

Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 December 2012

Peruvian judicial workers remain on strike

Workers for the Superior Court of Justice in Peru's northwestern Lambayeque region voted December 6 not to lift their strike, which began November 15 over salary scales and other issues. The vote rejected an accord between their union's national leadership and the judicial branch. About 900 workers are covered in the region.

Judicial workers in the region have held limited actions in the past over a number of issues, including pay scales, bonuses, docking of wages and the failure of the government to carry out their end of the contracts.

After voting down the agreement, the workers marched through downtown Chiclayo, shouting denunciations of the deal. A spokesperson for the striking workers called the agreement "one more mockery from the authorities" that does not guarantee any benefit for judicial workers.

The judicial workers union's national executive board has called for an assembly in Lambayeque. The union has already prevailed in all the other regions in pushing the agreement through.

Two-day strike by Chilean television workers

Following the breakdown of collective bargaining negotiations, workers at state-owned Television Nacional de Chile (TVN) struck on December 4. The workers, numbering about 1,000 of TVN's 1,400 employees, are members of three different unions.

According to a report in ilovechile.cl, "The key stumbling block in the negotiations is a pay raise being linked to sales made by the network, which the workers refuse to accept." The workers set up a picket line outside the TVN studio in Providencia, and TVN workers in other regions walked out in support.

Programming was little affected by the strike, as TVN called in "emergency personnel" to maintain it. Some news programming was impacted, however.

On the night of December 5, TVN announced that the station and the unions had reached a new two-year agreement, which contains a raise of US\$70 and a one-time bonus of US\$2,400. The workers returned to the job on December 6.

Argentinean long-distance bus drivers strike over elimination

of auxiliary drivers

Long-distance bus drivers throughout Argentina struck December 6 following a rule change imposed by omnibus owners. The owners had proclaimed that the buses would no longer carry auxiliary drivers.

The drivers' union, UTA, called the decision "despotic" and dangerous for drivers and passengers, and referred to Argentine law, which requires an auxiliary driver for trips of 300 kilometers or more.

In some locales, buses were permitted to leave their terminals if the auxiliary driver was aboard. In most terminals, bus traffic came to a standstill. Another drivers union, the Sipemon based in Mendoza, joined in the action.

The Labor Ministry immediately called for an "obligatory conciliation," a tripartite meeting at ministry headquarters. Owners representatives agreed to reinstate the two-driver rule and service was restored shortly.

Guyanese nurses hold "go-slow" and protest over firings

A "go slow" action by nurses at Guyana's Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) was followed by picketing December 5. The protest actions were taken over the dismissal of two and the suspension of one of their colleagues following the disappearance of a quantity of morphine from the hospital's Accident and Emergency Unit.

The protesting nurses claim that the accused were not given a fair hearing. The nurses told the Guyana Chronicle that "the administration acted in a prejudiced manner, in that they exercised judgment 'without the facts' and acted purely on assumption."

Medical personnel at the GPHC are members of the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), but it appears that the union did not call the actions. About a dozen nurses and one doctor at the facility picketed the emergency unit with signs saying, "Reinstate our colleagues now!" "Better conditions will guarantee better service" "Cleanse the top first" and "We are fed up with injustice," suggesting that there are other issues behind the protests.

Mexican state legislative office workers strike over nonpayment of salaries

Workers for the Mexican state of Jalisco's Congress went on strike December 6, forcing the suspension of the legislative session. Starting at 7:00 a.m., the workers took over the legislative building, blocked access to offices with benches and security tape, and impeded the passage of legislators and other workers.

The workers demanded an end to the delay in payment of November salaries for 219 workers during the last legislative term, most of whose contracts were "presumably irregular," according to *Informador*. The workers also wanted a guarantee of payment of the end-of-year bonus, or aguinaldo.

Two leaders of the Congressional Workers Union local, Secretary Irene Trejo and President Juan Pelayo Ruelas, met with government representatives and reached an agreement over the salary payments. When Ruelas communicated the accord to the workers, some urged remaining on strike until the aguinaldo was guaranteed, but the majority decided to return to work. The strike was called off at 5:00 p.m., December 7, when the disputed paychecks were delivered.

Judicial workers have expressed dissatisfaction with the local union bureaucrats before. *Informador* reported that at a meeting November 21, Trejo was upbraided by some workers who "shouting, called her leadership into question."

Technical union calls one-day strike at western US colleges

Broadcast technicians for the PAC 12 sports network set up picket lines at five men's college basketball games December 8 to protest the network's use of nonunion technicians. The International Association of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) said the strike aimed to establish standard wages and benefits for daily-hire technical employees in the western region.

IATSE charged the PAC 12 Network with "using non-union labor, or a combination of non-union and covered labor side by side on the same job. Those technicians, working without the protection of an IA contract for the PAC 12 network, receive generally lower wages, no benefits, and are without the job protections afforded by an IA contract."

IATSE admitted that they have given concessions in an effort to establish the union at the PAC 12, but without being able to curry favor with corporate management.

The PAC 12 Network profits from cable and satellite broadcasts of college and university sporting events. The campuses targeted for picketing by IATSE were at Arizona State University, Oregon State University, University of Oregon, University of Washington and the University of Southern California.

Cafeteria workers at Chicago State University hold one-day strike over cancelled bargaining

Cafeteria workers at Chicago State University (CSU) carried out a one-day strike December 6 after a food service contractor submitted a 30-day notice to terminate the union contract with UNITE HERE Local 1. Thompson Hospitality, which holds the food service contract for CSU, claims that it was compelled to take action due to "unfulfilled financial obligations" from the university. CSU has countered that it is not aware of any conflict with Thompson.

About 50 cafeteria workers unionized last April. On December 3, UNITE HERE filed unfair labor practices after Thompson cancelled all future contract negotiations and told the union they had a financial dispute with CSU.

Ontario teachers begin job action

Elementary school teachers across the province will begin job action this week beginning with a one-day strike on Monday at school boards in Northern Ontario and the Stratford area, west of Toronto.

The strikes by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) are to protest Bill 105, recently passed provincial legislation that effectively eliminates teachers' right to strike. Union leaders have assured parents that they will give three days' notice for the one-day strikes that they have pledged will affect every school in the province before the end of the month.

Education Minister Laurel Broten responded to the strike announcement by saying she would not employ new powers allowing the government to shut down the strikes, providing they remain limited to one-day actions.



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