

Workers Struggles: The Americas

23 June 2015

Mexican firefighters stage protest

On June 18, firefighters in Mexico City protested and held blockades at five fire stations to bring attention to the acute need for equipment among the city's 16 fire stations as well as improved salaries.

The principal demand is the channeling of 200 million pesos (US\$13 million) into the acquisition of fire trucks, pumps and other equipment. Union president Ismael Figueroa decried the deterioration of equipment and the deaf ear that the city government has turned to the firefighters' requests.

Figueroa told reporters that if there is no response to its demands, the union will call out its 1,800 members on strike June 30.

Mexican teachers march against evaluations and other education reforms

Teachers in the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) section 18 marched through the streets of Morelia, capital of the Mexican state of Michoacan, on June 19 and occupied offices of the educational sector to protest evaluation testing of both students and teachers.

The protest prevented the application of one test called PLANEA for secondary school students. Protesting teachers, who have been on strike for three weeks, prevented a similar test for primary school students the week before. CNTE said that it would continue the strike until July, when the school year ends.

Slowdown by Argentine airline pilots over travel pay

The Argentine Airline Pilots Association (AAA) called "assemblies," i.e., temporary work stoppages, June 18 at the Jorge Newberry Airport northeast of Buenos Aires. The AAA called the action due to problems with the payment of travel allowances.

AAA secretary general Juan Pablo Brey told reporters, "We lament that the enterprise doesn't take seriously the problems that affect the workers' normal performance. Time passes but we see that part of management don't show the necessary commitment and capacity to resolve them."

The slowdown had little effect on flights; eight flights were canceled and three were delayed.

Chilean dockworkers to strike over labor reform bill

Dockworkers in Chile's terminals held a one-day strike June 19 to protest the lack of progress in negotiations over legislation in Congress to revamp the nation's labor laws. Supporters of the legislation, which was approved in the lower chamber June 19, claim that it would bring the nation's labor laws in line with international standards.

On June 20, the Port Workers Union of Chile (UPCH) voted for an indefinite strike to demand modifications to the bill, "including clarification on a clause that would allow the termination of striking workers who pose an alleged threat to damaging infrastructure, the environment, or health services," according to a *marinelink.com* report.

The UPCH has called for the ports of San Antonio, Talcahuano, San Vicente, Coronel and Lirquen to stop work beginning June 25, while leaving others in partial or complete operation.

Strike by Chilean teachers enters fourth week

Last week marked three weeks that teachers in Chile's National Teachers Union have been on strike against education reform legislation in Congress (see 9 June Workers Struggles). In a June 18 assembly that lasted close to eight hours, the union resolved to continue the strike.

The decision was taken after the Congressional Commission on Education issued a proposal to the union, which rejected it as insufficient. However, union president Jaime Gajardo said that there has been progress in talks with the government.

Meanwhile, the government is considering moving the winter vacation break forward to undercut the strike's effectiveness.

Sickouts erupt in advance of expiration of contract for California county workers

Nearly 30 hospital workers at the Valley Health Center East and the Renal Care Center in California's Santa Clara County staged a sickout last week, only days before a two-year contract between the county and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 521 expires. The 10,000 members of Local 521 voted overwhelmingly on June 16 to strike for higher wages and benefits.

Expecting more sickouts, Valley Medical CEO Paul Lorenz threatened to dock workers' pay and other unspecified disciplinary action against attempts to use sick time off as a form of protest. As early as June 6, the county initiated a policy of requiring a doctor's note for unplanned sick leave events.

In a memo to all hospital personnel, Lorenz stated, "The County has contacted SEIU regarding this 'sickout' and SEIU staff and elected leadership informed the county that the rumored 'sickouts' are not SEIU authorized nor SEIU endorsed events. In fact, the SEIU chapter chair stated clearly that such a sickout 'would be illegal.'"

Boston airport workers strike for union recognition

Over 100 contract airplane cleaners and baggage handlers held a one-day strike June 17 at Boston Logan Airport. The workers are seeking union recognition with the Service Employees International Union Local 32BJ.

The walkout sought to call attention to the abysmally low wages—between \$8 and \$10 an hour—that the workers receive from G2 Secure Staff and ReadyJet Flight Support. Workers have also been subject to victimization by management for advocating unionization and exposing safety problems.

Both G2 and ReadyJet have been compelled to pay fines to OSHA. ReadyJet was fined \$30,000 for multiple infractions, including failure to provide safety equipment for workers dealing with lavatory waste. Other state infractions have included failure to allow workers to take mandatory breaks and overdue back wages.

Toronto area city workers set to strike

Municipal workers at two union locals are preparing for strike action in the coming days in the city of Burlington, just west of Toronto, Ontario.

Transit workers and outside pool workers in Burlington are represented by Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and have been working without a contract since the end of 2014. The city has issued advisories to residents to prepare for a strike that would affect numerous city services starting as early as July 2.

While city leaders boast that Burlington is "the best place to work," union leaders say that wages for city workers are well below those of neighboring municipalities such as Hamilton and Oakville. Negotiations won't resume until next week and will be under the pressure of a strike deadline just days later.

Scabs embitter London municipal strike

In a provocative move, at least two city departments have begun using replacement workers in the month-old strike by 750 inside municipal workers in the southern Ontario city of London.

The workers, who are represented by CUPE, are fighting against a raft of concession demands by the city in a new contract, from a proposed expansion of work hours to cuts in pension benefits for new hires.

Although the city has up to this point been using management to maintain services, a spokesman has said they have brought in an undisclosed number of replacement workers in the IT department and some planning and building inspection work is also being done by scabs. Union leaders have expressed dismay at the move but say that the rank and file are still strong and resolved to continue. CUPE is the largest union in the country.



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