

Workers Struggles: The Americas

6 December 2016

Wave of layoffs continues in Argentina

Following a national wave of layoffs in the public sector and the Argentine auto industry, Alladio, a washing machine manufacturer, shut down two plants and sacked 1,500 workers. Tandil foundry laid off 130 workers, all of its employees except maintenance staff, and Expofruits, a food processing firm, also shut down two plants, sacking 260 workers.

The three main trade union federations continue observing a truce with the right-wing, corrupt and neoliberal administration of President Mauricio Macri, ruling out strikes and protests against the attack on jobs.

Illusory growth of employment in Mexico

With cynical fanfare, President Peña Nieto recently declared the creation of 2 million jobs between the second quarter of 2012 and the second quarter of 2016. The government claims that the current rate of unemployment is 3.9 percent.

This announcement is illusory. During the same period more than 5 million joined the labor force; another 6 million are not in the labor force but available for work, for a total deficit of more than 8 million jobs.

Including these workers in the ranks of the unemployed, the unemployment rate leaps to 13.5 percent.

The announcement by Peña Nieto's "Pact for Mexico" coalition government (PRI, PAN and PRD) also leaves out the growth in jobs that pay poverty wages from 18.2 million in 2012 to 21.7 in 2016.

In December 2014, the Peña Nieto administration negotiated with 30 trade union leaders to establish a

framework for labor peace. Each of the trade union officials present pledged to "place the interests of the nation" ahead of those of the workers that they represent.

"If the President [Peña Nieto] succeeds, the working class and Mexico will succeed," declared the union chiefs.

Guerra workers protest in Brazil

Guerra workers locked one of the gates of the company on Friday morning. They are demanding that the company pay 180 workers who were laid off recently. Guerra manufactures agricultural and road building equipment in the city of Caixas do Sul, in Southern Brazil.

The company declared itself in financial emergency in 2015 and since then has sacked half of its 1,000 workers. São Paulo-based private equity group Axxon, a financial asset stripper, took over Guerra in 2008.

The Metalworkers Union of Caxias do Sul has ruled out industrial action and instead is appealing to the court system.

Chile: Five-day occupation by contract workers at the Los Bronces copper mine

On November 26, contract workers occupied the Los Bronces copper mine, jointly owned by Anglo-American, the government-owned Codelco, and two Japanese firms. The workers occupied the mine to demand the return to wages and benefits that they enjoyed in 2014. Their protest had the full support of

all the other mine workers.

Los Bronces management declared the occupation illegal, claiming that the dispute was not with the mine, but with the labor brokers that hire and assign workers on a contingent basis.

The United States

Pennsylvania hospital drags feet on implementation of \$15 wage for hospital workers

Some 20 workers at the University of Pittsburgh's UPMC hospital walked off the job November 29 as a part of the "Fight for \$15" campaign. But in the case of these workers, they are pressuring for an earlier implementation of a "pledge" by UPMC to pay workers \$15 an hour. The hospital system said it would delay the wage hike until 2021.

The hospital had indicated it would incrementally implement the wage increase, but has done nothing to date. On April 14, dozens of workers held a similar strike to press for quicker implementation of the wage hike. The workers are also protesting harassment and some four firings they claim are related to their attempt to unionize with the Service Employees International Union.

Meanwhile, registered nurses at UPMC's nearby hospital in Altoona have been in negotiations with management over staffing levels and other issues since October 29. The contract covering nurses there expires December 31.

Nova Scotia schools close due to job action

The provincial Liberal government of Nova Scotia has closed the doors to all public schools in the province this week after 9,300 teachers began a work-to-rule campaign last week that has been supported by unionized school support workers who have refused to do "struck work."

The provincial government cited public safety as the reason for the school shutdown and immediately

announced that they would introduce legislation to put an end to the strike and impose the contract that was recently rejected over the heads of their union leadership. Growing class sizes and deteriorating working conditions are central issues in the dispute between the government and members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NTSU).

The government has made clear that back-to-work legislation, which may take another week to pass, will be designed to avert any further strike action by teachers in the province. Teachers affected by the contract dispute were still required to show up for work on Monday even though there were no students in attendance.



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