

Doctors in Guyana strike over intolerable and unsafe conditions

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 May 2017

### **Colombian teachers continue strike, march in capital over salary, budget demands**

Teachers in the Colombian Teachers Federation (Fecode) remained on strike last week and marched in the capital Bogota May 25 and 26. The teachers walked out May 11 to press their demands of higher salaries, a larger national budget for public education and a guarantee of health care services.

President Juan Manuel Santos claims that the nation does not have the resources to meet the demands. Instead, Santos has said, “We have to tighten our belts to be able to face up to this economic and fiscal reality” and that the parties need to continue dialog to reach “sensible and constructive agreements.” So far, after eight meetings, the government has not budged, apart from two proposals Fecode considers unacceptable. Another march, to take place in five departmental capitals, is planned for May 31

### **Guyanese doctors strike over working conditions, shortages**

Doctors at the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) in Guyana began a strike May 23 over the failure of the Public Health Ministry to address their various problems. The doctors composed and delivered a letter to their superintendent listing the conditions they work under.

The missive said that the doctors “are disappointed, frustrated, disgusted and fed up with the way in which our daily verbal grievances are being handled. To date we have not seen any measures implemented within our department to alleviate our struggles or worries.”

Among their complaints were the lack of a safe working environment, typified by verbal and physical abuse suffered from frustrated patients and their relatives. In addition, they noted the lack of equipment, supplies and medications, as well as the unsanitary condition of the hospital.

### **Uruguayan state telecommunications workers to strike for one day**

Last week, the president of the Uruguayan state communications workers union federation Sutel announced a one-day strike for May 30. The limited job action will involve workers for the Antel state telecom enterprise, which has been under pressure to privatize.

The official, Gabriel Molina, mentioned Sutel’s demands: defense of public workers and more public investment; respect for agreements made by the tripartite Salary Council; the end of temporary contract labor and integration of workers into permanent status; and recognition of December 13 as the Day of the Worker.

### **Chilean customs workers strike over unfulfilled contract provisions**

Workers at Chilean border crossings, ports, airports and freight terminals struck early in the morning on May 23 to demand that the government comply with contract provisions signed in May 2015 and November last year. The workers’ union, ANFACH, said that it called the action over staffing levels, hours and retirement benefits. About 1,900 workers joined the stoppage.

According to union officials, the customs workers on average work an additional 150 hours per month on top of the 192 hours called for in their contract. ANFACH is calling for another 250 workers to be hired.

The strike stopped the crossing of about 850 trucks from Chile’s landlocked neighbor, Bolivia, which ships its cargo through the northern port of Arica.

### **Jamaican cement workers strike over wage negotiations impasse**

Workers at the Caribbean Cement plant in Rockfort, Jamaica downed their tools on May 26 in response to the company’s wage offer. After six months in meetings with the National Workers Union (NWU), the firm offered a two-year, 7 percent raise, in installments of 3 percent the first year and 4 percent the second. NWU General Secretary Granville Valentine called the offer an

insult and said that workers want 7 percent for the first year.

He also criticized Caribbean Cement for allegedly offering an extra 5 percent to workers who would be willing to have their positions made redundant without the union's knowledge. Valentine declared the offer "the last straw that might have broken the camel's back." The Ministry of Labor called a meeting with management and NWU reps that afternoon. Valentine emerged from the meeting and told workers to return to the job. The parties will hold yet more discussions next week.

### **Petaluma, California teachers hold one-day strike**

Some 360 teachers from California's Petaluma City Schools District held a one-day strike May 24 that was bolstered by the refusal of 5,000 students to attend classes for the day. School officials were staggered by the student response, having expected a mere 25 percent of students to boycott classes while the real figure escalated to 65 percent of the student body.

Teachers have been without a contract for nearly a year in a pay dispute that is exacerbated by Petaluma's skyrocketing cost of living. Also in dispute are pay along with class sizes and retirement issues.

The Petaluma City Schools District for its part is using the general crisis of school districts to reinforce its position.

### **Nonunion laborers strike Louisville hotel**

About 100 nonunion construction workers returned to work Friday after picketing the massive Omni Hotel work site over unequal treatment. The workers were mostly immigrants. Workers had walked off the job after finding out that they were making up to \$20 an hour less than other workers at the site.

When workers confronted management over the issue, they were told that the repeal of the prevailing wage law by the Republican-controlled state legislature sanctioned their mistreatment. Workers reported that they were threatened with firing in retaliation for any complaint.

A labor attorney said the workers were being paid \$18 to \$26 an hour while others are making \$35 to \$45 at the site. While area construction unions claimed sympathy, unionized workers at the site remained on the job during the walkout.

### **Video game publishers consider unionization to rein in players**

The publishers of popular video games are considering seeking the services of unions to bring rebellious game players to heel. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that in the wake of a threatened strike

by professional game players last winter, video game publishers are considering unionization of the industry as a solution to their problems.

E sport matches sell out professional basketball arenas and attract millions of online viewers, generating big profits for team owners.

Owners reportedly see unionization as a way of bringing stability by locking players into dispute regulation procedures that would impose conformity and quell "labor unrest." For their part, players have shown little interest in such schemes.

### **Pressure builds for Saskatchewan steelworkers strike**

After working without a contract since July of last year, Saskatchewan steelworkers employed by Russian-based steel producer Evraz Regina voted almost unanimously in favor of strike action, sending a clear signal to union leaders of their determination to fight against the attacks they are facing.

The highly profitable company has advanced a range of demands for concessions in a new contract, including a three-year wage freeze with no cost-of-living increase. In addition, it wants to implement a two-tiered wage system with reductions in overtime pay and benefits.

So far, negotiators for the United Steelworkers 900-plus members at Evraz have only said they will use their 99.3 percent strike mandate "if necessary." The company has indicated it will seek mediation in the coming days.

### **CN rail workers union gives strike notice**

Conductors at Canadian National railways across Canada could be on strike this week after their union, the Teamsters Canadian Rail Conference—Conductors, Trainpersons and Yardpersons (TCRC-CTY) issued a 72-hour strike notice last Friday.

The Teamsters leadership was pushed to give strike notice when workers voted 98 percent in favor of strike action after the company announced it was changing the terms of their collective agreement. The provocative measures outlined by CN would allow the company to displace or relocate workers with impunity. The 3,000 workers affected have also been without a contract since July 2016.



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