

Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 February 2018

Argentine state workers strike, protest over layoffs

Workers across Argentina struck and held protests on February 15 against the austerity policies of the right-wing government of Mauricio Macri. In Buenos Aires thousands marched against the latest wave of layoffs of state workers.

The actions were called by the State Employees Association (ATE) and the Workers Central of Argentina (CTA) to advance the demand that laid-off public sector workers—in January alone, over 4,000—be reinstated.

Other unions have joined the ATE and CTA in a coalition called “Unity against Austerity and Layoffs,” which plans on protest actions to last until February 21. In addition to stopping the layoffs and reinstating the workers, they are calling for Macri, who one union official claimed “generates poverty in permanent form, since every day they close factories, entities of control and production so that those services are offered to private enterprises,” to step down.

Mexican university workers strike over raise, bonus, contract violations

Workers at the Autonomous University of Chapingo (UACH) in Texcoco, Mexico state went on strike February 13. Their union, the UACH Workers Syndicate (STUACH), held an assembly in which members voted 286 in favor of striking and 189 against. There were 86 abstentions and 354 null votes as well.

In negotiations, the UACH rectory refused to agree to STUACH’s demand for a salary raise of 18.5 percent as well as increases for the cost of food and living in an area with a high cost of living.

STUACH members were joined February 15 by members of the UACH Academic Workers Syndicate (STAUACH), who walked out over their raise demand of 20 percent and a bonus of 30,000 pesos (US\$1,600) for each professor. The administration’s offer to both unions has been a 3.4 percent raise. The professors also want parity with their counterparts

at the National Autonomous University, a 4.83 percent increase.

Another STAUACH demand is resolution of several contract violations regarding competitive bidding, outsourcing, work materials, infrastructure and tools.

Activities at UACH’s 11 Regional University Centers have been paralyzed, with over 3,000 members of both unions not working. Talks have continued while the strike has been in force.

Antiguan psychiatric hospital workers end month-long strike over deplorable conditions

Workers at the Clarevue Psychiatric Hospital, in St Johnston Village, Antigua, went on strike January 10 to protest deplorable conditions at the facility. The hospital has been notorious for years for unsanitary conditions, lack of maintenance, undependable water supply and other complaints.

The workers, members of the Antigua and Barbuda Public Service Association and Antigua Trades and Labour Union (AT&LU), have asked for transportation and uniform allowances, and outstanding overtime has been a complaint since 2015.

On January 7, the Antigua and Barbuda Nurses Association (ABNA) gave the government a 30-day period to improve conditions and ensure outstanding payments, saying that they would go on strike if their demands were not met. When February 7 came, the ABNA first extended the deadline, then scuttled it on February 10, withdrawing their strike threat as well, as work progresses on the nurses station.

The AT&LU called the workers back to their posts on January 11. The ABPSA directed its members to resume their duties on February 13. ABPSA president Joan Peters said that the union would do a “walk through” to determine whether to call another strike.

JetBlue contract workers stage two-day strike at Boston's Logan Airport

Some 150 workers with JetBlue subcontractors FSS and ReadyJet at Boston's Logan Airport struck for two days last week over union representation. The token protest received official support from Mayor Martin Walsh and other leading Democratic politicians in the area.

The workers include cabin cleaners, wheelchair attendants, baggage handlers and skycaps who complain of low pay and scant benefits. Both FSS and ReadyJet have faced charges from the National Labor Relations Board for wage theft and safety violations. Workers also complain of 10-hour work days with only a half-hour break.

Protest at Ohio manufacturing plant ends after unions settle dispute over representation

A section of workers at the Dana Incorporated plant in Toledo, Ohio, ended their eight-hour strike after competing unions resolved who would represent them in negotiating their first contract with management. The protest by some 50 workers brought the issue to a head and the United Steelworkers (USW) agreed to step aside and allow the United Auto Workers (UAW) to represent the 200 workers at the plant which supplies axles for Jeeps made at Fiat-Chrysler's Toledo Assembly Complex.

Dana management was irritated at the work stoppage, declaring, "While we are disappointed that today's completely unnecessary labor action took place, we are pleased that the two unions have come to an agreement and that the matter was resolved quickly to protect the best interests of our people, our customers, and our shareholders."

Both the UAW and USW claimed support in the plant. Dana has 20 facilities spread across the United States with the two unions representing all plants except for one represented by the International Association of Machinists. The UAW claimed 70 percent of the workforce signed representation cards.

Workers are demanding better pay, improved working conditions and an end to long hours. "Twenty four days straight" without a day off, one worker complained to the *Toledo Blade*. Many workers came on as temporary workers, but when they were hired full-time, their pay was cut.

Workers at four Chrysler minivan supplier plants set strike deadline

Workers at four plants that supply parts to the Fiat Chrysler minivan plant in Windsor, Ontario have set a March 4 strike deadline if a new contract agreement isn't settled. The Windsor plant builds the Chrysler Pacifica and Dodge Caravan.

About 1,000 workers are employed by HBPO, Dakkota Integrated Systems, Avancez and ZF, members of Unifor. The union reported that about 75 percent of workers voted in favor of strike action. The plants make a variety of parts including instrument panels and powertrains.

Wages are a major issue in dispute. Minimum wage workers in the province of Ontario got a 23 percent boost January 1. A strike at the plant could affect up to 30,000 workers due to a ripple effect. There are about 5,000 workers at the Chrysler minivan plant.

Montreal bus drivers set to resume strike

Bus drivers employed by Autobus Transco Montreal, which provides school bus service across the city, may walk off the job again this week after a two-day strike at the end of January. Last week the 330 drivers turned down a deal accepted by their union, the Syndicat des travailleuses et travailleurs de Transco-CSN (STTT-CSN).

With the vote 83 percent against, union negotiators acknowledged that the concerns of workers over wages and other provisions were not addressed in the deal. While details of the latest offer are not available, in January workers voted nearly unanimously to strike over employer demands for a two-year wage freeze with subsequent wage hikes limited to half the inflation rate.

Bus drivers at Transco have been without a contract since June of last year, but since this latest rejection, the union has not indicated if or when a strike will be called. Transco is owned by Ohio based First Student Inc., which is the largest provider of school transportation in North America.



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