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Workers Struggles: the Americas

6 June 2017

Chilean customs workers' strike called off after 10 days

On June 3, around 1,900 customs workers throughout Chile ended the strike they began May 24 to press their demands concerning additional personnel, job classifications, job security, working hours and retirement benefits.

The workers had begun the walkout after a May 22 government announcement of its budget proposal, which failed to honor previous contract provisions. Their union, Anfach, had submitted a budget proposal in early May that was rejected by management.

Anfach met with Budget Direction (Dipres) officials, including the new acting customs agency director, on June 1, after which the Finance Ministry released a statement that it had withdrawn its proposal. The parties will now go back to the table.

Food safety workers in Argentina strike over budget cutbacks, working conditions

Members of Argentina's ATE-SENASA state food safety workers union met in a plenary session on May 31 to decide a response to the government's plan to cut the budget for SENASA (National Food Processing Sanitation and Quality Service) and other issues. The meeting took place after the failure of "obligatory conciliation" talks decreed by the Labor Ministry.

Among the reductions that would take effect under the new budget are travel allowances and overtime. ATE-SENASA rejected the government's wage raise offer as insufficient to stave off the effects of the nation's inflation rate.

Several other demands were discussed at the plenary session: the promotion of contract workers to permanent status; changes to the retirement plan; reactivation of the negotiating commission for the contract; raises in salaries. At the end of the meeting, it was decided to extend the strike that began on May

30 to three days.

Argentine grain inspectors hold 48-hour strike over lack of response to complaints

The Grain Inspectors Union of Argentina (Urgara) called out its private grain port members on May 31 over the lack of response by grain cooperative confederations to its demands. The stoppage followed a 3-day walkout by government health inspection unit SENASA's workers.

Both sections made wage demands that were rejected by their employers. Meanwhile, inflation continues to drive down Argentine workers' living standards.

Urgara denounced the "intransigent and capricious policy" of the employers and stated that its members would carry out another limited strike action, this time for 72 hours, if management continued its refusal to budge.

Trinidadian community residents protest lack of jobs, social services

Residents of Morvant, a working-class community to the east of Port of Spain, Trinidad, held protests May 29 over the dire conditions they live under. The protesters blocked and lit tires on roads leading into Trinidad and Tobago's capital, causing gridlock along some thoroughfares.

The residents held a similar protest action on May 15 for the same reason: to compel the government to rectify a number of problems in the community. These include lack of jobs, unreliable water supply and other infrastructure deficiencies, police harassment and paucity of community services, including programs for youth.

Settlement at AT&T West, DirecTV while Spectrum telecom strike continues

The Communications Workers of America and AT&T announced a tentative deal covering 17,000 workers in California and Nevada employed at the company's traditional phone and internet business, AT&T West and DirecTV. Few details are yet available over the four-year deal. Management had sought concessions in health care along the lines of the Verizon sellout last year.

Another 21,000 AT&T wireless workers in 36 states are still without a contract. Both groups of telecom workers engaged in a three-day, weekend strike, in late May, a stunt by the union aimed at allowing workers to vent their frustration over the lack of progress in contract talks.

Meanwhile, striking telecom workers at Spectrum are in their third month on strike over wages, health care and pensions for some 1,800 workers in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Spectrum-Time Warner Cable is now owned by Charter communications. The dispute revolves around claims by International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 3 that the new management has refused to bargain in good faith.

Massachusetts beverage company hires strikebreakers

Quality Beverage of Taunton, Massachusetts, launched a strikebreaking operation May 30 to restart distribution with replacement workers backed by police protection. Management hired a company to provide both warehouse workers and drivers to facilitate the company's resumption of deliveries after workers went on strike May 26 over health care and wages.

In particular, workers rejected the company's five-year proposal because it provides no guarantee against arbitrary increases to workers' portion of the health care plan. Quality Beverage is one of the largest independently-owned beer wholesalers in New England.

Beer drivers continue walkout in Long Island

Over 100 workers at the beer distributor Clare Rose on Long Island, New York are continuing a strike begun in April. Management is refusing to negotiate and has hired permanent strikebreakers to enable it to continue operations. The walkout centers on wages and pensions. A number of local businesses have come to the aid of strikers, announcing they will not

accept deliveries until the dispute is settled.

Quebec engineers continue strike despite legislation

Although the provincial Liberal government last week mandated an end to the construction workers strike in Quebec, at least 1,400 government engineers remain off the job this week because they are not covered by the back-to-work legislation.

Engineers had given their union a strike mandate almost a year ago but it was not until other unions took action that they were called out on strike May 24. Among the issues that striking engineers are pressing is wage parity, citing salaries that are more than 20 percent below counterparts in other sectors.

The government has already indicated that it is considering further legislation to order engineers back to work, though the two sides have so far continued negotiations.

Group home workers locked out in Saskatchewan

45 workers in Outlook, Saskatchewan were locked out by their employer, Variety Place on May 21, three days after their union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU-West), gave notice that they intended to take job action.

Variety Place is a government-funded organization that runs three group homes in Outlook for the mentally disabled, many of whom have been relocated due to the conflict. Variety Place has stated publicly that they have not had any salary funding increase for the current fiscal year or any funding increase since 2013 and so are in no position to give workers a wage increase. Workers at the facility have been without a contract since September of 2013.



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