

Workers Struggles: The Americas

3 February 2015

Latin America

Strike by Mexican university workers in third week

A strike at the Yucatan Autonomous University (UADY) by administrative and manual workers completed its second week last week with no agreement between the administration and the workers' union, AUTAMUADY. The union called the strike January 16 after negotiations failed to achieve the union's 10 percent salary rise demand.

This is the first strike at UADY since AUTAMUADY's inception over four decades ago.

The union and the administration have held sporadic meetings, but UADY has stuck by its offer of 3.4 percent, less than the 3.5 percent hike of the year before. UADY has offered some other increments, such as in travel allowances and food vouchers, but they would still fall short of the 10 percent the union has demanded.

UADY claimed that the walkout was illegal because the vote in favor, 708 out of 760—i.e., 93 percent—was not unanimous. However, the local arbitration board validated the strike.

Claiming to champion “the right to education,” the UADY administration has set up alternate sites for classes. (Mexican workers traditionally use chains and padlocks to block access to buildings where they strike.) Attendance at the alternative sites has been sparse so far.

Guyanese university staff protest delays over salary demand

Workers both academic and nonacademic marched January 28 on the University of Guyana's Turkeyen campus to protest foot-dragging over their demands for salary and benefit increases. The workers are members of the University of Guyana Senior Staff Association (UGSSA) and University of Guyana Workers Union (UGWU).

Following the march, they congregated and chanted outside the office of the vice chancellor.

The unions have been negotiating with the administration since 2012, with no agreement, and talks have broken off. There are about 600 workers belonging to the two unions.

According to *caribnewsdesk.com*, “Among the workers demands are a 60 percent increase in salaries, a 200 percent increase in travel allowances, duty-free concessions for

academic and some non-academic staff as well the payment of all outstanding social security (National Insurance) and income taxes dating back to 2012.”

Guyanese mineworkers end strike over pay

Following the intervention of Guyana's Chief Labour Officer, Charles Ogle, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) signed an agreement January 28 with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), to end the strike begun on the 12th. The unions had called the walkout as worker discontent threatened to boil over from the lack of progress in protracted wage negotiations.

Workers held vociferous demonstrations in front of the Labour Ministry in Georgetown, chanting “We're fed up at the same thing over and over ...no money no work.” The workers had struck in 2014 over the delays in an agreement, but in December the union held off further actions with an interim eight percent increase. However, management stonewalled on the 35 percent rise that the workers were calling for, precipitating the latest stoppage.

Ogle initially declared that the strike was “illegal,” “unethical,” “improper” and “may not be in accord with known and acceptable principles of good labour-management relations.” However, he then chaired meetings that resulted in the accord. The *Guyana Chronicle* reported that a formula for retroactive payments for 2013 and 2014 had been devised, but both the union and GGMC were “tightlipped” on details.

One-week strike by Peruvian mineworkers over abuses, firings

Over 2,000 workers at the Casapalca polymetallic mine in Peru's central Andean Junín region downed their tools on January 22 to demand the reinstatement of four of their coworkers and the replacement of two executives whom they accused of abuse of authority.

On January 28, workers blocked the region's main highway near a smelting plant as union leaders met with Labor Ministry officials. Two days later, the ministry announced that, through its mediation, it had resolved the dispute.

“Among the agreements reached include the change of food concessions and unannounced inspections once a week to different company cafeterias, change of schedule departure of personnel, among others.”

The statement did not mention the fired workers or the executives. Nonetheless, the union called off the strike.

Argentine health professionals strike to demand parity talks

Doctors and psychologists for hospitals and health centers in Argentina’s Santa Fe province stopped work on January 26 to demand salary updates and a definite date for parity talks between their union, Sipur (University Health Professionals Syndicate), and the provincial health ministry. Emergency services remained in effect.

A Sipur communiqué stated, “This week January ends and there is still no date for parity talks... We will continue with the measures until the official announcement is in our hands. The same will happen if they keep delaying the payment of salaries.” The government claimed that it was at the point of announcing the date for the talks, and said that it would dock pay for the day on strike.

In an interview with El Litoral, Sipur president María Fernanda Boriotti called the docking “amputation of the right to strike,” and concluded, “Our salaries are insufficient and they were devoured by the inflationary process. The upgrade of 28 percent that we received in 2014 was still far behind inflation.”

The health ministry has since announced that it has set the talks for February 5.

The United States

Airport food workers protest in Chicago

Workers who supply onboard food at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport held a protest outside United Airlines headquarters January 29 to demand better pay. The union Unite Here is calling for airlines to increase fares by five cents in order to pay more to catering workers who are not employed by the airlines. The protest comes as talks continue with Gate Gourmet, the largest food catering company at the airport.

According to a survey conducted by Unite Here in 2014, of 10,000 catering workers surveyed, 40 percent earned less than \$10.10 per hour. The workers say that health care costs alone eat up more than 25 percent of their pay, while about one-quarter of the workers are uninsured.

Unite Here said the airlines pay catering companies an average of \$2.50 per customer for food. That amounts to nearly \$2 less than in 2001.

Canada

Ontario health care workers on strike

Nearly 3,000 home health workers at nine Community Care Access Centres (CCAC) across the province of Ontario walked off the job on January 30, after rejecting contract offers at their respective centres.

The striking workers include nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, therapists, and other health professionals who are represented by the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) and have been working without a contract since March of last year. Even as negotiations have broken down at the nine CCACs, the ONA has had a contract ratified at another centre.

The union says they are fighting only for a wage increase in line with nurses and other workers employed at hospitals which amounts to a mere 1.4 percent increase, which is still more than what these workers are being offered. Some centres have said they are implementing contingency plans that include the use of replacement workers during the strike.

Montreal high school workers stage one-day strike

Around 20 workers at Villa Maria High School in Montreal, Quebec staged a one-day strike last Friday to protest the slow pace of contract negotiations that have dragged on for over a year with no result.

The workers, who include administrators, guidance counselors and maintenance workers, are affiliated with the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN). While the school says that the school was officially closed as a “snow day,” workers nevertheless showed up to picket outside the school.

Union leaders say that the school has carried out job cuts and contracting out of work throughout the negotiation process, clearly demonstrating that they are bargaining in bad faith.



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