

Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 November 2015

Chilean Civil Registry workers strike ended after 39 days

Workers in Chile's Civil Registry voted in assembly November 6 to accept the latest government proposal, putting an end to a strike that lasted 39 days. The vote followed the tenth meeting between the Anercich civil registry workers union president, Nelly Díaz, and Justice Minister Javiera Blanco since the strike began.

The strike began September 29 over a bonus that had been promised by the previous justice minister to the 3,000 civil registry workers, only to be reneged on when Blanco took office. Striking workers were joined at different times by other workers, who marched and held short strikes.

The government reacted by declaring the strike illegal, vilifying the workers, threatening them, using scabs, firing some regional directors and saying that it would not negotiate until the striking employees returned to their posts. Nonetheless, meetings took place over the last 14 days.

Details about the deal so far are scarce, with Díaz saying about the bonus, which will not take effect until 2017, "The amount I don't want to say." About the agreement, she told reporters, "I would have liked to be more satisfied, but we understand that it was for the moment what we wanted to have and farther along we will perfect it."

Peruvian union federation calls 48-hour strike to protest attacks on workers

Peru's CGTP general workers' federation called a two-day strike for November 5 and 6. The CGTP website claimed that participants would include "municipal workers, prison employees, armed forces, the health sector, education, judicial system, ministries, etc."

The website announced that among the themes of the mobilization would be corruption and poor services by state agencies, the vulnerable condition of workers, privatization of public services, firings and attacks on labor rights.

Argentine bank employees hold 72-hour national strike over "profit tax"

Employees of Argentina's largest state-run bank, known popularly as the Banco Nación, held a work stoppage on November 4 and 5. The bank employees were called out by their union, La Bancaria, to protest a "profit tax" imposed in 2013 upon monthly incomes of over 15,000 pesos (US\$1,593).

The union and the bank have been negotiating for six months, with union reps demanding that the bank refund the "confiscatory" tax, which they say amounts to over a third of their income. Despite the fact that the bank executive recognizes the impact of the tax and has promised to address it, "until this date this commitment has not been fulfilled," union representatives complained.

In addition, according to an infobae.com report, "Since the government never updated that [15,000 peso] floor and the date of validity, employees who entered afterwards or who were lower than 15,000 pesos are now exempt from the tax," creating a "two-tier" situation where employees at lower levels and with less seniority earn the same or more than their more experienced colleagues.

Salvadoran public workers strike over outsourcing, lack of equipment and supplies

Interior Ministry workers in El Salvador—including those in national firefighting, mail delivery, printing and civil defense—declared indefinite strike action on November 5. The workers complain of being under-equipped for carrying out their duties in the nation's 14 departments.

For instance, the Firefighter Corps claimed that its central station has only one fire truck, one tank and one ladder for emergencies. The Sitramig government workers union also accuses the ministry of contracting out services, a violation of the collective agreement.

Mexican public transport drivers strike against extortion

Bus drivers in the Mexican state of Veracruz went on strike November 4 alleging extortion by elements of the state's Public Transport Regional Coordination agency.

"According to drivers' declarations, transport officials hide in avenues of little public lighting where they signal with a lamp for them to stop, and it is there where they demand a certain amount

of money,” reported lopezdoriga.com. The drivers also complained of being subject to muggings.

Some drivers parked their buses along major roads and demonstrated at the district attorney’s office to demand an investigation. By that evening, most of the drivers had returned to work.

Trinidadian student nurses protest in support of lecturers’ demands

Some 300 student nurses in Trinidad held a protest action outside the parliament tower in Port of Spain to support the demands of their lecturers. The student nurses, who were joined by members of the Trinidad and Tobago Nurses Association, denounced the short-term contracts the lecturers are forced to work under and called on the Minister of Education to provide longer-term contracts.

According to a report in newsday.co.tt “by mid-December, all teachers’ contracts will expire and none have any idea whether they will be renewed.” The contracts, which last for three months, do not include any provisions for sick leave or vacations. The lecturers also complain of being overwhelmed by class sizes.

Teamsters end strike by truckers, warehouse workers at California ports

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters ended a strike October 30 by truck drivers at three carriers at the twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, California.

Drivers for XPO Logistics began the strike October 26 alongside of truckers for Pacific 9 Transportation that have been on indefinite strike. On October 27, drivers for Intermodal Bridge Transport walked out and on the last day of the strike, truckers for Gold Point Transportation joined the action. On October 28 the truckers were joined by about 50 warehouse workers from California Cartage.

The workers are mainly protesting what they call “wage theft,” whereby trucking companies classify workers as independent contractors. The result is that companies can rob workers of overtime, deny health care and other benefits, charge truck repairs, cost of diesel fuel, insurance, parking and even the cost of printing paychecks.

A 2014 study estimated that over 65 percent of the 75,000 truckers who work out of US ports are misclassified as independent contractors. Other studies estimate that the average port truck driver is fleeced of \$48,000 per year in wage theft as drivers are compelled to work 80 to 100 hours a week.

The Teamsters sought to divert the struggle into petitions and appeals to the Los Angeles city council and mayor and the filing of claims with the California Division of Labor Standards

Enforcement.

Toronto childhood trauma workers facing strike/lockout

Workers at Radius SAFE-T (Sexual Abuse: Family Education and Treatment) in Toronto could be on strike or locked out this week if mediated talks don’t produce an agreement before a November 12th deadline.

The 19 workers, who last June voted unanimously for strike action after working without a contract since December of last year, are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). Union negotiators say the employer is seeking a number of concessions in a new contract including a wage cut of 1.5 percent and increases to benefit premiums from workers.

Unionized workers at the trauma centre include social workers and administrative staff. The strike/lockout could take affect if a deal is not reached through mediated talks that are scheduled for this week.

Faculty strike at Ontario University

One hundred seventy-three faculty, including professors and other academic staff at all three campuses of Nipissing University in Ontario, went on strike last week after working without a contract since May of this year.

Members of the Nipissing University Faculty Association are fighting for improvements in pay and staffing levels and an increased role in school governance. Earlier this year, the university carried out its latest round of job cuts and other cost-saving measures to fight a projected budget deficit.

Nipissing University has campuses in North Bay and Muskoka, north of Toronto, and in Brantford, west of Toronto—all of which have suspended classes due to the strike.



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