

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 October 2015

## Chilean government continues moves against Civil Registry strike

Eighteen days after the start of a strike by Chile's Civil Registry workers, the government announced October 16 that it had called for a "summary investigation" regarding the "illegal paralysis." An attorney for the Legal Entity Department, part of the Justice Ministry, will carry out the investigation.

The strike was precipitated September 29 by the collapse of talks between the Anercich civil registry workers' union and the Budget Board over an incentive bonus promised by then-justice minister José Antonio Gómez, but repudiated by the minister who succeeded him.

A government communiqué stated that it had "instituted a summary investigation to establish administrative responsibilities that can affect Civil Registry functionaries for the time effectively not worked." The government has already used workers from other government departments as scabs and distributed instructions to city and regional governments.

The document also said that the ministry "will keep adopting the measures intended to assure that those indispensable procedures can be fulfilled, implementing special service centers in all the nation's regions."

On October 17, the Fiscal Employees National Grouping and the Civil Registry union reiterated a request for dialogue between the parties.

## Bolivian fast-food workers return to work with overtime issue unresolved

One week after workers in La Paz for Bolivian fast-food chain Pollos Copacabana began their strike, their union signed an accord with management and called them back

to work October 15. The agreement between the Copacabana Mixed Workers union and Copacabana Industries executives was reached with the mediation of the Labor Ministry, the Bolivian Workers Central, the Industrial Federation of Bolivia and the Industrial Federation of La Paz.

The workers walked out over poor labor conditions, harassment and pay issues, particularly the lack of a production bonus and overtime for working on Sunday. After months of stonewalling by management, the workers struck, marched and held demonstrations at various Copacabana locations.

Union leader Victor Choquehuanca, who had been fired previously, stated that the strike had a happy finale and that the important thing was to get back to work. However, as *paginasiete.bo* reported, "The [union] leadership avoided talking about the principal demand, payment for Sunday work, and said that it would be discussed in the next meetings with La Paz fast food and traditional food industry executives."

## Antiriot police attack striking Nicaraguan mineworkers and supporters

A gold mining town 140 kilometers (86 miles) northwest of Managua, Nicaragua, has been the scene of protests and repression in recent weeks.

On September 28, workers at the El Limón mine, which is owned by Canadian firm B2Gold, struck to protest the firings of three workers, claiming that the sackings were of an "arbitrary form." About 220 workers, augmented by sympathetic residents, held a peaceful protest in front of El Limon headquarters to demand the workers' reinstatement.

The action followed the reversal by the Labor Ministry (Mintrab) of its September 25 resolution that the firings were a "violation of rights" after El Limon, claiming that

the workers “had harmed disciplinary norms,” challenged the resolution. Mintrab then said that the firings were “for just cause.”

Workers and residents held strikes, protests and blockades in the following weeks, leading to confrontations with antiriot police, who at one point laid siege to the town, preventing the entrance of food and supplies. One disturbance resulted in the death of one policeman, injuries on both sides, arrests of protesters—including the three fired workers—the burning of the police station and damage to mine vehicles.

On the morning of October 17, police used tear gas, mortars and rubber bullets indiscriminately to take back the town. One 66-year-old mother of a miner told reporters, “They are repressing the people for demanding that they respect their rights. We are asking the fulfillment of the collective contract on the part of the enterprise, and the government, instead of supporting the workers, has put itself on its side.”

Another neighbor said, “We are not vandals; we’re people with rights and we’re Sandinistas...and now we’re having to hide from the police as we used to do with Somoza’s National Guard. We never expected this from the government of Daniel [Ortega].”

### **Short strike by Mexican hotel workers over salaries and other issues**

Workers at the Hotel Tortuga in Acapulco, Guerrero, Mexico, covered the building with black and red flags on October 16. The flags are the customary declaration of a strike, this time to demand that management sit down with them to negotiate back payment of their wages as well as other issues.

Forty-five workers at the resort hotel had not received their wages for eight weeks. A few hours after the walkout began, the owner produced the money and the union called the workers back to their jobs.

“Nonetheless,” reported *trasfondoinformativo.com*, “other requests such as uniforms, supplies and the salary situation [e.g., profit-sharing payments dating back to 2014] remain pending, for which reason it will be not until Monday that the problem is resolved in the Conciliation and Arbitration meeting.”

### **California county workers return to work after two-day strike**

Workers for Solano County, California, returned to work October 16, after two days on strike over unfair labor practices. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) had originally scheduled a one-day strike, but the 1,800 members voted to continue the strike for an additional day.

The strike, endorsed by 90 percent of the workforce, encompassed a broad section of community services, embracing social workers, infant nutrition counselors, mental health specialists, public health nurses, librarians, Child Support and Child Welfare specialists, public safety dispatchers, veterans’ services workers and clerical staff.

According to county negotiators, the SEIU was pressing for wage increases of 3.5 and 3.25 percent during the course of a two-year agreement and an additional holiday. The union also sought higher contributions by the county for health care and the elimination of cost sharing for employee pensions.

### **Ontario nurses’ union evades strike action**

Despite being without a contract since December 2013, the leadership of the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA) is taking drastic measures to avoid a strike by Public Health Nurses in the Chatham-Kent Health Unit of southern Ontario.

The 42 nurses affected are being asked to leaflet their communities to canvass support among residents in advance of the federal election on Monday. This action will be supplemented by an e-mail campaign to solicit public support for a contract that would bring them in line with nurses doing similar work in the province.

Nurses in the region are among the lowest paid in the province and are legally able to go on strike, yet their union has made it clear that it will do everything possible to avoid calling them out.



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