

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 December 2012

## Argentine city electrical workers strike over exclusion from bonus

Workers for the Light and Power Department in the Argentine city of San Carlos de Bariloche began a strike December 20 to protest their exclusion from Christmas bonuses given to workers in other departments. The walkout followed a demonstration in front of the offices of the Bariloche Electricity Cooperative the previous day.

An official for the Light and Power workers' union told reporters that the city's refusal of the bonus payment was due to the union's support for opposition candidates in the last elections and called it "a discriminatory act." The official, Gabriel Prieto, noted that the union has always been patient, at times accepting the payments in portions, but that this time the department unilaterally decided not to pay them.

Prieto added that the union's federation has declared its support and that the strike "is total, save for those jobs that are done to guarantee public safety."

## Chilean civil servants end strike over unrenewed contracts

On December 18, civil servants for Chile's National Corporation for Indigenous Development (Conadi) ended a strike they had begun 17 days earlier. The workers, members of the National Association of Conadi Functionaries (Anfuco), walked out when the contracts of 18 of their colleagues were not renewed.

Conadi, established as part of the Indigenous Law of 1993, "included directly elected indigenous representatives, advised and directed government programs to assist the economic development of indigenous people," according to Wikipedia.

The return to work followed extended negotiations in which a process for appeal of the dismissals was agreed upon. The contracts of nine workers were extended until December 31. However, Anfuco conceded to the dismissals of nine workers "owing to reasons such as delays, the end of programs and modernization," reported radio.uchile.cl.

## Honduran hospital workers strike to demand end to wage payment delays

Workers at the San Felipe Hospital in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, stopped work on December 18 to demand that the payment of delayed wages of permanent and contract employees and of purchases to food providers. The workers are members of the San Felipe Hospital Workers Syndicate (Sitrasanfelipe).

About a month and a half ago, the union complained to the minister of health, Roxana Araujo, that there was not enough food for the patients due to budget shortages. In fact, workers' own meals had been cut so that patients could be fed, but that measure was insufficient. "If they gave a patient lunch, they wouldn't give him dinner, and if they gave him dinner they wouldn't give him breakfast," Sitrasanfelipe president Elvin Canales told *La Tribuna*. Food concessionaires have said that they will not continue to deliver food if they do not get paid.

Arnold Zelaya, director of the hospital's service center, explained that the Finance Secretariat has not released funds to pay the food providers, so the administration has had to take out funds from other sources and cannot pay the workers. Sitrasanfelipe has said it will continue with the strike until the funds are provided.

## San Francisco area nurses carry through one-day protest strike against concessions

Thousands of San Francisco-area nurses walked off the job at nine health care facilities December 24 to protest demands by hospital companies Sutter Health and Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) over staffing levels, wages and benefits. Spokespersons for the California Nurses Association (CNA), which represents 5,000 nurses at the struck facilities, said Sutter was demanding "sweeping and unwarranted reductions in patient care protections" and "drastic reductions in mental health services, elimination of health care coverage for 1,500 Sutter RNs [Registered Nurses] and their families and loss of sick leave."

Management at the Sutter Solano Medical Center in Vallejo, California, threatened disciplinary action against any nurse who

struck, “up to and including possible termination.” The CNA has called several strikes during the past period, and Sutter Solano came out last week declaring “these repeated strikes are not protected under federal law.” The CNA called the threat “bogus” and said it would file a formal charge with the National Labor Relations Board.

Contract talks reached an impasse in November, and the hospitals have begun implementing some of the bargaining demands. Sutter Health has amassed \$4.2 billion in profits since 2005 and its top 28 executives make more than \$1 million in total compensation last year, while Sutter CEO Pat Fry pulled down a salary of \$5.2 million.

### **Four-day stagehands strike ends with settlement**

Stagehands in West Palm Beach, Florida, returned to work at the Kravis Center December 21, ending a strike that caused the cancellation of four performances of the Broadway production of *Jersey Boys*. Neither Kravis nor the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees would comment about the exact nature of the settlement except to say it included “the withdrawal of all pending unfair labor practice charges, and a resolution of the back pay elements of the case.”

### **IBEW shuts down Illinois communications workers strike after six days**

On December 12, a strike by workers at Consolidated Communications in Mattoon, Illinois, was shut down by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), despite the lack of a new contract or a retraction of the company’s demands for concessions.

More than 150 communications workers, including technicians, customer service representatives, and repair, warehouse, and facilities employees, struck after voting 143 to 1 to reject a company offer that included major concessions on workers’ pensions and health care. Subsequently, the company attempted to intimidate workers by canceling their current health insurance.

The IBEW shut down the strike shortly after Consolidated Communications agreed to reinstate workers’ insurance. However, workers remain without a contract and on December 19 voted 109-12 to reject the company’s “last, best, and final offer.”

The walkout is said to have its roots in a 12-year dispute over hiring. Union road crews refused to cross picket lines last week, leaving nine trucks carrying props and scenery idled.

### **Quebec ambulance workers on strike**

Nearly 2,500 ambulance technicians and paramedics in the province of Quebec went on strike Christmas eve after talks broke down the day before and just prior to the negotiation deadline.

According to a spokesperson for the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN), which represents the strikers, “people are pissed” and want a settlement soon. The union has said that, to conform to essential service laws, they will increase the number of workers so that there will be no cutbacks in service during the strike and that there may in fact be improvements.

Ambulance workers represented by CSN represent 60 percent of the provincial total and have been without a contract since March 2010. In October of this year, they overwhelmingly rejected a deal recommended by their union in July.

### **Ontario school support staff to join strike action**

Some 55,000 school support workers in Ontario could begin strike action next week if the Liberal government acts on new legislation, Bill 115, and imposes contracts on support staff in the new year.

Bus drivers, administrative staff, and early childhood educators could join the one-day strikes that Ontario teachers are currently engaged in, if Education Minister Laurel Broten sticks to the current deadline for unions to reach negotiated settlements by December 31.

Support workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), whose leaders say that they may be required to invoke their right to political protest if the government doesn’t reconsider its position.



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