

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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legislature reject the cut.

Argentina: Buenos Aires teachers protest

Public School teachers employed by the Province of Buenos Aires carried out a one-day protest strike last Thursday and plan a second one this Tuesday. The central issue over which they struck was wages.

Last week's walkout was the fifth since school began in March. A union spokesperson declared there was "total" participation among public school teachers and "massive" participation among private school teachers, a sign of the universality of the wage demand. The union has threatened escalation of the strikes if the province does not address the teachers' wage demands.

Buenos Aires Governor Daniel Scioli has taken a hard-line stance and declared that there will be no wage increase for teachers this year.

Argentine public health workers strike

Public health workers and doctors at 290 hospitals carried out a 24-hour strike on October 28. The protesters were demanding wage increases, better working conditions and the restitution of government funds for public health. In the City of Buenos Aires the strike lasted 48 hours.

Collectively, the 290 hospitals employ 50,000 doctors and health workers. A current draft of budget legislation for 2010 calls for a cut of 500 million pesos (US \$161 million) from the health budget, a 20 percent cut. The health workers are demanding that the

Mexico: Protests continue over utility's closure

The Mexican Electricians Union (SME) threatened last week to organize a national general strike to force President Felipe Calderón to reverse his decision to shut down Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro (LyFC) the electrical utility that used to produce and distribute electricity in Mexico City and the region that surrounds it.

This Thursday, November 5, the National Assembly of Popular Resistance, a coalition of labor, student and community organizations, linked to the bourgeois nationalist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the Labor Party (PT) will meet at the SME headquarters in Mexico City. The meeting may decide on a date for the national strike.

Chile: Copper strike escalates

Over 1,500 workers employed by subcontracting companies at the Minera Spence mine have threatened this week to join 560 striking workers employed directly by the company if management refuses to pay them for lost days as a result of the strike. The mine, owned by BHP Billiton, a transnational firm, was shut down by the strike three weeks ago.

The strike is widely seen as bell weather for negotiations at copper mines across Chile. Santiago stock market analysts have criticized a recent wage settlement at the Escondida mine, also owned by BHP for being too generous and for having raised the bar for

all the other mines including the Codelco mines. Codelco is Chile's giant state-owned copper corporation. Chile is the world's leading copper producer.

Chilean teachers continue strike

As Chilean teachers continue their two-week old strike Jaime Gallardo, president of the Chilean Professors' College (CP), accused the government of President Michelle Bachelet of decertifying and dividing the striking educators. The teachers launched their strike to demand payment of a so-called "historic debt"—funds owed to some 84,000 teachers since the days of the Pinochet dictatorship in 1981 when the government decentralized schools. The government does not recognize the existence of that obligation and has refused to negotiate with the teachers as long as the strike lasts.

Gallardo's words came in response to a declaration by government spokesperson Carolina Tohá suggesting that a recent decision to continue the strike was pushed through by the CP leaders and did not represent the rank and file sentiment.

Pennsylvania teachers return to work without contract

Teachers in Pennsylvania's Saucon Valley School District returned to work October 30, bringing a 12-day strike by the district's 190 instructors to a close. The return to work however, did not include a signed agreement and neither side has disclosed the content of recent talks.

The union and district negotiators concluded three days of bargaining that resulted in what has been called a "conceptual" understanding. The move avoids additional strike days that would have to be made up under law by the scheduling of classes on holidays. The two sides are to continue bargaining over issues that

involve differences of some \$600,000 to \$700,000.

The board had been pressing for a four-year contract with wage increases of 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8 percent while the union has been seeking annual increases of 3.9 percent. According to the school board a major sticking point has been the failure to agree upon rules governing reimbursements for teachers doing post-graduate work and the manner in which these should affect salaries.

McMaster University TAs on strike

Twenty-seven hundred teaching and research assistants at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, were on strike as of Monday morning after their union rejected the school's final offer.

A spokesperson for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) representing the strikers said that the terms contained in that offer were insufficient to present to the membership for a vote. Outstanding issues in the dispute include class sizes, benefits, pay scales for graduate teaching assistants and access to shifts for senior PhD students.

Although the school has announced that no classes will be cancelled, it has said that some schedules will have to be adjusted. The union has indicated that at the very least a number of tutorials and labs will be suspended.

A full day of mediated bargaining in advance of the strike announcement left the two sides far apart, and no new talks are currently scheduled.



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