

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

31 January 2017

## **Twelve-hour strike by Mexican professors to demand overdue pay**

The Academic Personnel of the Autonomous University of Zacatecas Syndicate (SPAUAZ) called a 12-hour strike on January 25 to press its demands for overdue salaries. The action took place from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The Zacatecas Autonomous University (UAZ) rectory has not paid some 80 million pesos (US\$3.8 million) corresponding to a clause in the collective labor contract. Included in the debt, which began accumulating in mid-2015, are seniority bonuses for over a thousand professors.

SPAUAZ has also expressed doubts about the UAZ's real financial situation, which the administration has yet to reveal.

## **Mexican university workers march for salary raise**

More than 400 members of the State Syndicate of Service Workers of the University of Veracruz (SETSUV) marched in the Mexican state's capital of the same name January 24. The workers marched to demand a revision of their collective contract in order to raise their wages 20 percent.

On December 13, SETSUV presented an announcement of intention to strike to the Conciliation and Arbitration Board, as required by law. The union's demands also include increments in food and housing allowances.

The University of Veracruz (UV) rector has not responded, forcing SETSUV, despite its oft-professed willingness to negotiate every demand and its being "open to dialogue," to call the march. Workers marched from SETSUV's headquarters, temporarily blocked a main thoroughfare and passed the office of the Labor, Social Security and Productivity Secretariat.

SETSUV set February 2 as the first day of the strike, which will take place in all five state UV campuses if there is still no response from the UV administration.

## **Salvadoran municipal maintenance workers strike for wage increase**

Maintenance workers in El Salvador's Usulután municipality

suspended their labors on January 23 to pressure the city council to approve a wage hike that had already been agreed to and is included in this year's budget. The raise was to be for US\$30 per month. (El Salvador's previous currency, the colón, was "dollarized" in 2011.)

Many municipal workers in Usulután earn less than US\$450 per month. The current mayor, Miguel Ángel Jaime, had promised three raises of \$30 per year during his electoral campaign. The workers' union, ASTRAM, called the stoppage due to uncertainty that Jaime would deliver. About 500 workers are slated for the raise.

Trash collection and other services were halted, although administrative offices functioned normally. The delay in the raise was blamed on city councilors who opposed certain points in the budget presented by the mayor.

On January 27, ASTRAM called off the strike after being assured that the increase will kick in next month.

## **Dominican Republic: Partial strike by professors over salaries, working conditions**

In the Dominican Republic's southeastern coastal municipality of La Romana, the Dominican Professors Association (ADP) voted January 27 to teach only three days a week.

The assembly vote was the latest in the struggle to achieve a number of demands: a 25 percent salary raise; security on campuses; improvements in medical insurance; quality of school lunches; better pension benefits; and implementation of overtime pay. ADP's National Executive Committee will hold a national meeting of all sections on February 2 in Santo Domingo to strategize.

In several other areas in the country, teachers have carried out protests and limited strikes to press for raises and other demands.

## **Strike and protests by Colombian transport workers and students over fares**

Transport workers in both suburban and interurban lines in the Colombian state of Mérida stopped work January 25 to protest a new system of fares that does away with the discount for students at the University of the Andes (ULA). The workers, who are

supported by ULA students, blame the national government “for eliminating a system that functioned to implement another that is not defined and for breaking its word that it would be operative from January 15,” reported [equilibrioinformativo.com](http://equilibrioinformativo.com).

The workers and students are demanding that Transport Minister Ricardo Molina and the president of the National Urban Transport Foundation (Fontur) meet with them to resolve the issue. State Transport Union secretary Yovany Nieto decried the “lack of respect” shown by Fontur, which had not responded to their demands, necessitating the indefinite strike call.

There are around 350,000 students in Mérida, and one student leader pointed out that the situation has a negative impact on parents, who “don’t escape from the nation’s economic, political and social reality.” There have been a number of street protests, temporary student occupations of buses, and the torching of two of them. Academic activities at ULA have been halted as well.

### **Pilots union files legal complaint against Washington state airline over bypassing contract negotiations**

Pilots with the regional airline Horizon Air filed a complaint in federal court January 27, requesting an injunction to bar the airline from offering new benefits to new-hires outside the collective bargaining process. Horizon sought to offer a one-time signing bonus of \$10,000 and an education reimbursement program for new employees.

The incentives were originally part of a proposal made by Teamsters Local 1224, which represents pilots at the Washington state-based airline. “What they did is took one element and implemented it outside of the negotiations,” said Captain Jeff Cox, a Horizon pilot. “We want the company to come back to the bargaining table and negotiate a comprehensive plan.”

Regional airline pilots are underpaid when compared to major air carrier pilots. Horizon pilots are among the lowest-paid of regional pilots. With their limited incomes, they must shoulder the considerable costs of pilot training and this is causing a shortage of pilots.

According to a study, the United States faces a shortage of pilots that will total 15,000 by 2026 as older pilots retire and potential recruits decline to absorb the costs of training. At the same time, the airline companies are seeking to avoid an outbreak of discontent among pilots over stagnant wages and living standards.

### **Contract deadlock at Minnesota manufacturer could lead to walkout**

Some 1,000 workers at four facilities owned by Honeywell in the Minneapolis, Minnesota metro-region could be locked out after their contract expires on January 31. On December 31, members of Teamsters Local 1145 rejected by an 89 percent margin an offer

threatening pensions, healthcare and job security. The failure to reach a new agreement could cause the company to lock out workers.

As the clock ticks down, a company statement declared “we are prepared.” Honeywell wants to eliminate healthcare benefits for all future and some past retirees. Management also wants to eliminate seniority as a consideration when implementing layoffs.

Last year, Honeywell locked out workers at its Green Island, New York and South Bend, Indiana facilities. South Bend workers continue to be on a lockout that began in May of 2016.

### **Cambridge, Ontario city workers to strike**

Outside workers for the City of Cambridge, Ontario, an hour west of Toronto, could go on strike as early as February 2 after city negotiators broke off talks last week.

Some 185 workers, who do road maintenance, water service and park maintenance among other jobs in Cambridge, are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and have been without a contract since the beginning of the year. Union negotiators are highlighting research that shows that these workers are paid 12 percent less than their counterparts in neighboring municipalities, among the lowest in the province, while pay for management is 15 to 20 percent higher.

Mediated talks are scheduled to take place this week and union negotiators are urging management to return to the bargaining table to avoid planned strike action.

### **Northern Ontario teachers set to strike**

Teachers at the Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board in northern Ontario could take some form of job action up to and including an all-out this week or face a lockout if a deal isn’t reached soon.

Their union, the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA), has said that job action would include rotating walkouts at two schools each day, but they are willing to take the dispute to binding arbitration at any point. The main issue in dispute, according to union negotiators, is the board’s refusal to involve the union in the internal hiring process.

Teachers instituted work-to-rule sanctions late last year and have been in a legal strike position since last June. The current contract expires in August.



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