

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Mexican autoworkers strike, protests against IMF-dictated price hikes hit Suriname

11 April 2017

Mexican autoworkers strike over wages

Autoworkers for the Nissan auto plant in Cuernavaca, Morelos, in Mexico walked off the job on April 4 to press for wage increases. The workers' union, Sitnissan, called for a 5.5 percent raise, while the company offered 3 percent with a bonus of 1,750 pesos (US\$93.76), which it later raised to 3,000 pesos (US\$160.73).

The next day, Nissan raised its offer to 4 percent. After an assembly vote of the nearly 3,800 workers the next day, Sitnissan countered with 4.5 percent, which management accepted. Workers returned to work Monday, April 10. Last month, Bloomberg reported that "the inflation rate rose to the highest since the 2009 recession," with consumer prices rising by an annual rate of 5.29 percent in early March.

Last year in early April, the workers struck for two days before Sitnissan accepted a 4 percent raise. Mexican autoworkers suffer from some of the lowest wages in the world, earning even less than workers in China, where a series of strikes in 2010 led to a rise in wages.

Antiguan telephone workers protest delays in long-overdue payments

Some 150 telephone workers held a six-hour sit-in at the Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) Cassada Gardens headquarters on April 4 to demand payment of bonuses and raises dating back two years.

While the workers were holding the protest, Antigua Trades & Labour Union President Wigley George met with APUA executives during the protest and, based on that promise, emerged from the meeting to tell the protesters to go back to work.

Trinidadian cement workers protest nonpayment of back wages

Workers for Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) gathered at the entrance to the company's Claxton Bay compound in the early morning of April 5 to demand the payment of over 20 million Trinidadian dollars (US\$3 million) in overdue wages. Around 600 workers—400 permanent and 200 casual—at TCL and two other businesses, Trinidad Packaging Limited and Trinidad Ponsa Manufacturing Limited, are owed the back pay.

The back pay dispute dates to the 2009 to 2011 and 2012 to 2014 bargaining periods, when the companies and the Oilfields Workers Trade Union (OWTU) reached accords that were never carried out. The workers are still being paid at the 2011 rate, according to OWTU President Ahmad Mohammed, who later told protesters to go back to work while he met with management.

Trinidadian court takes action against oilrig workers who struck over safety

An injunction issued March 31 against 22 offshore oilrig workers for Rowan EXL II in Trinidad and Tobago has been extended. The workers struck over safety concerns on the platform. Rowan Drilling, claiming that the strike was illegal, requested the injunction.

Police removed the militant workers from the platform, and they have been barred until a June 9 hearing. The offshore drilling rig is owned by British Petroleum and run by its Trinidad subsidiary, bpTT. *Newsday Trinidad* reported that picketers at bpTT's Port-of-Spain headquarters earlier in the week called for "an investigation into the manner in which they were removed and a full report on their claims of

increased accidents on the platform.”

Protests oppose fuel price rise in Suriname

Thousands of Surinamese turned out on April 6 and 7 to protest hikes in the price of gasoline and diesel imposed by the government of President Desi Bouterse. On the second day, more than 10,000 people, carrying signs and chanting denunciations of Bouterse, held protests, the largest being in the capital Paramaribo, according to a demerarawaves.com report.

The Ravaksur union federation moved in to rein in protesters who had been calling for Bouterse’s resignation. Ravaksur head Robby Berenstein declared that “the objective is not to overthrow the government, but rather to press the administration to change its policies.”

Suriname has been hit hard since the slide in prices for gold and oil, its two most important exports. Foreign currency reserves have shrank drastically, and the Suriname dollar has suffered a 20 percent devaluation, leading to continuing price rises for essential goods. The fuel price hike was demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The protests in Suriname coincide with a general strike in neighboring French Guiana.

Striking telecom workers rally in New York City

Striking telecom workers rallied in front of Spectrum-Time Warner Cable’s Manhattan headquarters April 5 to oppose management plans to end contributions to pensions and medical benefits. Some 1,700 workers in New York and New Jersey walked off their jobs on March 28. Contract talks between the company and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have been going on for four years without any resolution.

While exact details of the talks have not been released, the union has complained about the deterioration of equipment and charged management with scapegoating technicians for repeat service calls when equipment failure is to blame.

Meanwhile, the Communications Workers of America (CWA) is continuing to keep 15,000 AT&T West and 20,000 AT&T Mobility workers on the job past their contract expirations. The CWA held a rally in San Jose, California, to mark one year since the expiration of the contract, with CWA President Chris Shelton parading

various Democratic Party politicians before workers, falsely claiming they are friends of the working class.

Aerospace workers in Newfoundland locked out for more than three months

Aerospace workers at D-J Composites manufacturing in Gander, on the island of Newfoundland, have been locked out for nearly four months. The 34 workers—members of Unifor—have been working without a contract for nearly two years and are opposing company demands for wage cuts and attacks on seniority rights.

Workers temporarily blocked 16 managers from entering the plant last Friday and say they will not be deterred by the presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The August, Kansas-based corporation supplies parts for general aviation, military and rocket and satellite programs.

Toronto-area community support workers on strike

After being locked out at some locations, almost 100 workers at Community Living Campbellford/Brighton (CLCB), east of Toronto, have been on strike since March 22 against deep concessions demands.

The workers—members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)—provide support and assistance for people with intellectual disabilities and have been without a contract since March 2016. CLCB is demanding workers use their own vehicles to carry out their jobs, which would shift costs to workers and pose a range of liability and safety issues.



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