

Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 November 2012

Mexican teachers strike, march against regulatory framework

Some 600 teachers in Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico struck and marched down the city's main highway, Costera Miguel Aleman, November 15. The demonstrators, members of section 14 of the National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), protested the application of new regulations instituted in May.

Marchers shouted slogans denouncing the regulations, which SNTE leaders say undermine workers' rights. The march ended at the Acapulco International Center, where speakers criticized the secretary of education, while at the same time claiming to be "open to dialogue."

Dominican nurses end weeklong strike

On November 16, nurses at the José María Cabral y Báez Regional University Hospital in Santiago, Dominican Republic lifted a strike that they began a week before. The nurses, members of the SINATRAE nurses' union, walked out November 9 over delayed salaries and other issues.

In addition to the salary demand, the nurses called for the assignment of 50 permanent nurses at the newly inaugurated emergency area. Reyna Curiel, a supervisor with 37 years in emergency services, told reporters, "We can't provide quality service when we can count on neither the necessary personnel nor conditions."

The strikers were joined in the action by nurses from the nearby Grullon children's hospital.

According to the agreement signed between SINATRAE and Public Health Ministry negotiators, the ministry promised to hire 78 new nurses at the Cabral y Báez facility on January 1. Other provisions of the accord

include the payment of the back wages and the depositing of RD\$600,000 (slightly less than US\$15,000) into the SENASA social security fund and the payment of September and October wages to all union members, including stretcher-bearers, cleaners and others.

Finally, the ministry pledged to renovate the x-ray, mammography, intake and other departments.

Colombian judicial workers split over strike settlement

A faction of workers in Colombia's judicial branch union remain on strike after government and union representatives reached an agreement. The National Professional Judiciary Employees Association (Asonal), which is headed by Fernando Otalvaro, called the strike October 11 to demand consistency of salaries across the sector.

In addition to the demand for regularization, which the government had promised 20 years before, Asonal called for more funding for the judicial branch.

On November 9, Asonal and government negotiators signed an agreement instituting a process whereby a Technical Parity Board will investigate and make recommendations for salary regularization. A funding increase was included in the deal.

However, a dissident faction, led by Nelson Cantillo, remains on strike. Cantillo, who claims to be the true president of Asonal, argued that the deal did not fully meet the demands of strikers.

On November 17, about 300 dissident Asonal members held a protest at Bogota's court complex. Some 9,000 judicial workers, about 20 percent of Asonal's membership, remain on strike.

California-Nevada Grocery strike ends with tentative agreement

The strike by 7,400 grocery workers at Raley's and Nob Hill Foods in Northern California and Nevada ended November 13 after the company and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) arrived at a tentative agreement. The UFCW rapidly ended picketing and announced union members will vote on the agreement over the next two to three weeks.

Neither side would provide details of the tentative pact. The UFCW simply claimed that it preserves the old agreement's health care provisions. Raley's issued a statement that said the agreement "provides us with the cost savings we need to fund our vision and the initiatives to make us more competitive."

Early in the strike the UFCW said Raley's had a "laundry list" of concessions. It is rumored that the union likely made concessions similar to recent contracts reached with Safeway and Save Mart that are alleged to have preserved health coverage but implemented other cuts.

Walmart files charges with labor board to block protests

Walmart Stores filed an unfair labor practices charge against the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) accusing the union of organizing protests against the giant retailer leading up to and including on so-called Black Friday—the day after Thanksgiving which is touted as the biggest shopping day of the year. The company is requesting that the National Labor Relations Board issue an injunction against any protests at its stores or warehouses.

Walmart outside counsel Steven Wheelless, in a letter to the UFCW general counsel, declared, "We are prepared to and will take all appropriate legal actions to enforce our property rights, protect our business, and ensure the safety of our customers and associates, on Black Friday and in the future."

A series of protests and walkouts have hit Walmart's operations recently. Organization United for Respect (OUR Walmart), which is backed by the UFCW, has said

Walmart workers will strike stores in Chicago, Dallas, Miami, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. in the period leading up to Black Friday.

BC college workers set to strike

Three thousand support workers at colleges across British Columbia are poised to go on strike this week after working without a contract for two and a half years.

Leaders of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) issued a 72-hour strike notice last week, threatening to expand job actions that have been ongoing at some B.C. colleges for several weeks.

The union blames the intransigence of the provincial Liberal government, which has refused to give employers a mandate to grant fair contracts. Recent public sector wage settlements in the province have granted workers little to no wage increases.

Staff strike at Toronto university

Instructors and teaching assistants at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, Ontario went on strike last week in their bid for a first contract.

After 13 months of unsuccessful talks, negotiators for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) say they remain hopeful that they can win a contract that will give the teachers a measure of job security they don't currently have. Many of the striking teachers have been at the school for years, teaching single semester courses with no assurance of having their contracts renewed.



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