

Chilean port workers strike over working conditions

Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 November 2018

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Temporary workers at the port city of Valparaíso struck November 22 to press for improvements in their working conditions. Vessels including cruise ships and refrigerated cargo ships were diverted to other ports. The walkout follows an indefinite strike at two terminals starting November 16.

Temporary workers are often referred to in Spanish as *precarios*, an aptly descriptive term. In addition to inferior pay, they have no guaranteed income during slack times and there is no law to regulate their working conditions or to set standards for their rights. They also lack benefits such as paid vacations, pre- and postnatal leave, and training.

The workers, some of whom are in unions, distrust the port workers' unions, which they consider too indulgent with the shipping companies. Thus, they took the action without calling on the support of the union bureaucracies.

Belizean teachers protest nonpayment of salaries, firing of colleague

Over 40 teachers at the Mount Carmel Roman Catholic Primary School in Benque Viejo Del Carmen, Belize, held a sit-out protest on November 21. The teachers decided on the strike action to protest the nonpayment of the salaries from the last school year to three substitute teachers.

Another issue concerned a teacher with 29 years of experience who had requested early retirement because of the upcoming expiration of her license, but who was granted a special license by the Teaching Services Commission in August. However, she has not been paid since September, and on November 21, the principal received a letter ordering her termination.

At a rally that morning, teachers from three other Catholic schools in the area joined their colleagues at Mount Carmel, where numerous other complaints—at least 17 at last count—were aired about the treatment of teachers. Parents were supportive of the protest, some of them accompanying the teachers on a march through one of Benque's streets that morning.

The Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU) belatedly arranged to meet with the teachers on November 26 and has requested intervention from the Chief Education Officer.

Grenadian teachers, civil service workers hold periodic strikes over pensions, bonus

Teachers and civil service workers in Grenada have held two- and three-day strike actions since November 5. The actions were called by the Public Workers Union, Technical and Allied Workers Union and Grenada Union of Teachers. Most recently, the three unions called their members out on November 20 through 24. The Labour Ministry had filed an injunction over the weekend but later withdrew it as the parties held a meeting on the November 20.

The unions and the government are at loggerheads about two issues: pensions and the "gratuity"—i.e., a bonus paid after 33 years of service and added to the pension upon retirement. The government offered 2 percent while the unions are calling for 25 percent. Following the meeting with the labour minister on the 20th, the unions called a march and rally for the next day.

The government called for a meeting with the unions for November 24. On the same day, the acting minister of labour stated his intention to send the dispute to an arbitration tribunal.

Strike by Colombian truckers gets partial participation

On November 23, some truckers in Colombia went on strike over the increase in the price of fuel, changes to the value-added tax, rules regarding the scrapping of old vehicles, and toll rates. The National Drivers and Small Proprietors Syndicate issued the strike call.

However, several large truckers' union federations and owner-operator organizations either refused to join the strike or gave it lukewarm support. The Colombian Truckers Association, the Colombian Cargo Transport Federation, the National Cargo Transport Enterprises Association and others, while they agreed on the issues, declared that they would not join the strike. One organization, the Cargo Transportation Association, said that its members were at liberty to join the strike, but did not endorse it.

Argentine taxi drivers protest football association's Uber contract

Taxi drivers parked their vehicles and gathered in front of the offices of the Argentine Soccer Association (AFA) in Buenos Aires on November 21 to protest its signing of a sponsorship deal with the Uber

ride service. Laws governing digital ride services are stringent in the city of Buenos Aires, but the deal was signed in Mendoza, where the laws are more lenient.

Marcelo Boeri, leader of the United Civil Taxi Drivers Association, which called the action, told reporters, “We won’t stop. There will be protests at AFA, at the home of [AFA president Claudio] Tapia and every time that the national team boards [a bus].”

Federal judge issues order barring strike by Reno, Nevada, trash haulers

A US District Court judge issued a temporary restraining order barring the union representing 150 trash collectors for Waste Management in Reno, Nevada, from striking. Judge Larry Hicks declared that a strike would cause the company to “suffer irreparable harm.”

The contract covering workers represented by Teamsters Local 533 does not expire until April 2019. But a new policy announcement by the company last July ordered truck drivers to leave onboard units used to clock out for unpaid 30-minute lunch breaks in the trucks. Traditionally, drivers have removed the unit from the truck and only clocked off after hand-washing. The effect of the new order will shave time from drivers’ half-hour lunch breaks and make wash-up time unpaid.

The union ordered drivers to ignore the new rule. The company responded by threatening to discipline or fire workers. Local 533 President Gary Watson then sent an e-mail to Reno’s mayor and city council members warning of “a good possibility of a strike.” Judge Hicks pointed to the union contract’s no-strike clause and the requirements for arbitration when making his decision.

Washington state theatrical stage workers in contract struggle against Rhino Staging

Some 70 stagehands and riggers organized in the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 15 have been locked in a struggle against Rhino Staging for decent wages, pensions, benefits, job security, and safe working conditions since they voted to organize in IATSE in 2015.

After the NLRB ordered Rhino to engage in contract negotiations in 2016, the workers have seen the Arizona-based company drag its feet in negotiations that began only in the earlier part of this year. Rhino Northwest employees have no pensions and medical benefits, with their hours of work being unpredictable.

Rhino is now demanding that its workers labor for a full shift without breaks—a condition that is currently not only a violation of state law but a throwback to the nineteenth century as well. As 31-year-old Kyle Daley told *Seattle Weekly*, “The whole business model of Rhino is to bring in new people, give them as little training as possible, so they can keep their [labor] rates down. ... They basically churn them and burn them.”

Daley stated that new hires are not given the proper training before they are given dangerous work tasks. He added that he has worked at

extreme heights with another stagehand who had not received the training to conduct a rescue if one of them fell to the stage. Said Daley, “I’ve seen, and I’ve heard of a lot of people getting hurt on the job. It’s very much an aspect of what we do.”

Saskatchewan Co-Op Workers Continue Strike

About 800 workers, members of Local 1400 of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) at 20 Saskatoon Co-Op gas stations, grocery and hardware stores are entering their fourth week on strike against management demands to install a two-tier pay scale at the cooperative. Over the past month, about 100 workers have crossed the picket lines and returned to work. The workers have been without a contract for the past two years.

Although the Saskatoon Co-op continues to be profitable (earning over C\$12 million in profits last year on revenues of C\$439 million), management has sought to force newly hired workers to accept a cap on pay that would leave them up to C\$4.36 per hour below current top wages. Presently, clerks at the retail outlets have a starting wage of C\$11.43 per hour, just pennies above the provincial minimum wage.

In early November, a month-long strike by 400 Co-Op workers, also members of UFCW Local 1400 in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, against similar concessions ended when the union agreed to accept a two-tier wage structure with management demands for top wage differentials only slightly reduced. Negotiations in the Saskatoon dispute are set to re-start later this week.

Oshawa and Quebec Grocery Clerks Ratify Low-Wage Contracts

Members of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in Oshawa, Ontario, agreed to a new contract this month at Sobeys FreshCo that further entrenched the low-wage status of grocery workers throughout the industry. The 1.5 percent pay increase allows workers to barely stay ahead of the provincial minimum wage of C\$14 per hour. But with inflation currently tabbed at 2.4 percent and expected to rise further, the deal actually represents a real wage cut over the life of the agreement.

Typical of conditions within the grocery industry, 34 of the 38 employees in the Oshawa store were part-time employees. Echoing the real wage cuts being negotiated by the UFCW across Canada, 100 workers at IGA groceries in L’Île Bizard, Quebec, settled last week for a 2 percent wage increase, but only for workers who have reached the top of their pay scale.



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