

Workers Struggles: The Americas

22 January 2013

Mexican teachers protest education law

Some 2,000 members of the CNTE teachers union marched to the Supreme Court building in Mexico City on January 14 to voice their opposition to labor law “reforms” recently passed by national legislators. The laws, which must be ratified by 17 of the nation’s 32 states, will greatly diminish teachers’ rights, job security and living standards, allowing for temporary employment and new-hire probation periods, among other measures.

Other actions were coordinated with the Mexico City action, which included the delivery of about 140,000 legal challenges to the Supreme Court. In Oaxaca, for example, members of the SNTE union held a sit-in in front of the legislature. In Chiapas, over 10,000 teachers blocked roads.

Strike at Mexican university over administration labor violations

On January 16, members of the SUEUM university workers union at the University of Michoacan of San Nicolas de Hidalgo (UMSNH) voted to go on strike, with 2,480 of the union’s 2,800 members approving the action.

The strike, according to SUEUM official Armando Rangel, “is solely and exclusively the fault of the authorities, since there was never any rapprochement to attend to the affairs or to address the violations of the Collective Work Contract [CCT].”

SUEUM had struck in October over demands for a 15 percent salary raise and 5 percent in benefits. The university claimed at the time that the funds did not exist to meet those demands. The university rector,

Salvador Jara, also maintains that there is insufficient evidence of violations of the CCT and that the strike is illegal.

A number of university and state unions have declared their support for the strike.

Honduran National Persons Registry workers strike over nonpayment of wages

As of January 18, workers for the Honduran National Persons Registry (RNP) were continuing the strike they began January 15 over unpaid wages and benefits. The RNP employees, who process applications for birth certificates, ID cards, voter registration and other official documents, are demanding between 75 million and 113 million lempiras (US\$3,765,000-\$5,673,000) in overtime, vacation pay and social security payments, as well as maintenance for office machinery and equipment.

The RNP workers’ union, Sitrarenape, has about 1,400 members in 310 offices nationwide. In the capital, Tegucigalpa, about 100 protesting workers banged casserole pans and chanted in the noonday sun in front of the downtown Finance Ministry offices.

The RNP workers went on strike before in November over unpaid overtime during the run-up to national elections.

Costa Rica: Worker discontent at highest level in years

Sparked by widespread anger and disgust over falling earning power, worsening working conditions and

government corruption, Costa Rica's working class protested in record numbers and frequency in the last three years. This is the conclusion of an independent "State of the Nation 2012" report, which found that protests against President Laura Chinchilla's policies averaged one a day last year.

The government's recent decree granting a tiny 1.84 percent salary increase for public sector workers has put the National Association of Public and Private Employees (ANEP) bureaucracy under pressure from the membership. Union leaders called a demonstration last week in which chanting demonstrators carried signs reading "RAISE=SPARE CHANGE" ("AUMENTO=LIMOSNA").

ANEP is threatening to call a strike, possibly in early February, after a survey the union conducted found "general discontent among workers" and support for a public protest.

Ohio workers strike in face of massive concessions

Production workers at the Rotek, Inc. plant in Aurora, Ohio went on strike January 18 after management declared an impasse in negotiations and proceeded to implement a concessionary contract. The 120 members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 8565 struck rather than accept cuts that include a 20 to 30 percent slash in wages.

The USW bureaucracy offered Rotek the option to continue negotiations under the old contract agreement while taking a wage freeze. The previous pact expired on November 1. Negotiations have been ongoing since October. Rotek is a part of ThyssenKrupp Technologies and manufactures components for wind energy turbines and a variety of other equipment.

Washington state workers reject concessions pact again

Striking warehouse workers and drivers at the United Natural Foods (UNFI) distribution center in Auburn,

Washington rejected another company proposal on January 11 that leaves 72 workers permanently replaced. The 168 members of Teamsters Local 117 voted by a 104-26 margin to continue their month-long strike against the supplier of natural and organic products to grocery retailers.

Back in December UNFI workers attempted to return to work, but over half the workforce was denied entry to the facility, sparking a renewal of the strike. The latest terms advanced by UNFI also proposed to remove caps on health care premium increases, setting the stage for shifting all future medical costs unto the backs of workers.

In earlier agreements, UNFI proposed workers a 10.8 percent wage increase over the course of a new three-year agreement. But that offer rings hollow considering that UNFI workers make 25 percent less than workers at other distribution centers in western Washington state. The lead-up to the current struggle was punctuated by union documentations of threats, intimidation and discrimination by the company.

B.C. lab technicians to strike

Seven hundred six laboratory technicians employed by Lifelabs across British Columbia are set to take job action this week consisting of rotating strikes at the company's various patient service centers across the province.

The workers, who have been without a contract since the end of 2011, are represented by the British Columbia Government Employees union (BCGEU/NUPGE). Outstanding issues in contract negotiations center on wages, with the employer demanding deep concessions in a new contract.

In November of last year workers voted almost unanimously to strike, but their union has opted to limit action to a series of one-day or two-day walkouts.



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