Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Salvadoran municipal workers strike against firings

Municipal workers in Santa Ana, El Salvador's second-largest city, went on indefinite strike January 8 to protest the unjustified firings of coworkers. The Santa Ana Municipality Workers Syndicate (SITRAMSA) stated that over 60 employees were notified by letter that the city had decided not to extend their contracts after they expired December 31.

SITRAMSA Secretary General José Linares Ponce told reporters that the city council's action was a violation of the collective contract. He blamed the sackings on "the bad management of this administration" and called them "an attack against the working class."

Work was paralyzed in the areas of road maintenance, urban cleaning, trash collection and decorations. A stadium and swimming pool were closed to the public.

The city council denied that the firings were unjustified, claiming that the contracts were temporary. SITRAMSA has disclosed that the strike will not be lifted as long as the council "does not have a positive response."

Laid-off Brazilian Olympic site construction workers protest unpaid wages

A group of laid-off construction workers at Rio de Janeiro's Olympic Park project held a protest January 7. The workers were laid off in December, but said that they had not yet received their last month's wages or legally required severance pay.

Originally scheduled for opening on August 5, 2016, at an estimated cost of US$7.4 billion, the Olympic Park construction project has been marked by cost overruns, delays, faulty construction, injuries and deaths of workers and strikes, as well as occupations by evicted residents and other protests. Over 4,100 families living in *favelas* (slums) were evicted and their homes were razed to build the sports facilities, according to the World Cup and Olympics Popular Committee of Rio De Janeiro.

A few hours after the protest by the laid-off workers, a small fire broke out in a shipping container near the tennis courts. Authorities were quick to surmise that the protesting workers were to blame. Police later detained four people on suspicion of starting the fire, but reportage did not mention whether they had been involved in the protest.

Buenos Aires subway workers hold 2-hour strike for year-end bonus

Workers for Metrovías, a privately owned subway system, known as a subte, which operates six lines in Buenos Aires, Argentina, struck from 5 until 7 a.m. on January 7. The brief stoppage was called by the Subte and Premetro Workers Union Association (AGTSyP) over its demand for a yearend bonus of 10,000 pesos (US$720) for about 4,000 workers.

AGTSyP representatives had made the demand on December 18 during negotiations, citing rampaging inflation that in November and December rose to 10 percent for a yearly rate of 30 percent. Union bargainers also mentioned bonuses in other industries like trucking, which obtained between 5,200 and 12,000 pesos (US$376 and $868). Metrovías refused to address the demand.

Clarín reported that on the January 6, AGTSyP negotiators had signed an agreement in which they committed to "maintain a private and fluid dialogue" despite their "discomfort with the lack of response on the part of the employer" regarding the bonus. AGTSyP called the strike after leaving the meeting.

The short walkout was the first industrial action by subte workers under the city government of Mayor Horacio Rodríguez Larreta of the right-wing PRO party.

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Larreta took office December 10 after elections in which former Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri, also of the PRO, won the national presidency following 12 years of rule by the Justicialista Party leaders Néstor Kirchner and his widow, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner.

Antigua and Barbuda: Transport workers protest stalled negotiations

Workers for Antigua and Barbuda's Transport Board stopped work January 7 to protest the lack of progress of contract negotiations between the board and the Antigua & Barbuda Workers Union (ABWU).

According to the *Antigua Observer*, "The action disrupted operations at the Transport Board and the East and West Bus Station Terminals. Drivers from the Public Works Department (PWD) were called in to transport children who utilized the National School Bus System."

The main concerns of the workers are delays in salary increases and working conditions. ABWU deputy general secretary Chester Hughes also cited allowances and the medical plan as bones of contention. Hughes blamed the breakdown in communication between the Transport Board's management and the board and appealed to the prime minister and transport minister to "take urgent action."

Once a meeting was called between the union and the board, the ABWU told the workers to end the strike. ABWU said that it has given the board seven working days to meet and discuss the issues.

Lockout of New York nurses to end in wake of one-day strike

The 137 nurses at the Nathan Littauer Hospital and Nursing Home in Gloversville, New York, were scheduled to return to work January 11 after a one-day strike and four-day lockout. The nurses, members of the New York State Nurses Association, called a 24-hour strike last week to protest two years of stagnant bargaining.

The hospital is demanding nurses contribute a greater share of health care costs, the elimination of current pension benefits and a tightening of rules governing sick time that could lead to nurses working sick. The union charges the hospital is understaffed and seeks remedy through better nurse-to-patient ratios. Currently, the hospital has 30 open positions.

Nurses carried out a 24-hour strike January 6. The hospital responded the following day with a four-day lockout, contracting a nursing agency to provide replacement nurses.

Strike at New Brunswick potato chip company

Sixteen of the 32 unionized workers who went on strike last week at Covered Bridge Potato Chip Company near Hartland, New Brunswick, have set up picket lines outside the factory in their fight to win a first contract.

Unionized workers at the plant, who are represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), have been in a legal strike position since June but union leaders say that some of their members have crossed the picket line allowing production to continue during the strike. Most of the workers earn minimum wage or just above, despite many years seniority. The company is now refusing further negotiations with the union.

Company president, Ryan Albright, has shown outright contempt for workers and the union, bringing in scab labor as soon as the strike began. The UFCW has launched a boycott against the company that produces potato chips for a variety of brands.

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