

Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 October 2014

IT workers in Argentina strike over working conditions, pay, job security

Information technology workers at the Rosario, Argentina software firm Neuralsoft struck on October 8. The workers set up canopies in front of the firm with signs demanding that Neuralsoft respond to their demands.

Those demands include a 35 percent raise, improved working conditions, job security, an end to forced—usually unpaid—overtime, training and expense allowances and recognition of the union. Pablo Dorin, secretary general of the IT workers' union told reporters that “work is done here for 10 to 12 hours under deplorable working conditions; there's no overtime, or rather after eight hours of work, it's normal to work a few more hours and nothing: thanks for the favor.”

The company, founded in 1989, claims that it is a PYME, or “small and medium-sized firm,” but Dorin said that “clearly it's a big enterprise, it's doing very well, of that there is no doubt, but it doesn't treat its workers as they deserve.”

Since they began their strike, the workers have been assaulted by the Sindicato de Comercio company union, which at one point sent a patota (gang) of about 40 thugs to threaten and intimidate the strikers. The police, who refused to protect the strikers, later attempted unsuccessfully to dislodge the striking workers.

Argentine dockworkers strike over noncompliance with contract

Some 600 dockworkers at the Port of Rosario walked off the job October 8 to protest breaches of contract by the Rosario Port Terminal (TPR) concessionaire. The strike was called “for an indeterminate time” by the Supa port workers syndicate. At two terminals, workers picketed the entrance.

The strike began after a group of Supa officials attempted to present a set of demands at the entrance of the concessionaire, and were prohibited entry. On the union's web site, Supa general secretary Cesar Aybar said, “The enterprise did not comply with a series of accords that we had signed and they were not paying the totality for a workday to the workers, keeping a percentage of what they owed.” Aybar added that “they are wanting to make a ferocious adjustment on the dockworkers.”

Other demands concern retirement contributions, benefits and the impediment of entry onto the premises. A tripartite meeting was scheduled for October 10 at the Labor Ministry.

Bank workers in Brazil end nationwide strike over wages and working conditions

Bank workers across 50 regions containing Brazil's largest metropolitan

areas returned to work on October 6 after a week on strike. The bank workers, members of the Contraf-CUT financial sector union federation, had walked out to demand improved salaries and working conditions.

The bank workers stopped work after eight rounds of talks with the Fenaban bankers federation had collapsed. The banks' offer of 7.5 percent was countered by a 12.5 percent demand by Contraf negotiators. The union bargainers also wanted 14 months of wages per year and a bonus. In the end, they accepted a nominal 8.5 percent raise and a bonus equal to wages for a little over two months.

Bolivian soccer team strikes over unpaid wages

Members of the Bolivian soccer team The Strongest completed a week on strike last week to demand payment of overdue wages. The players struck twice before in the last month, returning to work after promises that they would be paid, promises that were broken.

The players rejected a plan by president Kurt Reintsch to pay the remainder of money owed from July on October 9 and 50 percent of August's wages between October 20 and 25. Reintsch is now in jail for other unpaid debts. The last three remaining members of the team's board of directors resigned October 11, two weeks after two vice presidents and the general secretary stepped down.

On October 8, the players held a demonstration to show solidarity with employees of the Achumani sports complex who have not been paid for five months.

There is a game scheduled on the 19th, but the team members say they will not play if they are not paid in full by then. A communiqué from the team stated, “training will be individual, with a work plan that each player has taken home.”

Peruvian postal workers remain on indefinite strike over bonus, conditions, promotions

Workers for Peru's Serpost postal service remain out on a strike that they began September 16. The workers walked to demand the payment of an annual bonus, better working conditions and promotions for workers with seniority.

On October 11, a group of about 80 demonstrators burned tires and threw eggs at the central Serpost headquarters in Los Olivos after Serpost fired the SINATS postal union sub secretary. The union says it will “amplify the measures” until the company meets its demands.

Airline cabin cleaners end strike over working conditions at New York airport

Up to 200 workers who clean airplanes at New York's LaGuardia Airport for Delta Air Lines agreed to end their one-day strike and return to work October 9 after Port Authority agreed to review their complaints

about working conditions.

The workers complain about working in both extreme cold and heat, being exposed to human body fluids, defective safety equipment such as plastic gloves that easily tear and the company's refusal to allow workers to change uniforms during work shifts when they are soiled by human waste.

Recently, the workers filed a complaint with OSHA that complained of extreme speedups where workers must clean a plane in 5 minutes rather than the normal 45 minutes.

The workers are seeking representation by the Service Employees International Union and work for the contractor Air Serv Corporation, which has yet to agree to a labor agreement. The union has added the concern over the spread of Ebola to the tasks of cleaning airliners.

Indiana factory workers strike

Some 300 workers at the Schneider Electric plant in Peru, Indiana walked off the job October 6 after rejecting management's demand to liquidate pension funds. The workers, members of the International Association of Machinists are also dissatisfied with minimal raises in the proposed three-year agreement.

No new talks had been agreed to by the end of last week. Schneider Electric claims that workers accepted the same contract at four of its other plants in North America.

Production at the Peru plant is currently being shifted to other locations. Management recently announced it would move its headquarters from the Chicago region to Massachusetts.

Agreement ends strike by editors of Bravo reality shows

Post-production editors for the reality show "Shahs of Sunset" ended their month-long strike October 10 after management agreed to unionization of the workers by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). An overwhelming majority of the workers signed cards seeking union representation and immediate negotiations, but when Ryan Seacrest Productions declined to meet, workers walked out on strike September 10. At the heart of workers' demands are health care coverage and pensions.

The strike forced the October 13 premiere of Season 4 to be pushed back and no date has yet been announced. According to some press reports, Bravo has taken over production of "Shahs of Sunset" from Ryan Seacrest Productions and it is alleged they will seek to hire non-union post-production crews to bypass the current strikers.

Warehouse workers strike against massive pay cuts at US Army depot in Kentucky

Warehouse Workers at the Bluegrass Station Army Depot in Lexington, Kentucky went on strike October 1 after Allsource Global Management (AGM) demanded workers take pay cuts between 30 and 50 percent. The pay reduction is being achieved by reclassifying workers to a lower pay grade.

AGM is a subcontractor to Lockheed Martin and provides supplies to

the US Army Special Forces units. The company claims the pressure for wage cuts is coming from the federal government. But the International Association of Machinists, which represents the 170 workers at AGM, is demanding AGM provide details of the contract between AGM and Lockheed that mandates pay cuts, something AGM management has refused to do despite a request from the National Labor Relations Board.

Another possible factor in the clash are tax incentives worth \$10.8 million received by Lockheed Martin from the state of Kentucky provided the company maintain a base employment level of 1,009. Last June, Lockheed laid off 100 workers. Pay cuts as high as 50 percent may allow the company to regain the base employment level. The tax incentives expire in October 2015.

New Jersey construction workers strike to protest contract violations

Bricklayers working on a construction project in Atlantic City, New Jersey walked off the job the first week of October to protest contract violations. Richard Tolson of the Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers refused to specify what aspects of their labor contract had been violated except to say "all of it" and pointed the finger at the contractor BSP.

The strike affected a small number of workers working on a new building for Bass Pro Shop. The general contractor in overall charge of the project said work continued but witnesses claim there was no evidence of construction activity at the site, indicating other trades may be refusing to cross picket lines.

Community service workers strike in Toronto

Over 500 workers employed by Woodgreen Community Services at 32 offices across the Toronto area went on strike last week after rejecting the employer's latest contract offer.

The striking workers, who are members of the Workers United union, include childcare staff, personal support workers, housing workers and others employed by the government-funded organization. The union has reduced its wage demand to 2 percent, which would only allow for the cost of inflation but Woodgreen is offering only 1.25 percent and even that, would not be given to all workers.

Workers are also angered by pay increases that have been given to executive management staff, which totaled over \$1 million last year with the CEO receiving over \$200,000 in salaries and benefits.

University support workers strike in Montreal

2,000 academic and administrative staff at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) held a one-day strike last week for the second time this year after working without a contract since May of 2012.

The union representing strikers, Syndicat des employées et employés de l'UQAM (SEUQAM) has said that their wage demands will only keep pace with inflation but that the University has refused to even index salaries to the cost of living.

Workers voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action earlier this year, but limited to a total of five days for this semester by the union leadership. The first one-day strike was held at the beginning of the school year. In

this latest action, a number of students picketed with the strikers to show their solidarity and support.



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