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Workers Struggles: The Americas

15 January 2019

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Some 35,000 Honduran public health sector workers struck nationwide January 9 over the failure of the government to deliver on a salary demand dating to 2018. The strike, which lasted from 6:00 a.m. to noon, drew attention to a demand last year of 4,000 lempiras (US\$163) to compensate for the rising cost of living. To date, there has been no official response.

The president of the Medicine, Hospital and Similar Sectors Syndicate (Sitramedhys), Miguel Mejía, denounced the government's "apathy and irresponsibility" concerning the demand. He added that recently representatives from all the national unions had been convoked, but only one person from the governmental commission named to deal with the demand showed up.

Union leaders expressed hope that the short stoppage would bring the authorities to call for negotiations.

Mexican auto parts factory workers strike to demand unpaid bonus

Over 700 workers at six auto parts and equipment factories in the northeastern Mexican border city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas turned off their machines January 9 and 10 and held protests over the nonpayment of a promised productivity bonus. The bonus of 3,300 pesos (US\$172.40) in food vouchers was supposed to be deposited on January 8 but was not.

On December 17, the government of the incoming administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced that the minimum daily wage of 88.36 pesos (US\$4.62) would be doubled to 176.72 pesos in the northern maquila regions. The companies, which include Polytech, Dura, AFX Autoliv and Cedras de Mexico, claim that the increase does away with the need for the bonus, which is included in the collective bargaining agreement signed in January 2018.

During a demonstration on January 10 in front of the Dura Plant 3, workers practically ran off Armando Treviño Rivera, delegate of the state secretary of labor, who had come to ask them to return to the production lines. The workers were also told by the secretary general of the Union of Laborers and Industrial Workers of the Maquiladora Industry that he was

informed by government authorities that the union's 40,000 members had no right to an adjustment that they had anticipated that would have added 32,000 pesos (US\$1,670) to their annual pay.

Antiguan postal workers walk out over noxious and hazardous work environment

Some 200 workers at the General Post Office in St. John's, Antigua walked off the job January 12 to protest conditions in the building. Workers have walked out and protested intermittently over the last few months, but with recent heavy rainfall the problems have worsened.

Leaky roofs resulted in damaged mail as well as the need to shut off electricity due to exposed wiring that could cause short circuits or electrocution. Mold and dampness, which have been common complaints, have increased from the rains. Another complaint has been the poor lighting.

The General Post Office workers, huddled under umbrellas, demonstrated outside, carrying signs and chanting against not only conditions inside the building, but working conditions for letter carriers, including attacks by dogs and goats. In addition, according to an Antigua Observer report, "The workers used the strike opportunity to voice their concerns about other issues to include the \$105 per month for travel allowance and no risk allowance."

Workers from at least eight other branches have since joined the General Post Office workers in solidarity. They say they will not return to work until the problems are remedied.

Puerto Rican legal services lawyers strike, protest administration's refusal to sign agreement

Lawyers for the Union of Legal Services (UASL) in San Juan, Puerto Rico struck and demonstrated January 8 to protest the intransigence of Puerto Rico Legal Services (SLPR), which provides legal services to the poor, regarding the collective bargaining agreement, which expired in June.

The lawyers accuse the SLPR administration of contracting out work that should go to them, extending their workdays while reducing their incomes and reducing bonuses, "substantially decreasing our income; substitute[ing] bonuses

for ‘productivity bonuses’ that management in the future will determine the criteria for granting them; strips those unionized of all the rights negotiated in the collective agreement, including the reduction of holidays, sick leave and flexible hours: increase[ing] the hiring salary, without doing justice to the lawyers who already work for Legal Services, and reduc[ing] substantially the contribution to the medical plan.”

Peruvian contract mineworkers strike over working conditions

Contract workers at the Uchucchacua mine complex in Peru’s Oyón province began a strike January 9 against “unsuitable working conditions.” The striking mineworkers also mentioned unjustifiable firings as a reason for the walkout.

Uchucchacua, where silver, lead and zinc are extracted, is part of Buenaventura Mining Company, Inc., the largest publicly traded precious metals mining company in Peru with some 17 assets across the country.

Despite the mineworkers’ grievances, the Peruvian Labor Authority declared the strike illegal.

Argentina: Marches and protests against public service fee increases

Thousands of demonstrators marched in Buenos Aires January 10 against public service fees imposed by the government of president Mauricio Macri. The National Syndical Front, the CTA federations as well as social organizations participated in the action.

Protesters marched to the National Congress building to demand an end to the Macri administration’s austerity policies. Secretary general of the Truckers Syndicate Pablo Moyano and other union bureaucrats denounced Macri’s “policies of hunger and adjustment” and urged protesters to “transform this uproar into millions of votes in October so that the right never again returns to govern in Argentina,” without mentioning the anti-working-class policies of the previous Kirchnerista government.

Argentine Labor Ministry quashes planned strike by lifeguards

The Production and Labor Ministry of Argentina issued an order January 12 for binding arbitration—known as “obligatory conciliation”—to lifeguards in the city of Mar del Plata, forbidding them to carry out a strike planned for that day.

Two lifeguards’ unions had called for the stoppage at private beaches in Mar del Plata over their demand for a 40 percent salary raise. The Chamber of Resort, Restaurant and Related Businesses had refused to budge from its offer of 34 percent. The obligatory conciliation decree imposes a 15-day waiting period for negotiations.

City of Everett, Washington to use buyouts to eliminate jobs

The city of Everett, Washington announced it will go through with buyouts that will reduce the city’s workforce by 300 jobs. Everett, whose population is over 100,000 and has a city workforce of 1,200 employees, faces an \$11 million budget deficit that is expected to increase each year.

Democratic Mayor Cassie Franklin and the city council attempted to push through cuts in health care benefits last fall as the contract for members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) expired at the end of last year. But workers voted against any renegotiation of benefits. So the city and AFSCME have conspired to utilize the buyout to attain those ends.

Michael Rainey, an AFSCME official, called the buyouts “fair” and indicated that they aimed to eliminate workers at the higher end of the benefit scale. The buyouts are only available to about 330 of the 400 members of AFSCME.

Many cities, while forgoing taxes on corporations and the wealthy, rely on property tax increases to meet shortfalls. But Everett passed a resolution limiting property tax increases to 1 percent. In a mayoral directive toward the beginning of 2018, Mayor Franklin stated the city would target city positions for elimination, reduce health care benefits, seek to find alternative “service delivery models for major city departments” such as fire, transit, libraries, city parks and other community services.

Ontario grocery workers continue strike

Picket lines remain up at Baxtrom’s Independent Grocer in the town of Cornwall in eastern Ontario, with over 100 workers on strike for a living wage since November of last year when the employer left the bargaining table.

The striking workers, organized under the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW), are fighting for a raise above minimum wage, which they are currently paid despite having up to 25 years’ experience. Baxtrom’s, an independently operated franchise of grocery giant Loblaw Co. Ltd., has continued to operate with nonunion workers and strikers who have crossed the picket line to return to work since the strike began.

Contract talks broke down after the employer walked away from negotiations last year and has refused to return to bargaining or to communicate with UFCW negotiators.

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