Workers Struggles: The Americas

25 August 2015

Latin America

Costa Rican public employees protest labor "reform" legislation

A protest march by public employees stretched five blocks along Second Avenue in San Jose, Costa Rica on August 20. The protesters, including public school, social security and health care workers, marched against a "Public Employment Law" being discussed in the Legislative Assembly.

According to a *Tico Times* report, "The bill would eliminate benefits public agencies offer to their employees, including yearly bonuses, extra pay for enrolling in educational courses and premium pay for the birth of a child or for showing up on time." Another object of the protest was a Finance Ministry-promoted bill to amend the income tax law and turn the sales tax into a value added tax, measures that would most affect the poor and working class.

A coalition of 80 unions, the Costa Rican Syndical and Social Unitary Bloc, organized the mobilization, which ended with its representatives handing over a petition to legislators. Dockworkers in the ports of Limon and Moin stopped work in solidarity with the protest. Union leaders said that they would call a nationwide strike if the bill goes forward.

Peruvian municipal workers strike to demand payment of benefits

Workers for the District Municipality of Jose Leonardo Ortiz (JLO) in Peru began an indefinite strike to demand the payment of benefits that the county has delayed year after year. The employees demonstrated in front of the district council and denounced the mayor, who they said was unable to govern the district.

The striking workers were joined by workers from a neighboring town, Santa Ana, where they are working on a street improvement project financed by a national government program. The workers have yet to be paid their first month's wages.

Brazilian McDonald's workers stage protest against poor pay, conditions

On August 19, over 1,300 McDonald's employees in downtown Sao Paulo protested the fast food giant's poor pay and working conditions. Some of the protesters were dressed in clown outfits resembling that of the company mascot, carried signs with their demands and briefly held up traffic on a major street.

The protest was called by the Sinthoresp services and commerce union with support from the US-based Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which has called protests at McDonald's franchises in the US. It was held the day before a session of the Brazilian Senate that was convened to look into allegations of unfair labor practices and tax evasion by the chain.

Chilean government workers strike to demand job security

Chile's Association of Regional Government Functionaries (FENAGORE) held a national strike August 22 to call attention to its opposition to aspects of proposed legislation that it claims would bring labor instability to government workers.

The proposal would reform the constitution to institute the direct election of regional governors (intendents, or *intendentes*) instead of through appointments by the president. A FENAGORE official asserted that although direct election of intendents was desirable, the proposal as it now stands "puts labor stability and a government career in check, under the present conditions that reign in the public sector."

A regional FENAGORE president, Mauricio Rojas, told *El Rancagüino* regarding the labor aspect of the bill, "This modification of the law has us worried, because in our staff we have 80 percent contract workers and 20 percent permanent employees." A statement from the Coquimbo branch claimed, "Every time there are elections for mayor or changes of intendant our work is at stake, since in general a high

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percentage of contract workers are fired to be replaced by those who did some political favor."

FENAGORE is demanding to be involved in fashioning the legislation.

The United States

Nonunion contract workers hold second one-day strike at Boston Logan International Airport

Contract workers at Boston's Logan Airport held their second one-day strike this summer as they seek unionization. Over 100 workers and supporters gathered outside the offices of contractors G2 Secure Staff and ReadyJet Flight Support August 19 to carry out an unfair labor practices strike.

The airplane cleaners, baggage handlers and other support staff earn between $8 and $10 an hour with no benefits. Workers at ReadyJet who have advocated organizing under the Service Employees International Union have been fired.

Workers previously held a one-day strike back on June 17, but both contractors continue to threaten workers and working conditions are abysmal. Both companies 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.

Canada

Workers locked out at BC student union

Staff at the Capilano Students' Union (CSU) in Vancouver, British Columbia are locked out this week after workers voted unanimously last week to reject the employer's final offer.

The 13 workers affected are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and are mostly students themselves. They provide a number of support services for students and school events, from locker rentals to advising on health and dental plans.

CSU management have already indicated that they will be filling in to maintain services during the lockout with the help of nonunion staff as needed.

Special Education workers set to strike in Calgary

Workers at Calgary Quest School in Calgary, Alberta could be on strike this week after voting to unionize in March and then voting overwhelmingly in favor of strike action.

Negotiators for the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) that represents staff at the school say they are having problems reaching even a basic agreement. In addition, they are dealing with issues arising from a range of complaints including wrongful dismissal, underpayment and nepotism, which has created what has been called a poisoned work environment.

Calgary Quest is a publicly funded but privately run school with around 160 students, all with disabilities. Classes had originally been scheduled to begin on September 2, but a strike could begin as early as August 27.

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