

Workers Struggles: The Americas

24 May 2016

Mexican military, police dislodge striking Mexican steelworkers

Some 160 workers for Korea-based steel producer POSCO's plant in Altamira, Tamaulipas, Mexico went on strike May 18 to protest unjust working conditions. The workers are demanding the reinstitution of their union director, who they claim was unjustly expelled. Jorge Gómez, a representative of the workers, told reporters that the workers have engaged a lawyer to present their complaint before a labor court.

The workers set up a blockade at the entrance to the plant, which was constructed in 2009 and produces around 400,000 tons of galvanized sheet steel annually for automakers. That night, a POSCO legal representative and ministerial personnel came to the encampment and "they asked for our petition, we gave it to them and they said that they were going to check it and after 20 minutes they came with judicial [attorney general's office] people with instructions to carry out people by force," said Gómez.

In the early morning of May 21, state police and military units forcibly dislodged the workers, clearing the way for nonunion employees. Afterwards, a group of about 30 workers went to the offices of the municipal president and state government's liaison, asking them to intervene and prevent them from being fired. "The municipality made it clear that the action undertaken by the workers ... of stopping production was not the best option; however, they said that it would be necessary to come to a good agreement," reported eldiariodevictoria.com.

Honduran nurses join medical interns in strike over wage issues

On May 20, nurses in the Hospital Rivas, in San Pedro

Sula, Honduras, joined interns who had walked out on May 16 over wage issues. The doctors struck after almost five months without pay. Only two of the 55 doctors at Rivas have received their salaries since then.

One of the doctors told laprensa.hon reporters: "Supposedly the process is now in the Health Secretariat payroll department, but the payment hasn't been put into effect; we're in our fifth month. They always have an excuse, that they need a signature or a stamp; what we believe is that there is a lack of will.

"Every six months we hand in all the required documentation; there are people who have been working at the hospital for 12 years and it's still the same. The cumbersome steps should be eliminated and be automated."

The hospital employs at least 200 nurses, who have been demanding a monthly salary adjustment of 4,000 lempiras (US\$177) for over six years.

Panamanian veterinarians strike for pay raise

Members of the Panamanian Veterinary Doctors Association (APMV) began a 24-hour strike on May 16 to press their salary demands. About 270 veterinarians in the Health Ministry (Minsa), Panamanian Food Security Authority (Aupsa), Farming Development Bank (BDA), Farming Security Institute (ISA), Farming Development Ministry (Mida) and the Panamanian Farming Research Institute (IDIAP) walked off the job.

The veterinarians struck to protest Mida's proposed repeal of a 2014 executive decree that regulates salaries and classifications for veterinarians, and with which authorities had never completely complied. Repeal of the decree, according to the veterinarians, would end remuneration for specialized studies and academic titles, exclude all except Mida employees from salary scale adjustments and limit salaries to US\$800 for starting

veterinarians, not to exceed US\$2,000 after 20 years.

At the beginning, the strike affected the transfer of animals, inspections of butcher shops, registrations and Depa operations. It did not include border inspections, airports and diagnostic labs. However, when the vets got no response, they extended the strike another 24 hours and expanded it to include the aforementioned.

That afternoon, Minsa and Mida signed an accord with the APMV in which the agencies agreed not to repeal the decree, to raise the starting salary to US\$960 and to retain and raise the remunerations for masters, doctorates and specialist degrees. Another demand, that contract workers be given permanent status, will be taken up in future meetings.

The current starting salary for veterinarians is US\$800 a month.

24-hour strike by Bolivian health workers for salary rise

Health workers throughout Bolivia held a one-day work stoppage May 17 to press their salary demands. Hospitals only provided emergency and internal services, while external consultations were paralyzed.

Health Ministry and union negotiators held talks during the walkout. A spokesman for the health workers' union said that the strike was part of a national demand that was supported by the national Workers' Confederation.

The health minister claimed that the workers' demands had already been met, and that they will receive a raise soon.

Salinas, California hospital workers carry out 24-hour strike

Over 600 workers at the Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital (SVMH) in Salinas, California carried out a one-day strike May 17 against cuts in benefits, outsourcing of jobs to contractors and some 16 other issues touching on sick leave, personal time off and overtime pay. Health care would skyrocket with monthly increases doubling for full-time workers and quadrupling for part-timers. The nurse's aides, technicians, custodial and other staff

workers are members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers and have been without a contract since July of last year.

A series of 23 bargaining sessions, including mediated talks, have failed to make a dent in management's determination to slash living standards. On May 13, in the lead-up to the strike, management unilaterally implemented several parts of their concession package.

SVMH brought in 263 replacement workers at a cost of \$1.6 million and in the agreement with the contractor they worked for three days, displacing strikers for an additional two days.

Further provoking the strikers has been the fact that SVMH has made \$30 million in annual profit in each of the last three years while CEO Peter Delgado increased his compensation by \$230,000. Pay for top-level executives has increased by 16.7 percent during the period 2013-14.

Montreal port workers set to strike

Two hundred workers employed by the Old Port of Montreal Corporation, which runs a number of attractions in what is now a tourist area of the city, are set to go on strike in the coming days after rejecting the employer's final contract offer on May 13.

The workers, who are represented by the Syndicat des employés du Vieux-Port de Montréal (SEVPM), include sales, maintenance and education workers at various centers and sites of the Crown Corporation in the area. The union is fighting to raise entry-level wages from \$10.68 to \$15 an hour and for improvements in wages and working conditions across the board with management offering only a 2 percent annual wage increase.

Workers gave their union an overwhelming strike mandate after their last contract expired at the end of March and they will be in a legal strike position this week.



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