

Workers Struggles: The Americas

13 September 2011

Uruguayan teachers hold nationwide 24-hour strike

Teachers across Uruguay, members of the CSEU teachers' federation, held a one-day strike on September 7 to demand more resources and to protest the bad condition of schools. The teachers' demands included an across-the-board salary hike, the defense of public education, an end to casualization and the creation of more positions.

The teachers demand that improvements in the crumbling school infrastructure be financed through the apportionment of six percent of the gross national product to the education sector.

The stoppage covered all public education nationwide and was embraced by teachers unions such as the Uruguayan Teachers Federation, the Secondary Professors Association, the Association of Secondary Education Workers, the University Docents Association and others.

Students joined the educators, who gathered at the esplanade of the University of the Republic in Montevideo. From there they marched to the Legislative Palace, where the Uruguayan Parliament meets.

One-day strike by Chilean television workers

Workers at the Chilevisión television channel voted to return to work Thursday September 8 after walking out over wages and conditions. By a vote of 397 to 178, with one abstention, the workers, members of Chilevisión Syndicates 1 and 2, accepted management's offer and ended the strike that had begun at midnight.

The employees had rejected a previous offer as unsatisfactory, one that "trickles a little to the Chilevisión workers," Syndicate 1 president Marcelo Figueroa told *La Tercera* Thursday. Figueroa complained that the channel had profited by millions and "I believe that many years have passed that the workers haven't seen it and have been neglected like a number."

The contract will be in effect for three years and includes a raise of 60,000 pesos (US\$128) and a bonus of 1.8 million pesos (US\$3,832) for ending the strike. In 2012 and 2013, they will receive raises of 200,000 and 30,000 (US\$425 and \$64)

respectively.

Two-day strike at Peruvian copper mine

Some 1,200 mineworkers at the Cerro Verde mining complex in southern Peru's Arequipa region struck for two days beginning September 7. The miners' primary demand was for an improvement in wages.

William Camacho, director of the miners union, pointed out to Reuters, "What we have seen initially is the non-compliance with the average prevailing [salary] revision clause. Our clause is very clear and indicates that the Cerro Verde workers' wages should be the average of the wages of the mining industry nationwide," which he maintained Cerro Verde was underestimating.

Cerro Verde, controlled by the Freeport-McMoRan copper and gold conglomerate, accounts for about 2 percent of world copper production, producing 170 million tons in the second quarter of this year.

The firm immediately hired 400 contract workers to counteract the strike's effect.

The miners returned to work on September 9 with no resolution. Union and company negotiators met that day to attempt to head off an indefinite strike called for September 10. Leoncio Amudio, president of the union, told reporters, "Sincerely, in my personal opinion, I don't think there is going to be a solution," since the positions of the company and the union are far apart.

Honduran teachers strike to protest delays in payment of salaries

On Monday, September 5, about 30,000 public school teachers in Honduras went on strike over delays in payments of their salaries. The strike encompassed about half of the nation's public school teachers in 298 municipalities, and follows on the heels of five weeks of street protests against an education law promoted by the government.

Education minister Alejandro Ventura claimed that the delay in delivery of the August paychecks was due to errors in names, but that the problem was being resolved.

The strike is the latest in an ongoing series of conflicts between teachers and the Porfirio Lobo government, which was installed following the 2009 coup against president Manuel Zelaya.

Mexican public transport bus drivers strike

Public transit bus drivers in the Mexican city of Aguascalientes in the state of the same name struck on September 9. The drivers accuse the president of the Oriente bus line, Sergio Gómez, of refusing to recognize their union and of rejecting any attempt at dialogue with the workers.

Drivers of about 50 buses stopped work and convened an assembly at the headquarters of the Federation of Aguascalientes Workers (FTA-CTM) headed by CTM director Roberto Mora Márquez. Márquez told reporters that the strike was a response to the “intransigent and despotic” attitude that Gómez had shown the drivers, whom he insults and humiliates constantly.

Michigan Red Cross workers strike

Red Cross workers from units that serve 65 counties in the state of Michigan went on strike September 7 to protest negotiations that have left them without a contract for three years. Among the issues that separate the two sides is Red Cross management’s drive to raise workers’ portion of insurance costs from the current 10 percent through increased co-pays and deductibles.

Red Cross workers are also opposed to changes in the contract that would no longer require a registered nurse on site during blood collection drives, something the Office and Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU) and the Teamsters claim could endanger donor safety. An administrative law judge has also found the Red Cross guilty of unfair labor practices involving the unilateral alteration of attendance policy, elimination of a pension plan and making changes to the health insurance and 401(k) insurance plans without bargaining with the union.

The strike covers most Red Cross workers, with the exception of those in Detroit. The OPEIU says strikes in other states will follow the Michigan strike.

Hyatt workers strike over contractual language aimed at expanding union representation

Hotel workers walked off the job September 8 in a weeklong strike against Hyatt hotels in Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Honolulu. UNITE HERE, which represents the striking workers, is seeking a change in contract language that will allow the union to strike on behalf of non-union workers at other branches of the Hyatt chain of hotels.

Hyatt and the union have already come to agreement on economic terms earlier this year. But the union claims Hyatt is the “the most abusive employer in the industry,” citing a high injury rate, heavy workloads and the company’s “aggressive outsourcing” that has led to workers being paid minimum wages and no benefits. The union wants the right “to take on Hyatt wherever these abuses occur.”

Job actions widen at Montreal universities

Alongside the ongoing strike by 1,700 staff at McGill University, 60 skilled trades workers at Concordia University in Montreal stage a one-day strike last Wednesday which their union, Le Syndicat Canadien des officiers de marine marchande (SCOMM-SGW), called a “day of reflection”.

Plumbers, electricians and other trades people at Concordia have been without a contract for over three years. This is the first job action that has been launched by their union despite a membership vote last spring for strike action.

Workers are fighting demands for cuts by school negotiators and for wage parity with trades at other schools which the union says are \$2 to \$4 an hour higher than at Concordia.



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