

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 January 2008

Latin America and the Caribbean

Buenos Aires municipal employees protest sackings

On January 5, the union that represents municipal employees in Argentina's capital city announced a three-day strike to begin January 8 to protest the layoff of 2,300 workers by the city administration of Mayor Mauricio Macri. On Friday, thousands of workers marched on City Hall in a demonstration organized by the General Workers Confederation (CGT).

Since he took office on December 10, Macri, of the right-wing PRO party (Propuesta Republicana—Republican Proposal), has been at war with the municipal union. In addition to sacking the 2,300 employees, claiming they were hired as a result of political cronyism (known as "gnocchi employees" in Argentine slang), he also placed a union-controlled health fund under a six-month receivership; the fund has an annual budget of US\$111 million.

CGT leaders deny that the sacked employees are "gnocchis." "The mayor is trying to do what the military dictatorship did not do," said CGT National Secretary Hugo Moyano.

Macri reacted to the protest march and to the strike announcement with bravado, saying that he would not be "blackmailed" by the protests and threatened to sack up to 20,000 more employees.

There are 120,000 municipal employees in the city of Buenos Aires.

One-day strike by copper miners in Chile

Non-permanent miners under contract to CODELCO, Chile's government mining corporation, went on strike for 24 hours last Thursday to protest management's refusal to hire 5,000 more contract miners. CODELCO has been ordered to hire the workers by the Labor Ministry and is appealing the order in the courts.

Telecommunications workers strike in Barbados

A total of 750 workers struck the telecommunication company Cable and Wireless (C&W) on January 4,

disrupting services in Jamaica and the Eastern Caribbean. All but one of C&W's retail outlets, along with the contact center that serves other regional countries, were shut down, after a breakdown in negotiations over wages, retroactive payments and other protracted issues.

Sir Roy Trotman, general secretary of the Barbados Workers Union (BWU), which represents the workers, told the Caribbean Media Corporation (CMC) the workers will protest the headquarters on a 24-hour basis until there is resolution of the issues.

United States

Florida symphony musicians' lockout nears two months

Members of the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra are nearing the two-month mark of a lockout by management. In mid-November, the Jacksonville Symphony Association locked out 52 full-time and 15 part-time musicians citing deficits in 8 of the past 10 years and a cut in government contributions.

Initially, the two sides were \$190,000 apart on economic issues for the first year of a new contract. Negotiating has brought the two sides to a \$65,000 difference. A tentative agreement between the Symphony Association and the American Federation of Musicians Local 444 that attempted to bridge the gap was voted down by rank and file musicians.

The organization lost \$650,000 in funds that was derived from local property taxes. But the union has advanced the proposal to increase the annual drawing on an endowment that funds the orchestra from 4.5 percent to 5 percent.

The lockout came unexpectedly, and it is seen as a way to cut costs. Revenues from tickets only cover half the cost of an orchestra performance. By locking out musicians, the association is building up its funds while leaving musicians without a paycheck.

Missouri developer fined by state for failure to withhold taxes

A Missouri developer who employed 30 undocumented workers in the construction of a luxury apartment complex will be required to pay \$980,000 for failure to withhold payroll taxes. Michael Schlup was found guilty on 14 felony counts involving failure to failure to deduct, file and pay withholding taxes for workers laboring on the luxury condominiums at Lake of the Ozarks.

The failure to withhold took place back in the first part of 2005. Schlup paid workers in cash but did not follow proper tax withholding procedures. Workers put in 60 to 70 hours a week and were paid between \$8 and \$9 an hour.

Attention was drawn to the construction site as a result of the death of one construction worker and several serious injuries that afflicted other workers.

Schlup escaped a five-year term in the Department of Corrections when the court suspended the sentence and ordered probation.



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