

Workers Struggles: The Americas

7 June 2011

Argentinean long distance bus drivers stop work over failed salary talks

Long distance bus drivers in the Argentinean province of Mendoza suspended service June 1 when negotiations with management broke down over salary demands. The walkout stopped scheduled trips by the Andesmar, Cata, Sendas, Tramat y El Rápido companies when negotiations failed to reach agreement on a 23 percent raise demanded by the drivers. The current average monthly wage for the drivers is 3,800 pesos (US\$929).

Passengers were redirected to other bus companies or given refunds.

Rodolfo Calcagni, head of the Sipemon micro- and omnibus drivers' union, told *Los Andes* that during the morning a conciliation hearing, in which they were seeking to close the salary deal, broke down, impelling the stoppage that afternoon.

Calcagni assured Radio Nihuil, "We're not obstructing the departure of any vehicle; the drivers simply are not coming out because there is one reality: the businessmen do not want to pay what corresponds and they are pressuring us and they don't give us time to rest."

Sixth week for teachers strike in southern Argentina

A strike begun by teachers in Argentina's southern province of Santa Cruz completed 42 days on Friday, June 3. Pickets and roadblocks have slowed production in the area's petroleum refineries and snarled traffic in Río Gallegos, Santa Cruz, Caleta Olivia and other cities. On Thursday a group of teachers, members of the Adosac and AMET unions, occupied a government office in Río Gallegos.

The teachers are demanding a raise of 50 percent to keep pace with the country's inflation rate. Authorities have continued to reject the demand and have attempted a number of measures to cut the strike short: declaring binding arbitration on May 2, which the teachers refused; leveling of fines upon striking teachers and upon the unions; punitive measures for "disobedience"; the bringing in of "substitutes."

The Provincial Education Council (CPE) has threatened to declare the strike "illegal" and has appealed to the courts to force the teachers back to work.

Santa Cruz is not the only province where teachers are engaged in protest actions. The CTA labor federation called a national stoppage on Wednesday, which was supported by Buenos Aires' SUTEBA teachers union, and resulted in the closing of the National Southern University as well as public schools in Bahía Blanca, south of Buenos Aires.

Brazilian railroad workers strike over salary demand

Employees for São Paulo's Paulista Metropolitan Train Company (CPTM) struck on June 2 to pressure authorities to comply with their salary demand. A CPTM communiqué noted that three of the four unions that represent rail workers have struck six train lines, expanding on a partial walkout on June 1.

Eighty-nine stations in the metropolitan region were closed, affecting some 2.4 million commuters. The rail workers want a raise of 5 percent, while CPTM representatives are offering a mere 3.7 percent.

Chilean mineworkers return to work after three-day strike

Workers at the Chilean molybdenum mine complex Molybmet returned to work Thursday, June 2 after a strike called on Monday in rejection of the company's collective contract proposal.

Molybdenum is found mostly as a byproduct of copper and is used to strengthen steel. Molybmet is the world's main producer of molybdenum.

A company statement issued on June 1 stated, "The union...and the enterprise have signed a new contract that will regulate common working conditions and remuneration for a period of four years." No other details were forthcoming.

Mexican teachers protest in Michoacán, then Mexico City

Angered over authorities' rejection of their wage proposal and continued delays in remuneration, teachers in the Mexican state of Michoacán initiated an indefinite strike on May 31. The educators, members of CNTE (National Education Workers Confederation) section 18, held a massive demonstration that day in the state capital Morelia.

CNTE and the State Secretariat of Education (SEE) differed on the amount of compliance with the strike, with the latter claiming that only 19 percent of the state's schools were shut down, affecting 200,000 students, not one million as claimed by CNTE. Nonetheless, SEE head Graciela Andrade admitted that 36 percent of schools were in a state of partial strike, and that the actions would escalate if the federal government did not commit to dialogue with union reps.

Andrade called on the government to "solidarize" with the teachers and attend to the delays in payments, from which 70 percent of teachers are suffering. The federal government owes the state 1.4 billion pesos (US\$120 million) in education funding.

After the demonstration in Morelia, a contingent of 700 teachers formed a caravan of around 200 vehicles that traveled 240 kilometers to Mexico City. Traffic was temporarily paralyzed on a number of main thoroughfares as the caravan proceeded through the city until being

stopped by police barriers near the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) headquarters. A delegation delivered petitions to the Interior Department.

48-hour strike by Venezuelan university professors

A 48-hour strike by professors at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) “was completed with total normality,” according to Héctor Moreno, director of the Association of University Professors of the Central University of Venezuela (APUCV). Moreno told *El Universal* that the goal of the strike was to get the Higher Education Ministry’s attention so that it would continue discussions and keep reviewing university professors’ labor rights.

According to a *PressTV* report, “Pro-government students dismiss their peers’ demands for higher salaries or university budgets.” The report cites Tibusay Hung, Deputy Director of the Office of Planning of Universities, who pointed out that teachers have seen a rise in their salaries up to 40 percent. Teachers counter that the rise is illegal, being imposed without their consent and after a two-year delay.

A number of other universities held parallel strikes. The limited strike actions will continue, according to Moreno, until June 16, when an APUCV assembly will discuss and decide on further actions. “We do not discount total paralyzation.”

Negotiations between Jamaican public sector unions, government at stalemate

On June 2, representatives of four Jamaican public sector unions left contract negotiations after rejecting the government’s latest proposal. The main issues concern raises and retroactive payments going back to 2009.

The government’s proposal would begin the retroactive payments in 2013 and end them in 2019. In addition, according to the *Jamica Observer*, “The position calls for the seven percent increase owed from the 2008-2010 contract to be paid starting in September this year.”

The proposal was rejected by the Jamaica Teachers’ Association (JTA), the Jamaica Medical Doctors Association (JMDA), the Nurses Association of Jamaica (NAJ), and five groups representing the police. A joint statement expressed “profound disappointment with the latest position as enunciated by the state minister at the meeting today.”

In a press conference, NAJ President Anthonette Patterson described the mood of the public sector workers as “disgruntled, frustrated, demotivated, burnt-out and almost hopeless.” Raymond Wilson, chairman of the Police Federation, complained of officers working up to 72 hours per week, and called the unions’ counterproposal “reasonable,” considering the nation’s economic difficulties.

Union officials expressed the hope that the public would support their demands. They did not, however, say what action, if any, they would take, only saying that they would discuss it with the membership. “Patterson said the groups were open to further discussions with the Government before they move into any form of action,” according to the *Jamaica Gleaner*.

The talks have coincided with Prime Minister Bruce Golding’s budget presentation in the Jamaican parliament. On Monday, Golding announced that 10,000 public sector workers would be laid off over a five-year period as part of a plan to make the public sector more “cost effective.”

Kansas City pipefitters strike over threat to pensions and benefits

Pipefitters at several major construction sites in the Kansas City, Missouri, area went on strike June 1 as the old contract expired and the union was unable to come to an agreement with the Mechanical Contractors Association (MCA) over proposed changes that will affect pension and benefit plans. Work ground to a halt on projects such as the Hollywood Casino, the University of Kansas Hospital, the Western Missouri Medical Center, the Honeywell nuclear weapons parts plant, John Deere and other sites.

Currently no talks are being held, and it is reported that workers from other construction trades are honoring picket lines set up by Pipefitters Local 533, which represents some 1,600 retirees and actively working members and has not struck since 1967.

The Mechanical Contractors Association Executive Director Bob Looman revealed that the contractors want language in the contract that the union pension will be fully funded by June 1, 2018, in order that the MCA isn’t “stuck with unfunded liability.” To arrive at this the contractors are seeking to increase the burden on workers of funding pensions and health care benefits.

St. Louis bricklayers go on strike

About 1,000 St. Louis-area bricklayers went on strike June 1 after their union and the Mason Contractors Association (MCA) failed to come to an agreement as the old five-year agreement came to an end. No details on the differences were made available, but the MCA declared that any new agreement must “reflect the current realities of the market place. This means the mason industry needs to be flexible to compete with other materials, trades and non-union contractors.”

The MCA, which represents 114 contractors, indicated that part of the new reality is that union contractors are a minority among companies in the building industry of today. Bricklayers Local 1 business manager Don Brown told the media, “We have no desire to shut down the construction industry so there will be no blanket picketing of construction jobs. Bricklayers will only picket those projects where someone else tries to do our work.”

The two sides had engaged in three weeks of contract talks up until May 27. The last attempt to hold a discussion on May 31 lasted only five minutes. No new talks have been scheduled.

Rolling strikes continue at Canada Post

Amid a concerted media campaign to raise alarm over a possible disruption to national postal service, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) continues to pursue a toothless strategy of rolling strikes one city at a time beginning with a one-day walk out in Winnipeg last week and a weekend strike by 1,350 postal workers in Hamilton, Ontario.

While Canada’s business elite appear intent on a confrontation with the 48,000 postal workers now in a legal strike position, the CUPW has made it clear it wants to avoid a showdown at all costs.

Canada Post is demanding broad concessions in a new contract and is offering wage increases below the rate of inflation. The union has already indicated agreement to some concessions on two-tiered wage and benefit

provisions for new hires and, despite an overwhelming strike mandate from their members, have clearly stated that they want to limit job action to the current strategy of rolling strikes.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact