

Workers Struggles: The Americas

20 May 2014

Latin America

Brazilian bus drivers hold limited strikes for salary raises

Bus drivers and fare collectors in São Paulo, Brazil, struck and blocked two streets May 12 to demand wage increases. Some 250 buses were idled during the one-day action.

Bus drivers in Rio de Janeiro stopped work May 13 and 14 to demand a pay increase. The strike is a rejection of a 10 percent hike agreed upon between their union and transit companies. The drivers are demanding a 40 percent raise.

The strike was the second in two weeks; Rio drivers walked out for 24 hours on May 8. This time, only about 10 percent of buses were operating.

As the World Cup draws closer, a rash of strikes has hit Brazil, including walkouts by teachers, museum workers, sanitation workers, security guards, police, firemen and civil engineers.

48-hour strike by Argentine social service workers over inadequate supplies

Workers for Argentina's Social Services Fund (CSS) in the far southern province of Santa Cruz held a 48-hour strike on May 12 and 13. The strike was held to protest CSS's inadequate provision of supplies following binding arbitration talks at which the agency had promised to update and/or provide replacements for current supplies and equipment.

A workers' representative told *Tiempo Sur* that CSS only partially complied with the agreement signed at a meeting held in the city of Río Gallegos. "They sent some things and they sent others used and in bad condition...they always sent us things in a bad state, everything recycled...." She added that computers were outdated and that three workers had suffered falls because their chairs were in bad condition.

She noted that despite the agreement being reached, neither the CSS general director nor the government inspector signed it. "There are many things that we are asking for, but you can't count on our director."

Colombian teachers take national strike action over pay, health care, evaluations

About 4,000 teachers, members of the Colombian Federation of Educators, or Fedcode, went on strike on the national Day of the Teacher, May 14, over three demands that have not been resolved in talks with the government.

The first demand is a review of the pay increase—denounced as "pitiful" by Fedcode—that the government decreed for 2014. Fedcode is calling for the submission of a plan for the next quarter, "so that in the next quarter our squalid salaries may reach a more suitable level."

The second demand calls for President Juan Carlos Santos to "resolve once and for all the problems of the teachers" regarding the provision of health care. Lastly, Fedcode demands the suspension of teacher evaluations until a new statute of procedures for promotions is instituted.

Teachers marched in Bogotá, Cartagena, Riohacha and other cities throughout the country.

One-day strike by Costa Rican city workers against outsourcing

Municipal workers in San José, Costa Rica, struck May 12 against the outsourcing of garbage collection to a private Mexican firm. The workers' union, ANEP, said that the firm, PASA, does not respect workers' rights. PASA has held the contract since 2010.

An ANEP official told reporters that PASA has not invested in upgrading trucks and equipment and has fired some workers and hired people living in extreme poverty in order to avoid providing insurance or job security. The city's mayor, Sandra García, came under fire for her "arrogance and haughtiness" as well.

By May 13, ANEP reached an accord with the city. PASA was redefined as being a "support service" that would not completely replace municipal trash collection services. The city also agreed to buy two trash trucks and facilitate the process for acquiring spare parts.

Mexican teachers strike for unpaid bonus

Close to 1,400 teachers in the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí began a strike May 15 to press for payment of a "performance stimulus" bonus. The teachers are members of the Independent Syndicate of Bachelor Colleges Workers (COBACH), and they work at 400 high schools. The bonus payments, amounting to about 8 million pesos (US\$620,000), were due on May 15.

About 40 campuses and nine Distance Middle Superior Education (EMSAD) centers were closed due to the strike. An EMSAD spokesperson said that there are about 900 teachers who are being investigated regarding the nonpayments, despite already having received the promise to be paid the bonus.

Barbadian unions rein in workers' strike call over firings

Following the dismissals of 200 of their colleagues in the last week of April, workers for Barbados's National Conservation Commission (NCC) engaged in protest actions (see May 6 "Workers Struggles"). The NCC plans to eventually retrench nearly 1,000 workers, including lifeguards, rangers, artisans, drivers and general workers.

The workers have objected particularly to the arbitrary nature of the retrenchments, with workers having many years of service being dismissed before relative newcomers.

Meanwhile, the workers' unions, the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW) and Barbados Workers' Union (BWU), have attempted to keep control of their members by engaging in talks with the NCC. So far NCC negotiators have refused to budge, and union reps said they would take the matter to the chief labour officer.

According to *Nation News*, a "loud and vociferous" meeting at NUPW headquarters May 15 had "scores of disgruntled National Conservation Commission workers" calling for strike action. NUPW general secretary Dennis Clarke told the angry attendees, "We are going to have some action going, but as I said...there is a process."

Clarke thanked the workers "for the solidarity shown to your brothers and sisters" and told them that the unions would not let them down.

After separate meetings by the NCC and the union reps with the labour officer on May 16, the parties returned to negotiations.

United States

Mississippi machinists strike against attempt to strip pensions

Machinists at the Stennis Space Center in Hancock County, Mississippi, went on strike May 16 against Lockheed Martin to oppose an attempt to strip away their pensions. Ken Powe, chief steward for the International Association of Machinists told the *Sun Herald*, "These companies come in and out of here every five to seven years, and we just want our pension to be consistent".

Lockheed declared its current proposal to the 116 members of Local 2249 is the "last, best and final offer." Some 5,000 workers are employed at Stennis Space Center. Striking workers are demanding retention of their pensions and point to another recent contract settlement by Lockheed at Stennis that retained pensions.

Buffalo workers reject company attempt to impose new work rules

Workers at Calspan Corporation in Buffalo, New York, walked off the job May 13 after twice rejecting management proposals by unanimous votes. The 24 members of the International Association of Machinists, Lodge 1180, comprise mechanics, machinists, wind tunnel workers and aircraft inspectors.

According a union spokesperson, Calspan is attempting to negate the labor agreement by shifting contract language to the employee handbook without union input. The company is also seeking to impose 18 hours of mandatory overtime per week.

Canada

BC Community center workers strike

Around 40 workers employed at the Naramata Community Center in Penticton, British Columbia, east of Vancouver, went on strike late last week in protest over the proposed contracting out of jobs.

The workers, who are members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), soundly rejected the latest contract offer from Naramata, which is affiliated with the United Church of Canada, because it could have meant losing their jobs within the term of a proposed two-year deal.

The center has remained open despite the strike with the use of management personnel, and no talks are currently scheduled.

Ontario cleaning supply workers locked out

Workers at the Oakville operation of JemPak GK Inc., west of Toronto, Ontario, were escorted off the property by security guards when the company locked them out last Thursday, a day before a strike deadline.

Members of union giant Unifor, the 22 locked-out workers are fighting a bid by the company to have all new-hires be nonunion and also have some existing work be taken over by management. The company is also seeking concessions on wages and benefits.

The union has filed a charge of bad-faith bargaining and the company, which manufactures laundry and cleaning detergent, has refused to meet with a conciliator, thereby preventing the resumption of contract negotiations.

BC municipal workers expand strike action

Following a series of one-day job actions, 100 municipal workers in the city of White Rock, east of Vancouver, British Columbia, have launched an all-out strike, the first time city workers have gone on strike in the city's history.

The strike will affect a range of services from public works and garbage collection to roadwork. City workers are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), whose leaders have said they hope this will act as a wake-up call to City Hall, which they say has ignored the job actions leading up to the strike.

Workers are fighting cuts to work hours and long-term disability provisions as well as for protections for part-timers.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact