

Workers Struggles: The Americas

1 May 2007

Latin America

Argentine teachers in Neuquén Province end two-month strike

Striking teachers in the Patagonian Province of Neuquén ended a 54-day walkout on April 28. The agreement was produced on Friday and would raise the starting wage of a teacher to 1,240 pesos a month (about US\$400). It was approved in a teachers' assembly despite a significant opposition vote.

Throughout the strike the teachers confronted vigilantism and police repression that led to the killing of a striking teacher. Last Tuesday, a government gang broke into the house of Marcelo Guagliardo, leader of the Association of Education Workers in Neuquén Province (ATEN). The gang kicked at doors and windows, terrorizing Guagliardo's young daughters and a woman that was taking care of them. Before they left they scattered leaflets on the property accusing the ATEN and Guagliardo of attempting to destabilize the province and to overthrow the Neuquén Governor Jorge Sobish.

Tensions increased after it was announced that the Neuquén Popular Movement (MPN,) which opposed the teachers, had taken over the school where Carlos Fuentalba's wife teaches. Fuentalba is the striking teacher that was killed by the Neuquén Police. ATEN leaders charged that the governor is responsible for both incidents and demanded an end to political violence.

Striking teachers in Santa Cruz Province, also part of the Patagonian region, were holding a return to work vote on Sunday, April 29. Teachers there have carried out several strikes since the beginning of the school year in March. In addition, teachers have rallied and protested in the Provincial Capital, Río Gallegos and across the region. Their base pay of 160 pesos a month is among the lowest for teachers in Argentina.

Bolivian public health employees launch strike

over wages

On April 26 public health workers walked off their jobs in Bolivian public hospitals. The strike affects the cities of La Paz, El Alto, Cochabamba, Oruro and Santa Cruz. The strikers are demanding that the government of President Evo Morales offer more than the six percent wage increase currently on the negotiating table. The government offer covers clerical personnel, paramedics, and public health nurses across Bolivia. In addition to their wage demands, the strikers call for the building of more hospitals and the hiring of 5,000 more public health workers. A government spokesman charged the strikers with "jeopardizing the health of poor people."

Peruvian miners to strike this week

Leaders of the largest miners union in Perú met with government representatives last Friday in a seemingly futile attempt to resolve the miners' demands and prevent a strike by the National Federation of Mine, Metal and Steelworkers over working conditions. Mining employs 110,000 workers in Perú, which is the world's third largest copper and zinc producer and a major producer of gold and silver. World copper prices went up last week in anticipation of the strike. Copper executives expressed hope that other mine unions will continue working and have warned that foreign capital will not enter Perú out of fear of labor instability.

United States

Montana construction workers strike

Construction workers from three unions walked off the job April 25 after an agreement failed to materialize with JTL Group. The Laborers Local 1686, Teamsters Local 190 and Operating Engineers Local 400 set up picket lines the following day at some eight construction sites around Billings, Montana. Overall, some 20 construction projects are affected.

The strike was triggered by company demands to increase the share workers pay for medical coverage. According to the Laborers union, deductibles had been

\$200 for single workers and \$600 for families. JTL's new proposal seeks to extract \$1,750 for individuals and \$3,500 for families. The unions believe that the current wage offers will not offset the added burden of healthcare costs.

The old agreement expired March 31. Two subsequent contract extensions and the intervention of a federal mediator failed to overcome differences. The current walkout is believed to be the first construction strike in the state since the 1970's.

Two Maryland miners killed in collapse

Two miners were killed when a 100-foot wall collapsed April 17 at an open pit coal mine near Barton, Maryland. The two workers, whose names were not immediately released, were buried under 45 feet of earth and rock at the Job No. 3 Mine, owned by Tri-Star Mining Inc.

Three days later, rescue workers discovered the two dead men, one in a backhoe and the other in a bulldozer. They are the sixth and seventh miners to die this year. Last year 47 miners died, a 210 percent increase over the previous year.

California teachers end strike

The 1,300 teachers of the Hayward School District near San Francisco voted by an 89 percent margin April 26 to end their 10-day strike after school negotiators agreed to an eight percent immediate pay raise this year followed by a three percent raise next year. Previously, district officials had been insisting on limiting wage increases to three percent and seven percent while teachers had wanted back-to-back eight percent raises. The new agreement also provides for a one percent bonus beginning on July 15.

The school district had filed an injunction earlier in the strike that sought to end the work stoppage. It will now be withdrawn.



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