

Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 September 2014

Latin America

Chilean clinic workers continue strike for better salaries

Workers at the Reñaca Clinic in Viña del Mar, Chile are continuing their strike begun on September 8 over salary demands. About 350 workers, members of the Reñaca Clinic Syndicate No. 1, are involved in the action, which has included blockades, daily pickets and a soup kitchen called an “olla común,” or “common pot.”

Clinic management so far has not budged from its original offer, a pitiful 2 percent for one year followed by 1 percent the next. The offer was overwhelmingly voted down in assembly. On September 25, three striking employees began a hunger strike.

Argentine fruit packaging workers strike for pay raise

Shipments of fruit from Argentina’s Neuquen and Rio Negro provinces were halted on September 24 due to a strike at two packing plants. Workers at the La Deliciosa and La Flor storehouses in Centenario, Neuquen are demanding a 40 percent wage hike. The Chamber of Integrated Fruit Growers (CAFI) has offered 12 percent.

The workers prevented the entry and exit of trucks to and from customs clearing areas, preventing the movement of pears and apples, most of which are destined for Brazil.

Paraguayan teachers vote for two-day general strike

On September 25, Paraguay’s National Educators Union (UNE) met and ratified a general strike for September 30 and October 1 after tripartite negotiations with Education and Labor Ministry representatives broke down.

UNE is demanding a 10 percent raise for all teachers, while

the Education Ministry claims that the law of fiscal responsibility will not allow any augmentation of the 2015 budget.

A second meeting was attended by the Educators Federation of Paraguay or FEP, which did not say whether it would participate in the strike. However, FEP said that it would “mobilize” for both days as a “measure of force.”

Brazilian bank workers reject wage offer, vote for strike

Bank workers across Brazil voted September 26 to reject a counterproposal to their salary demands and strike. The bank workers are members of the National Financial Branch Workers Confederation or Contraf-CUT. The bank executives group, Fenaban, offered a miserly 0.61 percent increase. Contraf-CUT is demanding 5.4 percent after adjustment for inflation.

In addition to the raise, Contraf-CUT is calling for eight other proposed measures including the implementation of a 14th monthly wage and an increase in the value of food vouchers.

The strike was slated to begin September 30, embracing unions from 50 regions, which include all the largest urban areas throughout the country. Barring an agreement with Fenaban, the strike will be of an indefinite character.

Barbadian autoworkers strike again over unpaid wages

Workers at United Commercial Autoworks Limited (UCAL) in Bridgetown, Barbados struck on September 24 to protest the nonpayment by the Transport Board of outstanding salaries and wages for about 100 workers. UCAL claimed there were not enough funds to pay the workers.

The workers walked off the job on March 25 over the same issue (see 1 April 2014 Workers Struggles). The general secretary of the Barbados Workers Union (BWU) at the time, Sir Roy Trotman, after professing no knowledge of the problem, eventually secured an agreement to arrange for the payments and told the workers to go back to work, which they

did... reluctantly. Trotman was also chairman of the UCAL board.

This time, an agreement was reached after three hours of talks between Minister of Transport and Works Michael Lashley, UCAL's shareholders and board of management headed by Trotman—now retired as BWU general secretary, representatives of the BWU, Transport Board and Transport Authority. The workers returned to work on September 26.

A “source close to the negotiations” told reporters, “We agreed that the Government will make funds available to cover both salaries and operational expenses until March 31 next year.”

The United States

Strike at Texas seat manufacturer

Workers at Zodiac Seats US in Gainesville, Texas voted 374 to 24 to strike over a series of grievances. According to Teamsters Local 767, issues that led to the strike include work environment, seniority rights, work schedules, the grievance arbitration system and overall morale. Twice workers voted down company proposals before walking off the job.

The company wants to cut overtime by implementing a policy where workers would work 10-12 consecutive shift hours at straight time pay. Workers, for their part, are also seeking to establish permanent shift schedules.

Zodiac Seats US manufactures seats for airplanes. The current 3-year agreement expired earlier in September.

Pennsylvania nurses locked out after protest over staffing ratios

Nurses at the Crozer-Chester Medical Center in Upland, Pennsylvania were locked out September 23 after attempting to return to work at the conclusion of a two-day strike. Members of the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals went on strike to protest deficient staff-to-patient ratios that they want addressed in the current contract negotiations.

Management claimed it locked out nurses because their contract for services with the strikebreaking firm U.S. Nursing Corporation required a five-day agreement. They claim that they cannot honor nurses' demands for increased patient care due to financial constraints.

One nurse told the Delaware County *Daily Times*, “We don't have what we need to take good care of the patients. We don't have the resources. We don't have the supplies. We don't have

the manpower to take good care of the patients. It's hard.”

Canada

Native court workers set to strike in British Columbia

Thirty-six workers at the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia (NCCABC) across the province are set to go on strike this week after their union issued a 72-hour strike notice late last week.

The workers, who are represented by the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), provide counselling and court services to Native people to help them negotiate the legal system. They have not had a wage increase in five years with wages as low as 30 percent below comparable job classifications for other Aboriginal workers in the public service.

In early September, workers voted almost unanimously in favor of strike action against the NCCABC, which is funded by the provincial Liberal government. Union leaders are also demanding that this bargaining unit be brought under the Community Services Labour Relations Act, which they say could allow for proper funding.

Strike/lockout looms for Newfoundland city workers

Municipal workers in the city of Mount Pearl, adjacent to St. John's, Newfoundland, could be off the job this week after their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), declined to present the city's final offer to workers last week.

City workers are in a legal strike position and could be locked out at any time, after talks broke off last week with CUPE negotiators saying that the two sides are still far apart on the issues of wages, benefits and pensions. Armed with an overwhelming strike mandate last week, union leaders said there is no need to present the latest offer to workers because outstanding differences have not been addressed.

With the union's rejection of that “final offer,” conciliated talks collapsed last week with the city's mayor, Randy Simms, saying that a lockout is a “very real possibility.”



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