

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 April 2013

## Chilean copper miners end strike

Workers at the Chilean Radomiro Tomic open-pit copper mine returned to work April 1, four days after walking off the job over the death of a worker. The worker, 37-year-old machine operator Nelson Barria, was killed in a cave-in on March 23.

Barria's coworkers blamed the tragedy on the lack of adequate safety measures, and demanded the firing of the general manager, Francisco Carvajal. In addition, they called for more attention to be given to worker safety.

The 1,000 regular miners were joined in the strike by about 3,000 contract workers.

The miners' union, the CTC, reached an agreement late on March 31. Calling the sacking of Carvajal "a great triumph for the workers," CTC president Cristian Cuevas said he had received assurances that the strikers would not face reprisals.

## Striking Chilean dockworkers win demands

On April 6, a dockworkers strike that began almost three weeks before at the northern port of Angamo, and then spread to eight other Chilean ports was ended on April 6. Most of the ports returned to operation on that day.

The strike, which had primarily been concerned with maintaining a 30-minute lunch break—which until recently was customary—brought shipments of copper, the nation's primary export at 9,000 tons a day, to a standstill. Shipments of fruit, another important export, at some of the other docks were halted as well.

The agreement signed between the Chilean Port Workers Union and Ultraport, manager of the Angamos facility, granted the lunch break and unspecified benefits.

## Argentine bus drivers strike to protest firing

Interurban bus drivers in the city of Carlos Paz, located in Argentina's Cordoba province, struck on April 4 to protest the firing of a coworker. The drivers are members of the Transportation Industry Workers Association or Aoitá.

Workers had gathered in front of the headquarters of the bus company, Transporte Carlos Paz, upon hearing that the firm was going to contract drivers from another bus line. They blockaded the entrance and prevented the buses from leaving. The police arrived, fired rubber bullets and arrested nine of the workers, allegedly for throwing rocks at them.

Aoitá Secretary General Miguel Herrera denounced the arrests, asserting, "We have returned to the old epoch of repression." He added

that the Transporte management "never worried about resolving the issue."

Nonetheless, contending that the Transportation Secretary asked Aoitá not to jeopardize negotiations with other bus employers' organizations, the union called off the strike.

## Mexican teachers continue protests against education reforms

On April 4, thousands of teachers converged on Mexico City to protest education reforms. The mobilization, which included a march from the Zocalo plaza to the Interior Ministry, was called by the Education Workers National Coordinator, or CNTE.

In Guerrero, a group of teachers blocked the Autopista del Sol freeway until forced back by over 2,000 federal police. Mobilizations took place in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Morelos and Michoacan as well.

The teachers unions oppose the reforms, a centerpiece of President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration, which would weaken teachers' rights and living standards. The evaluation process has come under particular criticism for its lack of allowance for Mexico's wide cultural and economic diversity and its punitive character.

In a press conference April 7 in Mexico City, union officials from a number of states condemned the reforms and the repression of teachers and said that they would decide on whether to call a national strike after meeting with the government April 9.

## Bahaman electrical workers protest to demand resignation of executive

Some 100 employees of the Bahamas Electricity Corporation (BEC) demonstrated April 3 and 4 to demand the replacement of the state entity's executive chairman. The chairman, Leslie Miller, has "publicly chastised them [BEC employees] about waste and excess and threatened legal action against employees who he accused of defrauding the corporation of millions of dollars in overtime," according to a Bahamas Journal report.

Since Miller assumed the post last year, the Bahamas Electrical Workers Union (BEWU) has filed over 50 trade disputes with the Labour Ministry against BEC practices. On March 12, workers protested in front of BEC's Baillou Hill headquarters over the unilateral imposition of a changed shift and roster system.

Anger grew when a 17-year employee was fired without cause March 25. After hearing that a shop steward was suspended April 2 for remarks he made during a radio interview, the employees held a one-hour strike on the 3rd, then struck and blocked the entrance to the Baillou Hill site on the 4th. At one point, irate demonstrators chanting, "Leslie got to go!" had a short shoving match with police.

Miller has called the strike illegal and hinted at retaliation.

BEWU president Stephano Greene has characterized the recent conflicts as the result of the acts of a “tyrannical” individual, and has “called on the government to intervene to restore industrial harmony to the corporation,” according to the Nassau Guardian.

However, after meeting with the parties April 5, Labour Minister issued a press statement warning, “if any member of the union or Executive Committee of the BEWU contravenes the Industrial Relations Act regarding continued industrial action, they will be subject to penalties as outlined in the Act.”

### **Jamaican telecom workers strike over staff cuts**

On April 3, about 200 unionized employees of telecommunication company LIME Jamaica went on strike following management’s nonattendance at a meeting concerning planned job cuts. LIME had announced earlier that it intended to eliminate over 300 support delivery jobs in May through outsourcing.

As reported by *Caribbean Trakker*, “Unions representing the workers have disputed the move and accused the company of breaching a 2011 Memorandum of Understanding that stipulated no staff cuts.” LIME disavows any breach of contract and says that workers have the option of applying at Ericsson, the international firm where the jobs are being outsourced.

The unions plan to take the matter before the Industrial Disputes Tribunal.

### **Sickouts by Jamaican doctors over reclassification**

About 1,500 of Jamaica’s 2,500 public health doctors called in sick April 4 to protest a planned reclassification exercise. The sickout continued and grew the next day.

Hospitals cut all but emergency services, while outpatient appointments have been canceled and elective surgeries have been rescheduled.

The doctors fear that the reclassification plans for fiscal year 2013-2014 will result in a lowering of their salaries, since under the plan, some of the doctors will be reclassified to lower positions and forced to take a pay cut. In addition, they are angered over outstanding allowances and pension payments.

The Public Health Service Minister Horace Dalley called for a meeting with doctors’ representatives on April 5.

### **Teamsters leaders sabotage Ohio sanitation strike**

Teamsters Local 377 ordered some 80 Republic Services/Allied Waste sanitation truck drivers in Youngstown, Ohio back to work April 3 while 23 onsite union workers at the local Carbon Limestone landfill continue their unfair labor practices strike. The company was struggling to cope with accumulating garbage until the union leadership undermined the struggle of the striking workers.

According to a Republic spokesperson, strikebreakers filling in since the March 27 strike began were unfamiliar with local area routes. “The company isn’t even halfway done catching up,” said Ralph Sam Cook,

secretary-treasurer of Local 377, who indicated the union “pulled back those picket lines so the drivers could get out and clean up the trash.”

The previous week, Teamsters at Republic Services in Evansville, Indiana and Urbana, Illinois held sympathy strikes on behalf of Youngstown strikers. On April 1, strikers from the Carbon Limestone site traveled to Republic’s Elyria, Ohio facility where 197 drivers and mechanics for Teamsters Local 20 honored picket lines. Then on April 4, Republic Services/Allied Waste drivers in the San Francisco Bay Area launched sympathy strikes.

According to reports, at issue is the company demand that the Carbon Limestone landfill workers withdraw from the Teamsters-controlled Central States Pension fund in return for the inferior 401(k) plan and a lump sum contribution.

### **Diplomats take job action against federal government**

The union representing at least 1,500 Canadian Foreign Service workers began job action this week after nearly 20 months of fruitless negotiations.

While the initial job action was limited to what the union has termed an “electronic info picket”, the federal government has responded with threats of severe reprisals up to and including firing of those involved. The Professional Association of Foreign Service Officers (PAFSO) says they are only asking for “equal pay for equal work”, citing salary gaps of between \$10,000 and \$14,000 with other government departments that have persisted for over 8 years.

Those affected by what could be escalating job action in the coming days up to and including a strike, include heads of foreign missions, but not immigration, security or defence related personnel.

### **Montreal hotel locks out workers**

Around 110 workers at the Hotel Vogue in Montreal, Quebec were locked out by their employer last week after rejecting the company’s latest contract offer and voting in favor of strike action.

The workers are represented by the Teamsters Union, which says that management at the five-star hotel is demanding deep concessions in a number of areas including vacation, flexible work days and pension and health insurance plans. In addition, the union says that company plans to subcontract some work will mean the loss of at least 15 unionized jobs.

### **Strike at Alberta seniors’ home**

65 nurses and support workers at Waterford of Summerlea seniors support home in Edmonton, Alberta went on strike last Friday after negotiations for a first contract broke down.

The striking workers are represented by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE) who have been negotiating for over fifteen months for a contract to achieve wage parity with industry standards which currently pay at least 25 percent more than wages at Waterford.

Waterford is a for-profit living facility for seniors with 142 units and is owned by B.C. based Chantelle Management which runs six such facilities in Alberta and elsewhere.



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