

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 November 2016

Brazilian public workers repeat protest against proposed austerity bill

As the legislature for the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro continued deliberating on a set of harsh austerity measures, over 1,000 public workers protested outside the building on November 22. In addition to denunciations of a raft of bills—including higher taxes, cuts to public service personnel, pay, social programs and pensions, as well as postponement of raises—many of the workers demanded wages that have been overdue for weeks.

Last week, protesters marched to the Congress, and some clashed with contingents of federal and state police, who blocked the entrance to the legislature. A small number of right-wing “anticorruption” protesters gained entry and chanted demands for military rule.

This time the protesters, who were peaceful, were again blocked by police, but no confrontations were reported.

Chilean taxi drivers protest Uber and other app-based ride services

A caravan of taxicabs entered central Santiago, Chile early the morning of November 25 in a protest against Uber, Cabify and other app-based transportation services. Cabs halted or delayed traffic as they wended their way toward the Plaza Italia.

Taxi drivers slowly drove their vehicles down the capital’s main streets and honked their horns. If a taxi drove by carrying a passenger, the driver was subject to catcalls and “guttural noises,” according to El Ciudadano.

The protest action was convened by the National Taxi Confederation, which issued a petition calling for legislation to sanction or block businesses that do not comply with the law, and standardization of regulations for all passenger transport vehicles. It also demands that

the ride services not be allowed to use taxi spaces to pick up passengers.

The ride-share services are relatively unregulated, and cabbies’ earnings have been seriously undermined by their appearance. The number of Uber and other drivers is now around 33,000, more than the number of taxi drivers. An “Uber law” is currently being debated in the legislature.

Strike by Chilean home supply store chain workers in third week

Over 8,700 employees of the Chile-based Sodimac home improvement chain remain on strike over their wage demands. The workers walked off the job November 9 when Sodimac refused to budge from its offer of a 3.5 percent raise and 150,000 peso (US\$220) bonus. The home center workers’ union is demanding 7 percent and 500,000 pesos (US\$734).

Workers also complain of around 2,500 firings recently, coupled with increased overtime, extra shifts and “a series of irregularities that they now demand be put to an end,” reported radio.chile.cl.

Judge issues restraining order to end cargo pilots strike

A Cincinnati US District judge issued a temporary restraining order against 250 cargo pilots for ABX Air that haul orders for Amazon and DHL. “Imagine Christmas without Amazon!” declared Judge Timothy Black as he ignored working conditions and inferior wages by ABX pilots.

This is the first holiday season for Amazon since

jettisoning its contracts with the higher-paid air cargo pilots at UPS and FedEx and its turn to heavier reliance on ABX. In the first day of the strike, 26 flights were grounded leaving 1.25 million pounds of Amazon online orders undelivered.

The Teamsters union, which represents ABX pilots, charges the company did not move quickly to expand its workforce given the contracts with Amazon and has been relying on what they call “emergency hours” to force pilots basically work overtime.

The Teamsters claim this violates their contract by denying vacation time and compensatory time off for pilots with one pilot claiming, “It’s taking a tremendous toll on our families.” ABX refuses to hire furloughed pilots laid off in 2009 when DHL ended domestic operations making the pilots redundant.

Judge Black ordered the Teamsters to end their strike and would not rule on the issues, declaring they needed to be submitted to binding arbitration. Already ABX pilots have been enduring emergency hours for two years and the judge’s decision guarantees a continuation of the drawn out negotiations.

Nova Scotia teachers set to strike

Some 9,000 public school teachers in Nova Scotia could begin job action by the beginning of next week after twice rejecting proposed contracts that were recommended by the union, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NTSU).

NTSU leaders have announced that job action could begin as early as December 5 but that it may be limited to a work-to-rule campaign at the outset. Union negotiators say they received no reply to a proposal that the government has said is “not sustainable”, costing upwards of \$500 million, more than four times the amount contained in their own proposal for a new three-year contract.

Ballooning class sizes and working conditions are central issues in the dispute, which recently saw an unprecedented 61 percent of teachers reject the recommendations of their executive. The governing Liberal Party has already indicated that it may, with the support of the opposition Conservatives, legislate teachers back to work in the event of an all-out strike.

Personal care workers to strike in Manitoba

Personal Care Home (PCH) workers in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (NCN) in Nelson House, which is in central Manitoba, are set to go on strike this week after working without a contract since March of this year.

Members of the Manitoba Government and General Employees’ Union (MGEU), the 30 workers affected are fighting for wage parity with their counterparts across the province, who are paid 27 percent more. Workers delivered an overwhelming strike mandate to their union in October after fighting for over six years on this issue that have included unsuccessful appeals to both the federal and provincial governments for increased funding.

Union negotiators say that a funding dispute between the Band and the federal government has left a shortfall of at least \$200,000 which is the cost estimated to bring wages in line with the rest of the province.

Border bridge workers strike

Workers at the Blue Water Bridge at the border crossing between Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan went on strike last week against the Federal Bridge Corporation which operates the second busiest commercial border crossing in the country.

The 47 workers are represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) who are fighting against employer demands to cut benefits along with numerous other concessions that they say would set workers back years. The bridge will remain open during the strike with the use of management and scab labor, although delays have been reported and currency exchange offices are not operating. Negotiations have broken off and no new talks are currently scheduled.



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