

## SEIU calls off week-long Oakland city strike without contract

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

19 December 2017

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

### SEIU calls off week-long Oakland city strike without contract

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) called off the seven-day strike by 2,000 city workers in Oakland, California December 11 without achieving a contract. The decision came after a day of mediated negotiations that supposedly reached agreement covering working conditions, but no details were forthcoming.

The two sides have agreed on a four percent wage increase for the contract's first year, but workers consider the city's offer of a one percent increase in year two tied to city revenue goals unacceptable. Workers are also demanding an end to the denial of benefits to part-time workers and want staffing increases to meet workload demands.

SEIU president Felipe Cuevas said the mediated talks represented a "new tone and demonstrated flexibility and openness to continue negotiations." Oakland mayor Libbie Schaaf, responded, "I want to thank SEIU's bargaining team for their commitment to the mediation process, and for bringing workers back to work in service of our community."

Typically the SEIU attempts to use one-day strikes to deflect militancy in the rank-and-file. In this case the seven-day strike appeared to be a necessary departure in order to vent the anger of workers.

In addition to the 2,000 SEIU members on strike, another 1,000 members of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 21 walked out on a sympathy strike. The IFPTE is also negotiating with the city. In addition, another 1,000 members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers honored SEIU picket lines.

### Labor Department to allow restaurant owners to take control of workers' tips

The Labor Department proposed a new rule December 5 that would allow restaurant employers to take control of tips from employees. The rule is being touted as a way for owners to equally redistribute tips from servers to back-of-house employees such as cooks.

"The big lie is that it will lead to restaurants sharing these tips with back of house," said the Economic Policy Institute. "The biggest effect of it will be employers being able to control tips and take a big chunk of them as long as they pay the minimum wage."

The institute warns that restaurant owners could confiscate between \$523 million and \$14.2 billion a year with a best estimate of \$5.8 billion.

The rule would roll back a section of a 2011 Department of Labor ruling that barred employers from pocketing tips.

### Mexican teachers strike to demand investigation of school director

Teachers at the Professor Carlos A. Carrillo Normal School of Santa María del Oro in Durango, Mexico stopped work on December 15. The teachers struck to demand an audit of the current director's administration of the teacher training school, Modesta Corral Ramos.

The teachers went on strike on the third day of a student walkout. According to a durangopress.com report, the students demanded the director's "immediate and irrevocable" firing, due to her "arrogant, haughty and indifferent attitude to the needs of the students," as well as her "evident manipulation of announcements or official documentation, in favor of whomever [she] holds in regard."

The students also expressed doubts about the handling of financial resources under her stewardship, and they demanded transparency in the assignment of scholarships. Moreover, they complained of the poor condition of the transport vehicles.

### Mexican educational workers walk out over year-end bonus

Academic and administrative workers of the Oaxaca Bachelors College (Cobao) in Pueblo Nuevo went on strike December 15 to demand their year-end bonus. Striking teachers say that the administration has refused to pay the bonus, known as el aguinaldo, to over 200 teachers, and has refused to respond to their demands.

The educational workers took the action without the support of their union, Sutcobao. One union functionary told reporters that since the midnight payment deadline had not been reached, the workers were obliged to return to work. The workers remained on strike nonetheless, and declared that they would not discount stronger measures.

### Workers in Chiapas health center strike for 12 hours to protest shortages

More than 90 workers for the Prudencio Moscoso Health Center in San Cristobal de Las Casas, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, struck from 8:00 am to 8:00 pm on December 15. They took the action to protest the lack of necessary supplies, equipment and medicine at the institution,

as well as local authorities' contemptuous attitude toward the workers and residents.

A male nurse at the center told reporters that the health center was in the midst of "one of the worst crises that the Health Secretariat is going through" and listed among the workers' complaints scarce or inadequate supplies, medicine and equipment and refusal to pay travel.

He also noted that as the crisis worsens, "the authorities have mocked us," and as people "are dying of hunger, cold and lack of medication," the authorities are spending money for political campaigns in preparation for upcoming elections. Budget projections for the region next year are around half of 2017. The Moscoso facility is not alone; in fact, workers from other health centers in Chiapas went to San Cristobal de Las Casas to express support for the strikers.

### **Honduran medical workers' strike passes one-month mark**

Last week, medical specialists in the Honduran Social Security Institute (IHSS) completed one month of a stoppage of external services, while emergency and some specialized services were provided.

The Medical College of Honduras (CMH), which represents the doctors, is demanding that the IHSS comply with the 4.5 percent pay raise that it agreed to in contract negotiations December 5. However, the next day the IHSS's Intervention Board claimed that it lacked the funds to carry out that promise, reactivating the strike.

CMH and IHSS have continued meetings while the strike remains in force.

### **Chilean rail workers' strike in third week**

A strike by workers for Tren Central, a commuter rail service headquartered in Santiago, Chile, completed its second week on December 14. The workers' union called the strike following fruitless meetings in late November. In one brief meeting on December 5, "from there absolutely nothing" was accomplished, complained union president Fernando Arcos.

The main demands of the workers concern equalization of pay by classification, distribution of shifts, travel allowances for workers who have to stay at sites overnight, and bonuses for risky work and transfers. The company has refused to meet with the union over these issues.

The local government was quick to come to the aid of Tren Central, adding buses from the Transantiago public transit system to routes normally served by Tren Central. Arcos accused the government of violating labor law by providing "hidden strike replacement" workers through its contingency plan. The union has called demonstrations and other protest actions to put more pressure on Tren Central.

### **24-hour strike by Argentine health workers over late wage payments**

Workers for a sanitarium in Argentina's Río Negro province struck December 14 and 15 in its headquarters in the cities of Cipolletti and Cinco Saltos. The workers are members of the Health Workers Association, which announced the job action.

The workers complain that Sanitorio Río Negro has more than once

delayed payment of their salaries, or has paid it in installments, most recently last week. Over 300 workers are affected, but the company has repeatedly turned deaf ears to their grievances.

### **Buenos Aires bank employees strike over planned retirement plan changes**

Employees at the Bank of Buenos Aires Province, or Bapro, walked off the job on December 14 to protest changes to their pension plan promoted by the governor, María Eugenia Vidal. The governor wants to line up the bank workers' pension plan with the one proposed by President Mauricio Macri for Argentina's state workers.

The proposed national plan, which was scheduled to be debated in the Congress this week, would raise the retirement age and change the method for calculating benefits, to the detriment of retirees.

Mobilizations against the national plan have already taken place, including a protest by state workers and teachers near the Congress on the 14th that included Bapro workers. A nationwide strike and protest for this week was called by a number of union federations, such as the Argentina Workers Central, the General Confederation of Labor and the State Workers Association, to protest the changes.

### **Ontario salt mine guards locked out**

Thirteen employees of ASAP Secured Inc. in the town of Goderich, Ontario were locked out without warning last week at the giant underground salt mine owned by Compass Minerals on the shores of Lake Huron.

The guards and other security workers have been involved in first contract negotiations since joining the United Steelworkers of America (USW) last year. They voted unanimously to reject a contract offer last June and the company has since refused to improve the wage provisions that elicited solid opposition.

The lockout was announced as workers arrived for their shift last Sunday following the announcement by the union that it would be seeking binding arbitration. Kansas based Compass Minerals is the largest salt producer in North America with over 2,000 employees globally and its Goderich operation includes the largest rock salt mine in the world.



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