strike.

According to Teamsters Local 580, workers at Watertown Township faced cuts in wages and benefits. The company dropped those issues but retained a demand for a two-tier wage scale that pays new hires lower wages.

In other areas, Aunt Millie's was seeking competitive pricing language that would allow the company to lower compensation in the event another bakery

competitor enters the market. Workers involved in sales are also seeking an hourly wage as opposed to the current commission rates, which have not changed in 40 years.

South Carolina workers decertify Machinists union

Workers at the old Vought facility in North Charleston, purchased last month by the aerospace giant Boeing, voted 199-68 to decertify the International Association of Machinists (IAM) as their bargaining representative. Boeing has expressed interest in establishing a new assembly line at the facility for its mid-sized 787 Dreamliner commercial aircraft. A spokesman for Boeing claimed there was no connection between the decertification vote and its expansion plans.

Judge sets bail for CEO theft in worker-occupied Illinois plant

A Cook County, Illinois judge ordered bail set at \$10 million for Republic Windows and Doors CEO Richard Gillman after prosecutors presented allegations that the sudden plant closing last year was part of a plan to loot the business, steal manufacturing equipment and set up a new operation in Iowa. Workers at Republic Windows and Doors near Chicago occupied the plant for several days last December to demand unpaid wages and other benefits.

Gillman and two other executives hoped to relocate equipment in Red Oak, Iowa in order to escape the company's giant debt. The trio reportedly stole more than \$200,000 in cash from Republic Windows and Doors and are alleged to have defrauded creditors of \$10 million.

Safeway strike ends

Workers at the Edmonton, Alberta Safeway distribution center ended a six-day walkout Saturday after voting to approve a new contract. The settlement was the same offer workers had recently rejected. The revote came after management reopened the struck facility with strikebreakers.

Within hours of locking out the 350 workers at its distribution center, grocery giant Safeway was advertising for replacements. By the next day, 162 workers had been hired at rates well above what union hires were getting, with at least 35 more replacements

to come.

Alberta has no laws prohibiting the use of scabs during strikes. In this case the Alberta Labour Relations Board even held an emergency meeting on the first day of the strike to instruct the picketers that they must allow trucks access to the yard to be loaded by strikebreakers.

The strikers are represented by the UFCW and had been without a contract since last December. Workers voted overwhelmingly to reject the company's last offer at the end of August due to disputes in the areas of wages, benefits and job security. One of the main issues was management's demand to increase the standard workweek from 37 hours to 40 hours.

Elder care workers on strike in Newfoundland

Sixty workers in St. John's, Newfoundland went on strike last Wednesday afternoon following a morning meeting between union leaders and management at Elizabeth Towers retirement living complex.

The workers are represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) and have been in negotiations with Chartwells Seniors Housing, which had recently taken over operation of the facility. Although wages and benefits are the main issues, the company has inflamed the dispute by attempting to bring in replacement workers from its other facilities.

The striking workers provide a range of care to the elderly and disabled at the assisted living complex and include personal care assistants, nurses, maintenance and other care workers. The company has said that because it is a for-profit organization, it cannot pay the wages that workers are asking.

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