

Workers Struggles: The Americas

2 July 2013

24-hour strike by Argentine print media workers over stalled salary negotiations

In a protest against the impasse in negotiations with Buenos Aires newspaper executives, the city's print media workers—including journalists, proofreaders and workers in layout, graphics, administration and maintenance—held a 24-hour strike on June 26. It was the second such stoppage in June over the talks, which have been going on for two months.

The press workers marched on the downtown headquarters of the *El Clarín* daily newspaper group, where they held signs with their salary demands. A delegation from the Newspaper Vendors Syndicate SIVENDIA advocated coordination among all workers in the sector, including journalists, production workers, vendors and delivery truck drivers.

There have been ten meetings at the Labor Ministry between the Buenos Aires Press Workers Union (UTPBA) on the one hand, and the Buenos Aires Newspaper Editors Association (AEDBA) and Federal Association of Editors of the Argentine Republic (AFERA) on the other. Talks have snagged over the employers' offer of a 21 percent raise to be paid in three increments, the last being in January 2014. UTPBA is demanding a 35 percent raise, a minimum salary of 7,000 pesos (US\$1,300) and 50 pesos (US\$9.28) for each article.

Massive march by striking Uruguayan teachers

Thousands of public primary and secondary teachers blocked the center of the Uruguayan capital Montevideo June 28 to demand salary raises and beefing up of the nation's education budget. The educators, many dressed in their characteristic white overalls, marched down the principal artery of the capital.

A number of teachers' unions held 24-hour strikes on June 24 and in some cases occupied buildings. On the same day, the Montevideo Teachers Association, ADEMU, expelled Oscar Gómez, Subsecretary of Education and head of Uruguay's Communist Party, accusing him and a number of other government officials of "not fighting for teachers' salaries like they did when they were union leaders," according to a report by Uypress.

Other teachers had been on strike for the whole week.

The marchers were supported by the PIT-CNT labor federation, which demanded that the administration of José Mujica—for whom it had vigorously campaigned—fulfill its promises to adequately fund public education and put it at the center of its policies.

One of the chants of the protesters was, "There are no first-class countries with fourth-class salaries." The current basic wage for teachers is 14,000 pesos (US\$668). The teachers are demanding 21,000 pesos (US\$1,002).

Multi-issue protests by Costa Rican workers

Protesters across Costa Rica mobilized June 25 over issues that impact on the living standards and rights of the nation's working class. The protests included workers in the health, education, port and other sectors, and involved marches, rallies, school closures, and blockades of highways, ports and ferries. Student and social organizations joined the protests as well.

A primary object of the protests was the rejection of a public concessions law that allows for privatization of services formerly provided by the state. Other demands included construction of hospitals, highways, sewage systems and other infrastructure and improvements in delivery of public services.

The scandal-ridden administration of Laura Chinchilla was targeted, with calls for an end to corruption, impunity and the "plundering" of the country by transnational corporations. Trade union contingents called for an across-the-board increase of the minimum wage and the right of public workers to strike.

The mobilizations coincided with a national strike by hospital workers over wage, staffing and other demands.

Costa Rican banana workers end strike

A nearly month-long strike by 1,000 banana workers on three plantations of the Banana Development Corporation (Bandeco), a Costa Rican subsidiary of Del Monte, ended on June 28 with the signing of an accord between the parties. Bandeco agreed to rehire 32 workers who, alleging violations of the collective agreement, had struck earlier. *El Nacional* reported, "The principal complaint was the firing of 59 workers without informing a labor relations board as the contract established and that the enterprise had 'intimidated in writing another 160 employees' as well."

However, the fate of other fired workers will be determined through the Labor Relations Board, since the company claims that they were dismissed due to other issues like punctuality, lack of respect for superiors, productivity and quality of work.

Dominican workers march to demand wage increase

Several hundred workers marched to the Dominican Republic's National Palace in Santo Domingo June 26 to demand a 30 percent hike to monthly wages. The action was called by the CNUS labor confederation and other unions.

The marchers carried picket signs and chanted on the way. Police stopped the crowd from entering the palace, but a small union delegation

was allowed to enter and hand in a document--which demanded the increase and opposed reforms of the labor code that would further undermine workers' earning power--to an official.

The minimum wage in the Dominican Republic is less than 5,000 pesos (US\$120) per month, while the Central Bank's 2010 Consumer Price Index for the average cost of a family of five was over 23,000 pesos (US\$553). An article in Dominican Today notes, "But while labor unions demand a 30 percent increase to the minimum wage, employers not only offer a raise of only 9 percent, they also want to strike the severance pay in the proposed amendment to the Labor Code."

Mexican street sweepers strike over nonfulfillment of agreement

Some 900 street sweepers in the southern Mexican municipality of Oaxaca struck on June 25 to press their demand that the city council deliver on promises previously made. The street sweepers struck in May with a list of demands including provision of proper equipment like gloves, handcarts, brooms, rakes and tires, as well as maintenance of their carts and other equipment.

The city and the street sweepers' union, the Sindicato 3 de Marzo, signed an agreement on May 15, but the sweepers saw no improvements, precipitating the June 25 walkout. The street sweepers also demanded improvements in their wages and benefits, which are among the lowest in the nation.

The strikers assembled at the historic Plaza de la Danza in the western part of the city, where some workers proposed blockades of streets and takeovers of public buildings.

The city signed another agreement that day promising salary and benefit raises of 9 percent and the delivery of the needed materials. The street sweepers returned to work June 26.

Jamaican Supreme Court shuts down air traffic controllers' sickout

A sickout by Jamaican air traffic controllers ended June 24 when the Supreme Court granted an injunction to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The controllers had begun calling in sick or "unable to report for duties" at the beginning of the morning shift at the Kingston Air Traffic Control Centre and the Norman Manley and Sangster international airports on Saturday, June 22.

The action was called by the Jamaica Air Traffic Controllers Association (JACTA) over salaries, the state of essential equipment, "severe stress" and other problems with the island's civil aviation agency, the JCAA. The effect of the sickout was minimal, due to planning by the JCAA, which called in a "contingency response team" to perform scab labor.

California warehouse workers strike over hours and benefits

Warehouse workers at a 7-Up distribution center in Riverside, California walked off the job June 24 in opposition to increased medical costs and work schedules. Teamsters Local 63, which represents the striking workers, reports that the American Bottling Company wants to replace the old schedule of five eight-hour days with a new four ten-hour-day

schedule. Previously, workers would have received time-and-a-half for any hours worked over eight hours.

Management is also seeking to impose a greater share of health care costs on workers. American Bottling Company, which is owned by Dr. Pepper Snapple Group, has brought in management personnel from other operations to perform warehouse workers' tasks, and delivery trucks continue to leave the facility with product.

Workers strike Ohio beverage wholesaler

Delivery drivers and warehouse workers went on strike against RL Lipton Distributing in Austintown, Ohio, June 25. The 23 workers, who load and transport beverages to retailers, walked off the job over wages and health care benefits.

Teamsters Local 377, which represents the striking workers, indicated that hospitalization and starting wages for new hires are among the issues in dispute. The previous labor agreement expired May 31. RL Lipton is using temporary replacement workers to continue its operations.

Toronto area Coca-Cola workers strike

700 workers employed by Coca-Cola Refreshments Canada (CCR) in Brampton, Ontario, north of Toronto, went on strike June 26 after contract talks broke down between the company and their union, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW).

There are numerous issues in dispute, including pensions, outsourcing of jobs, health and safety, and work hours. The company claims that they are willing to bargain but the union walked away from negotiations. Union leaders say they are fighting to ensure that the manufacture and distribution of products at the Brampton plant remain unionized.

The CCR plant in Brampton is the largest in Canada and provides product throughout Ontario and Manitoba.

Utility company locks out workers in B.C.

Last week utility giant FortisBC locked out 240 electrical workers in southern British Columbia following weeks of limited job actions by their union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

The union, which filed strike notice in March, has been working without a contract since the beginning of February. The company locked workers out under what is termed an essential service order that allows them to continue to provide service with limited staff.

The union is asking for a three percent wage increase in a new three-year deal but at this point there are no new negotiations scheduled. FortisBC is a subsidiary of the largest private utility provider in the country, Fortis Inc.

Agreement reached in Toronto elevator strike

A new three-year deal was reached last Friday in a strike that began

May 1 by 1,400 elevator workers across Ontario, which will put all workers back on the job by July 10 without requiring a vote.

Leaders of the International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC) are touting gains in wages and working conditions and the preservation of seniority provisions in a new contract. A spokesperson for the National Elevator and Escalator Association (NEEA), representing employers, says that the new deal gives them more control in hiring. 300 workers were already returned to work on June 14 due to a provision in the Ontario Labour Relations Act.



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