

Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 April 2015

Latin America

Strike by Mexican judicial sector workers in fifth week

Some 400 workers for the Superior Justice Court (TSJ) in the Mexican state of Guerrero walked off the job in Acapulco, Tlapa, Chilpancingo and Iguala March 11 to demand resolution of outstanding issues, including salary, retirement and work conditions. On April 8, the workers, who labor mostly in the family and commercial law departments in 16 of Guerrero's 18 judicial districts, completed four weeks on strike.

The next day, riot police attempted to dislodge striking workers blocking entrances at some buildings, provoking confrontations. In Tixtla, police were forced back by workers. At two courthouses in Teloloapan and Ayutla, work resumed after demonstrators were forced out.

The workers are represented by the State Judicial Public Servants Union, which has denounced several judges for threatening striking workers. The union is demanding the state judiciary fulfill its promised commitment regarding economic and social demands following a strike and plenary meeting in April of last year.

Strike, protests by Chilean airline workers over wages, benefits continue

Maintenance, passenger service and cargo workers for Chile's LAN Express airline, a subsidiary of LATAM Airlines, struck April 8 over pay and benefit demands. The workers voted on March 31 to walk out on April 6 but held off action while the LAN Express-Sidilanex union and management held government-mediated talks, which failed.

The workers are demanding a 15 percent raise, while management has refused to budge from its 4 percent offer. Inflation in Chile has been above 4 percent for the

last year. Workers also want an improved benefits package.

Strike at Chilean supermarket chain demands higher pay

Following failed contract talks, workers at Chile's Jumbo Supermarkets, part of the Cencosud supermarket chain, stopped work April 6 to press their salary demands.

The Jumbo Workers National Syndicate, which represents about 1,700 cashiers, sales staff, bakers and stockers, had proposed a raise of at least 8.5 percent, but the company would not budge from its 2.7 percent offer. Since the walkout began, the union has lowered its demand to 7.8 percent.

Protests in Brazil against proposed outsourcing law

Protests were held in 15 Brazilian state capitals April 7 against a bill up for a vote in the national congress that would facilitate the outsourcing of jobs. The Unified Workers' Central (CUT) union federation called the protests.

Protesters in the capital Brasilia marched to the congress building, which was cordoned off by police who fired tear gas at marchers. Protesters responded by throwing sticks and other objects. At least one person was reportedly arrested and seven injured.

Social unrest has grown in Brazil due to job losses, police violence, official corruption, the economic downturn and austerity measures by the Workers Party (PT) government of Dilma Rousseff. The CUT, which is aligned with the PT government, claims that already about 12.7 million jobs are outsourced.

However, as one CUT bureaucrat told reporters, "We

are not here to topple Dilma but to ask for dialogue. Workers' rights are at stake." The union's groveling support for the PT has resulted in diminishing numbers of protesters at union-initiated mobilizations, even as the crisis intensifies. For example, www1.folha.uol.com.br reported that in São Paulo, "The CUT, which expected 10,000 protesters, says that 1,000 participated. According to the police, there were just 400." At the same time, well-funded right-wing protests have grown.

The United States

University of California doctors launch second strike over decline in health care for college students

The strike by doctors at University of California (UC) campuses in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley, begun on April 9, spread to another five campuses in the southern part of the state on April 11. In all, some 130 members of the Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD) are involved in four-day strikes to call attention to the refusal of UC administrators to properly fund the system's health care for students.

The UAPD has filed unfair labor practices charges alleging UC has not provided relevant financial information during the yearlong negotiations. Doctors charge that the administration is underfunding health care on campuses, which affects student health. The policy is also affecting doctors' salaries, which are below the market average, making it difficult to retain physicians while health center facilities are not being improved.

"For more than a year, UC said it could not afford to make the changes needed to attract and retain student health center doctors," declared UAPD president Dr. Stuart Bussey. "Recently they admitted they can afford to improve health care on campus, they just choose not to." The current strike comes on the heels of a one-day strike back on January 25.

Canada

Ontario-area teachers set to strike

Public high school teachers in Halton Region, east of Toronto, Ontario, are in a legal strike/lockout position this week after the union requested a no-board report in March, which would acknowledge the failure of the conciliation process and start the countdown to job actions.

Negotiators for the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), representing 1,300 teachers and support staff in the Region, say there are a number of substantial non-monetary issues outstanding and that the Halton District School Board has not been prepared to bargain seriously. Teachers in Halton, along with a number of other school districts in the province, have been working without a contract since August of last year.

Negotiations between the OSSTF and the Halton School Board have been ongoing since February, and the union has made requests for conciliation in a number of school boards across the province including Halton.

Ontario home care nurses and staff on strike

One hundred and forty workers at CarePartners in the Niagara Region of Ontario, which provides nursing and home care services, went on strike last week after rejecting a contract offer from the company on March 22.

The company has said the demands by negotiators for the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPESU), which represents the strikers, would require cutting jobs. The union is seeking improvements in wages, sick time allowances, and health and safety issues in a new contract.

CarePartners provides nursing and other health services in a number of clinics in the area as well as home care for patients who are unable to travel. Talks have broken off, and the company says it intends to keep clinics open with non-union workers brought in from other areas.



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