

Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 October 2015

Three-hour strike by Argentine metro security workers for unpaid overtime

Workers for a private firm that provides security on the 12-kilometer (7.5-mile) Line B underground rail system in Buenos Aires stopped work for three hours on the morning of October 1. The workers struck to demand the payment of overtime that their employer, MCM Global Security, has owed them for a year and a half.

The Buenos Aires government began outsourcing personnel for Line B, the most important line in its subterranean (subte) network, through MCM in 2005. The firm has rebuffed repeated attempts by the workers to receive overtime dating back to January 2014. A union delegate told *La Razón*, “First we appealed to dialogue, then to a judicial measure. The response was the removal of a colleague from his position.”

“Tired of complaining,” the workers sat in on the tracks and interfered with ticket dispensers, impeding the movement of commuter trains.

Later that morning, the workers suspended the strike and met with authorities, who announced that the subte operator Metrovías had reached an agreement with the workers for payment of the overtime. Workers returned to their jobs, though they said that they would return to their protests if MCM retaliated.

Argentine social security system workers strike to demand parity talks

On September 30, workers for Argentina’s National Social Security Administration (ANSES) began an indefinite strike to demand parity talks with the agency. In some cities, workers belonging to the ANSES workers union, APOPS, marched from ANSES offices carrying signs saying, “It wasn’t magic, it was us,” referring to previous struggles to increase pay and benefits.

According to an October 1 *La Nueva* report, “The demands range from the economic to fundamental changes in personnel rules, that threaten their own security.” The strike is also a repudiation of the ANSES executive board’s salary offer of three payments of 1,900 pesos (US\$201), which the majority of members voted down.

Chilean civil registry workers strike over breakdown of talks

Workers for Chile’s Civil Registry began a strike on September 29 over the breakdown of talks with the Budget Board (Dipres), a branch of the Treasury. The talks collapsed as the Anercich civil registry workers union and Dipres were discussing an incentive bonus. According to Anercich, the bonus had been promised by the ex-Justice Minister, José Antonio Gómez.

The following day, the striking workers, joined by officials of the National Fiscal Employees Association (Anef), marched by Civil Registry offices in central Santiago. Anercich president Nelly Díaz said, “there are no motives to justify that they don’t sit at the table with us, until today we have no invitation to sit at the table.”

Díaz had previously noted that the salaries and benefits at the Civil Registry rank 20th out of 22 public service agencies.

As part of its “contingency plans,” the government has called in members of two other public service unions to act as scabs.

Chilean copper mine professionals reject salary offer, stop work

On October 1, members of the Union of Professionals of the Radomiro Tomic Division of Codelco, Chile’s state copper mining company, rejected the firm’s salary offer by 96 percent. A union statement said that the workers rejected the offer because it refused to establish norms for work practices and did not offer “benefits of equity with the rest of the corporation.” The statement also accused Codelco of offering a “0 percent [salary] readjustment,” which it called “an unheard of deed in the organization.”

The union has requested the intervention of the Labor Ministry.

Peruvian teachers begin general strike to demand overdue pay

Teachers in the Peruvian Sutep teachers union in San Martín province began an indefinite general strike October 1 to press their demand for installment payments of 500 million soles (US\$155 million) that has been owed to them for several years. The payment demand is the result of a judicial ruling that establishes the payment in three parts: in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The teachers had struck previously, but suspended the action in the hopes of negotiating with the regional government. Having seen no will on the government’s part to negotiate, the San Martín section of Sutep decided to restart the strike.

Mexican sanitation workers on strike over bonus

Workers who pick up trash and clean the streets and beaches of Acapulco, the resort city in the Mexican state of Guerrero, remain on strike to press their demand for a bonus as part of a six-year plan. Trash has piled up along tourist areas on sidewalks, streets and beaches.

Security workers, employed by the Beach Promotion and Administration, a state agency, are also on strike.

Some 25,000 state employees across Guerrero have remained on strike since September 21 to demand the bonus, which the state government claims is illegal.

Protests by Tobago doctors over unsigned agreement

Doctors in Tobago have held protests in recent weeks over foot-dragging by their employer, the Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA), on signing an agreement to raise their salaries. On September 29, the doctors assembled outside the Accident and Emergency Lounge of the Scarborough General Hospital to chant, "Settle the agreement."

Dawn Garcia, an official with the Public Services Association (PSA), told *Newsday* that the protest was held against TRHA's "total disrespect" for the doctors and failure to sign an agreement to bring their "2008 salaries" up to the level of the "2015 salaries" that doctors in Trinidad receive.

The following day, TRHA CEO Brent Murphy and PSA VP Christopher Joefield held a joint press conference in which they signed the long-delayed agreement. Murphy claimed that the doctors would get their raises toward the end of October and that arrears would be paid in January 2016.

Texas nuclear plant strike ends as contract is narrowly ratified

Workers at the Pantex nuclear weapons plant in Amarillo, Texas voted October 4 to ratify the latest contract offer from Consolidated Nuclear Security (CNS) and end nearly two months on the picket line. According to the Metal Trades Council, which represented the 1,200 workers, the passage of the new agreement was "razor thin" and the union would neither provide a vote total nor reveal the actual contents of the new agreement.

According to the Coordinator of Collective Bargaining, James Price of the International Association of Machinists, the new agreement fended off concessions on health care and pensions. But the labor bureaucracy sacrificed pensions for new-hires in order to get a tentative agreement. The new contract will run until 2019.

Behind the struggle over pensions and health care and the resistance of the workers loomed an ugly statistic: according to the union, 1,300 workers have become ill during or after their employment at the Pantex nuclear plant.

Nonunion iron workers' strike enters eighth month

A strike by nonunion iron workers at Instafab, a steel fabrication facility in Vancouver, Washington, has entered its eighth month as two more workers walked off the job last week. The strike began with a walkout by five workers after the company refused to review a list of complaints over working conditions. Since last May, more workers walked out bringing the total to 14.

Instafab serves as a subcontractor that manufactures and installs structural and architectural steel for major contractors that have unionized labor forces. Strikers are appealing to other construction workers to support their struggle. Most of the workers are between the ages of 20 and 30 and two are veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The workers are without a pension and make as little as \$13.25 an hour. They get no match to their 401(k) contributions and shoulder the burden of paying the majority of their health care premiums with a plan that has a \$20,000 deductible.

Ontario forge workers strike

Fifty-three workers at Welland Forge, west of Niagara Falls, Ontario, went on strike last week just hours after their contract expired and the employer left the bargaining table.

The workers are represented by union giant Unifor, whose negotiating team reports that while many issues had agreed upon, issues such as sick benefits remain unresolved. Plant vice-president Shane Smith claims that competition from Mexico and overseas has put the company in a financial squeeze in the recent period.

The company, which has been operating for over 50 years, produces forged parts for the automotive, gas and mining industries, among others.

Quebec public servants protest government cuts

Tens of thousands of public-sector workers marched and demonstrated in downtown Montreal last Saturday in a show of protest over stalled contract negotiations that could presage strike action in the coming weeks.

Leaders for union federations Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) say that they are fighting demands by the Quebec Liberal government to freeze public-sector wages for at least two years in a new contract. A "common front" of public and semi-public-sector workers are asking for annual wage increases of 4.5 percent in a new three-year contract.

At least 300,000 workers in the provincial public sector have already given their unions strong strike mandates. This follows the recent vote by schoolteachers in the province overwhelmingly in favor of strike action.



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