

Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 September 2016

Mexican restaurant workers strike to demand overdue pay, benefits

Restaurant workers for the Beto Condesa Restaurant in the Mexican resort city of Acapulco, Guerrero hung the traditional black and red strike flags on the building at noon on September 24. The workers walked out over “three months of salaries, two years without end-of-year pay, two years without profit sharing, three in which they were not paid for vacations and four without the food bonus and other benefits,” according to a *suracapulco.mx* report.

The Acapulco Hotel and Gastronomic Industry Workers Syndicate, which ostensibly represents the workers, postponed taking industrial action repeatedly when the owner, Héctor Rodríguez Escalona, asked for “extension after extension,” according to union secretary general Raúl Ramírez Gallardo, but “there is no will” on the part of the proprietor, who is the brother of the present Minister of Tourism of Guerrero, to rectify the situation. “Today we had a talk from 10 to 12 and Héctor and his representative didn’t offer us anything, and it wasn’t possible to impede the strike,” lamented Ramírez Gallardo.

Last year, the workers struck over the same demands, but returned to work after one day because the owner promised to pay the overdue wages, a promise he quickly reneged on. Daily pay for Beto Condesa workers, with ages from 22 to 50, range from 74 pesos (US\$3.74) to 205 pesos (US\$10.35) when they are paid. The workers have had to get by on tips while waiting to get their regular wages.

Guatemalan factory workers protest for higher wages, labor rights

Workers for assembly plants—known in Spanish as maquiladoras or maquilas—held a protest September 19 in front of the Presidential House in Guatemala City. The workers, most of whom are women, demonstrated to demand decent wages and full freedom to organize. They demanded an end to labor abuses by the maquila owners as well.

They also demanded a meeting with the right-wing president, Jimmy Morales, a former comic actor who was elected in 2015 after the arrests of both the former vice president and the outgoing president on corruption charges. Morales did not respond to the demand.

The Guatemalan Workers General Central Confederation (CGTG), to which the protesting workers belong, has already brought various charges against the maquila owners before the Public Ministry, to no avail. CGTG has decided on a 15-day deadline for a response, after which it will call an assembly to decide on measures to take next.

Peruvian workers strike, protest against Supreme Court ruling allowing wage cuts

Workers across Peru struck and protested September 22 against a recent Supreme Court ruling allowing businesses to reduce wages “in exceptional cases.” The mobilization was called by the General Workers Confederation of Peru (CGTP), the Confederation of Workers of Peru (CTP), as well as a number of social organizations.

In the capital, Lima, thousands of protesters marched through the city carrying banners and signs saying “Ni Un Sol Menos” (Not One Sol—the Peruvian currency—Less). The marchers descended upon the Palace of Justice, where some protesters tussled with police.

Baggage handlers at Argentine airport strike over wage demands

Baggage handlers at Argentina’s Ezeiza and Jorge Newbery Airports struck September 23, delaying flights to and from Buenos Aires. The Aeronautic Personnel Association (APA) called the action because, according to APA official Rodrigo Borrás, “Yesterday, they informed us that [contractor] Intercargo, at the point of signing a parity agreement on good terms, came out with a proposal that was inferior to the one we were coming to agreement on.”

The agreement was to have consisted of a 28 percent increase this year to be followed by an 8 percent raise in January. An average airport worker earns about 17 or 18 thousand pesos (US\$1,122-1,188) a month for working 44 hours a week.

The strike began at 6 a.m., but was called off at 10:45 when the Labor Ministry decreed “obligatory conciliation” talks with a 15-workday deadline.

Argentine teachers vote for short strikes over reopening of parity talks

Teachers in the Santa Fé Rosario Teachers Association (Amsafé Rosario) attended an assembly September 23 to decide on a strike vote over the government’s refusal to restart parity talks. The vote of the almost 27,500 attendees was near unanimous in favor of strike action.

The teachers resolved to hold two 24-hour walkouts, one on September 27 to coincide with a strike by the Ctera teachers’ federation and another planned for October 5 to demand reopening of parity talks and for changes in the retirement and medical benefit systems and the licensure process for medical professors.

The government of Mauricio Macri, according to Amsafé Rosario secretary general Gustavo Terés, has erected a “blockade” over the issue of adjusting salaries to bring them in line with the inflation rate. The raise agreed to at the beginning of 2016 was for 29 to 32 percent for working teachers and 26 percent for retirees. This year’s inflation rate is projected to be at least 40 percent.

One-day strike by Chilean public health workers over salaries, contract noncompliance

On September 23, health workers in Chile held a 24-hour strike “from Arica [in the far north] to Punta Arenas [in the far south],” according to a statement by the National Municipal Health Functionaries Association (Confusam). Union sources claimed adherence to the action to be from 80 to 90 percent, though emergency cases were treated in medical facilities.

Confusam and other health sector unions denounced the broken promise by the Health Ministry to adequately finance health care facilities, which the ministry itself admitted requires a minimum per capita investment of 6,050 Chilean pesos (US\$9.16). The unions say that the actual amount comes to barely 4,893 pesos, or US\$7.41, “a situation that explains the grave problems that affect our capacity to attend to the people,” the statement affirmed.

The government claims that the health care budget faces a deficit of 239 billion pesos (US\$361 million).

Negotiations were held between Chilean government and Confusam representatives during the temporary stoppage without reaching agreement on a salary raise. Confusam bargainers entered talks with a request for a 7.5 percent salary increase while the government reps stuck with their offer of 2.9 percent. Confusam called for another strike on September 29.

Jamaican hospital workers protest nonpayment of allowances and benefits

Workers in maintenance, medical records and other departments at the Savanna-la-Mar Hospital in Westmoreland, Jamaica walked out and held a protest in front of the facility September 22. The workers’ union, the Jamaica Association of Local Government Officers (JALGO), had presented a 14-day ultimatum to the administration regarding overdue allowance and benefit allowances. The deadline came and went without a management response.

JALGO did not demand immediate payment of the overdue monies, but only a timeframe. Management arranged for a meeting with JALGO bureaucrats and the workers were called back for the night shift.

Texas electrical workers locked out after objecting to mandatory overtime

Non-union electricians in Corpus Christi, Texas, continue to picket at a construction site after being locked out on September 19 following a protest over mandatory overtime. Three days earlier, they were informed by their employer, T.L. Electric, that workers who did not show up for mandatory overtime on weekends would be suspended for one week without pay.

According to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, employees also complained that the company did not provide water on the work site and wouldn’t allow a person to leave for grievance purposes. T.L. Electric told the *Caller-Times*, “We are not in talks with the union because we... are not a union shop.”

Electricians comprise about 10 out of a workforce of some 90 workers. The company has transferred workers from other trades to do the electrical work.

Saskatoon transit set to strike

Transit workers in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan could be on strike as early as Friday of this week if the union and city can’t come to terms in a new contract.

Negotiators for the Amalgamated Transit workers Union (ATU) say they are trying to win wage parity with workers in other cities in western Canada and at last report the union was asking for a 10 percent wage increase in a new four-year deal. Although they have been in a legal strike position since Sunday, the union says they are waiting until an essential services hearing makes a determination before they announce any job action.

The union submitted a strike notice two weeks ago but the only job action taken so far has been token measures such as not wearing uniforms.

Locked-out Ontario plastics workers return to work

Sixty-one workers at Hematite Manufacturing in Guelph Ontario west of Toronto are back on the job this week after being locked out since September 11, having voted down the same contract twice in recent weeks.

The workers are represented by the Workers United Canada Council who have charged that the company is trying to cut wages, vacation pay and benefits in a new contract. The company insisted that the workers vote a third time on a contract they had twice rejected and this time it passed, ending the lockout and allowing the workers to return to work.

Claiming the union made some gains in a new deal, union secretary Gerard Lizotte declared that it was “the best deal we could get.” Hematite, which manufactures auto parts from recycled plastics, says they are only trying to keep the company competitive.



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