

Workers Struggles: The Americas

3 June 2014

Latin America

Argentine bank employees strike against dismissals of colleagues, police repression

On May 29, bank employees in Argentina struck for one day to protest the firing of 36 workers in the Popular Savings Bank (CPA) in Tucumán. The strike also protested riot police attacks on the workers, who marched and demonstrated in front of a CPA office May 13. The CPA has refused to discuss either issue.

The government had called for the Banking Association (AB) union and CPA to attend an “obligatory conciliation” meeting, but the union went ahead with the strike. AB spokespeople say that if their demands are not listened to, more actions will follow.

Strikes by Brazilian bus drivers for wage raises

Bus drivers in the Brazilian city of Salvador went on strike May 27 to protest the contract agreed to between their union and management. The Salvador drivers’ walkout followed similar actions by drivers in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in preceding weeks.

In this case, the union had settled for a 9 percent hike; the striking drivers demanded 12 percent. However, after a meeting, the striking workers went back the next day after they agreed to the 9 percent raise, but got their workday cut from eight hours to six hours, 40 minutes.

Salvador is one of the 12 Brazilian cities chosen to host the World Cup soccer tournament, which is scheduled to begin this month.

In two other cities, São Luiz de Maranhão and Florianópolis, bus drivers have taken strike actions. The bus drivers from Rio and São Paulo are meeting this week to decide on whether to escalate their actions. The government

has ordered a mediation meeting on June 4 at the office of the Labor Justice ministry.

Costa Rican teachers remain on strike after breakdown of negotiations

Costa Rican teachers’ union representatives left a meeting with Public Education Ministry (MEP) officials May 27 with an agreement over payment of back pay and ending the strike begun May 5. However, the agreement was voted down when it was presented to the teachers. According to a *Tico Times* report, “Teachers cited the lack of a deadline for Education Ministry (MEP) officials to settle all back pay, and they were skeptical about the government’s proposed payment procedures.”

The government has since hardened its stance. Following the rejection of the agreement, MEP head Sonia Marta Mora told reporters that the teachers “must return to work. We will now deduct wages from those who fail to do so, starting on Monday,” June 2. “There is not a single reason for teachers to keep striking next week,” she claimed.

The teachers, members of the National Association of Educators (ANDE), the High School Teachers Association (APSE) and the Costa Rican Educators Union (SEC), walked out May 5 to demand months of unpaid wages, which the government of then-president Laura Chinchilla claimed was caused by the transition to a new database.

Chinchilla passed the problem on to incoming president Luis Guillermo Solís, who had expressed solidarity with the teachers during his election campaign. The wages, however, remain unpaid, and Solís has urged the teachers to go back to work.

Two of the unions have since said they will return to negotiations, but APSE president Ana Doris González said that “teachers will not return to work until all back pay is issued.”

Solís’s response is that “the continuation or worsening of the strike is not the government’s responsibility, and we will not tolerate it anymore. We have the responsibility to

maintain labor conditions for teachers, but we also must protect the students' rights."

Walkout by Puerto Rican dockworkers over medical coverage, austerity legislation

Workers at the Puerto Rico Ports Authority walked off the job on May 28 over planned changes to their medical plan and pending legislation reorganizing the Ports Authority. Workers picketed the Labor Department headquarters in San Juan as well as Ports Authority facilities.

The island's governor, Alejandro García Padilla, has pushed a "fiscal emergency law" that would reorganize and consolidate the Ports Authority in the name of cutting expenses, boosting revenues and jumpstarting the sluggish economy. Another would make changes in the workers' health insurance.

García Padilla and his supporters have additional plans to impose austerity on public workers. Legislation last year privatized the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, and lawmakers are considering a number of cost-cutting proposals including consolidation of agencies, budget cuts, layoffs of transitory and trust employees, cutbacks in Christmas bonuses, elimination of some holidays, liquidation of unused sick days and suspension of some incremental benefits.

Central Workers Federation official Emilio Nieves said labor groups are planning to launch a strike in early June in protest against the planned measures.

The United States

Indiana construction workers strike over wages and benefits

Construction workers in northwest Indiana went on strike May 29 against Superior Construction Company over wages and benefits. The contract between members of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 150 and the employers' group Northwest Indiana Contractors Association expired on April 30. The current walkout is in effect at several of Superior's job sites.

The same local union did sign agreements with another employers' group called the Northwest Indiana Independent Building Group on May 23, allowing these companies to continue work. This employers' group originated in a break

with the Northwest Indiana Contractors Association during a 2011 strike. That strike was precipitated by the cost of funding health care.

Canada

Toronto commuter bus strike looms

Go commuter bus drivers and staff are set to go on strike this week following a Sunday midnight strike deadline after the last contract expired on Saturday.

The Go Transit system, which is operated by Metrolinx, serves around 64,000 commuters in the Greater Toronto area. While most train service will not be affected by a strike, the 1,850 bus drivers, station staff and safety officers at Go, members of the Amalgamated Transit Union, will be off the job.

Go Transit has said that while ticket sales will continue and stations will stay open in spite of a possible strike using non-unionized staff, Metrolinx has warned that bus service will be halted. If a strike goes ahead, it will be the first in Go's 47-year history.

BC Aerospace workers set to strike

Four hundred and forty workers at the Cascade Aerospace plant in Abbotsford, British Columbia, are set to go on strike Wednesday of this week if a contract deal is not reached before then. Unifor, the largest private-sector union in the country, is the bargaining agent for workers at the plant.

The union, which represents engineers, technicians, mechanics and other staff at Cascade, has said they are not willing to accept the massive concessions being demanded by the company in the first contract with the new owners of Cascade, the Halifax-based IMP Group. Workers voted 98 percent in favor of strike action in May after months of fruitless negotiations.



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