

Workers Struggles: The Americas

24 November 2015

Brazil: Main holdout oil workers union ends strike

Workers in the main Brazilian oil workers union who had bucked the call by the FUP oil workers federation to end their strike against state-run Petrobras voted to return to work November 20.

Sindipetro Norte Fluminense is the union for oil platform workers in the Campos Basin region, which accounts for 60 percent of oil production. On November 13, two-thirds of the 800 Sindipetro NF workers voted in favor of continuing the strike.

The strike had been called originally to protest Petrobras' planned reductions in investment and sales of its assets. Among the Campos Basin workers' concerns was how much they would be paid for their time on strike. Reports on the vote to return did not mention if that issue had been settled.

FUP (Federação Única dos Petroleiros) is the larger of the two oil workers federations. The other is the FNP (Federação Nacional dos Petroleiros). After FUP and Petrobras reached the November 13 agreement, most FUP affiliates voted to end the strike. However, as of November 20, six unions, one affiliated with FUP and five with FNP, remained out.

Peruvian municipal cleaning workers strike second time for unpaid wages

Public cleaning workers for the Provincial Municipality of Sullana, Peru struck November 20 to demand payment of their wages. The striking workers have not been paid for the last two weeks.

The strike action was taken by second shift (1 p.m. to 9 p.m.) workers, after they said that they had felt themselves deceived by the mayor, who had told them that their pay would be in the bank by noon, November 19 for withdrawal. When they went to the bank, the money was not there.

24-hour strike by Uruguayan transport workers cut short by "pre-agreement"

Workers in Tres Cruces, site of the main interdepartmental bus station in Montevideo, Uruguay began what was to have been a 24-hour walkout November 20. The workers' union, Unott, had called the job action as tripartite talks stalled. Drivers, parcel, ticket sales and maintenance/repair workers participated.

The transport workers had already carried out a 24-hour stoppage on November 2, but without any movement from Anetra, the bus owners' association.

Negotiations continued during the strike. After a five-hour meeting at the National Labor Directorate, the parties announced the signing of a "pre-agreement" and the workers were called back on the job. The union and Anetra agreed on the salary component, which will be in effect for 36 months. It involves the payment of a fixed commission of 7,500 Uruguayan pesos (UYU), about US\$254, to parcel, ticket sales and maintenance/repair workers. Drivers and security workers will receive UYU6,000 (US\$203).

Anetra will pay the commission in 2016 and 2017, after which it will "study the growth of the sector to establish the increase of a third fixed commission to pay in 2018," according to subrayado.com.uy. Whether the commissions become a permanent part of the workers' wages will depend on "the evolution of the companies."

Unott director Juan Arellano said, "We are satisfied with the advance of negotiations, but various things remain to review," including "dead hours" (time between one trip and the next) and pay for drivers in special situations. The vote on the pre-agreement was scheduled to be held this week.

Jamaican traveling officers protest for back pay

Following a decision by the Jamaican government to delay the retroactive payment of their travel allowances, scores of traveling officers—civil service workers required to travel in the course of their duties—held a protest November 18 at the Heroes Circle public park in Kingston. They then marched to the Ministry of Finance, where a representative of the Jamaica Civil Service Association (JCSA) delivered a letter.

After negotiating the travel allowance with the JCSA this year, the government unilaterally announced that it would not

begin paying it until the first quarter of the 2016-2017 fiscal year. A JCSA spokesman told rjnnews.com, “Not giving us our retroactive payment means that our benefits that should have been incurred from recent increases may not be fully realized.” The union “expected a response” by November 22.

Guyanese timber workers reject bonus, strike for wage raise

Workers for Demerara Timbers Limited (DTL) stopped work on November 19 in repudiation of the Singapore-based company’s offer of a bonus instead of a wage increase. About 70 workers, members of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union (GAWU), marched to a DTL sawmill in Mabura Hill to picket at the gate.

Non-skilled DTL workers earn about 45,000 Guyanese dollars (GYD), or US\$217, per month, while skilled workers make less than \$60,000 (USD\$290), according to a *Guyana Chronicle* report. In negotiations, the GAWU proposed a 12 percent raise, or between GYD5,400 and 6,000 (US\$26-35) per month. On the third meeting on November 17, DTL flatly refused the raise and instead offered a Christmas bonus of GYD5,000 (US\$24.13).

Workers carried signs with such slogans as “No increase, No work,” “We need 12 percent increase,” “\$5,000 is an insult” and “DTL unfair to workers.” They also denounced working conditions, complaining of the lack of proper clothing and equipment, the absence of an ambulance in case of an accident, the dilapidated bus that transports workers and intermittent electricity at worksites.

The GAWU has called on the Labor Ministry to intervene and, reported the *Guyana Chronicle*, “requested the conciliatory services of the Ministry of Social Protection,” but the workers have expressed willingness to continue to shut down operations if DTL does not address their demands.

California county workers strike again

Nearly 1,800 workers for Solano County, California conducted a one-day strike November 17 over wages, pensions and health care benefits. The strike follows a two-day strike last October that failed to move negotiators for the county government.

The union is demanding an 8 percent raise over the course of a new two-year agreement, while the county is insisting on spreading a 5 percent increase across both wages and benefits. Workers charge that increased tax revenues should also provide

the basis for the county to assume some responsibility for increased health costs, which have been shifted onto workers.

Service Employees International Union Local 1021, which represents the striking workers, has also charged the county “illegally deducted fees from workers’ paychecks to cover the county’s financial obligations to retirement funds, despite California pension law.” The county has also “restricted workers’ earned sick leave” and has “inadequately addressed safety concerns of overnight, on-call social workers who move at-risk youth out of dangerous situations at all hours of night.”

Last week, county administrators declared negotiations with Service Employees International Union Local 1021 at an impasse and said “future discussions would be futile.” The union, which previously rejected mediated talks, has agreed to begin participation in negotiations under the auspicious of the state of California.

Locked-out Ontario transport workers occupy workplace

Locked-out bus and train mechanics at the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) occupied the company’s motor coach repair center for one day last week in North Bay, Ontario, 200 miles north of Toronto.

Nearly 200 skilled trades workers who refurbish rail cars have been without a contract for two years at the northern Ontario Crown agency, and their union Unifor maintains that they have been forced to take drastic measures because of the employer’s intransigence in negotiations.

The company presented the union with a contract proposal containing numerous concessions including a wage freeze for the first two years and when the union balked, they left the bargaining table and illegally locked workers out, saying that they were bringing in replacement workers. The subsequent occupation only lasted eight hours, but workers in North Bay and neighboring Cochrane remain on the picket line.



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