

Strike call in Dominican Republic over fuel price rise, crumbling infrastructure while nurses press demands

Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 November 2018

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Social organizations in the Dominican Republic are calling for a national 24-hour strike to protest recent increases in fuel prices. The strike, scheduled for November 27, would include among its demands the addressing of the sorry state of infrastructure in various parts of the nation.

Electrification, paving and waste treatment are some of the improvements that the Broad Front of Popular Struggle, which issued the strike call in alliance with some unions, is demanding of the government of Danilo Medina.

Nurses in Dominican Republic warn of strike over unfulfilled contract provisions

Bioanalysts, psychologists, technicians and nurses in the Dominican Social Security Institution met November 16 to discuss the failure of the National Health Service (Senasa) to comply with an agreement signed in 2016. The accord dealt with such issues as provision of equipment, promotions and incentive pay.

The assembled members also complained of the deterioration of their working conditions, including overwork and being subject to intimidation.

Union spokespeople said that the nurses will go on a national strike for one day if Senasa does not address their concerns.

Bermudan communications workers hold “sit-out” over firings

Employees at One Communications, which describes itself as “the leading full-service telecommunications provider for corporate and residential customers” in Bermuda and the Cayman Islands, stopped work on

November 15 over a recent series of firings of at least 14 workers. The Bermuda Industrial Union (BIU) accused the company of “targeting” the workers under a variety of pretexts.

The BIU met with management over the sackings and reached an agreement with the company, but the workers rejected it, forcing the union to call the workers out. Even then, the union’s chief organizer, George Scott, refused to call the walkout a strike, using the terms “work stoppage” and “sit-out,” and said that discussions with management were ongoing. Meanwhile, officials from the labor and immigration ministries met with workers in an attempt to keep the situation under control.

Venezuelan professors confront riot police in protest for higher pay

Several hundred teachers held a protest in front of the headquarters of the Venezuelan Education Ministry in Caracas on November 14 to demand higher pay. When some of them tried to enter the building, they were blocked by members of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) who had been sent to the site of the protest.

The protesters chanted “Get out!” and “We’re professors, not delinquents!” as pushing and shoving took place, with some professors claiming that they were struck. However, the situation de-escalated with no serious injuries.

Meanwhile, delegates of public education unions have been meeting with labor ministry officials to discuss wages. The current monthly minimum wage in Venezuela is 1,800 bolivares or US\$28.

Washington state paraeducators vote to accept deal, end strike

Some 115 paraeducators in Port Angeles, Washington state, voted to end their two-day strike November 16 and accept a compromise agreement. The Port Angeles School District had attempted to hire temporary replacements to replace the paraeducators, but the district's teachers, who settled their contract back in August after a stand-off through the summer, refused to cross picket lines and forced administrators to close the school. Teachers also called replacements and asked them not to agree to be strikebreakers.

The paraeducators, who assist teachers with instruction and tutoring, were being paid as low as \$15.68 an hour and might put in as much as 30 hours a week. They demanded 22 percent pay hikes over the course of a three-year agreement while the district offered a paltry 3.5 percent wage increase.

Back in August, paraeducators voted 87 to 4 to authorize a strike. In the end, they voted by 94 percent to settle for approximately a 15 percent wage increase for the duration of the contract.

District officials attempt to put workers off by declaring a shortage of levy funding. But a decision by the Washington state Supreme Court ruled that districts were not meeting constitutional requirements in providing funding for schools and the state legislature was compelled to provide \$2 billion specifically allotted for salaries.

Nevertheless, districts attempted to stiff teachers and direct the money elsewhere. Some 15 school districts began the school year with teacher bargaining units on strike. The Port Angeles strike was the first time that paraeducators have gone on strike in Washington state.

Toronto IATSE Lockout Ends

A four-month-long lockout of about 450 workers, members of the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE Local 58), in Toronto, Ontario ended last week when workers voted to accept a concessions-laden contract. Few workers willing to discuss the content of the contract spoke in favour of the deal that accepted management's main demand to significantly loosen constraints on contracting out of union jobs.

The contract was nonetheless ratified as workers realized that IATSE and the Ontario labour movement in general had no strategy to mobilize the strength of the provincial working class against the Board's

massive attack. In fact, as the lockout wore on, picketing of the Exhibition venues became more sporadic. Such was the limited action employed by IATSE that union members in both Vancouver and another Toronto local told the *World Socialist Web Site* that their members were largely unaware of the Local 58 lockout.

Local 58 president Justin Antheunis was forced to acknowledge the bitter defeat in the contract fight. Workers "took it on the chin", he told reporters.

The lockout by the Board of Governors at Exhibition Place, one of Toronto's main convention, entertainment and sports complexes, began on July 20. The Board is comprised of city councillors and hand-picked individuals from business and community organizations who have demanded that the IATSE members surrender long-standing job security protections.

Since the beginning of the lockout, the Board instructed the various businesses that operate inside Exhibition Place to provide their own workforce for various events scheduled, which have included Major League Soccer and Canadian Football League games, the giant Caribana West Indian cultural festival, the Canadian National Exhibition and the Royal Winter Fair as well as trade shows and conventions. As a result, scab labour performed the work of the locked-out stagehands throughout the complex.

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