

## Chilean port workers resume protests over firings

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Workers at the Chilean port of Valparaíso resumed their protests against the refusal of shipping company Ultraport to reinstate 22 workers whom it had fired during a strike over working conditions in November-December 2018. Ultraport had signed an agreement to end the strike but failed to comply to its provisions, including the rehiring of the workers.

Protesting workers took to the streets to protest in front of the headquarters of the Valparaíso Stevedores' Syndicate to demand the workers' reinstatement. The union called on the national government to "respect the accords and untangle this unnecessary conflict," according to a telesur.net report. The workers resolved at an assembly to continue striking and protesting until the situation is rectified.

### Argentine television workers' strike over firings squelched by binding arbitration decree

Argentina's Telefe television network, a division of Viacom, announced January 4 that it intended to fire 12 workers, with the possibility of more sackings to come. The Argentine Television Syndicate (Satsaid) then called a 24-hour strike, to be followed by two hours per shift the next day, and demanded the immediate reinstatement of the fired workers.

Workers for Telefe Noticias, who are members of a different union, declared their solidarity with the Satsaid members.

About five hours after the strike began, the Labor Secretariat decreed "obligatory conciliation." The firings were withdrawn, and the parties were given 15 days in which to negotiate.

### Union shuts down strike by Uruguayan trash collection workers

Union officials called off a walkout by sanitation workers in the city of Montevideo, Uruguay after just four days. The workers had walked off the job on December 31 following an assembly of the Municipal Employees and Workers Association (Adeom). The walkout was precipitated by denunciations of harassment on December 28.

The city reacted by employing private companies, cooperatives and NGOs as strikebreakers. Nonetheless, these tactics were not enough to prevent trash from piling up in most sections of the city.

Adeom called for an urgent meeting with city officials, but considered their response "insufficient" and continued the strike. Meanwhile, the mayor appealed to the national executive to declare trash collection an essential service and subject to a back-to-work decree.

Following a January 4 meeting, Adeom's secretary general, Dora Lorenzo, announced that although the city's response to its demands was insufficient, the union did not want to be considered to be holding city residents hostage, and Adeom called the workers back on the job at 10:00 p.m. Lorenzo said that Adeom would take a "recess until the next meeting and make a new evaluation."

### Puerto Rican basketball players vote in favor of strike over wage ceiling

About 35 delegates of the Basketball Players Association of Puerto Rico (Ajbpr) met on January 3 to discuss and vote on the National Superior Basketball (BSN) league Board of Directors' recent decision to put a cap on players' salaries. The delegates voted unanimously to approve strike action if the reductions are implemented.

Following Hurricane María in 2017, the players had

agreed to lower the salary cap from US\$120,000 to US\$80,000 during the 2017 and 2018 seasons. Last season, they agreed to a further reduction to US\$60,000. At its last meeting, the BSN board resolved to further lower the cap to US\$40,000 for 2019.

The 2019 season begins in March. The Ajbpr has resolved to hold firm to the \$80,000 cap, the amount agreed on in the second year of the current contract. The union's lawyer has indicated that his first step will be to request that the Basketball Federation serve as mediator in the conflict. If that fails, the Ajbpr will take the case to the courts.

### **Bahamian teachers' union obtains strike certificate over conditions at school**

After months of complaints by teachers about mold, rat infestation and crumbling infrastructure—such as nonfunctioning bathrooms—at CH Reeves Junior High School in Nassau, and an overwhelming vote for strike action last month, the Bahamas Union of Teachers (BUT) announced January 3 that it had gotten a strike certificate from the Ministry of Labour. Upon announcing the certificate, BUT president Belinda Wilson declared, “I hope, like I said earlier, that we will not have to use it.”

Last October and November, teachers had held sit-outs and walkouts, and were told by the labour minister that the issues would be resolved. However, in response to official foot dragging, and under pressure from teachers, in December the BUT held a strike vote, the result of which—68 in favor, one opposed—was at first rejected by the government but was later accepted. In the meantime, the education minister claimed that the problems had been or were being addressed.

The BUT and the ministers of labour and environment had been scheduled to do a “walkabout” of the school January 3, but it did not take place. The inspection was then rescheduled for January 7.

### **Owner of Cleveland Plain Dealer outsources nearly half of newsroom jobs**

George Rodrigue, editor and president of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, announced December 27 that management would slash just under half of the newspaper's workforce and outsource jobs to a parent operation. The cuts will result in the loss of 29 jobs in the newsroom, including copy

editors and page designers, who will be terminated sometime in March 2019.

These jobs, which involve the production of about half of the newspaper, will be farmed out by the *Plain Dealer's* parent company, Advance Publications, to its corporate parent, Advance Local, which is a central newspaper processing hub for 19 papers. The process is widespread in the newspaper business, according to Ideastream. GateHouse Media, which owns the Akron *Beacon Journal*, runs a centralized editing and design process for some 200 of its newspapers.

The *Plain Dealer* News Guild, which represents 68 *Plain Dealer* reporters, editors, photographers and illustrators, said management has continually whittled away at the workforce and working conditions since the 2008 financial crisis. The Guild's attempt to offer alternative concessions was brushed aside by management. Some predict that the Guild, which at one time represented some 700 workers in the newspaper business in the region, will fold after the current contract runs out this year.

### **Saskatchewan workers reject new offer despite two months on strike**

Workers employed at the Saskatoon Co-op, who have been off the job since the beginning of November, last week rejected management's latest contract offer despite claims by the employer that it contained modest improvements.

The heart of the proposal is the creation of a second tier for new hires who would be paid as much as \$8,000 less and receive fewer benefits than existing staff. Despite some reduction in the number of workers affected by the tier system and a small wage increase, management at the Saskatoon Co-op said 60 percent of workers voted to reject the deal. Although it remains unclear if their union, the United Food and Commercial Workers, recommended the offer, contracts containing similar concessions were accepted in other bargaining units of the same local at other co-ops in the province.

Workers at the Saskatoon Co-op have been without a contract for over two-years and in recent weeks many have reportedly crossed the picket line to return to work.



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