

Workers Struggles: The Americas

28 August 2012

Honduran public school teachers strike, protest salary delays and new education law

Thousands of public school teachers struck for two days August 21-22 in eight of Honduras's 18 departments to demand the payment of back salaries and the repeal of the new Fundamental Law of Education. The FOMH teachers' union federation called the strike.

The strike included a gathering in front of the Education Ministry in the capital Tegucigalpa, where speakers denounced the law, passed by the Honduran parliament in January, pointing out that it increases teacher retirement contributions and raises the retirement age.

On the second day of the mobilizations, Education Minister Marlon Escodo threatened to fire teachers who struck for a third day. FOMH called the teachers back to work, but announced a new strike for August 30 and 31.

Peruvian public health doctors march on regional capital

On August 24, the 18th day of their indefinite strike, doctors for Peru's EsSalud public health agency marched to Arequipa, Peru's second city and the capital of the region of the same name. Doctors from Arequipa, Cusco, Juliaca, Moquegua, Ilo and Mollendo congregated at the central Plaza de Armas to demand a solution to the impasse that has affected the delivery of health services in the region.

The doctors want a 40 percent raise in salary, but have only gotten a promise of bonuses from the government. A spokesperson for the doctors told *La República*, "We do not believe in bonuses, because they are not part of the pension system and you don't know how long they can last. We ask for a raise; otherwise we will continue with the protest."

Some 40 percent of the striking doctors have received letters from EsSalud informing them that their pay has been docked for their time on strike, and EsSalud officials have recently threatened to fire physicians who do not return to work. Roxana Medina, president of the Carlos Alberto Seguin Escobedo National Hospital Medical Corps, told reporters, "The indefinite strike will continue despite the letters of deductions

and threats that they have started to send the doctors."

Argentinean port grain inspectors strike for salary adjustment

Inspectors for Argentina's Agricultural Sanitary Agency (SENASA) at the main port hub of Rosario and other port cities began a three-day strike on August 22 to demand wage improvements. The inspectors primarily check grains and soy oil for export. Argentina is the world's leading exporter of soy oil and the third largest shipper of soybeans.

The inspectors' union, APUMAG, had called for a strike in July, but put it on hold while negotiations with SENASA and the Agriculture Ministry continued. However, management's final offer of 21 percent was deemed insufficient due to galloping inflation, which has eroded the Argentinean working class's purchasing power.

The effectiveness of the strike was diminished by a number of factors. This year's soybean harvest has been completed and the maize harvest is nearly complete, meaning that shipping activity is already reduced. Shipments of soy meal, flours and feed pellets do not require inspection by SENASA. Furthermore, SENASA claimed that by August 23, adherence to the strike was down to 15 percent outside of Rosario and that skeleton crews were able to carry out inspections.

Police attack protesting Argentinean public sector workers

At least 15 protesting judicial employees and 11 police officers in the central Argentine city of Cordoba were hurt on August 23, as police attacked a group of public employees protesting changes in the province of Cordoba's retirement system.

The judicial workers, accompanied by teachers, bank employees and others, had come to the city's court building to protest Governor José Manuel de la Sota's August 8 proposal to make adjustments to the retirement fund. The legislature quickly approved the changes. Among the changes would be an

increase in the employee contribution.

On August 23, union leaders presented an “action of unconstitutionality” against the adjustments to the provincial legislature. Outside, where protesters had gathered, the confrontation between protesters and police escalated, with rocks and bottles allegedly thrown by protesters being met with police tear gas and rubber bullets. A number of people were arrested, but police did not say how many.

On August 24, in protest against the police attacks, judicial employees, municipal workers, light and power workers and others held a 24-hour strike. The unions held a meeting Monday to decide on further measures.

Colombian GM ex-employees end hunger strike

On August 24, a group of former employees of General Motors in Colombia announced the end of a hunger strike that they had been on for 20 days. The ex-employees, members of the GM Workers and Sick Ex-Workers Association (Asotrecol), began the hunger strike to demand that GM compensate them for maladies that they contracted while working for the auto giant.

Some of the hunger strikers sewed their mouths shut to further dramatize their situation.

Asotrecol president Jorge Parra told reporters that the decision to stop the hunger strike was based on a promise of mediation the following week, and that the group wanted to “show that we are open to dialogue.” However, he added that an encampment in front of the US embassy in Bogotá would continue pending the results of the meeting.

Asotrecol claims that over 200 workers were fired from GM after they suffered from work-related health problems, including lumbar disc hernias, shoulder fractures, lesions and repetitive motion injuries. GM “does not recognize the professional origin of these physical problems and did not indemnify the workers,” according to a report by Univision.

Parra pointed out, “We didn’t have the right to a just defense. We request relocation in workplaces that do not affect our health and a pension for those who cannot continue working.”

Three-day strike by California operating engineers ends

A three-day strike at several facilities owned by Graniterock in the south San Francisco Bay Area came to a close August 21 after the union and company were rumored to have reached an

agreement. Neither side divulged what issues led to the work stoppage. The strike involved 75-100 members of Operating Engineers Local 3, which claims seven of its eight contracts with Graniterock had expired over the past two years.

Striking workers turned out at Graniterock sites in Watsonville, Gilroy, Hollister, Redwood City, San Jose and Aromas, largely crippling operations. The company also has workers represented by the Teamsters, International Association of Machinists and Laborers unions. Graniterock provides paving materials to municipalities.

California sawmill workers strike over concessions

Workers at the SierraPine sawmill in Martell, California walked off the job August 23 to protest wage and benefit cuts. The 65 members of Lumber and Sawmill Workers Local 2927 voted overwhelmingly against a 2 percent wage cut, four-year wage freeze, the implementation of mandatory overtime and benefit reductions.

SierraPine management announced it will hire replacement workers in order to restart operations at the plant that makes particleboard.

Strike looms for Saskatchewan cancer care workers

After being without a contract since December 2009, the union representing workers at the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency may actually call a strike in the coming days or weeks.

A spokesman for the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees’ Union (SGEU) has said that the union is still hoping that the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO), which is bargaining for the agency, will agree to mediation to avoid a strike. The union has had a strike mandate for over a year and workers voted in June to reject the latest contract offer, which contained wage increases of only 6 percent over 3 and a half years.

Even in the event of a strike, nearly 75 percent of workers affected are barred from striking by essential services laws.



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