

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 March 2016

Strike by Peruvian sugar workers for better pay, conditions

Workers for the Peru-based agricultural products firm Agroindustrial Casa Grande struck its sugar-processing plant near the city of Trujillo, in the nation's northwestern Ascope province, on March 22. The workers, whose demands include better pay and working conditions, marched and set up blockades along the Pan-American Highway.

Another demand is the divestiture of agribusiness conglomerate Grupo Gloria, owner of a 57 percent share in the formerly state-owned company, which was privatized in 2006.

The Regional Labor Directorate declared the strike "inappropriate" and illegal. National Police units were deployed to the area, where confrontations ensued, with police using tear gas and clubs to disperse the protesters. The tear gas fumes affected children as well as disabled and elderly people. Ten workers were arrested for "altering the public order."

As of March 26, the strike was still in effect in defiance of the illegality decree. A member of the workers' negotiating team told *RPP Noticias* reporters that a protesting worker had been physically attacked by a police officer and that another seven workers had been detained, though five were later released. The union sent a commission to Trujillo to ask him to declare the strike legal.

Uruguay: Transportation workers repeat one-day strike over death of another taxi driver

Barely a week after striking for one day to protest the shooting death of a taxi driver in a Montevideo neighborhood, the Transport Workers Union (Unott) and the Suatt taxi drivers union called another 24-hour walkout March 25. The reason: the death of another taxi driver, 53-year-old Juan Bonilla, who died after lingering in a hospital bed for 24 days from a gunshot wound suffered

February 28 in a robbery attempt.

Shortly after Bonilla's burial, the union members assembled and voted to strike. According to an *entornointeligente.com* report, "Some of the assembled aired their discontent with the attitude assumed by the PIT-CNT [union confederation] in this case. Insults against the union central and references to the principal directors being on vacation outside of Montevideo or the country were heard."

Suatt has accused the taxi companies and the Interior Ministry of "hiding something" for not having met to sign an agreement on security measures resolved several days ago, having only signed it the day after Bonilla's death.

The unions cut the strike short at 3:00 p.m., saying that they did not want to cause a "blow" to travelers returning from Holy Week activities. They said that they would continue other mobilizations as well as inform the public about their demands.

Mexican bus drivers strike over salary, benefit issues

Some 800 drivers for ViveBús, the bus system that serves the city of Chihuahua, Mexico, went on strike in the early hours of March 23. The drivers gathered at the city's Collective Transport Coordinator (CTC) installations and prevented the arrival and departure of buses.

The drivers struck to demand overtime pay, as well as the fulfillment of other commitments from the CTC, such as payments into the IMSS social security institute and INFONAVIT housing assistance program. The drivers are owed over 7 million pesos, or US\$400,000, in overtime for the last nine months. They have also been deprived of the end-of-year bonus and profit sharing.

The striking drivers complained that union negotiators, who had been in negotiations for nine months, "only had achieved political agreements that did not end up to the benefit of the workers."

Airport and seaport workers hold protest strike in Barbados

Workers at the Grantley Adams International Airport (GAIA) and the Bridgetown Port in Barbados walked off the job March 24. Due to the strike by air traffic controllers at GAIA, flights were canceled or delayed. Cargo operations at the port were slowed.

The striking workers took the action to express solidarity with their colleagues at the Barbados Water Authority (BWA) who went on strike the week before to demand the payment of outstanding wage increments that have been due for more than 10 years. The total of the overdue raises is equal to over 33 million Barbadian dollars (US\$16.5 million).

After seven hours on strike, the workers were called back to their posts as officials from the BWA, the Labor Ministry and the Barbados Workers Union (BWU) held a meeting. Following the meeting, BWU general secretary Toni Moore told reporters, “We have reached an agreement which we are sure will satisfy our constituents. Increments will be honored, as the union had requested and as was agreed by the parties previously, and we have made some concession as we indicated too, that would be necessary.”

Eleven-month lockout of Ohio steelworkers ends with return to work

The 11-month lockout of steelworkers at the ANH Refractories plant in Oak Hill, Ohio, ended March 23 when 43 members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 2324-5 narrowly approved a new contract agreement. A USW official admitted that, except for an \$11,000 signing bonus, the new agreement contained the same concessions ANH demanded when it locked out workers on April 15 of last year.

Back in January, the National Labor Relations Board prepared a complaint against ANH saying that it would determine the lockout illegal and that the company would be liable for back pay to workers. The USW has used this as a negotiating chip in an effort to come to an agreement on the company’s terms.

Both the company and the union cited the glut in the global steel industry and cheaper imports as a factor in demanding concessions. “We felt it was the only way to go at this time,” said USW representative Mike French. A company statement declared, “Throughout the process the

company was committed to working with our labor partners to address several factors in the global economy that are challenging our competitiveness. The new collective bargaining agreement moves us in the right direction.”

San Diego transit workers reject contract, seek to decertify union

Workers at San Diego Trolley rejected for the fifth time on March 14 a contract proposal reached between the Metropolitan Transit System and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 465. The latest contract was rejected by a 54 percent margin, while a previous contract was rejected by 65 percent back in December. Workers are currently barred from conducting a walkout by a no-strike clause.

On March 11, the State Mediation and Conciliation Services reported that they had received a petition signed by more than 30 percent of the membership and a decertification election has been scheduled for April 11.

Saskatoon transit job action ends

Despite being without a contract for more than four years, the union representing transit workers in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, has asked workers to end a job action involving not wearing their job uniforms that had been ongoing for a week.

A spokesman for the Amalgamated Transit Union said that the workers had achieved their goal of publicizing their fight, but it was in response to the city’s release of a press statement that the action was halted and workers were asked to resume wearing their uniforms.

While the union has agreed to the city’s wage proposal, they are in disagreement with the proposed changes to pensions that shift liability to workers. No further contract negotiations have been scheduled by either side.



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