

Workers Struggles: The Americas

28 February 2012

Argentine teachers unions call for limited strikes over salaries

With Argentina's academic year beginning February 28, teachers across the nation are being called to strike in demand of higher salaries than their provincial governments have offered in parity talks. The strikes in the various regions are of a limited nature, and most fit a pattern of 48 hours this week, with another 48 next week, barring any movement toward an agreement.

In the Buenos Aires area, the UDOCBA teachers union, after a meeting February 17, called for a 72-hour stoppage to begin on February 28. UDOCBA demands a basic salary of 3,900 pesos (US\$895). A meeting will be convened on March 1 to plan further actions if the government doesn't accede.

In the country's northeast, the Santa Fe Teachers Association, AMSAFE, rejected the government's offer, which fell short of their demand of 3,100 pesos (US\$688). AMSAFE is calling for two-day strikes for three consecutive weeks.

Delegates of the UEPC educators union in the central province of Córdoba voted in a plenary session February 25 for two 48-hour strikes, as did an extraordinary congress of the AMET union in Entre Ríos province. The union rejected the offer by Entre Ríos authorities of 2,800 pesos (US\$643). AMET's action is coordinated with the Entre Ríos Education Association AGMER.

In addition to the teachers unions, the ATE state employees union of Buenos Aires is calling for a 48-hour strike beginning February 28.

Three-day strike by Mexican state workers

Some 9,000 workers for the Public Security Secretariat (SSP) in Oaxaca, Mexico went on strike February 20. The state workers took the action to demand that governor Gabino Cué remove four high officials in the state police. At

least 79 SSP branch offices were affected.

The complaint originated in the attempt by state police to dislodge fifty workers who were occupying an SSP office with a list of demands. Juan Rosas, leader of the state workers' union, STPEIDCEO (State Powers and Decentralized Institutions Workers Syndicate), told reporters that "the workers were never going to hit the police, but nonetheless they were repressed with an excess of public force."

STPEIDCEO representatives met with the governor to show him a video of the operation. Cué agreed to put state police head César Alfaro and three others on leave pending an investigation of the incident. STPEIDCEO called members back to work on February 23.

Peruvian soccer players strike over unpaid salaries

After months of nonpayment of their salaries, players for some of Peru's biggest professional soccer clubs went on strike February 20. The players' union, SAFAP, is demanding that the players be paid within 12 months, as opposed to the 24-month plan that the clubs have offered.

The strike takes place as first division championship playoffs are underway. Reactions have varied among clubs. When its players refused to play Sunday, the Inti Gas soccer team fired all the players and coaches, an action taken a few days later by Universidad César Vallejo.

Three clubs—which do not owe their players—dropped out of participation in the tournament, and another, Universidad de San Martín, announced that it is leaving professional soccer altogether. Unión Comercio does not have any debt to its players, who nonetheless struck in solidarity with the others. The club's executive board fined its players 50 percent of their monthly salaries.

One club, Cienciano del Cusco, signed an agreement with SAFAP on February 21.

The amount that the various clubs owe their players range from \$570,000 (Alianza Lima) to \$1.5 million (Universitario de Deportes).

On February 23, the world soccer players union FIFPro announced its “unconditional support” for the striking players and criticized the “abominable behavior” of the clubs.

Trinidad and Tobago: Telecommunication workers protest treatment of retirees

On February 24, workers for Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT), accompanied by several retired TSTT employees, held a lunchtime protest outside the gates of TSTT Work Centre in San Fernando. The protesters were “demanding respect and just treatment for former workers,” according to *Trinidad Express*.

An official with the Communications Workers Union (CWU), Clyde Elder, told reporters that the retirees were being offered unacceptable pension and medical plans. The medical plan requires a quarterly contribution of 1,800TTD (US\$296) when the monthly pension in some cases is 1,200TTD (US\$197). In other words, those retirees would have to pay half of their pensions for their medical plans.

In addition, the medical plan has a high deductible—5,000TTD or US\$822—that Elder called “beyond inhumane” and appealed to the government to “take responsibility for this and have it stopped immediately.”

Elder also accused the government of moving toward privatization of TSTT.

Since the CWU is categorized as “essential services,” the union will not call for a strike, but instead will limit itself to lunchtime protests and “other avenues that we could take to ensure that our voices are heard,” declared Elder.

Workers and Occupy movement demonstrate on anniversary of two-year lockout in California

Locked-out workers from the Castlewood Country Club in Pleasanton, California were joined on February 25 by hundreds of supporters from the Occupy Wall Street movement of Oakland and surrounding areas to demand management rehire the 61 workers on the two-year anniversary of the lockout. Demonstrators marched 1.5 miles from Civic Park to the golf course to “shine a light on the division between the 1 percent and the 99 percent,” according to one of the organizers.

Food and maintenance workers rejected a contract two

years ago when Castlewood attempted to force workers to pay \$739.08 a month for family health insurance. As a result, management locked out members of UNITE HERE Local 2850. The added costs of the health insurance would have amounted to 35 percent of the wages of a full-time maintenance worker. The average wages for Castlewood union members is \$12.50 an hour.

Ground staff rejects tentative contract deal at Air Canada

Air Canada’s baggage handlers, ground crews and maintenance workers on February 22 rejected a tentative deal signed earlier this month with Canada’s biggest airline. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW), Air Canada’s largest union with 8,600 members, reached a tentative deal on February 10 that was rejected by two-thirds of the rank-and-file. Workers also gave the union 78 percent support to call a strike if a deal can’t be reached. Bill Trbovich, spokesman for the IAMAW, said, “It doesn’t necessarily mean we will go on strike.”

On February 14, the 3000 Air Canada pilots had voted, with a 97 percent participation rate, for a strike mandate to oppose management’s assault on salaries and pensions. The pilots are also opposing the setting up of a planned low-cost carrier.

For its part, despite the overwhelming support for a strike amongst its members, the Air Canada Pilots Association (ACPA) remains committed to reaching a negotiated settlement with the Conservative government.

Last year, Harper’s Conservatives intervened forcefully in contract negotiations between Air Canada and its customer service agents and call centre workers, threatening to introduce legislation that would have criminalized their strike.

Air Canada machinists and pilots have worked without a contract since March 31, 2011.



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