

Class struggle escalates in Dominican Republic

Workers Struggles: the Americas

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Public transport drivers protesting rising fuel prices in Santiago, Dominican Republic held protests September 17 that were attacked by the National Police. The protesting drivers marched down one of the city's principal streets en route to the provincial government buildings, with the intention of leaving a document with the lawmakers. Contingents of hundreds of police sent to the area fired shots and launched tear gas at the marchers.

The protesters were members of the Fenatrano and Conatra public transport drivers union federations.

On September 20, the truckers union federation Fenatrado announced that its members would strike nationwide for 72 hours beginning September 25. During the announcement, the federation's president, Ricardo de los Santos, mentioned that fuel costs amounted to 60 percent of truckers' income. He also mentioned the rise in costs for tires, lubricants and spare parts and called for urgent measures to help the drivers.

The next day, the Industry and Commerce Ministry lowered fuel prices by 1 or 2 pesos, equivalent to 2 or 4 US cents per gallon.

Mexican university workers strike over unpaid wages

Academic workers at the Morelos State Autonomous University (UAEM) in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico went on indefinite strike September 20 to demand payment of wages that have not been paid for months. The walkout followed a three-hour discussion among UAEM Independent Academic Workers Syndicate (SITAUAE) representatives over pros and cons as well as the strategy of a strike as opposed to a further extension of the waiting period.

The head of the state Finance Secretariat said that 23.7 million pesos (US\$1,251,330) would be deposited for the university that day. Even if it were all expended on the more than 2,000 UAEM workers who have not received their wages and benefits, it would come to less than 12,000 pesos—about US\$625—per worker.

The rectory has offered to pay the wages owed up to December 2017, but the workers consider that offer unacceptable. The rectory has put the blame on the state government, which has not delivered the resources, despite UAEM's status as a major university. The state Public Education Secretariat has underfunded UAEM for years and federal subsidies have shrunk as well.

SITAUAE has expressed the hope that the end of the current state administration and the installation of a new one following recent elections will bring results, a highly unlikely outcome. It will also appeal to federal legislators. Meanwhile, the UAEM Administrative Workers Syndicate has

expressed solidarity with SITAUAE but has not decided on any action to take, while the FEUM student association, whose members marched in support of SITAUAE the week before, has said that it will send students to both the state and federal authorities to advocate for the UAEM workers.

Strikes and protests against Costa Rican fiscal plan continue

After two days of negotiations between public sector union and government representatives ended on September 19, the strikes and protests begun September 10 against a proposed fiscal reform bill continued. The meeting, which included the Ministers of Planning, Justice and Labor, with mediation by San José's archbishop, was described as a "first preliminary encounter" by Labor Minister Steven Nuñez.

Protests have included blockades of major highways and obstruction of ports and fuel distribution points, and the government is demanding that they be stopped before further negotiations take place. Nuñez claimed that the unions "haven't moved a millimeter in their position" and demanded that the strike end.

On September 21, President Carlos Alvarado asserted that without the reforms, including a value added tax on services as well as goods, a raise of taxes on rent for higher-income individuals, a levy on basic foodstuffs and cuts in public sector workers' benefits, "there's no scenario for Costa Rica to go forward without this solution."

The unions have offered to present a "just and caring" proposal as an alternative, and say that if discussion of it is rejected, the strike will continue. The meetings were scheduled to resume this week.

Guyanese sugar workers strike to protest poor pay and working conditions

Cane cutters for a Guyanese sugar plantation struck September 18 and 19 over wages and working conditions. About 160 workers at the Uitvlugt Sugar Estate on the west coast of Demerara downed their tools because of the refusal of management to pay 2,700 Guyanese dollars, less than US\$13, for a six-hour day of work. State-owned Guyana Sugar Company (GuySuCo) brought in 141 cutters from another work crew to scab on the strikers.

The workers complain that there are many vines and deep mud in the cane fields due to continuing rainfall, making the work difficult and tiring. Representatives of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) met with company reps on September 18. On September 20, the GAWU called the cutters back to the job, saying that the issue had been

resolved, though no details were reported by the media.

In the last few years sugar workers have been in conflicts with GuySuCo, which is steadily shrinking the size of its operations. Workers have suffered layoffs with little chance of gaining new employment, shorting of severance pay, late payments of wages, bad working conditions and other complaints, and have reacted with strikes and demonstrations.

Argentine teachers strike over wage demand

Teachers in San Fernando del Valle de Catamarca, in Argentina's northwestern Catamarca province, struck for three days, September 18-20, to press their demand for a 15 percent raise in salaries. The Catamarca Teachers Syndicate (SIDCA) claimed 97 percent adherence to the strike call.

In negotiations with representatives of the Municipal Executive, teachers in assembly rejected a five percent offer and demanded the 15 percent raise with a trigger clause for inflation. The Executive then offered 7.5 percent, which the teachers consider insufficient. Inflation is expected to reach over 30 percent this year in Argentina.

Other issues raised by teachers include problems encountered with the OSEP public employees health agency, job insecurity and lack of funds for the schools. SIDCA says it is open to a call for the resumption of negotiations.

Chicago paratransit workers take strike vote

Some 150 paratransit workers are set to strike MV Transit October 1 over unfair labor practice charges as contract negotiations drag on. The drivers, reservationists, and dispatchers voted overwhelmingly for strike authorization.

The Teamsters union has filed multiple unfair labor practice charges accusing management of failing to bargain in good faith. The union further claims that management is attempting to operate despite a severe shortage of drivers, placing patient safety at risk.

The negotiations appeared stalled over the question of pay raises for veteran drivers. MV Transit claims it cannot address pay issues until it secures a paratransit contract renewal with Chicago school bus provider Pace Suburban Bus.

Labor Board approves unionization for Columbia postdoctoral workers

The US National Labor Relations Board ruled last week that postdoctoral researchers at Columbia University in New York will be allowed to form a union and engage in collective bargaining. It would be the first certified postdoctoral union at a private university.

The university had argued that postdocs are trainees and not full employees. They also argued that they could not be deemed employees due to the external funding of their salaries and their wide-ranging responsibilities.

The United Auto Workers has made a bid to represent the postdoctoral workers and a vote will now likely be held on union recognition. The

UAW is already the bargaining agent for Columbia's graduate student workers, who carried out a strike last April. The UAW limited the action to one week, essentially a token protest, that did not resolve any of the outstanding issues facing graduate workers.

Nova Scotia education staff set to strike

Four hundred workers employed by the Chignecto-Central Regional Centre for Education in northern Nova Scotia could be on strike as early as next week after months of conciliation ended without a new deal.

The school support staff includes custodians, bus drivers, and tradespeople who are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and who have been working without a contract since March of 2015. Outstanding issues include wages, a shortage of replacement staffing and unpaid work time for drivers.

With union leaders claiming that recent cuts by the provincial Liberal government are creating an unhealthy and unsafe workplace, their fight has drawn support from other school workers in the province who are facing similar issues.

Union squelches job action at Loto-Québec

A last-minute cancellation halted a scheduled nine-day strike set to begin Saturday by some 450 workers employed by the provincial crown corporation at Loto-Québec. The workers staged a weekend strike on September 14 as part of a string of job actions that began in July.

These actions are taking place after workers in communications, finance and sales voted nearly unanimously in favor of strike action in July after working without a contract since March of 2015. However, rather than lead an all-out fight and seek to mobilize support in the broader working class, the Syndicat de Professionnelles et professionnels du Gouvernement du Québec (SPGQ,) has sought to limit workers actions.

SPGQ negotiators cited some movement in negotiations as the reason for calling off the latest strike. According to SPGQ the company offer of 0.7 percent annual wage increases is unacceptable because it is packaged with cuts to sick pay, health insurance and other benefits.



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