

Workers Struggles: The Americas

21 June 2011

Chile: Tens of thousands of students and university professors march in Santiago

On June 16, more than 70,000 university professors, students and their supporters marched through Santiago's Alameda Boulevard demanding the nationalization of for-profit universities in Chile.

The demonstrators are demanding an end to the legacy of the Pinochet regime, which privatized much of Chile's higher education. About two thirds of Chile's university students attend private for-profit universities.

Protests also took place in Valparaiso, Concepción and other Chilean cities.

The one-day strike and mobilization took place one day after thousands of secondary school students marched, demanding more resources for public education and for the repair of schools, many of which were badly damaged by the earthquake of February 27, 2010. Santiago police repressed that demonstration. About 57 students were arrested.

Protest by striking Chilean copper workers

On Friday, June 17, 1,000 striking contingent workers, employed by subcontractors at the massive El Teniente copper mine in northern Chile, marched in the city of Rancagua to press their wage demands. The underground mine employs 11,000 contingent workers in addition to 4,000 miners employed at the facility directly by CODELCO, Chile's national copper company.

The miners are on the fourth week of their strike.

Argentine teachers strike enters its eighth week

The strike by teachers in the Patagonian oil-producing province of Santa Cruz in southern Argentina has entered its eighth week and there is no end in sight.

The teachers' demands for a 50 percent wage increase to make up for the loss of real wages from ongoing inflation has met no response from the Santa Cruz government or from federal authorities, both caught up in electoral politics.

Meanwhile, angry parents, demanding that the schools re-open, have blocked the roads that lead to the oil fields in Caleta Oliva and Río Turbio. At the same time, their children have occupied some 50 schools and union headquarters in the city of Santa Cruz.

Strike at San Nicolás de Hidalgo Michoacán University in the state of Michoacán, Mexico

Education workers at San Nicolás de Hidalgo Michoacán University went on strike last Thursday. The striking educators accuse university authorities of contract violations and of interfering with the internal life of the union that represents them. Two thousand educators are occupying the university and several satellite campuses.

San Nicolás de Hidalgo educates 57,000 graduate and undergraduate students.

Strikes by elementary and secondary teachers are also taking place in Michoacán and in Tabasco.

Chicago hotel workers strike

More than 600 workers at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in

Chicago staged a one-day strike June 20 over working conditions and pay. The housekeepers, bellmen, dishwashers and other workers have been without a contract since August 31, 2009.

Workers at the 2,000-room Hyatt Regency are members of Unite Here Local 1. A spokesperson for the union said, "The two big things we're stuck on right now are subcontracting and working conditions for housekeepers, which has been a major concern." The union says housekeeping work can lead to dangerous and debilitating injuries. Local 1 is the bargaining agent for some 1,800 Hyatt workers in the Chicago area.

The walkout is the latest in a series of protests. In September the union conducted a one-day walkout at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare and in May 2010, 100 housekeepers at the Hyatt Regency Chicago staged an informal walkout over working conditions.

Unions reach tentative agreement with General Electric

The Communications Workers of American (CWA) and the International Union of Electronic Workers (IUE) have reached a tentative contract deal with General Electric containing significant concessions. The contracts cover some 15,200 GE workers in the United States.

Under terms of the proposed agreements workers' health care costs will rise by 2.5 percent. The contract also creates an inferior 401(k) retirement plan for new hires in place of a defined benefit pension. Workers will receive a \$5,000 cash payment in July and wage increases of 2.25 percent in 2012 and 2014 and 3 percent in 2014.

The contract also contains early retirement incentives.

The current contract expired midnight, June 19, but negotiations continued under a 10-day extension. Workers must still vote on the tentative agreement.

Agreements covering 4,000 other unionized employees are being negotiated at the plant level. GE has some 133,000 employees in the US.

Aerospace Workers (IAMAW) gave strike notice effective June 20 to Finning International units in British Columbia and Yukon. Finning is the largest dealer of Caterpillar equipment, with operations in western Canada, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, Ireland and Great Britain.

The previous contract agreement between the IAMAW and Finning expired April 14. The IAMAW is the bargaining agent for 700 hourly Finning parts and service workers in BC and Yukon. The company's operations in Alberta and the Northwest Territories are covered by a separate agreement and will not be affected.

Saskatchewan health care workers continue rotating strikes

Some 300 health care workers in four Saskatchewan cities walked off the job June 20, as rotating strikes by the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan enter their seventh week.

Workers in Regina, Moose Jaw, North Battleford and Prince Albert walked out to protest lack of progress in contract talks that have gone on for 27 months. HSAS is the bargaining agent for 3,000 health care workers in the province. It has called for binding arbitration to settle the dispute.

HSAS did not say how long the workers will remain on strike. The union is calling for a wage increase of 14.5 percent over four years. The Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations has offered a 7.5 percent increase with what it calls market-based increases for about 85 percent of employees.



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Strike notice given at Finning International

The International Association of Machinists and