

Teachers protest in Venezuela, contract talks begin with US oil refiners

Workers Struggles: The Americas

22 January 2019

Mexican university workers hold one-day strike over pay, working conditions

Administrative, technical and manual workers at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University at Oaxaca (UABJO) went on strike from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. January 16. The workers are members of the UABJO Workers and Employees Syndicate (STEUABJO), which has been holding talks with the UABJO administration without progress on a number of points.

Those issues include assignments of positions and *basificación* or conversion of employees from temporary contracts to full-time permanent status; payment of salary differentials; increase of performance bonuses; rehabilitation of the union's building and other demands.

STEUABJO has announced that if these and other issues are not addressed satisfactorily, that it will call a strike for February 1.

Guatemalan Congress workers protest for pay increase

Some of the employees of Guatemala's Congress held a protest on January 18 to demand a 10 percent pay increase that was included in their collective contract. Holding signs calling for "Respect for the Pact," the workers called for the increase to be based on the total salary and not on the base salary.

The Collective Pact was signed in 1999 and calculated increases based on the base salary, but later was pegged to total salaries. In 2016, the base salary was reestablished as the guideline for increases, reducing the raises. The workers want the decision reversed and say that they will

strike to attain their demand.

Protests in Puerto Rico against debt deal

Several hundred protesters gathered in front of the federal court building in Hato Rey, Puerto Rico January 16 to voice opposition to a debt deal signed between the government's Financial Oversight & Management Board (FOMB) and bondholders of the Sales Tax Financing Corporation (Cofina) and approved by a US federal judge. The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), which was joined by other organizations, called the protest.

According to a caribbeanabusiness.com report, "Under the settlement, about 53.5 percent of the pledged sales & use tax will go to Cofina and about 46 percent to the commonwealth," and "will restructure the debt with Cofina bondholders, who will exchange their current bonds for new bonds whose value will be cut by 32 percent. Senior bonds were cut by 7 percent, that is they will recover 93 percent of the nominal value of the bonds, while junior bonds were cut by 46 percent, enabling a recovery of 53.9 percent of the bonds' value.

The deal, part of the Title III Plan of Adjustment of the \$17.5 billion debt owed to Cofina, was accepted by an overwhelming majority of the bondholders. While described by the FOMB as "another step in helping set Puerto Rico on the road to recovery," protesters say it will result in more austerity for workers, retirees and the poor and cuts in essential public services.

Nationwide strikes and protests by Venezuelan teachers over pay, contracts

Teachers across Venezuela marched and held protests last week over pay and contract issues. On January 15, Teacher's Day, teachers marched to the Education Ministry in Caracas, and on January 17 they held protest demonstrations to demand pay raises and respect for their collective contracts. Mobilizations were reported in Caracas, Mérida and other cities and regions.

Although the Maduro government recently enacted a raise in the minimum wage, it has been "pulverized" by hyperinflation, according to teachers' union spokespeople.

Argentine pilots' union calls off two-day strike as government imposes another round of binding arbitration

A two-day strike called by Argentina's Airline Pilots Association (APLA) and Airline Aviators Union (UALA) was called off after two hours when the National Civil Aeronautics Administration (ANAC) withdrew a resolution to facilitate the use of pilots from other countries as strikebreakers. The action, which began at 6:00 a.m. January 17, was called off at 8:00 a.m. Between 10 and 15 flights were delayed, but activity soon resumed.

The unions and airlines had already engaged in "obligatory conciliation" talks convoked by the ANAC for a month, but without results. When the ANAC announced its decision to enact Resolution 895/18, allowing foreign pilots to scab on Argentine pilots, the APLA and UALA called for "assemblies," i.e., work stoppages for 48 hours.

Shortly thereafter, the ANAC rescinded the resolution and the unions agreed to another round of Labor Secretariat-dictated obligatory conciliation talks.

Contract talks set to begin for 30,000 US oil refinery and chemical workers

The United Steelworkers is set to meet with representatives of the oil industry Wednesday over terms of a new contract deal. The contract for some 30,000 oil refinery and chemical workers expires February 1. The union is reportedly planning to ask for annual 8 percent

pay raises.

The USW betrayed and sabotaged a partial strike against oil refiners in 2015 resulting in a sellout contract that provided inadequate 4 percent annual raises that would be eaten up by increases in healthcare costs. The agreement did not address staffing issues and the contracting out of work.

The union called a token strike against 15 of 63 oil refineries it negotiates for involving 7,000 workers. The USW ordered members to keep working at ExxonMobil, Chevron and other oil giants. Meanwhile, it refused to pay strike benefits from its one-half billion strike fund.

Ontario casino workers set to strike

Casino workers employed at Casino Rama Resort, two hours north of Toronto, are poised to walk off the job this week after voting 94 percent in favor of strike action last week.

According to negotiators for Unifor, which is the bargaining agent for cashiers, dealers, service staff and other workers at the casino, their union members are among the lowest paid in the industry. In addition, the union says it is seeking improvements in wages and benefits as well as more balanced work schedules.

Over 1,400 unionized workers are employed at Casino Rama, which is operated by gaming giant Gateway Casinos & Entertainment Ltd., who took over operations at the casino last year.



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