

Workers Struggles: The Americas

3 November 2015

Brazilian oil workers strike

The 13 trade unions affiliated with the Brazilian Petroleum Workers Federation (FUP) walked off their jobs on November 1 against Brazil's state-owned oil company, Petrobras, to protest against the reduction in investment and sales of Petrobras assets.

Jose María Rangel, vice coordinator of FUP, said that the goal in the strike is to reduce oil and fuel production as much as possible, without totally paralyzing supply.

Rangel denounced Petrobras for not including the FUP in the new business model that contemplates lower investments and the sale of assets of the company.

On Saturday, Petrobras management issued a memo saying that while it was willing to negotiate a new wage agreement with the oil workers, it will not discuss the retrenchment in investments, known as the "Pauta pelo Brasil."

Protest by Costa Rican government workers

On October 27, hundreds of public employees marched throughout Costa Rica to demand decent working conditions and in repudiation of the government's austerity policies.

The protests and walkout slowed down some services, such as fuel delivery, some services at the Government electric utility (ICE), port operations and affected public health delivery.

The strikers repudiated draft measures that would increase contingent employment, destroy living standards and outlaw public-sector unions, and neo-liberal plans to privatize government services.

Peruvian miners demand reopening of smelter

On October 30, mine workers employed by Doe Run Perú

carried out a 24-hour strike to demand that the government order the opening of the mine and approve a contract that respects workers' labor rights.

The workers marched through the smelting installations in the city of La Oroya and marched in the surrounding streets to protest and pressure the debtors board meeting to discuss the liquidation of Doe Run. The smelter refines copper, zinc and other metals.

Doe Run Perú has been in bankruptcy proceedings since 2009.

Beer workers strike in Argentina

Beer workers across Argentina, members of the Argentine Oil Workers Federation (FATCA), walked off their jobs last Thursday over wages.

The employers group has offered a 27 percent wage increase. The workers are asking for a 34 percent raise to keep up with Argentine inflation.

Strike at the Argentine National Social Security Agency

Workers at the Argentine Social Security Agency (ANSES) carried out a three-day strike on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday last week. The strike will be followed by a slowdown beginning this week.

At issue are wages and working conditions. The 72-hour strike is part of an ongoing campaign to reopen wage negotiations and lessen the load on ANSES employees.

The current contract dates from 1990, with unilateral wage increases by the government of Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, which do not cover the rising cost of living.

Government workers in Chile to strike this Wednesday

Public Employees across Chile will strike this Wednesday. Their union, the National Association of Public Employees (ANFP), organized this job action in support of the strike of civil registry employees, now in its second month.

The Civil Registry employees' demands include that the administration of president Michele Bachelet increase the budget for promotions in pay grade.

The government has declared the strike illegal and refuses to negotiate until the workers return. It is also threatening to fire the striking workers, under the State Security legislation that is meant for groups engaged in terrorism.

Since the Civil Registry employees began their mobilization, the government and mass media have engaged in a campaign of slander and vilification to isolate the strikers, claiming for instance that this is a strike against the public.

East St. Louis school strike ends with concessions contract

Some 400 schoolteachers in East St. Louis voted to end their month-long strike October 30 and accept a new concessions contract forced upon them by the school district and state. The Illinois Federation of Teachers declined to release the vote total, but said it was "much more than a simple majority."

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The school board made slight concessions in the form of a \$3,000 one-time bonus and a revision of the draconian pay scale. It will now take 19 years to reach top pay, where previously the contract only required 11 years. Originally, the school district had sought a 21-year scale. The concessions will save \$40 million over 20 years.

The teachers in the impoverished working class community of East St. Louis have been under assault by the school district and the state. A six-member Financial Oversight Panel was installed in 2011 when the Illinois State Board of Education assumed control of the district.

With the district facing an eroding tax base due to declining property values, the teachers were threatened that if they didn't accept the contract proposal, the already suffering residents of the district would be subject to property tax increases. This comes on top of school closures, job cuts and salary freezes.

Quebec public sector job actions continue

Health care workers, teachers and other public sector workers that have formed a common front in Quebec will continue a campaign of limited job action that will include at least two days of strike action in November, according to union leaders.

More than 114,000 workers were off the job last Thursday in the most recent action to pressure the provincial Liberal government for improvements in wages and working conditions for 400,000 public sector workers in Quebec who have been without a contract since April. Union organizations including the FTQ (Quebec Federation of Workers) and the Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN) are seeking a 13.5 percent wage increase over three years, while the province is offering only 3 percent over five years, starting with a wage freeze in the first two years.

November 9 and 10 have been set as the next strike days and further actions that will mobilize all public sector workers in the province are scheduled for early December if negotiations remain stalled.

Alberta seniors care workers set to strike

Unionized workers at two facilities in Calgary, Alberta could be on strike in the coming days after the employer, Covenant Health, delivered what they called a final offer last week at the conclusion of mediated talks.

According to their union, the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), workers at these sites are paid around 25 percent below provincial rates and as a result the company is notoriously understaffed, leading to increased workloads.

Covenant Health, which is funded from provincial coffers, bills itself as "Canada's largest Catholic Healthcare organization" serving 12 communities across Alberta.



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