

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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## Teachers' protests continue in Honduras as injuries and arrests increase

Honduran teachers and their supporters have continued their protests in Tegucigalpa and other cities over delays in salary payments to over 6,000 teachers, underfunding of the teachers' pension fund and an education reform law currently being discussed in Congress. Ostensibly crafted to decentralize operations and administration, teachers claim the law would lead to privatization and disempowerment of teachers.

Another factor in the demonstrations is continued popular opposition to the government of Porfirio Lobo, who took office in a fraudulent election following the coup that sent elected president Manuel Zelaya into exile. The assumption of office by Lobo shortly after Zelaya's ouster was never accepted by wide sectors of Honduran society, including the 7,000-member Federation of Educational Organizations (FOM), which called the strikes and protests in alliance with the National Popular Resistance Front (FNRP).

In the northern cities of San Pedro Sula and El Progreso, protests on March 23 were reported as peaceful. However, in the capital Tegucigalpa protesters clashed with police and the military. In another protest, 24 protesters were detained.

Secretariat of Security spokesman Leonel Saucedo claimed at a press conference that four soldiers—the number later lowered by police sources to three—were burned and hospitalized when protesters threw incendiary bombs. Riot police dispersed the crowd with

teargas and water blasts.

On Friday, March 25, around 5,000 FOM and FNRP members returned to the streets. Hundreds of police attacked protesters with tear gas and clubs near the Educators Pension Institute. Protesters fought back with rocks, and dozens were injured or affected by tear gas. At least two journalists of opposition Canal 36 were taken to the hospital.

FNRP spokesman Gerardo Torres told reporters, "At the emergency room of the Hospital Escuela, 22 people were brought in, the majority because they were suffering from asphyxiation. Another 13 were arrested by the police" when the teachers were fleeing from the fumes.

## Mexico: Teachers strike in Oaxaca over disappeared professor

Teachers in the state of Oaxaca struck for the second time during the administration of the state's governor, Gabino Cué, demanding the return of missing professor Carlos René Román Salazar.

"As part of the agreements of the state assembly of Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE), they also initiated from 8:00 in the morning more than 50 street blockades—about which they did not communicate to the state—with their neighbors Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla and Veracruz," according to a *Proceso* report.

The strike closed thousands of schools at all 11 educational levels, affecting more than 1,300,000 students. Traffic was snarled on major thoroughfares in the states' principal cities.

Section 22's executive committee stated that the blockades were only one means of pressure and that they would intensify if Román Salazar were not

presented alive. The professor, who contributed to alternative educational projects in the state, disappeared on March 14.

### **Bolivian miners strike**

Miners at the Bolivian San Cristóbal Mines (MSC) complex in Potosí struck the company, a subsidiary of the Japanese Sumitomo conglomerate, on March 23. Rafael Quispe, secretary general of the MSC miners' union, told *América Económica* that since Wednesday the union members were mobilized in the hope that company executives would carry on a dialogue and find solutions to the mineworkers' complaints.

Reportage on the strike has been scant and most of it has consisted of quotes from a company communiqué, in which MSC claims that the loss of royalties to the department of Potosí has been over US\$130,000 a day.

The communiqué further claimed that "the enterprise will study the technical, social and economic feasibility of improving and strengthening medical services in force...established by the National Health Fund (CNS) that MSC applies to attend to its workers."

The strike is taking place almost exactly a year after Potosí residents held protests and street blockades over environmental damage they said was caused by MSC's operations.

### **Minnesota bill aims at banning teacher strikes**

The Minnesota state Senate Education Committee began hearings last week on a bill that aims to take away the right to strike by teachers. The bill was passed by an 8-5 margin by a senate committee the previous week along party lines, with Republicans in the majority.

The bill was engineered by the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, which is comprised of 350 school superintendents. Should it pass, the bill would take effect in 2013. It would reclassify teachers as "essential" state employees,

similar to restrictions that bar firefighters from striking. It would also limit bargaining to the summer months.

The Senate has already passed another bill sponsored by Republican David Thompson that would impose a two-year wage freeze on school employees and bars them from striking. Minnesota Democratic Governor Mark Dayton has indicated he opposes arbitrary wage freezes on public bargaining units that have recently agreed to concessions, indicating he prefers working through the labor bureaucracy to impose attacks on workers.

### **Toronto car rental workers take strike action**

Ninety-five workers employed by National Car Rental at Toronto's Pearson International Airport are on strike against demands for deep concessions from the company that workers voted down in a meeting held on March 10.

Picket lines were set up at two terminals at the airport last week to inform the public that the company is threatening to contract out work unless the workers grant \$2 million in concessions. The union says that the demands presented in the latest contract offer would mean wage cuts of up to \$4.50 an hour, making them the lowest paid workers in the industry. The company is also demanding a reduction in sick days and holidays and to transfer the full cost of health and welfare benefits to workers.



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