

Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 December 2023

The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Mass protests in Peru against the Dina Boluarte government

Mass protests took place in Peru on December 7, 8 and 9 on the first anniversary of the congressional coup that overthrew President Pedro Castillo and installed Dina Boluarte as head of state.

Chanting “out with everyone!” (¡Que se vayan todos!) the demonstrations demanded Boluarte’s ouster, the closure of the National Congress, new elections and a new constitution, and that the death of more than 60 demonstrators, killed by the newly installed government during popular protests over Castillo’s removal last December and in early 2023, be investigated and the killers be punished.

Former Peru President Alberto Fujimori was sentenced in 2009 for 25 murders committed by a death squad under his orders in Lima and in Cantuta University. After an unsuccessful attempt to free him in 2017 by then President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, Fujimori was released last week with Boluarte’s approval.

On December 7, as the protests began, demonstrators attempting to block the Pan-American highway were dispersed by government police forces.

Protest marks anniversary of El Mozote massacre in El Salvador

Salvadorians marked the 42nd anniversary of the massacres that took place in the city of El Mozote (near the border with Honduras) and nearby towns by El Salvador’s Atlacatl Battalion during that nation’s civil war in 1981. Over one thousand people were executed during the massacres, considered the most brutal in El Salvador’s history. In addition to the killings, many families saw their homes completely destroyed.

“It’s been 42 years”, declared a demonstrator, “we are still suffering, with wounds that cannot be erased, with no justice. We fight to put all those that ordered the massacre in jail.”

Successive Salvadorian government have ignored the demands of the relatives of the victims and have not recognized that a massacre even took place, despite findings by the Interamerican

Human Rights Court and independent investigators.

In her speech, Raquel Caballero de Guevara, the Attorney for Defense of Human Rights (PDDH), declared that the desire for truth, justice and comprehensive reparation continue to be more valid than ever.

Bolivia truckers hold protest strike

Bolivian truckers blocked four points in the highway that links Cochabamba and Santa Cruz for five days last week to protest poorly maintained and dangerous road and bridge conditions.

The protest strike ended last Wednesday, following negotiations between the truck drivers’ union and Bolivian authorities.

Brazil Aerospace workers protest

Workers employed by Brazilian aerospace Avibras corporation protested last Wednesday, blocking a main road in the city of São José dos Campos. The protesting workers are owed 9 months of back wages. A central demand by the workers is that the company be taken over by the Lula administration.

Scores of workers walked two kilometers carrying banners demanding their back wages and the nationalization of the bankrupt firm. Avibras management recently reneged on a promise of two-months back wages plus a bonus of 1,000 Reales, not a dime of which was ever paid.

Last year the company entered bankruptcy proceedings and sacked 420 workers.

Mexico City educators protest

On December 5, thousands of education workers from all over Mexico City carried out a massive march through downtown. The protest included teachers and support personnel at high schools and elementary schools. They were also joined by their own students, striking at teaching colleges.

The march ended with a rally at the El Zocalo central square. The issue is wages and working conditions.

Workers at Sutter Health psychiatric facility in Sacramento, California, carry out one-day strike

Some 150 workers at Sutter Health's Center for Psychiatry in Sacramento, California conducted a one-day strike December 6 after more than a year of fruitless bargaining failed to produce an acceptable contract to members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW). Workers first unionized in November 2021 and are still without a first contract.

Sutter has offered only an insulting increase in annual wages of 2.25 percent. Besides increased wages, the social workers, therapists, food services and custodial workers are also seeking hazard pay and have raised unsafe staffing ratios as a major concern.

"Our frontline staff are with the patients 24/7," César Mardones, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, told CapRadio. "They're really getting a lot of physical strain."

An NUHW survey reported that four out of five surveyed said they experience understaffing at least once a week. Another 58 percent said they've witnessed unsafe situations due to understaffing.

Workers are also protesting Sutter's withholding of cost-of-living increases. In another provocation, management paid out merit-based increases to all but the NUHW members. It only relented and began to pay after an NLRB ruling.

No further strike action has been planned by the NUHW.

Faculty at New Jersey Institute of Technology grant strike authorization

Faculty at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) in Newark voted by a 98 percent margin to grant strike authorization after 14 months of failed bargaining. The faculty are members of the United Council of Academics (UCAN), comprising adjunct faculty, postdoctoral research employees and graduate workers, constituting three-quarters of the teaching faculty at NJIT.

UCAN is seeking pay equity with educators and researchers at nearby Rutgers University, affordable healthcare, childcare, along with dental and vision benefits. Faculty also want limits on class sizes and work hours and job security provisions.

NJIT management has sought to pit faculty against students, responding, "We do not have the capacity to meet UCAN's current demands without passing a significant burden to students..."

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan city officials refuse to sign end of strike protocol

Despite ratifying a new four-year contract on December 1 after a bitter 11-week strike, the 90 permanent workers and 60 non-permanent inside workers for the municipality of Prince Albert remain on the picket lines because city officials have so far refused to sign a back-to-work protocol with the union and officially activate the new collective agreement.

The workers, members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), voted by 81 percent to accept a new contract negotiated between their union officials and city management.

That deal provided for a paltry 11 percent wage rise spread over the life of the agreement and minor benefit improvements. Workers had rejected the 11 percent wage offer as inadequate earlier in the negotiation process and counterposed a 15 percent increase in overall compensation. But with bills mounting and the union urging them to reduce their expectations, workers saw no way forward.

With the ratification of the contract, normal procedure would see a timely meeting called by city officials to declare the strike over. However, management, after initially agreeing to a return-to-work protocol, then demanded that workers who had been struck by the mayor's vehicle as it pushed its way through a picket line during the strike, withdraw their complaint lodged with the police. Union officials pointed out that such a demand to interfere with already filed charges was in violation of their basic legal rights.

The current dispute is the second time that a union ratification vote has been thrown into disarray by management. Last October, a vote on a contract was halted hours after it had begun because management had belatedly announced new terms that were not detailed in the document the workers were voting on. That management maneuver was met with the filing of an Unfair Labour Practice complaint with the province.

The latest delay in resolving the strike has been viewed by workers with deep suspicion. At the beginning of the strike municipal HR Manager Kevin Yates bragged that the strike would actually prove to be a "cost-saving" for the city.

City management is currently insisting on a concessions-laden contract with more than 300 outside municipal workers organized by CUPE. Those workers recently voted to authorize a strike. However, pro-employer provincial rules require further steps to be first undertaken in the negotiating process.



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