

Workers Struggles: The Americas

8 December 2015

Two-day national strike by Argentine state workers for bonus, labor stability

State workers across Argentina struck for two days, December 3 and 4, to demand payment of their end-of-year bonus, labor stability and other demands. The mobilization was mainly organized by the ATE state workers union. The CTA trade union federation, UTA transit workers union and the AJP judicial workers association were among other organizations joining in the strike and protests.

The end-of-year bonus was formerly customary throughout Latin America, but has been delayed, shrunk or eliminated in recent years as the economic crisis has deepened. Regarding the second demand, roughly 40 percent of the Argentine workforce consists of *precarizados* or contingent workers who are poorly paid and have no job security.

A statement by the CTA in Buenos Aires, where marches and demonstrations were held, demanded “that the still-contingent workers pass to permanent status and the hiring of personnel in health, child care and education.” Other demands included tax reform “that serves for investing in social areas” and a collective contract “that makes things well.”

The protests took place a week before the swearing-in of right-wing Buenos Aires Mayor Mario Macri to the nation’s presidency. Macri, who narrowly won a runoff vote in November, is committed to pursuing pro-business policies that will further exacerbate declining working class living standards and class polarization in Argentina.

Peruvian government workers restart strike over broken promises

Workers for the Regional Government of Puno (GRP), Peru resumed their indefinite strike December 3, accusing the GRP of breaking promises it had made previously. The workers repeated their demand for a wage raise, respect for labor rights and the hiring of permanent unionized workers

instead of temporary staff.

A GRP Workers Syndicate spokesperson told reporters that “we want our family basket [cost of living adjustment] to be twice a year; at other institutions they receive it every month. In the meeting that we held the governor promised to carry out his commitments, nonetheless they [government functionaries] have not carried them out.”

Workers occupied the central GRP headquarters, demanding that the regional governor fulfill months-old promises and that the regional directors of Planning, Administration and other departments be sacked.

According to pachamamaradio.org, “Other members of the syndicate threatened to bring to light compromising documents concerning acts of corruption committed under this administration. In the same way, they announced that if there is no solution to their demands, they would enter into an indefinite strike.”

Mexican municipal water workers vote to strike over unpaid wages

Workers for the Municipal Potable Water and Sewerage Board (Jumapag) in Guasave, Sinaloa, Mexico voted unanimously December 5 to down their tools at noon on December 14 to demand payment of overdue wages. The 387 workers “are owed two-and-a-half million [pesos, or US\$150,00] in savings funds, retentions for five fortnights and the last fortnight of salaries, two to retired personnel,” according to debate.com.mx.

The Jumapag workers union’s Facebook page stated that the workers had been “patient awaiting a positive response” from the municipal government; “nonetheless, at not showing interest nor capacity to resolve the issue, the eruption of the strike remains the government’s responsibility.” However, talks were scheduled for December 10.

Dominican Republic: Nurses hold strike for increases in personnel, supplies

Nurses at three public hospitals in the Dominican Republic's northern province of Valverde stopped work for 24 hours on December 4. They took the action in support of their colleagues at the José María Cabral y Báez Regional Hospital in the neighboring province of Santiago, who have been on strike since November 25.

The striking nurses, members of the SINATRAE national nurses union, are demanding that the Public Health Ministry remedy three main complaints: shortages of supplies and medicine (patients' families "often have to buy them in the streets at elevated costs," reports listindiario.com); the hiring of additional personnel; the completion of renovations of public health centers in the region.

Chicago Coca-Cola workers strike

Drivers, warehouse and production workers at two Chicago-area Coca-Cola plants went on strike December 3 demanding the maintenance of benefits and a modest raise. Workers, who voted 226-23 to strike, charge that management's wage offers will be more than offset by increases in health insurance costs.

Teamsters Local 727, which represents the 319 striking workers, and the company are also at loggerheads over shift preferences, the grievance procedure and a guaranteed 40-hour workweek. Workers are upset over scheduling, whereby they are forced to work as much as 60 hours a week and have no advance notice.

Local 727 initiated the work stoppage as an unfair labor practices strike and cited a number of technical issues in complaints to the National Labor Relations Board. Among them, the union charges management with "intimidating employees in the workplace with baseball bats" and "threatening employees with job loss for engaging with the union."

The company did not directly deny the charges, but simply called the union's tactics "unfortunate" and the charges "unsubstantiated."

Strike at Oregon beer distributor ends after company threatens replacement of workers

The 16-day strike by 80 workers at General Distributors Inc. in Oregon City, Oregon ended December 2 after the company threatened the jobs of any worker who failed to report to work by December 4. Teamsters Local 162 originally called the strike to protest a concessions package that called for an annual cut of \$19,000 per worker.

General Distributors (GDI), which distributes beer and wine, claims its economic demands were to bring its employees into line with the wages and benefits received by workers at its competitor, Maletis Beverage, which is also represented by Local 162. The Teamsters sought to extend the current agreement by three years, but GDI flatly refused.

When the strike was launched on November 17, GDI immediately hired permanent replacement workers and then issued a letter to workers threatening their jobs. GDI insists that it will retain the 30 permanent replacement workers it hired during the strike. The company also informed a mediator that it would provide a counterproposal to the union at a later date.

Nova Scotia teachers reject union approved contract

A ratification vote last week soundly rejected a union-recommended deal affecting 9,000 public school teachers in Nova Scotia, while the provincial Liberal government has prepared legislation to impose a contract unilaterally.

The contract that was turned down by members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) included a wage freeze for the first two years of a four-year contract and only a 2 percent increase over the final two years. The contract was intended to be a pattern for public sector workers in the province and this rejection has meant that the vote by 7,600 civil servants in the province in another union will be postponed.

While negotiators for the NSTU admitted that teachers were unhappy with the deal that includes no improvements in working conditions along with the wage freeze, they expressed disappointment that the deal was not ratified for fear of an imposed contract.



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