

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 November 2012

## Three-week strike by Peruvian miners over wage demands

On October 29, workers at the Shougang Hierro mine near the southern Peruvian city of Ica returned to work after three weeks on strike. The workers had walked out to demand an increase of 10 soles (US\$3.85) in their daily pay, in opposition to management's offer of 2 soles, or 77 US cents. Over 700 workers make less than 50 soles (US\$10.27) a day.

Citing figures from the Ministry of Energy and Mining, *Peru This Week* reported that Shougang Hierro Peru—a unit of China's Shougang Group—produced 7.01 million tons of iron last year. The company recorded a 50 percent growth in its net profits.

On October 24, about 300 striking workers and their wives marched to Ica's Plaza de Armas to press their demands. They then continued on and gathered in front of the city's Regional Labor Agency for a rally.

The agreement, signed with the country's labor ministry, will increase their daily pay by 5.5 soles, or US\$2.12. Union leader Julio Ortiz told reporters, "We are very unhappy," but "since it is the last [resolution], administratively, there is nothing else we can do."

## Paraguayan judicial workers stop work over pay

Almost 6,000 Paraguayan judicial workers began an indefinite strike November 2 to demand salary increases. The strike was called after tripartite negotiations among delegates of the Supreme Court, the Labor Ministry and the judicial workers union collapsed.

The judicial employees are demanding a 20 percent raise from designated president Federico Franco, who succeeded ousted president Fernando Lugo in June. In addition, they want extra pay for academic level and seniority, as well as educational aid for workers' children.

The central government rejected an October 19 proposal for salary parity and bonuses for public employees and teachers, citing the country's grave economic crisis. Presently over 50 state workers unions are calling for a 20 percent salary increase.

## Argentinean state workers hold 48-hour strike over provincial budget

State workers in Argentina's Buenos Aires province stopped work for two days, October 31-November 1, to protest the 2013 national budget that was being discussed in the congress.

On the first day of the action, members of the Argentinean Workers Central (CTA) federation marched through downtown Buenos Aires in opposition to the bill. Public sector medical, judicial and educational workers added to the protest's numbers. Protesters rallied in front of the legislative building.

President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, whose faction of the Peronist

Party holds a slim Congressional majority, heavily promoted the budget. It is based on optimistic calculations of projected economic growth as well as a highly criticized underestimation of the inflation rate of 10.8 percent. Most analysts expect inflation will be around 25 percent.

The budget will not include a subsidy for Buenos Aires's Subte metro system, meaning the city will have to make up for the shortfall with increased fares, layoffs and budget cutbacks.

In addition, it threatens to cut over 6,000 public sector jobs. At the rally, Oscar De Isasi, secretary general of the ATE state employees union, denounced the job cuts and claimed that the budget "exponentially increases temporary jobs and maintains the low levels in social policies, which are presently provoking disasters."

The budget, which had already passed the lower house on October 11, was approved by the upper house on November 1.

## Panamanian nursing technicians end strike over salary reclassification

On November 1, nursing technicians in Panama lifted a strike begun October 23 after authorities agreed to conclude a reclassification process that will result in higher salaries. The National Nursing Technicians Association of Panama (Anpate) reached an agreement with the Social Security Fund (CSS) and Health Ministry (Minsa) on that date, and ordered the workers to return to their posts.

Anpate had lifted the strike once before, on October 27, as the parties returned to negotiations, but Anpate reinstituted it when Minsa reps announced their intention to dock the pay of striking workers. The union also demanded the reinstatement of 38 workers—six of them pregnant women—who had been fired for striking.

On October 30, the technicians marched from the CSS hospital complex in Panama City to the Presidential building to ask president Ricardo Martinelli to mediate. Workers from Colon, Cocle, Los Santos, Veraguas, Panama City and other cities attended the march.

The reclassification is part of a law passed in 2003 that would raise the monthly wages of nursing technicians from US\$405 to US\$550. Anpate President Carlos Peralta claimed that, according to the agreement, workers would begin getting their adjusted pay on November 30 and December 30, depending on the organization. Minsa and CSS issued a communiqué promising "not to initiate any disciplinary or administrative process and to desist from those already initiated."

## Honduran soccer players strike over unpaid salaries

Players in some of Honduras's First Division professional soccer teams announced their refusal to continue playing until the issue of unpaid salaries—in some cases delayed up to four months—is resolved. The teams

are Vida, Victoria, Platense, Deportes Savio, Sociedad Real and Marathon.

On November 1, Arnold Peralta, captain of the Vida team, told reporters that the team would not travel to a tournament scheduled for the weekend. “We are human beings and we have families to support,” he added.

As of November 1, one team, Marathon, which had refused to train for two days, had come to agreement with management and returned to play.

### **Honduran registry workers strike to demand overdue payments**

Fifteen workers at the Honduran National Registry of People (RNP) in the capital Tegucigalpa ceased their labors and occupied RNP offices to demand overdue salaries, overtime and vacation pay. Over 200 RNP employees have not been paid since June.

The RNP issues identity cards, birth and death certificates, voter registrations and other documents regarding Hondurans’ civil status.

A spokesperson for the striking workers, Reynaldo Vasquez, told reporters that most of the workers worked overtime in June due to upcoming elections, and although the authorities have signed various payment agreements, they have not complied with them. Vaquez added that they have been patient, but the majority of the employees are in a “calamitous situation.”

The RNP subdirector, Gerardo Martinez, claimed that the payments would be coming “in a couple of of days.” He told reporters that the strike, taking place as it is before upcoming elections, “could be considered an electoral crime,” since some of the strikers are candidates for local offices.

### **Trinidadian postal workers strike, protest stalled negotiations**

Postal workers in Trinidad and Tobago have been carrying out protest actions over the lack of movement in negotiations between their union, the Postal Workers Union (PSU), the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation—known as TTPost—and the Finance Ministry. The PSU is calling for improved wages and working conditions.

Negotiations have been going on since January, with TTPost refusing to offer a wage increase. A TTPost spokesperson told the Trinidad Express that the company had settled non-cash allowances, but needed approval from the ministry’s Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) to negotiate wages.

PSU has called the workers out on a number of limited actions. Workers protested in front of various post offices last week, chanting “Round and round we’re marching!” as a metaphor for the negotiations. On October 30 and 31, workers struck and picketed in front of the office of the CPO on St. Vincent Street in Port of Spain. They returned to work on November 1.

Their colleagues in Tobago staged protests at several branches on November 2. The PSU has said it will continue with the actions until the issues are addressed.

### **Grocery workers strike Raley’s supermarkets in Nevada and California**

About 7,400 grocery workers at Raley’s supermarkets in Northern California and Nevada went on strike November 4 over health care issues. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Locals 8 and 5 claim that the company’s stand on health will be “devastating” to workers.

According to the UFCW, Raley’s has a “laundry list” of concessions, including a wage freeze and the takeaway of premium pay for Sunday shifts. On health care the company is proposing sharp reductions in retiree health care as well as cuts to health care for current employees. The contract also puts in place language that establishes two different classes of workers—those employed before the contract and those hired subsequent to it—with the implications of a permanent lower tier of wages and benefits for the new workers.

Raley’s was prepared to implement part of its proposals back on November 1, but withdrew that plan when mediated talks were proposed. Management insists it must have concessions due to pressure from non-union competition by Walmart and other grocery chains.

### **Ontario teachers threaten strike action**

High school teachers in Ontario could take some form of job action as early as November 7 if a deal is not reached before that deadline between the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF) and seven public school boards.

Although a full-on strike has not been ruled out, union leaders are calling the imminent action an “administrative strike,” wherein teachers will limit their availability for meetings and work outside the classroom, which many teachers have already been doing.

An actual strike would confront Bill 115, recently passed legislation severely limiting sick days and teachers’ right to strike in the province, although the government has indicated its reluctance to block any strike before the end of this calendar year. Another 24 school boards could be in a strike position by the end of the month while union leaders continue to pursue a court challenge to the new law.

### **University workers to strike in B.C.**

Support workers at three campuses of Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Vancouver, British Columbia, are set to go on strike this week following a campaign of escalating job actions over the past month.

The workers are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which recently settled various contract disputes at schools across the province even as union leaders pledged their support for a possible SFU strike. Support workers at the school have been without a contract for two years and university negotiators abandoned negotiations last week and have refused to return to the bargaining table.

### **B.C. social workers on strike**

Workers at three social service agencies in the greater Vancouver area went on strike November 1 in protest against Liberal government budget cuts of over \$300 million in recent years.

The agencies affected provide services for children and adults with developmental and mental health problems and the union has given

assurances that essential service levels will be provided.

The striking workers, who are organizing by at least five different unions represented by the Community Social Services Bargaining Association, have faced wage cuts of up to 22 percent over the last decade with a new hire making an average of just over \$15 an hour.



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