

Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 June 2012

Peruvian teachers strike for 24 hours

Teachers across Peru struck on June 15 over salary and other demands. Adherence to the strike varied from region to region, with the Sutep national educators union claiming 90 percent in Lima, while in Tacna, Moquegua and other locales compliance was partial.

The teachers' demands included raises in salaries, increases for education in the national budget and payment of 30 percent of salaries for preparation time.

In Arequipa, the strike lasted for 48 hours. On the second day, some 3,000 teachers and supporters marched through downtown, with one group carrying two black coffins with the names of the president Ollanta Humala and the president of the Ministers' Council Óscar Valdez.

In Lima, Sutep representatives marched to the Legislative Palace to present a list of demands and a proposed "Law of the Teaching Profession." Sutep has said it will call for an indefinite strike if its demands are not addressed.

Costa Rican dockworkers strike to protest planned port concession

Dockworkers at Costa Rica's Caribbean port of Limón began a strike on June 12. The action was taken to protest a concession agreement signed last August between the government and Dutch company APM Terminals to build and operate a terminal at the nearby port of Moín.

About 80 percent of the country's export traffic—mostly bananas and pineapples—currently passes through Limón. Leaders of the Sinjatrapi dockworkers union claim the concession would create a monopoly and lead to job losses. The government claims the facility will create more jobs. The \$990 million facility is scheduled to open in 2016.

On June 14, 500 riot police clashed with striking workers while trying to reopen two terminals. As of June 14, about 25 protesters had been arrested at demonstrations and blockades in Limón and Moín. Several branches of Costa Rica's security apparatus took over the port and partially restarted operations.

That night, a number of incidents including arson, vandalism and gunfire were reported in Limón. Sinjatrapi disavowed any involvement or knowledge of the actions.

About 250 workers, including members of a number of public sector unions, protested on June 15, marching past the dock and ending at the Sinjatrapi headquarters. The government refuses to negotiate until the strike is called off.

Argentinean armored truck drivers in one-day "surprise" strike

Drivers of armored cars in Buenos Aires held a "surprise" 24-hour strike on June 15 to protest an impasse in contract negotiations. The drivers' union has been holding contract talks with negotiators for the Fedeeac transport business organization as well as with various bank representatives.

The drivers' union, headed by Pablo Moyano, son of CGT federation boss Hugo Moyano, is demanding a 30 percent salary raise and has rejected Fedeeac's 18 percent counteroffer.

The action caused delays in deliveries of cash to banks and ATM machines, resulting in some retirees receiving partial or no payments of their pensions. Some ATMs went out of service for the rest of the day.

The union is also calling for a fixed sum of between 3,000 and 4,000 pesos (US\$670 and \$890) to compensate for a recently passed tax on incomes above a certain ceiling. Union press secretary Hugo Pistone called the tax "absurd" because it would provoke the drivers "to work up to the ceiling to not enter into the tax rate and work under the table for the rest."

The union has said it may call more strikes if contract talks remain stalemated.

Defense manufacturer steps up replacement of striking machinists

The aerospace defense manufacturer Lockheed Martin announced it had hired 300 temporary workers at its struck plant in Fort Worth, Texas in its efforts to break the strike by

3,300 machinists at plants in Texas and two military bases in California and Maryland. The strike, which began on April 23, was ignited by Lockheed's demand that pensions for all new hires be replaced by the inferior 401(k) plan.

Lockheed is estimated to receive nearly \$400 billion over 25 years from the Pentagon for supplying the military with the F-35 strike fighter aircraft. But the Pentagon and the Obama administration have pressured Lockheed management to cut production costs and have been pressuring all defense contractors to lower pension and health care benefits for its workers.

Lockheed claims it can boost the current temporary workforce of 300 to 2,000 if necessary to meet production schedules. In addition, 1,100 salaried workers have been shifted over to production. The company also claims 260 striking machinists have crossed picket lines in Fort Worth, while most of the remaining 300 workers at bases in California and Maryland have returned to work.

Atlantic City casino workers arrested in protest over pensions

Some 50 casino workers were arrested June 15 outside the Tropicana Casino and Resort in Atlantic City, New Jersey after blocking an intersection outside the facility's main entrance to protest the company's refusal to fund pensions. "I think it's disgusting what they're doing to these poor people," Paul Smith, a cook at the Taj Mahal, told the Associated Press. "We have a billionaire coming in trying to ruin workers' lives and take away their pension and break the law by trying to force an unfair contract down their throats."

Carl Icahn, the infamous corporate raider, bought the Tropicana after it went bankrupt and refused to continue contributing to workers' pensions which are believed to be underfunded by as much as \$1.3 billion. Icahn unilaterally withdrew from the funding process and instead is contributing \$1.77 per hour per employee into either a 401(k) plan or a lump-sum cash payment to individual workers at their discretion.

Despite an NLRB decision in favor of the union, UNITE-HERE, Tropicana president Tony Rodio told the AP, "There is absolutely zero—and please emphasize the word 'zero'—chance that we are going to stay in that pension plan."

Atlantic City casino revenues have fallen from \$5.2 billion to \$3.3 billion over the course of the last year. Tropicana is one of two casinos out of twelve that are without union contracts.

Toronto cable technicians strike

Over 200 technicians employed by contractors for Rogers cable went on strike last Friday with the union accusing employers of refusing to bargain.

The strike by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) is against Dependable Home Tech and Intek Communications Inc. which is under contract to Rogers to do installation and repair work throughout Toronto and in the Simcoe area north of Toronto.

A central issue in the dispute is that technicians are paid by piecework which means self imposed speed-up and an uncertain income. According to the union, the company has been trying to intimidate workers into scabbing during the strike while refusing to sit at the bargaining table.

Mississauga city strike widens

Ninety transit workers employed by TransHelp in the city of Mississauga and Peel Region, west of Toronto, Ontario went on strike last week, joining 800 other workers who are on strike against the regional government.

The strike actions are being carried out by different bargaining units within the same union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). The strike by TransHelp workers, which provides transportation services for the disabled and elderly, includes drivers and maintenance staff who are fighting for equal treatment with management and non-unionized staff as well as to protect their benefits.

Hamilton social workers face lock-out

Workers employed by the Elizabeth Fry Society in Hamilton, Ontario could be locked out unless an agreement is reached by June 22.

The Society provides support services for women who have been in trouble with the law and their 10 Hamilton staff have been working without a contract for over two years. Conciliated talks earlier this month failed and mediation is scheduled for this week. The workers are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union, whose negotiators cite pay equity and wages as central issues in the dispute.



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