

Workers Struggles: The Americas

17 November 2015

Peruvian postal workers strike, demand payment of bonus

Workers in the Postal Service of Peru (Serpost) struck November 12 to demand bonuses promised but unpaid. In the city of Chiclayo, in the northern Lambayeque region, workers demonstrated to demand recognition of a bonus of 3,000 soles (US\$899) owed since September, which Serpost has refused to address.

Serpost workers in Huancayo, in the Junín central highlands region, stopped work to demand the payment of 2,200 soles (US\$659) for the present year. According to a union spokesman, Serpost plans to pay a bonus of 13,000 soles (US\$3,896) to its directors while the workers will get 1,000 soles (US\$299).

The postal workers were not the only Peruvian public service workers on strike last week. In the southern city of Chiclayo, judicial workers walked off the job November 10 over salary demands. On November 12, they held a sit-down protest and washed a flag near the Superior Court Building. They said that they would set up a soup kitchen and ask for support from other unions if their demands were not met.

Brazilian oil union call to end strike rejected by some regional unions

Leaders of Brazil's largest oil workers' union, FUP, urged its members to return to work November 13 after nearly two weeks of a strike against the nation's state-owned Petrobras company. The workers had walked off the job November 1 to protest against the reduction in investment and sales of Petrobras assets.

Claiming that the strike had achieved progress in its principal goal of reversing cuts in investments and blocking sales of assets, FUP said that the agreement it had reached with Petrobras would give workers a 9.53 percent raise and would establish a committee to "explore ways to restore investments," according to *El Economista*.

Most regional unions voted in line with FUP's recommendation. However, at least two unions in key areas voted to continue the strike: Sindipetro Caxias, the union at the Refinery in Duque de Caxias, near Rio de Janeiro; and Sindipetro Norte Fluminense, the union for oil platform workers in the Campos Basin region, which accounts for 60 percent of oil production. Over two thirds of the almost 800 Campos Basin workers voted against the callback.

Paraguayan clinic doctors call off strike over corruption, scarcity of supplies

Doctors at the Clinic Hospital in Asunción, Paraguay, voted November 13 to end the strike that they began November 3. The hospital doctors' "crisis committee" reached an agreement during tripartite meetings with an intervener for the Faculty of Medicine and a representative of the Labor Ministry.

The strike began in the context of protests against the right-wing policies of the president, which included peasants, students, unions and social organizations.

The doctors, with the support of nurses and other hospital workers, went on strike over a number of issues, including corruption and irregularities in management, as well as shortages of medicine and supplies. Fourteen people—among them the ex-deacon, the ex-vice-deacon and the ex-director—have been served with summonses, and an external audit has been authorized.

The intervener, César Duarte, told reporters that advisors would produce a document addressing the seven points that the doctors had brought to the table, but that the process of resolving them would be "gradual."

Work stoppage by Jamaican housing trust workers over unpaid allowance

Some 800 employees of Jamaica's National Housing Trust (NHT) did not go to work or showed up and refused to work on November 10. The workers are members of the NHT Staff Association, an affiliate of the University and Allied Workers Union (UAWU). They had voted for the action the day before to press for payment of on-call allowances agreed to in the collective labor accord signed in 2008.

Established in 1976, the NHT's function is "to address the need for a financial institution that could mobilize additional funds for housing and ensure that those funds are available to more Jamaican families at rates below the traditional markets rates," according to the Jamaica Social Investment Fund's website.

An NHTSA spokesman told the *Jamaica Observer*, "The management has refused to pay the allowance, even though workers are regularly required to be on call. This duty is required for technical maintenance, unscheduled emergency work and other work done outside of normal working hours." Although every annual budget has included the on-call allowance, it has never

been paid to any of the workers.

The strike lasted only one day. The NHTSA ordered its members back to work as it resumed “conciliatory talks” at the Labour and Social Security Ministry’s Kingston office on November 11.

Kohler workers in Wisconsin go on strike against two-tier wages and health care costs

The 2,100 workers at Kohler Company plants in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, went on strike November 15 after voting by a 94 percent margin two days earlier to reject the company’s “last, best and final” offer. Key issues in the contract struggle are a two-tier wage system and increased health care costs being pushed on workers by the plumbing product manufacturer.

Some 400 workers currently work under the lower-tier wage system and make a mere \$12.50 an hour, while upper tier workers average \$23.50, according to United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 833. The company offered wages of 50 cents in each year of a new three-year agreement along with a \$1,000 bonus to lower-tier wage-workers and \$1,200 to upper-tier workers.

But workers were not impressed, especially when new increases of health care costs are factored in. “They give you a little bit of a raise and they’re going to eat it up with the insurance later,” said 29-year veteran Bob Demers to the *Journal Sentinel*.

The hatred for the two-tier system is highlighted by the fact that more than 600 workers who started work under the lower tier have left the company during the last four years. Given this opposition, the UAW Local 833 leadership has attempted to straddle the rage of the workers and their support of corporate management. The tentativeness was expressed in Local 833 president Tim Tayloe’s statement, “Right now, I can’t recommend this. That’s how I’m standing right now.”

Ontario transport mechanics locked out illegally

Nearly 200 bus and train mechanics employed by the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) in North Bay and Cochrane, in northern Ontario, were locked out last week when their union failed to present the employer’s final contract offer to the membership.

The workers are represented by union giant Unifor and are part of a unit of 350 workers who have been working without a contract for almost two years. Picket lines went up late last week after the company locked workers out on Remembrance Day (November 11) in a move that has been ruled illegal by the Canada Industrial Relations Board (ONTC). The company has brought in replacement workers, and many of the unionized jobs are already being contracted out.

The company claims that wage increases and job security demands by the union threaten their competitiveness and

sustainability. Union negotiators have stated that they presented a contract proposal that satisfied demands outlined by the company in September.

Sudbury hardware giant locks out workers

Fourteen workers employed by Rona Inc. in Sudbury, Ontario, were locked out last week after rejecting two contract proposals from the company in recent months.

The workers are represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), which is planning to file charges against Rona for bad-faith bargaining. Among other issues in dispute is a demand to require employees to work Sundays that the union considers illegal.

The company has refused to return to the bargaining table after negotiations broke down at the end of October, and no new talks are scheduled.

Ottawa taxi drivers occupy corporate offices

Last Friday, about 30 taxi drivers, who are among more than 200 that have been on strike/lockout since August, occupied the dispatch offices of Coventry Connections. The company had hiked fees last summer for airport taxi drivers and ended their exclusive contract for fares at the Ottawa airport.

Police ended the occupation later the same day. The protest continued outside the building, with drivers taking part in pickets and a planned blockade of the Airport Parkway. The company had reportedly lowered the fee hike in a revised proposal to negotiators for Unifor, the union representing drivers, the previous day, although details of any new deal have not been made public.

At the same time as the union leadership is making a public appeal for support, a different union local not affected by the job action is allowing its drivers to take fares at the same airport.



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