

Workers Struggles: The Americas

17 January 2017

Mexican university workers strike for overdue pay

Members of the Autonomous University of the State of Morelos Administrative Workers Syndicate (STAUDEM) began a strike January 12. The workers stopped work because they have only been paid 50 percent of their year-end bonus and their pay for the first two weeks of January had not been deposited.

At about 11:00 that morning, workers were called out on strike. Classes and activities were canceled and buildings were closed and sealed. STAUDEM also demanded the firing of the rector.

On January 14, STAUDEM leader Virginia Paz Morales told an assembly of workers at the university that she had been notified that the money had been delivered to university and she called them back to work.

Three-day strike by Bolivian health workers against appointment of director

Administrative workers and medical professionals for Bolivia's National Health Fund (CNS) struck for three days beginning January 10. The walkout was the latest in a series of protests following the December 12 appointment of Juan Alfredo Jordán, an engineer without experience in the health care and medical fields, as director general of the agency.

Protesters marched in cities like Sucre, La Paz and Santa Cruz demanding Jordán's firing. The government has described the strikes and protests as unjustified and has begun legal action against the protesters. The public prosecutor for Santa Cruz has begun investigations of the workers for the "crime of assault on health" and called on six CNS workers to appear before the Public Ministry.

The National Bolivian Security Workers Federation (Fensegural) and the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) have announced their solidarity with the CNS workers, with the COB calling for a one-day strike this week. However, solidarity is not unanimous among the union bureaucracies. Orlando Gutiérrez, head of the Federation of Mineworkers of Bolivia, declared that "we cannot permit those doctors to grow their

tentacles in our CNS, created by the nation's mineworkers."

Chilean bus drivers strike against imposition of "mediocre" contract

More than a thousand bus drivers for Transantiago, the Chilean capital's bus system owned by Vule S.A., struck on January 12. The drivers work along Route 300, which serves a number of municipalities around central Santiago. The striking Vule workers were joined by drivers for other bus companies: Redbus, Express, Alsacia and Subus.

Vule workers' union head Sergio Muñoz stated that management "has wanted to impose a collective contract on us that is a detriment to the workers" and "in our view is mediocre." The workers are demanding a better base salary and increases in vouchers for breakfast, training, certification and mileage.

The strike and protests have been without incident with one exception. In the municipality of Maipú, some buses blocked the passage of other vehicles, but "the situation was rapidly controlled by the Carabineros," reported cooperative.cl.

Argentine anti-hail pilots strike over pay, job security

Anti-hail pilots in eastern Argentina's Mendoza province began a strike for 96 hours January 9. The pilots fly cloud-seeding airplanes in agricultural areas aimed at minimizing the formation of hail, which damages crops. They are affiliated with the Airline Pilots Association (APLA), which decided on the action following fruitless meetings with the government regarding pay, conditions and job security.

The pilots are contract workers, and their pay has not changed since 2011, while expenses and taxes have risen. In addition, the contracts do not have any job stability provisions. The provincial government, which declared the strike illegal, asserted that the pilots' concerns have to be resolved legislatively, and threatened to fire striking pilots.

By January 12, APLA and the government had reached "a

beginning of an accord” and called off the strike, reported mdzol.com. The Labor subsecretary claimed that issues of labor conditions, “the generation of an atmosphere of discussion in the Subsecretariat,” and review of flight protocols had been agreed to.

Wages, the main demand of the pilots, was not discussed at the meeting. The parties agreed to a suspension of the strike until January 17.

Trinidad and Tobago: Oil workers union accepts 5 percent pay raise offer, calls off strike

After 30 hours of negotiations, the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU) agreed to a 5 percent pay raise for workers at Petrotrin, Trinidad and Tobago’s state-owned oil company. OWTU had originally demanded a 10 percent wage hike for the years 2014-2017 against management’s offer of zero percent and had threatened a 90-day strike if the firm did not agree.

Petrotrin, citing drops in revenues for the last two years, had claimed that it was impossible to pay any raises. OWTU ended up accepting a halving of its original demand. After the agreement was announced, Petrotrin president Fitzroy Harewood said that “the strategic decisions to restructure” were on the horizon.

The web site tradingeconomics.com forecast that T&T’s inflation rate for 2017 would be between 3.3 and 3.4 percent.

Federal safety director says Nebraska industrial accident preventable

A director for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) announced January 14 that an industrial accident at the Western Sugar Cooperative refinery in Scottsbluff, Nebraska was “preventable.” An unnamed worker was cleaning the inside of an evaporator unit on January 9 when he was dosed with hot liquid that caused burns over 75 percent of his body. The worker was taken to Regional West Medical Center in Scottsbluff, and then later airlifted to a hospital in Colorado where his condition is unknown.

OSHA area director Jeff Funke told NBC news, “If all sources of energy would have been locked out, controlled, by the individuals that are inside of the tank, then this would not have occurred. So this is preventable, we have standards that apply to this. It’s the employer’s responsibility to follow OSHA standards to make sure this doesn’t happen.”

The worker was an employee of the contractor Rocky Mountain Specialty Services, which specializes in explosive

cleaning, water blasting, vacuum services and sand blasting. The Western Sugar plant in Scottsbluff was the site of the 1996 giant explosion whose fireball flattened seven silos, killed one worker and left another 11 injured.

Toronto brewery workers on strike

Over 320 workers employed at the Molson Coors plant in Toronto, Ontario, who unanimously rejected the employer’s latest offer in December, are on strike after negotiations broke down last week.

The workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW) and have been without a contract since December. According to union negotiators, the company is looking to cut wages, benefits and pensions across the board by 7 percent and have refused to back down on any of their demands.

While there is no indication whether they plan to bring in replacement workers, the company has given public assurances that there will be no disruption in supply to customers.

Nova Scotia University faculty set to strike

If a deal is not reached by January 21, 152 faculty and staff at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia could be on strike next week.

Contract negotiations have reached an impasse between the school and members of Cape Breton University Faculty Association (CBUFA), which includes professors, librarians and lab instructors. Although CBUFA accepted an agreement in November, the university board would not ratify it and have insisted on a clause that would allow them to carry out layoffs.

CBUFA has been in a strike-lockout position since December 26 and union negotiators have said they will give 48 hours notice before taking any job action.



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