

Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 January 2015

Latin America

Brazilian airline pilots, crewmembers hold two-hour strike over pay, conditions

Pilots and flight crewmembers at 60 airports across Brazil stopped work for two hours the morning of January 22, causing cancellations of 36 flights and delays in 87 others. At several of the airports, protesting workers held demonstrations.

The workers, members of the National Syndicate of Airline Workers, struck mainly to demand higher pay and enhanced security measures. The union is demanding 8.5 percent as opposed to management's 6.5 percent offer. It is also calling for additional flight safety measures.

Among other demands, the pilots want changes in scheduling policy and the assignment of free days in order to avoid fatigue and improve their lifestyle.

Slow down protest at Brazilian refinery after explosion injures three workers

On January 18, an explosion at the Landulpho Alves Refinery (RLAM) near the Brazilian city of Salvador injured three workers. Reuters reported that the workers suffered burns from over 10 to 75 percent of their bodies.

This was the second accident in less than a week at RLAM, which is owned by the semi-public corporation Petrobras and produces over 300,000 barrels of oil a day. On January 14, a fire broke out in RLAM's paraffin unit, but no injuries occurred.

Buffeted by a series of scandals, Petrobras has seen its profits dip, and it has cut back on contract maintenance and repair work at its refineries. An official with the national oil workers union federation FUP told reporters, "It is our feeling that most of Petrobras' refineries are not operating as safely as they should be."

The workers' union, SindipetroBA, called January 19 for a one-day "work to rule," causing a small crimp in production.

Mexican teachers strike for unpaid salaries

Teachers in over 500 preschool, primary and secondary schools in the northwestern Mexican state of Sinaloa went on strike January 19 for overdue salaries. The teachers contend that in the first 15-day pay period (quincena), they did not receive their full salaries or were not paid at all.

Several dozen teachers, members of the SNTE educators union, demonstrated in front of the offices of the state Secretariat of Public Education and Culture (SEPyC) in Culiacan, while protests took place in Mazatlán, Ahome, Concordia, San Ignacio and other cities.

One teacher, Lazaro Lopez Campos, told Televisa, "Some checks arrived with less than the quantity that is received normally in the quincena, others went to the bank and they couldn't cover them, others didn't get their checks."

Another teacher told reporters, "We're human beings, we eat like you do, we can't eat slices of air."

Mexican university workers strike over salary demands

Administrative and manual employees at the Autonomous University of Yucatan (Uady) voted in an extraordinary assembly January 23 to continue their weeklong strike over salary demands. The university employees' union, Autamuady, called the assembly over the Uady administration's latest salary and benefits offer at a meeting between the parties.

According to union sources, university representatives offered a transportation payment of 40 pesos (US\$2.73) and about 140 pesos (US\$9.55) in food vouchers per month, but they would not consider a salary hike above their original 3.4 percent offer. The vote in favor of continuing the strike was reported by *sipse.com* to be "overwhelming."

A group of students from various departments held a rally in a local park and distributed leaflets in support of the strike.

Uady filed a request with the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JLCA) to declare the strike illegal, but on January 20, the JLCA ruled that the strike is legal. Uady has a 15-day deadline "to analyze the resolution and, in this case, to appeal on grounds against the labor agreement."

Protest by Peruvian health sector workers against contract violations and privatization moves

A large group of workers in EsSalud, Peru's public health agency, held a protest January 21 against failure to comply with contract provisions, and also to reject privatization of the sector.

Dr. Luis Rios Galdo, secretary general of the National Syndicate of EsSalud, denounced the January 5 publication of a reorganization plan "where Social Security decides to abandon the role of service provider to dedicate itself to be one more insurance company," a step he called "the last stage in the privatization of health."

The protesters threatened to carry out an indefinite strike if their demands go unheeded.

Trinidad and Tobago: University staff protest breach of agreement, demand unpaid money

Lecturers and nonacademic staff at the University of the West Indies (UWI) in St Augustine, Trinidad chanted, demonstrated and attempted to storm the office of the principal of the University of the West Indies to demand money owed to them from an agreement signed in June 2014. The university workers are represented respectively by the West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT) and the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union (OWTU).

Security personnel held off the angry crowd until the principal finally emerged from his office. He claimed that the government had assured him that they would receive their back pay in two tranches, at the end of March and the end of June. His explanation failed to mollify the protesters, since UWI had previously promised last June to pay the money by the end of December. The workers demanded the money, which comes to TT\$87 million (US\$13.8 million), in one payment.

WIGUT and the OWTU have given the administration one month to pay the money, after which they will take "other courses of action," according to WIGUT president Dr Russel Ramsewak.

The United States

One day strike by California hotel workers

Workers at Hilton's DoubleTree Hotel in downtown Los Angeles held a one-day strike January 22 in support of co-workers who claim they go without breaks. The 11 workers, represented by Unite Here Local 11, are demanding back pay for the missing breaks.

Some two-dozen co-workers turned out to picket on behalf of the strikers. The complaints were filed on January 21 with the California State Division of Labor Standards Enforcement. Hotel management has declined to comment on the practice.

Canada

Ontario steelworkers push beer can boycott

After being out on strike for nearly a year and a half, the union representing 120 workers at Crown Holdings Inc., in Toronto, is advancing a boycott against buying beer cans, in a dire attempt to gain public attention.

Workers at the plant were forced out on strike in September of 2013, and replacement workers were brought in soon after, but rather than mobilizing a membership numbered in the hundreds of thousands, the leadership of the United Steelworkers union (USW) instead wrote letters of appeal to the company's CEO and board of directors to ask them to resolve the strike.

From the outset, the highly profitable global can manufacturing giant had tried to provoke a confrontation with the union with excessive concession demands, including a proposed cut in wages of over 40 percent for some workers. The USW is asking the public to buy bottled beer instead of cans, in a move that they hope will hurt the company's bottom line.

Dalhousie University workers vote to strike

Over 300 support workers at the agricultural campus of Dalhousie University near Truro, Nova Scotia, voted strongly in favor of strike action last week, after working without a contract since March of 2012.

The workers, who include clerical, maintenance, and professional staff, are members of the Nova Scotia Government & General Employees Union (NSGEU) who are in the process of merging three locals and are facing a range of conflicts with the school, from displacement rights to wages and job security.



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