

Workers Struggles: The Americas

2 December 2014

Latin America

Three-hour strike by Argentine transport workers to demand higher pay, tax cut

Transportation by train, truck, bus and air was halted from 4:00 to 7:00 am in Argentina on November 27. The brief strike, called by a number of unions as well as the CGT (General Workers Federation), demanded that the government of Cristina Fernández take action to counteract the effects of the nation's rampaging inflation rate, which is shredding Argentine spending power and living standards.

The primary demands are the lowering of income taxes for working class families and the addition of an end-of-year bonus. The government consistently underestimates the inflation rate, claiming presently that it is "only" 21.4 percent, while the real figure is closer to 40 percent.

The unions have already called two general strikes this year, in April and August. Those walkouts—which the union bureaucracies limited to two or three days—did nothing to halt the deterioration of working class living standards. Regarding this most recent action, Pablo Moyano, spokesman for the truckers' union and son of CGT boss Hugo Moyano, told reporters, "If there is no response, we will analyze this and then make a decision on what to do next."

Chilean mine supervisors strike following fruitless talks

Supervisors at London-based conglomerate Anglo American's Chilean copper mining complex went on strike in the early morning of November 28. The walkout follows a November 19 strike authorization vote, the result of the failure of over a month of talks between union negotiators and management to reach an agreement.

Union head Iván Mlynarz called the strike "inevitable" due to the intransigence of management, which "has refused to make any offer that includes any new benefit or compensation for its professionals." The union's demands include a five percent annual raise, a productivity bonus, a year-end bonus and allowances for their children's education.

This is the first strike by supervisors at the mine, located 3,500 meters (11,475 feet) above sea level, about 65 km (40 mi.) northeast of Santiago. Anglo American employs about 700 supervisors.

Strike by Peruvian miners ends following declaration of illegality

A strike by workers at Peru's largest copper and zinc mine, Antamina, was ended November 30. The SUTRACOMASA union ordered miners to work as it waits for a response to its appeal of a government declaration of

the action as illegal.

The workers downed their tools on November 10 to demand a bonus to counteract the decline in their incomes due to shrinking returns from a previously-negotiated profit-sharing agreement. Management at Antamina, which is controlled by BHP Billiton Ltd and Glencore Xstrata, claimed that, due to flagging profits, it would not pay more.

SUTRACOMASA said that it plans to strike again on December 10, but that it will inform authorities beforehand to avoid another declaration of illegality.

Peruvian health workers' strike for back-pay continues

Over 240 contract health workers in the south-central Peruvian region of Apurímac remain on strike for back-pay and supplies. The workers walked out on November 20 to demand the payment of three months of overdue wages and to protest corruption in the regional health department and chronic shortages of supplies and medicine.

In addition to picketing, the striking workers have blockaded sections of the highway, particularly the bridge leading into the town of Totorabamba. *Peru This Week* reported, "Soon after the strike began, a delegation of Chincheros [capital of a province in the region] had reported that the mayor of Apurímac region would come up with a solution, along with local authorities and leaders." So far no proposal has been forthcoming.

Honduran public employees protest mass suspensions

Public administration workers marched November 29 in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, to demand an end to massive layoffs of public employees. The protest was headed by the STENEE national electrical energy union as well as other public employee unions. Protesters gathered at the ENEE energy company and marched to central Tegucigalpa to demand an end to what they call a "labor massacre."

In recent weeks, the Hondutel telecommunications enterprise, the Bansupro national grain and food supplier, the INA agrarian institute and ENEE have laid off thousands of workers. Just last week, ENEE began procedures to suspend a thousand workers, while Hondutel laid off over 700. INA has announced plans to lay off an unspecified number.

St. Lucian sanitation workers strike to protest dismissal of coworker, working conditions

Sanitation workers in the St. Lucian city of Castries began an indefinite

strike on November 28 against the firing of a coworker and to highlight a number of workplace issues. The workers are members of the Seamen, Waterfront and General Workers Union (SWGU).

On November 27, an employee of the Castries City Council (CCC) was fired for insisting on his right to park in the CCC parking lot and for arguing with the town clerk, pointing out that several nonemployees were parked there. The striking workers are angered at the dismissal—for “insubordination”—and are demanding that he be rehired.

However, the workers have broadened their demands to include other workplace safety issues, which SWGU branch officer Timothy Alfred told reporters had the workers “restless and stressed out.” One is the CCC’s foot-dragging on providing safety equipment to workers. Another is the lack of concern of the CCC about injuries suffered by workers, the most recent being a worker who was struck in the eye while cleaning up a town square.

Guyana: Bauxite workers strike over salary demands

A protest action taken by workers at the bauxite operations in Linden, Guyana, November 24 was declared the day after management did not meet wage and salary increase demands. The company, BOSAI Minerals Group, has not budged from its offer of six percent that it made in May, when negotiations began with the National Association of Agricultural, Commercial and Industrial Employees (NAACIE).

NAACIE began the talks demanding 25 percent, then 8.25 percent, but has since lowered it to “anything above seven percent or nothing less,” as NAACIE branch secretary Aggrey Darlington told reporters. Last year, the union accepted a seven percent raise.

A report in *caribnewsdesk.com* adds, “There are also other grievances that the works have bundled with their pay demand in the hope of having them addressed,” but did not specify what they were.

Jamaican television workers strike over elimination of union post

On November 25, workers at Jamaican station CVM Television struck to protest a decision by management to eliminate the post of chief union delegate. The station sent a notification to the National Workers Union (NWU) that chief union delegate Michelle Charles, an accountant, had been made redundant.

There are other issues besides the redundancy, however. A November 21 article in *Loop News* reported that employees were at the point of staging a sit-in over several demands, including disbursements to employees for work-related expenses.

One employee, speaking anonymously, told the outlet, “Working conditions are becoming progressively bad and if we are to be the best professionals we can be, then we need to be given adequate resources. Morale is already low and the management style from the top can be heavy handed.”

Workers held a protest in front of CVM, and the NWU has requested the intervention of the Ministry of Labour, which called a “conciliatory meeting” on the 26th.

The United States

Struck telecom company issues return to work call to strikers

Fairpoint Communications issued letters to striking telecom workers appealing to them to cross picket lines as the strike by 1,800 members of the Communications Workers of America and the International

Brotherhood of Electrical Workers has gone on for one-and-a-half months. The company’s appeal comes in the wake of major problems that have affected Fairpoint’s operations in Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.

Storms in the northeast have toppled trees, and equipment malfunctions have caused a failure of the 911 emergency system, loss of dial tones, poor line quality and delays in repairs and installations. The company is also complaining about harassment through “mobile picketing” by strikers who follow replacement workers to worksites.

Strikers have raised questions about a posting on *Monster.com* that is offering telecom workers \$300,000 a year for jobs in northern New England. This salary would be three times the current cost of union workers under the old agreement.

The strike was provoked when Fairpoint unilaterally froze pensions, raised health care costs for workers and wiped out health insurance for retirees. The company also insisted on contract language allowing them to hire outside contractors, including from overseas companies, to do bargaining unit work. In all, Fairpoint had been demanding concessions amounting to \$700 million. Union officials concede that workers are overpaid and have offered \$200 million in cuts.

Canada

Quebec workers stage one-day strike

Over 5,500 municipal workers in 18 cities across the province of Quebec walked off the job on November 26 as part of a months-long protest by workers against the passage of Bill 3, which will drastically cut municipal workers’ pensions.

The previous day, tens of thousands of workers across Quebec staged a 15-minute protest. Workers took to the streets to publicize their fight against pension cuts and also against recently proposed increases to subsidized daycare charges and cuts to a whole array of social programs affecting thousands of jobs.

Despite the determination shown by rank-and-file workers to oppose the cuts in recent months, the union leadership has refused to mobilize against the class-war legislation in any meaningful way. A union alliance, Coalition syndicale pour la libre négociation (Union Coalition for Free Negotiation), has pledged to fight Bill 3 in the courts after it has passed into law, which is expected to take place next week.

Teaching assistants stage strike at Quebec University

Some 5,000 teaching and research assistants at Laval University in Quebec City held a one-day strike last week to pressure school negotiators back to the bargaining table.

TAs and researchers at Laval are represented by the Syndicat des Auxiliaires Administratifs, de recherche et d’enseignement (SA²RE). The school has blocked all negotiations since classes began this fall, after the Liberal government announced across-the-board spending cuts including funding to universities.



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