

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 April 2014

Latin America

Chilean supermarket workers strike to demand raise

Workers at the Unimarc supermarket in the Chilean community of Nacimiento went on strike April 4. According to the workers' union, 62 Unimarc employees, consisting of bakers, grocery workers, clerks and stockers, stopped work to demand that management comply with the salary petition that they have submitted.

The union and Unimarc have been in negotiations over salaries, which for most of the workers are the minimum wage. The union is asking for a raise of 22,000 pesos, a little less than US\$40. Unimarc has not budged.

Construction workers at Brazilian sports venues strike over death of coworker, working conditions

Workers engaged in the construction of the Itaquerao Stadium in Sao Paulo downed their tools on April 2 after a worker fell to his death while installing seating. On March 29, Fabio Hamilton da Cruz became the third worker to die at Itaquerao and the eighth at sites where the government is pushing to complete construction in anticipation of the World Cup games this summer.

The collapse of a crane killed two workers at the stadium last November, after which safety measures were supposedly installed.

On April 3, workers at the Olympic Park, the main cluster of venues for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, struck over wages and working conditions. The contractor for the project, Rio Mais, claims that about 2,300 workers walked out, though other estimates go as high as 5,000.

According to a report on infobae.com, "The strike reflects the workers' dissatisfaction with the 9 percent salary raise agreed to between the enterprise and the union... The leaders

of the movement demand to be represented by another union, the Heavy Construction Workers, which would, they claim, signify a 15 percent raise."

Strike by Argentine education workers over arbitrary transfers

Workers at the Provincial Teleducation and Development System (SIPTED) in Argentina's Misiones province struck on April 4 against the compulsory transfers of two of their coworkers. The striking workers are members of the State Workers Association, or ATE, and the two transferred workers were active in the union.

The decision to take the action was resolved in an assembly vote taken earlier. A notification of the action delivered to the Labor Ministry explained, "The reason for the measure is linked to the compulsory transfers of workers who fight for the labor rights of the sector." The notification adds, "In both cases, it has to do with measures in which management commits open violations of union rights."

One of the workers, Sandra Avalos, is an elected ATE delegate, whose transfer "makes union protection vulnerable ... constituting an antiunion, discriminatory, illegal and malicious conduct with respect to our delegate," a letter to the SIPTED director declared. The letter said that the transfer of the other worker, Ana Karasawa, "also harms union freedom, since it deals with a comrade ... known as someone in the exercise of the defense of labor rights."

The letter concludes, "We understand that that the clear objective of these transfers is to punish these two workers to discourage the exercise of labor rights, keeping in mind that our union together with others organizations are bringing strong claims to the provincial government over salaries and working conditions." ATE says that it will initiate legal action against the transfers.

Jamaican highway workers return to work after strike

over unfair treatment

On March 24, about 180 workers involved in a project on a portion of Jamaica's north-south Highway 2000 struck to demand better working conditions, fair treatment and better wages. The workers are employed by the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC).

The workers are members of the National Workers Union (NWU), which was negotiating with CHEC. NWU said the workers would remain off the job until CHEC agreed to conform to the Joint Industrial Council (JIC) rates and terms of conditions.

On April 1, the Ministry of Labour called the parties to a meeting, but no agreement was reached due to CHEC's refusal to sign a letter acknowledging the NWU and the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union as bargaining agents for the workers.

The workers returned to work on April 3 "on the basis of a decision by CHEC to pay them increased rates and provide them with protective gear," according to a jamaicaobserver . com report. "However the unions ... are insisting that the major issue, which is their representational rights on behalf of the workers, is still unresolved and should discussed at a meeting at the Ministry of Labour next week."

United States

Seven-week strike by Indiana workers ends

Workers at Neo Industries in Portage, Indiana ended their seven-month strike last week after the company agreed to increase severance pay for truck drivers. Production workers walked off the job back in February in support of 10 truck drivers when the company outsourced their work offering a mere \$500 to \$1,000 in severance pay.

Management finally agreed to boost the severance package to \$10,000. United Steelworkers District 7 Director Mike Millsap did not oppose the company's demand for cheaper transport or the loss of jobs by truckers. "We recognize the company had to change its operations," he said.

As a part of the strike settlement, the new five-year contract provided production workers with a 2 percent increase in wages and a \$1,500 signing bonus. Neo Industries workers add chrome plating to steel for the steel industry.

Vermont bus drivers' strike ends in compromise on concessions

Bus drivers voted by a 53 to 6 margin to end their strike against Chittenden County Transportation Authority (CCTA) after management withdrew some of its concession demands for longer shifts and increased use of part-time drivers. The CCTA had sought contract language that would allow them to replace all departing or retiring full-time drivers with part-timers, but ultimately management settled for increasing part-timers by 15 positions in the new contract.

A critical issue for CCTA drivers was the maximum number of shift hours. They work morning, afternoon and evening split shifts. Management had wanted to increase the maximum workday that encompasses these shifts from 12.5 hours to 13.5 hours. But the final agreement left this at 12.5 hours.

Canada

Sweeping law ends Nova Scotia nurses strike

The Liberal government of Nova Scotia passed broad new legislation last Friday, ending a strike by over 2,300 nurses against their employer, Capital Health, which lasted only one day.

Although the nurses had staged a wildcat strike earlier in the week, their union, the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU), did not support that action and has indicated that it will abide by the back-to-work law. Union leaders have however indicated that they may challenge the law in the courts on constitutional grounds.

Bill 37, put forward as essential-service legislation, effectively outlaws strike action by as many as 40,000 health care workers across the province. Official opposition to the bill was purely symbolic, with the Tories saying they would have preferred binding arbitration and the NDP raising obligatory concerns during parliamentary debate.



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