

Workers Struggles: the Americas

10 August 2016

Bolivian peasants seize natural gas installation

On August 4, protesting peasants seized a natural gas pumping field in Santa Cruz province, in eastern Bolivia. At issue are peasants' demands for title to the land that they have already occupied, and the paving of a road to give them access to local markets.

Following a two-day standoff with government troops, the occupiers voluntarily left the gas field in return for a government promise of negotiations over the two issues.

Bolivia is a major exporter of natural gas to Argentina, its southern neighbor, much of it delivered from the occupied field. By some estimates, the country lost \$400,000 due to this two-day occupation.

Bolivian oil workers strike

In Bolivia, on August 3, the Federation of Employees of the Oil Workers Health Fund launched a 72-hour strike, but it was observed by only about half the workers. Striking employees confronted non-strikers in the Santa Cruz headquarters of the Health Fund (CPS).

The main issue involved in this protest strike is the corruption that allegedly exists in the CPS itself. Its administrator, Victor Hugo Villegas is accused of spending only 1.6 percent of investment funds allocated for 2016. The strikers, led by union leader Cristina Morales are demanding Villegas' removal. An opposing faction in the union, led by Roque Perez opposed the job action.

While the Health Fund was able to provide medical care during the strike, the strike by administrative employees impacted clinics across the oil-producing regions.

Teachers protest in Mexico City

On August 3, some 1,500 members of the Mexican Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE) marched through Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City and rallied at historic central square ("El Zócalo") to announce that the new education cycle will not begin unless the government rescinds its education reform. CNTE leaders described the negotiations taking place with the Enrique Peña Nieto administration over the education reform law as "going backwards."

The teachers had reached the Fine Arts Museum when they were stopped by police from advancing to the Zocalo. Following a brief interval, the police did allow the march to pass, in what appears to have been a last-minute concession made to the teachers by government officials.

The CNTE has also threatened to block refineries operated by the national oil company PEMEX and even to block the US-Mexico and Guatemala-Mexico borders.

Big business is demanding that the government do something about the nearly 100 days of teacher barricades in Southern and Central México, which they claim have caused the loss of millions of dollars in profits.

Government threat to Ecuador teachers union

The Ecuadorean government is threatening to shut down the teacher's union (Unión Nacional de Educadores, UNE), in retaliation for public statements made earlier this year by UNE officials to the International Labor Organization and the UN human rights Committee on government violations of freedom of association.

Last week, the government of President Rafael Correa gave UNE 15 days to explain why it should not be shut down for violating government Decree 16 (that applies to nonprofit organizations) for having undertaken actions

that are prohibited in the Constitution, without specifying particular charges.

Perú: Teachers strike in Piura

Last Wednesday, education workers in the northwestern State of Piura, belonging to the United Education Workers Union (SUTE, Piura) announced a teachers strike for this week.

The strike is over nonpayment of medical benefits and class preparation wages, an amount that represents US\$25,000 per teacher (80,000 soles). There are 20,000 teachers in the region.

School district asks judge to block Yuba City, California teachers strike

On August 5, officials for the Yuba City Unified School District in northern California asked the Public Employment Relations Board to request that a judge block a strike by more than 700 teachers when school opens on August 11. The Yuba City Teachers Association (YCTA) countered with an unfair labor practices filing, charging the district with intimidating teachers and making unilateral changes to the contract.

Teachers voted by an 85 percent margin on May 17 to reject the district's 3.5 percent wage increase and in a second vote registered a 95 percent margin to strike. The YCTA is seeking a 13 percent raise.

The school district has been conducting training sessions for replacement teachers and teachers have responded with mass pickets chanting "don't cross the line" to potential strikebreakers attending the classes.

Teamsters union orders return to work in two-month Connecticut lockdown

Teamsters Local 1035 officials ordered an unconditional return to work August 3 for some 120 drivers and warehouse workers who were locked out for eight weeks

at Hartford Distributors in Manchester, Connecticut. Management at the beer distributor imposed its final contract offer that included a 75 cent per year wage increase over the course of a five-year agreement.

The contract includes an increase on commissions for drivers. But it also implements the company's demand to impose the cost of health care premiums on new-hires, something that had been free. The maximum load per truck was increased to boost productivity.

In earlier negotiations, the company included contract language requiring workers to give up their right to strike. It is not clear this issue was resolved in the final company offer.

Strike spreads against BC Nurses' Union

Last week, servicing staff employed by the BCNU joined administrative staff who went on strike against that union on July 22 after being locked out that same day.

The workers, who are represented by Unifor, include lawyers, educators and health and safety advocates, voted unanimously to go on strike last week, but BCNU has indicated they will seek to have their jobs designated as essential services in order to circumvent a strike. Unifor has said that they were forced into taking this action because of the heavy-handed tactics employed by BCNU.

Striking administrative staff are represented by the Movement of United Professionals (MoveUP) who are facing proposed cuts to sick leave and other benefits in what the employer has termed its 'final offer'.



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