

Workers Struggles: The Americas

7 July 2015

Mexican municipal workers strike for overdue pay

About 160 municipal workers in the city of Cadereyta de Montes, in the Mexican state of Queretaro, walked off the job June 29 to demand payment of nearly nine million pesos (US\$570,000) owed them by the town councilor. The workers' union, the Cadereyta Municipal Service Workers Union, had already met several times with the councilor over that and other demands to no avail.

The union claims that the city government set aside money that was meant for the employee savings fund, union dues and pension fund, and had not handed over the resources for the last four months. The strike affected all city services.

The town councilor, Rodrigo Mejia Hernandez, had offered an initial payment of 1.2 million pesos (US\$76,000), but the workers rejected it. Meanwhile, workers placed red and black flags—indicating that a strike was in effect—around the government building and prevented entry. On July 5, after Mejia Hernandez upped the offer to 2.3 million pesos (US\$145,840), the union and the government restarted negotiations while the strike remained in force.

Mexican teachers continue protests against education law

Teachers in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Acapulco and other cities in Mexico marched and held protests against educational reforms signed into law in September 2013. The teachers have mobilized repeatedly against the reforms, which they charge are punitive against teachers, destructive of their labor rights and leading toward the privatization of

education.

Of particular concern to the teachers is a newly instituted evaluation system that the teachers fear will scapegoat them without taking into account the conditions of poverty, isolation and lack of Spanish skills in indigenous communities.

Nicaraguan taxi drivers strike, protest schedule change, price of fuel

Taxi drivers in Rosita, a municipality in Nicaragua's North Caribbean Autonomous Region, struck in protest July 3 over a number of demands, including improvement of the streets and a subsidy for gasoline. They also demanded respect for their schedules, which had been trimmed by the mayor's office.

Panamanian sewerage workers strike for better salaries, supplies

Workers at Panama's National Aqueduct and Sewerage Institute (Idaan) began a strike July 3 to demand better pay and the provision of adequate equipment and supplies.

Among the complaints of the workers are damaged vehicles, lack of tools and instruments and shortages of personnel. At the Idaan headquarters in Carrasquilla, protesting workers told reporters that the demands of their job exceed the amount of personnel and resources. They demanded that there be a salary adjustment to reflect the amount and quality of work they do.

In the province of Los Santos, where the vote in support of the strike was 95 percent, workers

complained of not having necessary tools and asked where the one million dollars that had been approved for Idaan had gone, since workers did not even have good boots.

The workers have expressed their determination to stay on strike until their demands are met.

Customs agents at Argentina-Paraguay border strike for pay increase

On the morning of July 4, customs agents in Posadas, Argentina, which shares a border with Encarnacion, Paraguay, held a strike that stopped automobile traffic in both directions. The surprise action was called as a “trial balloon” for a previously-announced indefinite strike beginning July 10, timed to coincide with Pope Francis’s visit to Paraguay.

The agents are demanding the payment of overtime for extra hours worked, while the company running the service denies that it owes the money. The union says that if it does not get an agreement for the payment by July 10, it will shut down the train service, which it left untouched this time.

Cement workers strike New York City construction sites

Union cement workers went on strike July 1, causing work slowdowns or stoppages at some 30 major construction projects in New York City. The New York City District Council of Carpenters, which represents the striking workers, only said that they want a fair contract, while the Cement League, a trade organization representing contractors, accused the union of issuing a “take it or leave it” proposal and then ordering a walkout.

The Cement League contractors are responsible for the erection of concrete skeletons in the construction of high-rise buildings. The trade group accused the union of violating the Project Labor Agreement, which bars strikes on specified construction sites. The Carpenters

Council denied the accusation and said it did not condone walkouts at such sites, but apparently workers did halt work on projects such as the massive Hudson Yards development, which fall under the Project Labor Agreement.

Details of the specific contract bargaining issues dividing the two sides were not available. But hanging over the negotiations is the fact that organizations such as JDS Development Group have broken the grip of the building trades on residential construction and are now using non-union labor at a 30 percent cost-savings.

Wildcat job action halts flights in Toronto

Dozens of flights were cancelled and scores more were delayed last Friday when large numbers of employees of Consolidated Aviation Fueling failed to show up for work at Canada’s largest and busiest airport, Pearson International.

The job action was not sanctioned by the International Association of Machinists (IAM), which represents workers at Consolidated Aviation. At least 30 of the 47 workers scheduled to work on Friday reportedly called in sick, apparently in protest over plans to eliminate 250 jobs later this year as a number of airlines shift fuel providers to non-union companies. Although current employees will be allowed to reapply for their jobs when the shift takes place, they will have their pay cut in half and with no pension provisions.

The disruption takes place in the run-up to the Pan Am games in Toronto and operations have since returned to normal, although travelers have been asked to confirm their flights prior to heading to the airport.



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