

Workers Struggles: The Americas

30 August 2011

Argentinean teachers strike, march on provincial legislature over retirement demands

More than 2,500 teachers—members of the Amsafe, Sadop and Uda educators unions—from across the Argentine province of Santa Fe demonstrated in front of the provincial legislature August 25. The march and rally were part of a 48-hour strike called to highlight their demand for the lowering of the retirement age for teachers.

The media estimated adherence to the strike at 100 percent in public schools and 85 percent in private institutions.

The demonstrators called for a meeting with the provincial governor, Hermes Binner, who has claimed that the lowering of the retirement age would be a budget buster, a charge that union officials deny. The unions already have authorization from the members to carry out another 48-hour stoppage.

Petrol workers launch strike in southern Argentina

Petroleum workers in southern Argentina's Patagonia province announced an indeterminate strike August 26 as a response to ongoing internal union conflicts. The workers, in assemblies in Pico Truncado, Caleta Olivia and Rio Gallegos, voted for the strike to demand "the cessation of intervention in the union and the urgent convocation of elections."

This recent strike call is a sign that the struggle between different factions of the union bureaucracy that came to a head last April—involving strikes, blockades, occupations of plants and union local headquarters, a judicial order and finally intervention by the union federation and Labor Ministry—is still unsettled.

Lack of uniformity to the strike call highlighted divisions as well. In Punta Loyola, workers occupied the plant, paralyzing production, while in Las Heras workers were limited to a picket of a crude oil storage facility without impeding traffic in and out.

In anticipation of announced plans to blockade major roads, hundreds of police—principally from localities in the northern zone and from Rio Gallegos, and acting on orders from police headquarters—were sent to various chokepoints to "dissuade" striking workers from blockading and dislodge them if they tried. There were no reports of arrests or injuries as of Saturday.

A local delegate told *Diario Patagónico* that Zona Norte police and the union had arrived at an agreement whereby the workers were permitted to remain in the road only to "solicit adhesions of

other comrades who were going to their work sites. Basically, they were asked to sign a note directed to the national Labor Ministry asking that they urge the Argentina Federation of Private Petroleum and Gas to call a general assembly through the interveners, with the goal of convoking members to an electoral meeting, the first step toward the normalization of the union."

Strike at Brazilian sports stadium ended

Workers at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana Stadium refurbishing project voted to return to the job six days after walking out over an explosion that injured a worker on August 17. The decision was taken in an assembly on August 22 after several days of negotiation between the unions and management.

Although the walkout of some 2,000 construction workers had been sparked by the explosion of an oil barrel with chemical residue, the workers added other demands to that of improved safety: an increase in the current monthly financial aid allotment for basic foodstuffs, from 110 reais (US\$69) to 300 (US\$187) and health insurance for themselves and their families from the consortium that has the remodeling contract.

The consortium agreed to the demands for improved safety and pay, but only agreed to provide health care for the workers. A union official told Reuters "we're going to look into the possibility of extending it to their families."

Dominican Republic: Teachers strike over delayed raises

Several hundred teachers in the Dominican Republic's Espaillat province went out on strike on August 22 over delays in payment of raises, health insurance and other issues. The educators are members of the Dominican Professors Association (ADP).

Local ADP spokesman professor Alejandro Perez told *El Nuevo Diario* that teachers earn between 8,000 and 10,000 pesos (US\$211-264) regardless of professional level, and that "much less resolves the economic and social necessities of the claimants."

He added that there are other demands to resolve, but until now, educational authorities "have only stayed with promises and have not of the commitments assumed with the teachers union."

Strike at Haitian hospital in seventh week

The medical staff at the State University Hospital of Haiti (HUEH) in Port-au-Prince has been on indefinite strike since July 6. The medical workers accuse the hospital administrators of mismanagement and a “dysfunctional” emergency room. They demand back wages, better working conditions and the removal of the directorate.

On August 24, a group of about 25 workers blockaded the front gate with chairs and bricks, blocking patients from entering.

A statement by the hospital unions asserts “we have no personal problem with anyone, we have problems with the way the administration manages the hospital, it takes it as a private good, we say that this can not remain as a private good, it is a good of the State...”

The administration claims that the budget will not allow the raises.

Pennsylvania legislatures hold hearing to promote attack on teachers’ right to strike

A public hearing of the Pennsylvania House Education Committee called for stiff penalties against teachers’ strikes as a new bill is being considered by the committee. The new legislation, sponsored by Republican state representative Todd Rock calls for docking teachers two days of pay for every day on strike, a fine of \$5,000 against the union, and the forfeiting of the union’s dues check-off provision for a year.

Rock claimed Pennsylvania was the “strike capital of the nation” with 94 teachers’ strikes in the past decade and claims the legislation would “restore every student’s legal right to an uninterrupted education.”

The overwhelming majority of the witnesses testified in support of the attack on teachers. Only Jerry Oleksiak, vice president of the Pennsylvania Education Association spoke against the measures. The American Federation of Teachers did not attend.

The hearing was held at Neshaminy High School where the AFT represents 700 teachers who have been without a contract for three years and have not seen a pay raise since 2007. Back in June, the Neshaminy Federation of Teachers voted overwhelming to authorize a strike against the local school district.

New York restaurant workers strike over anti-union harassment

Some 60 hospitality workers at the Central Park Boathouse Restaurant walked off the job August 9 to protest abuses by restaurant management. Employees charge owner Dean Poll with breaking federal labor law by using a campaign of harassment,

intimidation and firings to block workers for unionizing with the Hotel Trades Council.

The Hotel Trades Council filed a suit with the National Labor Relations Board back in February. The NLRB is still investigating some 10 complaints against Poll.

Strike at New Brunswick airport

Twenty-five support workers at the Saint John airport in New Brunswick went on strike early last week after working without a contract for nearly three years.

The workers, who are represented by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), include firefighters as well as clerical and maintenance staff. While the union has not made public the issues involved in the strike, they have said that some workers remain on the job to maintain essential services.

Management has said that there will be no disruption to schedules or activity at the airport as a result of the strike, but the union has warned that this may not be the case if the strike continues for any time.

Office workers strike at Quebec university

Office staff at the Université de Sherbrooke east of Montreal went on strike August 24 as part of a longstanding impasse in contract negotiations which has seen some workers without a contract for over five years.

The 40 workers currently on strike are employed at the Registrar’s office at the university, but hundreds of other workers, including other support staff and researchers, have been in negotiations for several years. According to the union representing workers, the Syndicat des employées et employés de soutien de l’Université de Sherbrooke (SEESUS-CUPE), the main issue in the dispute is over wages which have not kept pace with the cost of living.

At the same time, union leaders make clear that they do not wish to disrupt the start of the new school year. In October of last year over 1,400 workers at the school voted in favor of strike action but the union has so far only staged limited job actions such as one-day strikes.



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