

Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 February 2016

Salvadoran education workers hold brief strike for wage raise

Administrative personnel of the departmental headquarters of the Ministry of Education (MINED) in San Miguel, El Salvador, stopped work on the morning of February 5. The workers took the action to press their demand for an 8 percent raise. Another demand is that all workers be given permanent status under the national Salary Law. Though they resumed their duties in the afternoon, the workers said that they would hold a one-day strike action if they are not listened to.

Costa Rican taxi drivers block traffic, protest Uber

Taxi drivers created gridlock on key streets in San Jose, Costa Rica, on February 1 following a meeting the day before, in which the government announced that it would not block the use of the Uber app-based ride service.

Traditional taxi services are subject to fees, overhead costs and regulations not imposed on Uber drivers and the taxi drivers complain that they are being driven out of business. Similar protests have taken place throughout the world. In other cases, Uber drivers themselves have protested the low pay and poor conditions they work under.

Taxi drivers blocked traffic in several areas of the city and many parked their cars in front of the Presidential House. Some hurled eggs at drivers who refused to participate in the protests.

24-hour strikes by hospital workers in the Dominican Republic

Medical and nursing personnel at three public hospitals in the Dominican Medical College (CMD) in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, held a 24-hour strike beginning the morning of February 4. The walkout was the latest of a number of one-day actions that hospital workers have carried out to push their demands for better salaries and working conditions.

In Cibao on January 27, and in the southern region on January 28, doctors, nurses and other personnel struck. On February 3, workers in the Dominican Republic's East Region stopped work. In all the actions, doctors and nurses continued working in emergency rooms, intensive care and for patients with in critical

condition.

Sickout at St. Lucian school over deplorable conditions

Teachers at the Dunnottar School in Catries, St. Lucia, staged a sickout to bring attention to the deplorable conditions at their workplace. The school serves about 80 special needs students ranging in ages from five to 25.

Among the problems cited by teachers are rat infestation, dripping roofs, sewage leaks and mold. Parents have expressed worries over their children's frequent illnesses and have taken their concerns to the principal, who claims that she has brought the issues to the attention of the Ministry of Education, which disavows responsibility.

The teachers have previously tried to get the administration to rectify the state of disrepair at the school to no avail. Claiming that the institution is not conducive to learning, the teachers have vowed not to return until conditions are fixed.

Two-hour strike by Brazilian airline workers for pay raise

Holding signs and banners, personnel at 12 of Brazil's major airports struck from 6 a.m. to 8 a.m. February 3. The job action, occurring during the run-up to Carnival festivities, forced over 400 delays and 130 cancellations nationwide.

In a statement, the National Airline Crew Syndicate (SNA) denounced the "disgraceful" wage increase offer made by airline companies to its 70,000 members, "which only brings losses to the sector." The union accused the Brazilian Airline Companies Association of "taking advantage of the crisis atmosphere in the country to justify a proposal" of 5.5 percent, which, "if accepted, would represent the biggest salary loss for any union in the country." With Brazil's inflation rate currently running at 10.67 percent—its highest since 2002—SNA demands an 11 percent hike retroactive to December 1 of last year.

Guyanese sugar workers continue protests against factory closure with strike

Workers at the Wales, West Bank Demerara (WBD) Sugar Estate in Guyana have continued their protests against the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the government's stated plans to close the sugar processing plant that many families in the area depend on to make a living.

On the morning February 4, hundreds of workers assembled in front of the estate and refused to work. Workers told reporters that they were unconvinced by GuySuCo's claim that workers with seniority would be transferred to another estate, and they decried the vagueness of management promises that workers would receive severance pay.

"The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) President Komal Chand said these measures, including strikes, will continue as the Union is firmly against the move of closure. He however did not specify the length of this latest action," reported guyanatimesgy.com.

Jamaican racetrack workers strike over contract stonewalling

Workers at the Caymanas Park racing complex, Jamaica's only racetrack located in Gregory Park, St. Catherine, walked off the job February 4 over management's reneging on some previously agreed benefits in the contract under negotiation. Those benefits "verbally included a salary upgrade for members of the engineering department as well as increases in breakfast, supper and traveling allowances among other improvements for various categories of workers," according to an rjrnewsonline.com report.

Workers set up pickets at the entrance, halting operations at about 5 p.m. while the Union of Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (UTASP) and management kept bargaining. By February 6, after five meetings lasting more than 14 hours, the parties remained deadlocked.

The February 6 race program was canceled and there is speculation that, lacking an agreement, the Ash Wednesday (February 10) program may be canceled as well. The last time a local race program was canceled at Caymanas Park due to industrial action was 1992. Caymanas Track Limited (CTL) management claimed that they could not sign on to any agreement without the approval of entire board and the finance minister. UTASP accused CTL of delaying tactics. United States

Workers strike Arizona food distributor over discrimination

Some 200 Teamsters went on an unfair labor practices strike February 4 against U.S. Foods in Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona. Teamsters Local 104 charges that the food distributor has victimized pro-union workers and refused to bargain in good faith. Several cases are now pending before the National Labor Relations Board.

According to the Teamsters, "US Foods is under investigation

for violations of federal labor law including disciplining workers for union activity, refusing to hire workers for their union affiliation, and denying workers access to their representatives." Workers have been without a contract since October of last year, when they rejected the company's last offer. Issues of contention involved in negotiations have included wages, health insurance and equity among union and non-union workers.

Since the initial walkout in Arizona, the strike against the company has spread to Southern California and could engulf other states. US Foods operates at 60 locations nationwide, servicing schools, hospitals, restaurants and military bases. Canada

Toronto municipal workers Set to Strike

Six thousand outside workers, members of Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 416, and 20,000 CUPE Local 79 inside city workers will be in a strike position beginning February 20 after contract negotiations reached an impasse with Toronto Mayor John Tory's bargaining committee.

Issues of job security are at the forefront of the contract dispute. The city has made it clear that it requires increased flexibility to reduce staff and privatize more services. In the 2012 contract rounds, the regime of former Mayor Rob Ford pushed through a contract that allowed for the outsourcing of hundreds of garbage collector jobs in the west end of the city.

A day before the city was in a legal lockout position Ford had announced that he would unilaterally impose a new contract on the municipal workers. The union, which had not even organized a strike vote, quickly buckled to Ford's demands.

In this current round of bargaining, city workers have already voted to give the union a strike mandate. At the same time, the City of Toronto can decide to impose a lockout or, as it did four years earlier, move to impose a contract unilaterally. Workers, disgusted with the union's refusal in 2012 to prepare strike action, have given notice that they will not accept the imposition of a new concessions contract.



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