

# Workers Struggles: the Americas

3 January 2017

## **Mexican natural disaster workers continue strike to demand overdue wages pay, bonuses**

Workers for Mexico's National Natural Disaster Fund (Fonden) have been on strike for more than three weeks. The workers downed their tools on December 12 to demand that the Agrarian, Territorial and Urban Development Secretariat (Sedatu) pay them for over four months of overdue wages.

On December 31, they blocked Huacapa River Boulevard in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, and marched and chanted in front of Sedatu headquarters. Some 60 workers in the program have not been paid, and they were forced to spend the holidays without funds.

"Due to the strike, since a little less than a month ago the workers haven't supervised nor has there been reconstruction of works damaged by the storms Ingrid and Manuel, since they would have to pay their own expenses to continue working," reported *suracapulco.com*. One striking Fonden worker told reporters that they have not been informed about anything, most likely meaning that the federal authorities in Mexico City have not released the funds.

## **Mexican sanitary workers strike for overdue pay**

Contract sanitary workers for the city of Xalapa, capital of the Mexican state of Veracruz, struck on December 28 to demand payment of up to two-and-a-half months' wages. The workers are employed in Sanitary Jurisdiction 7 vector area.

More than 50 workers have been owed wages from two weeks to two-and-a-half months. The workers' union's representatives have notified the state government, which has yet to reply.

## **Colombian health workers strike for 16 days for overdue**

Health workers in seven municipalities in the Colombian department of Boyacá went on strike December 12 over unpaid salaries, bonuses and benefits for the last two months. The workers are employed by the Mi IPS Corporation, which contracts services for the National Health Superintendency, known as EPS Cafesalud.

The workers had not been paid their wages, as well as bonuses and social security contributions, for November and December when they decided to walk out. On December 16, a Friday, delegates participated in a videoconference with Mi IPS President Carlos Correa, in which he told them that he would pay them 30 percent of their November wages the next week and 70 percent after December 26, but not the bonuses. Correa claimed that EPS Cafesalud had not paid Mi IPS.

One striking doctor told *El Tiempo*, "The big conclusion from Carlos Correa's proposal is that there is no guarantee of pay, nor of supplies, nor of social security, much less the work-related future." The workers remained on strike.

On December 28, delegates and Correa had reached an agreement, which one doctor called "good terms on various points that we were soliciting with respect to salaries and benefits." Those include payment of the overdue wages by the end of December, and of the bonuses by the middle of January. The workers returned to their jobs. The fate of the social security payments, however, remains uncertain.

## **Two-day strike by Bolivian public medical workers against appointment of director**

Workers for Bolivia's National Health Fund (CNS) held a 48-hour strike on December 28 and 29 to protest the recent appointment of the agency's director general. The doctors, nurses, technicians and auxiliary staff object to the December 12 appointment of Juan Jordán, who is an engineer and has no experience with administration of health

institutions.

The CNS workers already struck for one day on December 20, but the health minister, Ariana Campero, has not only refused to rescind the appointment, but she requested and obtained a declaration from the Labor Ministry that the strike was illegal. She discounted the pay for that day and has declared that pay for the two-day action will also be deducted.

Emergency services were not interrupted at hospitals, but surgeries, consultations and other services were postponed. In La Paz, Cochabamba, and other cities, striking workers held “white apron” marches and demonstrations against the appointment. The unions have declared that they will not be deterred by the docking of salaries and say that they will strike for 72 hours if their demand is not met.

### **Chilean miners continue occupation of mine to protest liquidation**

Sixty-five mineworkers at the central Chilean Santa María copper mine remain underground in a protest they began December 5. The miners occupied a mine shaft 650 meters (2,133 feet) deep to protest the liquidation of the mine by its owners, Rodrigo Danús and Paul Fontaine, who abandoned it without paying their wages, and to demand that the government provide resources for the mineworkers to buy and operate the mine.

Ten of the miners had been on a hunger strike, which they ended on December 28. Family members and supporters have held protests and roadblocks to bring attention to the miners and demand that the government act. The government’s attitude was typified by the words of Subsecretary of the Interior Mahmud Aleuy: “This has to do with a problem among private individuals,” and thus the government has no business intervening.

### **Strike deadline in Dayton transit contract dispute**

The union for Dayton, Ohio, area transit workers has set a strike deadline of January 9. The contract for 466 workers, members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), expired last April, but the union has kept workers on the job while management drags out negotiations.

Management of the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) says it will shut down the transit system in the event of a

walkout. Main issues in the contract dispute are the question of changes to workers health insurance as well as generally low pay and break time. The RTA says it presented a revised contract proposal to the ATU last week but has not yet received a formal response.

### **Ontario children’s aid workers locked out**

A total of 140 workers employed by the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) in the districts of Nipissing and Parry Sound in central Ontario were locked out on December 3 after they turned down the latest offer by the employer by an overwhelming 96 percent.

The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), which has been embattled through other strikes with CAS across the province of Ontario over the past year. The union says that quality of service and the safety of children are being jeopardized by financial constraints that have been imposed on the government-funded agency.

The main issues for workers, according to their union, are workload and sick leave. Negotiations broke off before Christmas, and no new talks are currently scheduled.

### **Newfoundland aerospace workers locked out**

Workers employed by D-J Composites, which is owned by US-based D-J Engineering Inc., were locked out just before Christmas after they voted unanimously in favor of strike action. The 40 locked-out workers, who are represented by union giant Unifor, have been working without a contract for 21 months and are fighting for gains in wages and job protections in a new contract. Many workers with over 10 years’ experience are paid less than C\$15 an hour, and the company is reportedly seeking a five-year wage freeze.

The company claims that orders have been declining and workloads have been reduced in recent months and that they were forced to lock workers out to protect company operations.



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