

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 May 2014

## Mexican arbitration board rules judicial workers' strike "nonexistent"

Michoacán, Mexico's Local Conciliation and Arbitration Tribunal (TCYA) declared a strike by the Executive Power Service Workers Syndicate (STASPE) "nonexistent" or illegal May 1. The state judicial system workers struck on April 22 after rejecting a government salary raise offer of 3.5 percent. STASPE had demanded 20 percent.

STASPE head Antonio Ferreyra Piñón told *El Universal*, "We saw this result coming, because the Tribunal president is a friend of the governor." Ferrera Piñón said that the strike would continue despite the ruling, "because we're going to appeal to the federal justice by means of a sanction against the Tribunal's resolution."

However, after a May 1 march, Ferreyra Piñón said that the Juridical Council, where the appeal would be submitted, in "conspiracy" with the TCYA, refused to accept it. Ferreyra Piñón called the rejection "a disgrace what they did to us." STASPE then called off the strike on May 2.

## Strike by Mexican public transit workers for overdue pay

At least 460 public transportation drivers in the Mexican coastal tourist city of Cancún suspended their labor in the early hours of May 1 to demand payment to the IMSS social security fund, the Infonavit housing fund and profit sharing. The workers say that the Turicun public transport line has not paid into the funds for five years.

Union leader Julio Pérez Ruiz told reporters that he had sat down to talk to Turicun majority shareholder Vicente Noya, "but the businessman told us that there is nothing in either shares or money." One worker said, "We're the ones that generate the income and it isn't just that in the night and in the morning they take the funds and as well when we get sick we have to pay private doctors even when they discount the insurance."

The strike impeded some 250 buses, affecting 55 routes. The drivers have vowed that if their demands are not met, they will take more extreme measures, including blockades of major thoroughfares and seizures of buses to prevent any of them from circulating.

The morning of May 2, the union accepted an offer to talk with Turicun management. At 8:30 am, the parties emerged with the union agreeing to go back to work. Details of the deal were not revealed at the time.

## Mexican telecommunications union backs down from strike call

On April 29, the day before the Telephone Syndicate of the Mexican Republic (STRM) was to take industrial action over wage, benefit and contract demands, the STRM called off the strike and signed a deal with telecommunications firm Telmex.

Telmex, headquartered in Mexico City, is the dominant fixed-line phone carrier in Mexico and also does business in a number of Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador.

The 40,000-strong union had originally demanded a nine percent wage raise and four percent in benefits. STRM settled for 4 and 1.5 percent respectively.

Another important demand was that Telmex not revise or eliminate almost 40 clauses in the current contract. The changes would have impacted such areas as hiring and retirement. Instead, the company signed a "letter of intent" not to touch the clauses until the passage of a proposed—and controversial—telecommunications law that ostensibly will make the industry more competitive.

## Peruvian miners strike for better pay, permanent status for casual workers

More than a thousand mineworkers at the El Brocal mining complex, located in Peru's Pasco region, began an indefinite strike May 2. They have presented a petition to the Pasco Regional Labor and Employment Promotion Directorate. The main demands are a pay increase and the conversion of casual workers to full-time status.

El Brocal is a polymetallic enterprise that engages in the exploration and production of zinc, lead, copper and silver.

If no agreement is reached, the mineworkers plan to travel to Lima to protest in front of parent company Buenaventura's headquarters.

## Strikes by Antiguan health, medical benefits workers

About 60 health workers at Antigua's Central Board of Health (CBH) in St. John's refused to work April 28 to demand information on overdue overtime payments. The workers, members of the Antigua Trades and Labour Union (AT&LU), began the action at 6:30 in the morning.

A worker told the Antigua Observer that the money had been owed for almost a year. "Since Friday, they promise the back pay purse and they paid us our weekly wage but nothing was said about the money that was owed to us since Carnival [last August]."

ATLU shop steward Donna Gregory told reporters that negotiations with Treasury officials were "ongoing." The HBS workers struck before in January, returning to work when promised that they would be getting their payments.

On April 29, workers for Antigua's Medical Benefits Scheme (MBS), also members of the AT&LU, struck to demand that a job reclassification recommendation, which would result in across-the-board salary increases, be accepted by the Board of Control.

Negotiations have been plodding along for over a year, and the present Board of Control's term is due to end soon.

The next day, over 70 chanting workers marched to the offices of both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour to make their demands.

### **Barbadian conservation workers protest retrenchment policy**

Workers for Barbados' National Conservation Commission (NCC) protested the retrenchment policies of the agency. Chanting "Last in, first out!" in front of the NCC office in Codrington, St. Michaels office April 30. The chant refers to the policy of retrenchments that the protesters felt was not followed properly.

Although most of the protesters had been dismissed that day, they were joined by NCC workers who objected to the retrenchment of their former colleagues. One worker told Nation News that he had nine years experience, yet he was let go while another worker with one year was retained.

In recent days, the NCC has sent nearly 200 workers home as part of a plan to cut 976 from the payrolls. Some of them, though classified as temporary, have up to 20 years experience with the NCC. The workers slated for dismissal include lifeguards, rangers, artisans, drivers and general workers.

### **Bermudan May Day marchers demand jobs and equality**

Hamilton, the capital of Bermuda, was the scene of a lively May Day march, as thousands of people took a petition to the House of Assembly after rallying in nearby Victoria Park. Marchers carried signs demanding "Jobs, Equality, Justice" and denouncing businesses that have profited while the working class has been hammered by the economic crisis.

Prime Minister Craig Cannonier met the marchers at the Assembly and attempted to speak, but had to stop three times because he was heckled by angry protesters. A number of politicians from both ruling and opposition parties showed up, each claiming to care for the concerns of the workers and maintaining that reforms could be achieved under "democratic capitalism."

The march was organized by a newly-formed pressure group called the People's Campaign for Equality, Jobs and Justice. The demands in the petition—referred to as a "manifesto" by the local press—called for a progressive tax system, jobs, equality in gaining postsecondary education, increased funding for health care, protection of labor rights and higher wages, among other issues.

### **Philadelphia convention center carpenters end strike, sign contract extension**

Members of Carpenters Local 8 ended their eight-hour strike May 1 after union officials and management at Philadelphia's Pennsylvania Convention Center signed a 10-day contract extension and agreed to resume negotiations this week. At issue is management's demand to change work rules that will allow exhibitors to double the previous size of booths they are allowed to build using non-union carpenters and to have the right to use power tools.

SMG, a private management company, took over running the state-owned convention center from city-appointed administrators on December

30. "Because of past labor issues in Philly, we're not as competitive as other cities," said SMG general manager Lorenz Hassenstein.

Carpenters union secretary-treasurer Ed Coryell said "people in government" demanded he call off the strike. Philadelphia Mayor Nutter is backing management's demands. "Clearly there's a need for reform, for further reform of work rules in order for the Pennsylvania Convention Center to be truly competitive," said Nutter.

### **Machinists strike at Alabama military installation ends**

Some 3,000 members of the International Association of Machinists Local 2003 voted May 4 to end their weeklong strike at Alabama's Fort Rucker. No details were made available about the final agreement.

Machinists first walked off the job over a proposed contract from L-3 Army Fleet Support which workers claimed would threaten seniority rights and overtime policies.

### **Ajax auto workers strike**

330 workers at Lear Corporation in Ajax, east of Toronto, Ontario, went on strike last week as bargaining continued between the company and Unifor, representing workers at the plant.

While no details have been released regarding negotiations, union leaders say they are trying to get a fair compensation package for workers at the plant. Lear's Ajax plant builds seats for the Chrysler plant in Brampton, north of Toronto. The union is pointing to Chrysler's dramatic rise in profits in the recent quarter.

### **Vancouver area city workers strike**

Over 100 municipal workers in the city of White Rock, east of Vancouver, BC, staged a one-day strike last week shutting down city hall. It marked the first strike in the city's history by civic workers.

Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), White Rock city workers had voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action in February after being without a contract since 2011. Outstanding issues in the dispute include provisions for part-time workers, long-term disability and protection for work hours.

The union has said that the one-day strike is the first of a series of job actions that will affect a range of city services in the coming days and weeks.



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