

Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 August 2014

Latin America

Argentine radio station workers strike for overdue pay, improvement of working conditions

Contract workers at the Buenos Aires-based radio station Radio Provincia struck for 48 hours beginning August 11 to demand the payment of their overdue salaries and the reversal of the steady decline of working conditions. According to a communiqué by the striking workers, contract employees have not been paid in eight months, and “the contracting system conceals the deterioration of work that personnel at this station suffer.”

The document points out, “Salaries for contract employees are below the minimum,” and “recategorizations have been frozen for more than seven years.

“Faced with this grave situation, the Radio Provincia workers resolved in general assembly to continue the delay of tasks and develop special programming until Tuesday, August 19.” The programming “will broadcast the conflict in which part of the workers of the Province find themselves.”

Strike by Argentine pilots for pay raise cut short

On August 12, pilots and copilots for Aerolíneas Argentinas walked off the job over wage demands. The strike delayed or canceled about 30 flights to Santiago, Asunción, Bogotá, Caracas, Miami and other cities.

The pilots struck to demand a 35 percent wage increase, citing the corrosive effects of Argentina’s rampaging inflation rate on their purchasing power. Although the state-run airline, which called the walkout “an act of enormous irresponsibility,” claimed in a press release that the pilots are “privileged with high salaries and luxurious working conditions,” their unions, APLA and UALA, countered that copilots earn less than US\$2,400 per month.

After about five hours, the Labor Ministry ordered the pilots and copilots back to work and to accept mediation. The unions complied, and operations returned to normal.

Strike by Argentine educators following failed parity talks

On August 13, the Tierra del Fuego Unified Education Workers Syndicate (SUTEF) in Argentina’s southern province called a two-day strike following the breakdown of negotiations with the Education Ministry the week before. The provincial government had refused to take

the inflation rate into account in salary discussions for the second semester. Government officials claimed that the funds were insufficient for any increase.

The strike included a mobilization and march to the legislature, an assembly and an *olla popular*, or soup kitchen.

Panamanian teachers strike for promised wage increase

Teachers at the San José de Las Lomas elementary school in David, a city in western Panama, began an indefinite strike August 15. The teachers are demanding a response from the Education Ministry regarding a promised US\$150 raise that they were promised.

The teachers decided on the action when only 12 of the 42 educators at the school received the raise. They put locks on the entrances and refused to hold classes.

Honduran microbus drivers protest harassment, seizures of vehicles

On August 14, drivers of informal minibuses converged on the Presidential House in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, to protest recent government actions, including harassment of the drivers and confiscation of their vehicles by national security forces (Fusina) officers.

In recent weeks, between 30 and 50 minibuses—known popularly as *brujos* or “wizards”—have been confiscated because their owners were not carrying operation permits and were covering prohibited routes in the capital. The owner-operators of the minibuses claim that the General Transportation Directorate (DGT) will not grant permits despite their attempts to obtain them.

The protesters denounced Fusina for not letting them work, and petitioned the government to legalize their operations, which they claim provide a service that is more efficient, economical and secure than the official public transport system.

Salvadoran health workers strike, protest nonfulfillment of contract provisions

Members of El Salvador’s health workers union SIGESAL in the western city of Santa Ana began a strike and protest actions on August 12 over the San Juan de Dios Hospital director’s failure to comply with contract provisions. Consultations, as well as cardiograms and encephalograms were suspended.

Protesters told reporters that the director, Ramón Abrego, had not complied with agreements reached several weeks ago, in which “he

indicated that there would not be sanctions for employees who requested the dismissal of a nursing department head who cut their hours for that reason.”

Despite Abrego’s promise, five employees were notified of pay cuts on July 29 for their participation in the action.

Dominica: Public workers protest over wages, benefits

Workers in the Public Workers Corporation (PWC) on the Caribbean island of Dominica (population 72,000) protested over a number of longstanding grievances August 11. The protesters, members of the Dominica Public Service Union (DPSU), marched to the headquarters of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit in the capital Roseau with an 11-point set of demands.

The workers had already held a public protest July 29 in the Financial Center after DPSU’s requests for meetings with the Public Works Minister and PWC management were ignored. The union then proposed a meeting with Skerrit on August 4. The meeting did not take place, forcing the union to call the August 11 protest.

An August 1 report on *dominicacentral.net* lists some of the grievances: “For the last six weeks, the fortnightly-paid workers at the corporation have not received any wages while the monthly paid workers have not been paid for the last two months. Social Security contributions and income tax deductions have also not been paid to the Dominica Social Security and the Inland Revenue Division on behalf of the workers. Consequently, workers have been losing their applicable benefits and income tax returns.

“Workers are also concerned that the government owes the PWC some \$3,137,691 [US\$1,062,106] and appears to be marginalizing the corporation.”

Strike by Trinidadian bus drivers over health and safety issues

Bus drivers for Trinidad’s Port of Spain to San Fernando route began a strike August 14 to protest health and safety issues at Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) buildings. The drivers, members of the Public Services Association (PSA), joined colleagues from the Ministry of Food Production who walked out over similar concerns. Over 100 workers from both sectors were involved in the action.

PSA President Watson Duke gave reporters a tour of PTSC’s Administrative Building in San Fernando and the Ministry of Food Production Regional Administrative South Office, where he pointed out “exposed wiring, falling ceilings, leaking roofs, unsteady floors, mouldy walls, poor lighting, uncleaned vents and mosquitoes,” according to the Trinidad Express. The report adds, “Workers at the Ministry of Food Production said that over the years several workers have died from cancer.”

The PSA is calling for Occupational Safety and Health Act inspections, reports, upgrades and certification of buildings in the PTSC system. Some 460 buildings may be subject to inspection.

The United States

Illinois teachers strike over working conditions

Teachers in Galesburg, Illinois started walking picket lines August 13 after 15 hours of mediated talks failed to produce a new contract. A statement by Superintendent Bart Arthur and the district’s school board president declared, “Given the state’s cuts in General State Aid, Transportation and other budget line items, we simply cannot go beyond our final offer and still fulfill our obligation to continue to provide top-quality educational opportunities for Galesburg students not only now but in future years.

But the Galesburg Education Association, which represents the 500 striking teachers, says the state budget is not the main obstacle to an agreement. Instead, the union hints at firings and working conditions as the main cause for teacher opposition. “Blaming the state of Illinois for our problems with finances is an old standby,” a union statement responded.

Another union reply stated, “You can’t offer a contract that is not worthwhile, that’s not comparable to our area.” According to the school board, their current proposal offers a 5.04 percent wage increase over a three-year agreement.

Survivor film editors strike for union recognition

Film editors for the reality TV series *Survivor* ended their strike after one day when the producers agreed to union recognition and bargaining over health and retirement benefits. The editors will now be represented by the Motion Picture Editors Guild (MPEG), a branch of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

The strike threatened to put in jeopardy Island Post Productions’ season premiere. Film editors for *Survivor* have the task of reviewing some 250 hours of raw footage and condensing it into a one-hour program.

Canada

British Columbia city workers set for job action

Some 34 municipal workers in the city of Castlegar, east of Vancouver, British Columbia, are poised to go on strike this week after working without a contract since February 2013.

The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) whose leadership issued a 72-hour strike notice last Friday, but saying that action could be limited to an overtime ban for now. The union is seeking wage increases to keep pace with inflation, but the city’s final offer was well below that at 5.75 percent over five years.

The union has demanded that the city return to the bargaining table, but both sides have accused the other of leaving negotiations prematurely. The city has said that there will be no disruption to services in the event of a strike.



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