

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

26 June 2012

## Argentinean truckers strike for pay raise

Truck drivers throughout Argentina held a 72-hour strike beginning June 19 over salary and other issues. The strike was called by the CATT teamsters union, which represents armored car, mail, fuel, food and waste truck drivers, and is headed by CGT confederation boss Hugo Moyano.

Last week, negotiators for the Argentine Federation of Cargo Transport Enterprises (FADEEAC) and union negotiators failed to reach agreement on salary increases. CATT had demanded a 25.5 percent hike, while FADEEAC originally offered 18 percent, which it later upped to 22 percent.

The Labor Ministry ordered the parties to compulsory conciliation, but CATT instead called the strike and mobilizations that included marches, demonstrations and, most importantly, stoppages of the delivery of fuel. FADEEAC and the union signed an agreement on June 21, according to which the 25.5 percent will be paid out in three increments over the course of a year.

However, after the signing of the agreement, Moyano called for a 10-hour work stoppage by CGT members on June 27 over a number of other issues involving government policies. Outstanding among the demands are the raising of the minimum income threshold for a tax rate hike enacted by the government of Cristina Fernández, the payment of family allowances and retirement security.

The response by other union leaders to Moyano's strike call has not been unanimous, a reflection of divisions and rivalries within the CGT bureaucracy.

## Costa Rican dockworkers end weeklong strike

A week after they went on strike, workers at Costa Rica's Caribbean port facilities of Limón and Moín returned to work following an agreement signed between the government and the Sintrajap dockworkers union. The accord was signed in the early hours of June 18 after prolonged negotiations.

The strike had been sparked by a nearly \$1 billion contract signed between the government and Dutch shipping conglomerate APM Terminals last August. The contract, by which APM would modernize and develop the port of Moín, contains an exclusivity clause that Sintrajap claimed would lead to job losses in Limón, which would suffer a competitive disadvantage.

Sintrajap demanded annulment of the clause and investment in

existing port facilities. The government sent in police and strikebreakers; sporadic violence flared at some sites.

By the terms of the agreement, the government promised to obtain loans and provide its own funds to modernize the dock and buy new equipment. The total amount of investment will come to about \$70 million. The exclusivity clause remains untouched.

Although Sintrajap representatives signed the accord, they expressed dissatisfaction with it. Union secretary Ronald Blear told reporters that Sintrajap would take "the judicial route" to block the project. "Blear did not discount that if necessary they would return to the streets and even close the Limón docks," reported *La Nación*.

## Peruvian teachers initiate indefinite strike

On June 20, teachers in various regions of Peru went on indefinite strike to demand a salary raise and improvements in working conditions. The strike was called by the CONARE SUTEP national teachers union in accordance with a vote taken at a national assembly of delegates June 2. The mobilizations follow one- and two-day actions taken June 15 and 16.

In Lima, CONARE SUTEP members and supporters "launched a massive mobilization from Avenida Canadá to the Education Ministry demanding the solution to the list of demands in respect to the Law of the Teaching Profession, the payment of 30 percent for class preparation, a raise in remunerations, the unfreezing of promotions, the 6 percent increase of the PBI [gross domestic product] for education, derogation of Law 29062, rejection of the New Law of Professors...etc." according to the CONARE web site. The union is calling for teachers to come to Lima to "centralize" the struggle.

Law 29062 is a set of measures that education unions denounce for reducing teachers' rights and benefits and facilitating the privatization of education. CONARE SUTEP demands direct negotiations with President Ollanta Humala.

Actions in Tacna, Ayacucho, Apurímac and other regions included marches and rallies in city plazas. Adherence to the strike call varied from 60 percent in Ucayali to 100 percent in Apurímac.

## Mexico: Striking Michoacán teachers end 26-day strike, sign accord

On June 23, representatives of the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE) and the government of the Mexican state of Michoacán signed an agreement, ending 26 days on strike. The CNTE—usually referred to as a “dissident” or “democratic” faction of the national SNTE union—also agreed to dismantle an encampment that it had set up at Morelia’s Centro Histórico.

The strike included a list of demands including better labor conditions and labor stability, and the prioritization in the budget of infrastructure improvements, more supplies and socio-educational programs.

But a primary motivation for the strike was to protest against a universal evaluation scheme, part of the ACE (Education Quality Alliance) education reform plan promoted by the Calderón administration and SNTE boss Elba Esther Gordillo, with no input from parents, students or the teaching rank and file. CNTE Section XVIII general secretary Jorge Cázares Torres claimed that “the standardized test de-professionalizes education work,” and has called the ACE “this neoliberal, privatizing and labor-rights-destroying educational model.” The evaluation had originally been scheduled for June 23 and 24, but has been postponed.

However, the accord—called “Memorandum 2012”—does not get rid of the evaluation. In fact, state Secretary of Education Teresa Herrera Guido stated that she did not sign the memorandum, but only an accord to “convoke a broad forum for education, and we are seeing the possibility of constructing a proposal for its authorization.”

According to the CNTE web site, the forum will bring in “parents, students, social movements and even the detractors of public education, because what we want is a debate up front, a frank debate to explain our position with respect to public education.”

Cázares Torres maintained that the CNTE had achieved 80 percent of its demands.

### **Wisconsin factory workers in ongoing strike over working conditions and workplace rights**

About 150 workers at Palermo’s Pizza Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin are concluding their third week on strike over working conditions and victimizations as they approach a July 6 Labor Board union election. Workers are angry over attempts by the company to threaten the largely Latino workforce with the company’s use of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to audit the employees work status.

Palermo issued letters to workers demanding they re-verify their immigration status or be fired. Meanwhile, management has hired replacement workers in order to continue production.

Workers at Palermo have complained for a long time about unsafe conditions at the plant along with an inability to collect overtime pay. OSHA records indicate a higher average rate of reported injuries at the Palermo plant when compared to the industry standard.

### **Striking farm workers vote to unionize**

Workers for Amaral Ranches in Gonzales, California voted to unionize June 20, two days after launching a strike to raise wages and improve working conditions. Out of the 346 workers who harvest various vegetables, 265 voted to organize under the United Farm Workers (UFW).

The strike takes place during a shortage of farm workers that has been created by US immigration policy, which has mandated the increased deportation of immigrants.

### **New Brunswick radio stations strike**

Workers at three radio stations in St. John, New Brunswick—Big John, K-100 and CFBC—went on strike this week after failing to win a first contract after eight months of negotiations.

The workers, who signed with the Canadian Media Guild (CMG) a year ago, include on-air announcers as well as production and administrative staff. Negotiations have been in mediation since February, but management left the bargaining table without explanation after tabling wage rollbacks of several thousand dollars from current levels.

CMG has been in a legal strike position since June 1, yet despite a unanimous strike vote in mid-May, union leaders opted for a work-to-rule campaign before being forced to call a strike.



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