

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Chilean teachers to continue strike

On November 12, the Chilean Teachers Association (CPC) decided to continue the national strike over the so-called “historic debt,” left over from 1981, under the Pinochet dictatorship, but denied by the current government.

By all appearances, the government intends to wear the strikers out. Government officials estimate that only 9 percent of teachers are currently on strike. The CPC estimate is that the true figure is 70 percent.

Chilean public employees strike for 72 hours

Chilean public employees returned to work last Thursday from a three-day strike over wages. The government workers had rejected a government offer for a 2.5 percent wage increase, demanding an 8 percent wage hike. On Wednesday, the legislature approved a 4.5 percent wage increase. The workers went back to work the next day.

According to the Association of Government Employees (ANEF), 450,000 workers participated in the walkout throughout Chile.

The three-day strike had an impact on overland trade, as mountain passes between the Mercosur block (Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina) and Chile were closed to truck traffic. More than 1,000 trucks were left stranded.

Buenos Aires airline workers protest

Last Thursday, employees of LAN airlines walked off their jobs, stranding flights at two of Argentina’s main airports. The federal government stepped in quickly, imposing mandatory conciliation. LAN is a domestic carrier in this southern nation.

The protest lasted nine hours and involved three of the seven trade unions representing LAN employees, including the powerful pilots’ union. At issue is an impasse in contract negotiations; they have been stalled for months. LAN management denounced the job action, claiming that the company had offered a one-year wage increase of 15 percent that, in its opinion, exceeds inflation.

Mexican electrical workers union threatens general strike over utility closure

Martín Esparza Flores, who leads the Mexican Electrician’s Union (SME), declared on Wednesday that a national strike of all Mexican workers will most likely take place this December.

The purpose of this national job action will be to repudiate the closure of Luz y Fuerza Centro, the electric utility company that provided electric service to Mexico City and Central México. Esparza indicated that a national strike would include peasant, student and community organizations. He also indicated that, were it to take place, such a strike would strengthen social movements across México.

Tens of thousands of workers took part in protests in Mexico City last week over the closure of the utility. Demonstrators protested outside government buildings and blocked main roads into the capital.

The SME is calling for the resignation of Labor Secretary Javier Lozano, whom it blames for initiating the shutdown measure. Esparza claims Lozano's resignation would help resolve other labor grievances across México.

Santa Catarina, Brazil: Public health strike

Public health employees in the State of Santa Catarina have been on strike since November 5. The 14,000 health workers are demanding a wage increase of 16.76 percent and an adjustment of 80.65 percent on food benefits.

The health care union is facing daily fines of R\$20,000. Last week, State Governor Ricardo Roesler threatened to increase the fine to R\$100,000. Union leaders plan to appeal the fines to the Supreme Court.

Workers strike at second San Francisco hotel

Some 350 workers at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco launched a three-day strike November 10 against attempts to impose future health care costs on the backs of workers. The strike follows a similar three-day strike by 300 workers at San Francisco's Grand Hyatt Union Square last week.

Contracts covering 6,000 San Francisco hotel workers represented by UNITE HERE Local 2 expired in August, and the union is conducting limited strike action. The major hotel chains want to cap monthly health care costs at \$1,235 per employee and impose all subsequent costs on the backs of workers. Workers have paid \$10 a month for health care coverage since 1972.

Starwood Hotels and Resorts, the parent company of the struck hotel, has amassed \$180 million in profits during the first nine months of 2009, and its stock price has risen 85 percent since the first of the year.

London, Ontario, transit on strike

Four hundred fifty transit workers in the southern Ontario city of London went on strike November 16 after contract talks ended, halting all bus service in this city of nearly half a million.

Amalgamated Transit Workers Union (ATU) Local 741, representing the striking drivers, had appealed to the city in advance of the strike to force the London Transit Commission (LTC) back into negotiations, but the city said it could not get involved. The union says it is only asking for wage increases commensurate with its counterparts in nearby regions as well as some improvements in benefits and staffing. The LTC says it does not have the money to meet union demands, despite a 10 percent fare increase in the last year.

The union had been at pains to avert a strike, taking only limited job action last month, but it was compelled to call the strike when talks failed. No new talks are currently scheduled.



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