

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 November 2011

Argentine teachers strike, petition legislature

Teachers in central Argentina's Cordoba province struck for 24 hours on November 23 in opposition to several parts of the government's 2012 budget. The educators, members of the Cordoba Province Educators Union (UEPC) and the Argentine Private Educators Syndicate (SADOP), took their protest to the legislature, where they demonstrated and handed over a petition.

A union delegate told *La Voz del Interior*, "Compliance with the action in the entire province was around 98 percent."

One of the main issues is the budget's provision of a non-accumulative salary increase of 12 percent for next year, which teachers consider insufficient to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Also, the unions claim funding has not been delivered for the 35 percent of the provincial budget that was slated for education.

Additionally, the educators are demanding that recently elected provincial governor Jose Manuel De la Sota fulfill his campaign promise to subsidize education. The teachers' unions maintain that the amount currently projected will have to triple due to future increases in the number of students.

The actions come near the end of the school year, with secondary schools closing on December 7 and elementary schools on December 16. UEPC director Juan Monserrat, who noted that the actions were "tardy," called them "a warning that in the coming year we are going to begin with conflict." He told *Canal Doce* that he does not believe there will be any more actions in the coming days.

Costa Rican doctors join striking anesthesiologists after firings

Some 200 medical doctors have joined about 80 anesthesiologists in a strike affecting 10 public hospitals in Costa Rica. On November 25, the ninth day of the strike, the CCSS social security agency fired two striking anesthesiologists at the San Juan de Dios and Mexico hospitals. The firings followed a declaration of illegality issued by the San Jose Second Circuit Court. A spokesperson for the CCSS board of directors announced that it was preparing to fire more striking doctors.

On November 23, the prosecutor's office charged 12 anesthesiologists from Hospital San Juan de Dios with disobeying an official Health Ministry order to return to work. *Tico Times*

reported, "If convicted, they face up to a year in jail. Charges could also be filed against 88 additional anesthesiologists."

The anesthesiologists had already held a one-day stoppage on November 8 over stalemated negotiations. Primary issues are pay, working conditions, vacation time and rest breaks. The negotiations with the CCSS have been ongoing for months.

It is possible that the strike will spread. *Inside Costa Rica* reported, "While the doctors strike, the Asociacion Nacional de Empleados Publicos y Privados (ANEP), one of Costa Rica's largest public workers unions, is calling for a general strike by all public sector employees."

Honduran health workers strike over pay delay

On November 24, Honduran minister of health Raúl Matamoros declared illegal a strike by employees at Gabriela Alvarado Hospital in the municipality of Danli, El Paraiso. The workers walked out over delays in payments of their salaries.

"The minister of health, Arturo Bendaña, has already promised that the situation was going to normalize; in fact, yesterday he authorized the hospital pay schedule," Matamoros assured reporters.

Workers in the Honduran public sector have had many experiences with pay delays, followed by promises that were not kept once they returned to work. Thus, they are taking a "seeing is believing" approach. As of November 25, the workers maintained their strike.

Matamoros professed perplexity at the continued stoppage and threatened the workers with "corrective actions," exclaiming, "The health of the Honduran people can't be played with."

Mexican public workers end takeover of government building

Municipal workers in the city of Venustiano Carranza in the Mexican state of Michoacan, who took over the city's municipal palace November 23 over salary delays, ended their strike and occupation on November 27 after receiving assurances that the money would be paid on Monday, November 28.

The strike/occupation was precipitated by the nonpayment of wages for the last two *quincenas* (15-day pay periods) in

November. Participants included sanitation and grounds maintenance workers. About 30 police officers joined the occupation, surrounding the building and blocking entry.

The city treasurer had tried to persuade the protesters that the building had to be cleared so that he could check financial records to facilitate the payments, but his request was rejected. Similarly, an attempt by city councilor Hugo Mejía Zepeda, using union bureaucrat Francisco Sánchez Mancilla as a go-between, was rebuffed. The police demanded to meet with Mejía Zepeda face to face.

As *Cambio de Michoacan* reported, “It bears emphasis that it was not until Friday [November 25] afternoon that the councilor Hugo Mejía Zepeda showed his face in the city administration headquarters to attempt to untangle the conflict.” Mejía Zepeda handed over two checks each to the police officers and promised that the rest of the payments—for about 20 other municipal workers—would be made on Monday.

City officials blamed the delays on the federal government, which they claimed had held back resources from the state government. The workers’ demand that payment of the end-of-year bonus, or *aguinaldo*, be made ahead of schedule was refused.

Strike at Kansas City Honeywell plant ends with concessions

Production workers at the Honeywell Federal Manufacturing and Technologies LLC plant in Kansas City, Missouri, ratified a new contract, bringing the 42-day strike by 840 machinists to an end. The vote, characterized as overwhelming by the International Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 778, approved a new two-tier wage system that will place all future hires in a substandard tier below current employees.

The agreement is inferior to the contract originally rejected by workers, which offered a 13.5 percent wage increase over the course of a six-year agreement. The new contract only provides an 11 percent wage hike and includes the original proposal that requires workers to bear a larger portion of health care costs.

The acceptance of the new agreement was due to the isolation of the strike by the IAM and threats by the company to hire hundreds of replacement workers. According to Honeywell, 82 union workers crossed the picket line as the strike dragged on.

Unionbusting at Indiana limestone mill as strike nears two-week mark

Workers at the Indiana Limestone Company in Oolitic, Indiana, are closing in on their second week on strike with no new talks scheduled. Members of Millworkers Local 8093 rejected a new three-year agreement on November 16 that froze wages in the first year, with only 50 cent and 15 cent hourly increases in years two and three.

However, alongside these meager wage increases, the company is demanding that workers pay all future increases in pension and insurance costs. In addition, new contract language will impact seniority rights, sick days, time off and attendance provisions.

The pressure for deep concessions comes on the heels of the 2010 acquisition of Limestone Company by the Cleveland-based private equity firm Resilience Capital Partners.

Sudbury health workers strike

Eighty-three full- and part-time mental health workers in Sudbury, Ontario, went on strike last week following an overwhelming vote in favor of strike action after working without a contract since last April.

The strikers, members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), work in front-line care at the Sudbury Child and Family Care centre delivering counseling and other services to schools and homes throughout the region.

Despite months of negotiations, as well as conciliation and mediated talks, outstanding issues in the dispute include job security and shift work. No talks are currently scheduled between OPSEU and the centre, which is funded by the provincial government.

Maritime bus workers set to strike

Bus drivers, mechanics and other unionized workers at Acadia Lines, which provides inter-city bus service between the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, delivered notice last week after a near-unanimous vote in favor of strike action.

The 59 workers, who are represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union, have been without a contract for more than 10 months, and contract talks have been stalled since the end of October. Though few details are available, the company is reportedly demanding a five-year wage freeze while the union is only asking for cost-of-living increases.



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