

Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 June 2013

One-day strike, march by Argentine teachers for increase in education budget

Some 3,000 teachers and supporters in Santa Rosa, the capital of Argentina's La Pampa province, carried out a one-day strike and marched on June 5. The mobilization was called by the La Pampa Education Workers Union (Utelpa), which is affiliated with the CTERA national teachers' confederation.

The Utelpa leadership claimed a participation rate of 95 percent. The march ended with a rally at the Civic Center across from the office of the provincial governor, where Utelpa head Claudia Fernández called on the administration to "adequately invest" in education.

Fernández called for an increase in support teacher positions, adequate infrastructure and teacher training, "more democracy and less bureaucracy" and new tax laws to fund the education budget.

An added, and key, demand is an end to violence committed against teachers and students by students and their parents, incidents of which have risen recently.

After a number of attacks in May, teachers in the provincial teacher training school held an assembly and produced a document criticizing the Education Ministry. A few days later, about 300 teachers convened in the city's Plaza San Martín and demanded that the Utelpa bureaucracy call a mobilization to bring attention to the issue.

One teacher at the June 5 march lamented the lack of "time, spaces and resources" to address students' needs and added, "There should be integral policies since it seems that the state is looking the other way with respect to social problems and naturally they have repercussions in the school."

Argentina: Journalist's Day sees 24-hour strike over salaries, working conditions

Last week, a national holiday for journalists became the occasion for a strike and protests. In 1938, June 7 was established in Argentina as Journalist's Day (Día de los Periodistas) to honor news reporters. This year in Buenos Aires, protests were added to the festivities as workers in print and electronic news media struck for 24 hours to voice their demands for better salaries and working conditions.

This is the first strike by Buenos Aires journalists in 38 years.

The Buenos Aires Press Workers Union (UTPBA) called the stoppage and led a march to the headquarters of the Buenos Aires News Editors Association (AEDBA), where the protesters demanded a 35 percent salary raise, a basic minimum salary of 7,000 pesos (US\$1,320), 1,000 pesos (US\$188) for collaboration, 2 percent for seniority and a raise in the child care allotment.

The AEDBA had previously offered a 24 percent raise, which would be paid in three quotas, the last in January 2014. A UTPBA communiqué denounced the offer as "laughable." The document also slammed management's delaying tactics in negotiations.

Other demands were "to cease every type of labor persecution and fully respect statutes and collective agreements," the first a reference to journalists who have been detained, murdered or "disappeared" over the years.

Brazilian public transportation users demonstrate against fee hikes, clash with police

Several Brazilian cities, including Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Natal, Goiana and Salvador, were the scenes of demonstrations against recent public transportation hikes on June 6. The 7 percent increase for bus, metro and train ticket prices will further jack up the cost of living for working class Brazilians, who have already been hard-hit by higher medicine, clothing and housing prices and a 6.5 percent 12-month inflation rate.

In Sao Paulo, home to 11 million people, about 2,000 demonstrators blocked traffic. Some committed acts of vandalism against bus stops and metro stations. In one district, police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the protesters. At least 50 people were injured and 15 were arrested.

Organizers of the protests plan on calling more mobilizations in the coming weeks.

24-hour strike by Bolivian bus drivers to demand raise in fares

Bus drivers in La Paz, Bolivia stopped work for 24 hours on June 3 to demand an increase in ticket prices in order to obtain a raise in their wages. The strike was held despite a warning by the local authorities that they would not raise the fares, having already approved a raise in March.

Demonstrators blocked some of La Paz's principal streets, as well as the heavily traveled freeway off-ramp from El Alto, about eight miles (13 km) to the southwest. Police sent to the scene broke up the blockade using tear gas and batons. Some strikers threw rocks onto the highway while fleeing from the blows of the police.

Mexico City teachers end strike

A strike begun May 30 at 27 campuses of the National College for Professional and Technical Education (Conalep) in Mexico City was ended June 3 when SUTDCONALEP teachers' union attendees voted unanimously in assembly to return to work. The vote followed a proposal by the college to change its policy of having teachers sign two contracts—one for five and a half months and one for two weeks—and instead sign one six-month contract per semester.

Vanguardia reported, "The principal motive [for the strike] was because they demanded labor stability, since until now they've signed contracts of five and a half months and the dismissals were systematic." According to the agreement to be signed at the Labor and Social Welfare Secretariat, contracts will be signed in July and January.

Although it reported that certain benefits, such as life insurance and a Christmas bonus, will be formalized, the article made no mention of any improvements in Conalep teachers' wages, which are the worst in the nation.

New York City legal service workers continue strike

Legal service workers in New York City continued their strike against concessions June 6 with a rally at the Legal Service NYC central office. Legal Service Staff Association (LSSA), an organization under the umbrella of the United Auto Workers, voted 173 to 13 to strike last month against demands to cut pensions, health care and sick leave.

The strike involves clerical, paralegals, lawyers and social workers who administer to low-income families and elderly workers dealing with issues such as housing, health problems, benefits and immigration. Legal Service NYC managers claim that the sequestration and other budget cuts will slash \$8 million—some 50 percent of their funding. The LSSA counters that management is still projecting a \$10 million surplus and that its cuts will drastically undermine the ability to service the poor.

LSSA has also raised questions about the top-heavy management-to-staff ratio at Legal Services NYC when compared to other agencies. LSSA has been working without a contract since July of last year. Workers took concessions in their last three-year labor agreement.

Teamsters request arbitration to end bus drivers' contract struggle in New York state

Teamsters Local 445 asked Durham School Services to agree to arbitration as a way to terminate a nine-month contract struggle that involved 165 bus drivers for Dutchess County BOCES and the Spackenkill and Rhinebeck school districts in New York state. In the past month there have been three strikes by bus drivers over unfair labor practices.

Teamsters' representative Adrian Huff told Durham management that if the company accepted arbitration, the union would "immediately pledge not to conduct another strike, and to accept in full the decision of the arbitrator."

Ohio manufacturing lockout reaches five months

Members of United Steelworkers Local 8565 are concluding their fifth month of a lockout at Rotek Inc., in Aurora, Ohio. The USW has indicated that the company is asking for "major concessions" but has not specified why they need to be imposed.

The original agreement expired in November of last year and union members continued working until January, when the company implemented its "last, best and final offer". The union voted 122-2 to reject the proposal and on January 18 a lockout began.

Rotek management ordered workers to return to work on May 16 or face permanent replacement. Since then, the company claims it has received more than 500 applications and indicated, "We have begun the hiring process."

Ontario tile setters strike

Over 800 tile setters across Ontario went on strike last week, after being in a legal strike position for nearly two weeks.

Members of the Brick and Allied Craft Union, most of whom are employed in the Toronto area, are fighting against employer demands to allow for piece-work contracts in addition to payment on an hourly basis. The Terrazzo, Tile and Marble Guild of Ontario, representing many large employers, say they need the flexibility of piece-work contracts to compete against nonunion bidders on some jobs.

A number of large construction projects across the province have been affected by the strike and no new talks are currently scheduled.

Strike hits Toronto paint company

Workers at Tilton Industries in Brampton, Ontario, north of Toronto, went on strike last week after the company put forward demands for a 20 percent cut in wages and benefits.

The workers at the company, which does industrial coatings and finishes, are members of the Canadian Auto Workers union (CAW).



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