

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

16 February 2015

## **Workers strike, block entrance to Mexican thermoelectric plant to demand overdue salaries**

About 200 workers at the Termoeléctrica thermal energy generation plant in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico, downed their tools and blocked the installation's entrance February 9. The workers took the action to press for payment of overdue salaries and other demands.

This was the fifth time that the workers have struck to demand their wages, going back to December 14. This time, the workers called for parent company Cocomex to deliver two weeks' wages as well as overtime pay. They also denounced the lack of protective equipment like hardhats and the exposure of workers to hazardous conditions.

Since the inauguration ceremony of Termoeléctrica in June 2013, with much fanfare and the presence of the state's governor as well as President Enrique Peña, the Cocomex firm has been accused of endangering workers and violating their rights, precipitating a Labor Secretariat investigation in May of last year amid charges of disregarding seniority and benefits, among other contract violations.

## **Dominican Republic: Professors accept salary offer, end strike**

After two and a half weeks on strike, professors at the public Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD) voted to return to work after 16 days on strike. The professors, members of the FAPROUASD professors' federation, had walked out on January 26 to demand a 40 percent salary raise, in addition to infrastructure improvements and other demands.

FAPROUASD held a general assembly on January 9, in which the members voted to accept two raises of 20 percent each, effective in March and next semester. FAPROUASD issued a call to students, some of whom had engaged in violent anti-strike demonstrations, to attend class the next day.

However, UASD rector Iván Grullón Fernández declared "that it was not certain that the authorities have offered a 20 percent salary offer...to take effect in March of this year, nor that they promised a similar increment for the next semester," according to a hoy.com.do report. Grullón Fernández contended that the University Council only agreed to "arrange a salary readjustment" and that it "will determine...the corresponding document for the salary increase."

## **One-day strike by Dominican Republic hospital workers in dispute over funding demands**

Continuing a series of one-day strikes begun in January, workers at public hospitals in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, held a 24-hour strike to press their demands for improved conditions. Doctors, bioanalysts, psychologists, nurses and administrative staff picketed the front entrances to six hospitals, carrying signs demanding "Salary readjustment," "A dignified pension" and "Appointments of more personnel."

Some signs read "No to privatization, 5 percent for the health sector" referring to their demand that 5 percent of the national budget be apportioned to improving conditions and infrastructure at hospitals. Workers complain of "questionable hygienic conditions" as well as "serious dangers in physical plant, personnel, equipment, supplies, among others," according to a listindiario.com report.

The director of the National Health Service, Dr. Ramón Alvarado, said that the budget for the year cannot be changed because it has already been drawn up. The president of the Dominican Medical College has appealed to the Health Ministry to convene a dialogue to find a solution to the problem.

## **Surprise strike by Argentine bus drivers for overdue wage payment**

Some 600 city and interurban bus drivers for four bus

lines in La Plata, Argentina, stopped work the afternoon of February 10 to press their demand for wages overdue since January. The drivers, members of the La Plata section of the UTA transportation workers union, are employed by the business group Línea 7.

The workers voted on the measure at 3:00 p.m. that day when “we didn’t have our wages deposited, as they had told us,” UTA local secretary general Oscar Pedrosa told reporters. The amount deposited for January was only 30 percent. Last November, the drivers struck for the same reason. According to Pedrosa, the company “claimed administrative problems.”

The latest strike follows a 24-hour walkout by bus drivers in Tucumán on February 9 over late wage payments and a 30 percent salary demand. On February 6, drivers on line 202 in the Berisso subdivision of the La Plata urban area stopped work following threats and violence against drivers and passengers. The drivers returned on February 9 when police officers were assigned to accompany the drivers while in the zone.

### **Jamaican racetrack workers end strike, return to work**

Workers at the Caymanas Park racetrack in Gregory Park, St. Catherine, Jamaica, ended their strike and began a phased resumption of duties. The return to work followed the announcement of an agreement February 10 between Caymanas Track Limited (CTL) reps and the Union of Technical, Administrative and Supervisory Personnel (UTASP).

The workers had walked out February 4 over management’s renegeing on some previously agreed benefits in the contract under negotiation, including increases in breakfast, supper and traveling allowances. CTL had also failed to implement elements of a verbally agreed reclassification exercise. The workers remained on strike as UTASP and CTL continued negotiating, bringing on a call by the Ministry of Labor for an “emergency conciliation session” at its Kingston office.

A 10-race event scheduled for February 6 was called off, and a “marathon meeting” on February 9 failed to head off the cancelation of the annual Ash Wednesday meet February 10. The parties reached a provisional accord later that day, and agreed to continue meeting at the ministry for further discussions.

### **Workers continue strike in Missouri industrial strike**

A strike by workers at the Polar Tank Trailer plant in Springfield, Missouri, is continuing despite the use of strikebreakers by management. Some 214 members of the United Steelworkers (USW) Local 11-770 walked off the job on February 5 to protest the company’s demand for new attendance policy and a “Standards of Conduct” clause that will allow them a wider scope in the firing of workers.

Since then, a number of workers have defected from a strike. As of February 12, the company reports that 69 workers have resigned from the union. These, combined with another 55 non-union workers, are continuing production. USW representative Roger Bricker has admitted that after the first day of the strike some 35 to 40 workers had crossed picket lines.

Negotiations between the union and company began back in September. The old agreement expired in October, and since then, some 15 workers have been fired by the company. Management says it has offered welders and electricians wage increases of between 1 and 4 percent.

On February 12, clashes occurred on the picket lines. According to the company, the USW quickly joined with management in crafting a “Joint Stipulated Preliminary Injunction” that will limit picketing and prohibit actions by striking workers.

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