

Workers Struggles: The Americas

4 November 2014

Latin America

Chilean teachers protest for better working conditions, other demands

More than 70,000 teachers throughout Chile struck, marched and demonstrated on October 29 to demand changes in the education system. The demonstration was organized by the College of Professors of Chile (CPC) union, which represents primarily public high school teachers.

Among the demands—called the Agenda Corta or Short Agenda—are tenure for contracted teachers, raising and regularizing salaries for one-year contract teachers and an end to the “suffocation and pressure of labor,” as well as the reestablishment of a retirement bonus and the payment of a salary demand dating back to the days of the Pinochet dictatorship. The CPC also called for “creating a dialogue to tackle the historical debt.”

The CPC claimed on its web site that more than 20,000 people attended the protest in the capital, Santiago. “The National Warning Strike materialized in Iquique, La Serena, Concepción, Punta Arenas, Valparaíso, Arica, Calama, Rancagua, among other places,” it added.

If its demands are not met, the CPC said it would call out the teachers on November 5 and 6. If that action fails to get a response, the teachers will go on indefinite strike on November 10.

Colombian judicial workers continue strike over salaries, reforms

Workers in the Colombian Asonal judicial union remain on their strike begun October 9 over salaries, scant resources and proposed reforms being debated in Congress. On October 30, about 2,000 employees of the judicial branch, district attorneys’ offices and the National Penitentiary and Prison Institute (Inpec) marched in Bogota to demand that the government examine and negotiate their demands with them.

Asonal head Freddy Machado told reporters that the 2015 budget for the judicial branch is insufficient, especially since an anticipated agreement between the government and FARC guerrillas will generate post-conflict tasks for the courts. He added that the government has not paid the workers according to the law.

Asonal also opposes reforms being debated in the legislature that would form a “super court” for high-level offenses and bureaucratize operations in the prosecutor general’s office.

“The government has made us invisible and doesn’t want to

negotiate...and therefore we are in the streets,” Inpec spokesperson Henry Robayo told [noticiasrcn.com](#). He called for more investments in the prison system, which has been in crisis due to overcrowding.

Strike by Costa Rican dockworkers against megaport concession continues

Dockworkers at the Costa Rican terminals of Limon and Moin have remained on strike to protest the granting of a 30-year concession to shipping giant APM Terminals to build a megaport facility in Limon. The workers’ union SINTRAJAP, saying that the concession will result in the elimination of public-sector jobs and constitute an “illegal monopoly” by APM, is demanding a renegotiation of its contract.

On October 22, the union called the strike, and as container traffic slowed, the government sent in 150 National Police, who arrested 68 people. Although the Atlantic Port Authority, JAPDEVA, brought in contract workers, operations have been slowed by ongoing protests of the workers and supporters.

Negotiations between the government and SINTRAJAP and its supporters broke down October 27 after union leaders walked out of a meeting with the labor minister. That evening, an image of the president, Luis Guillermo Solís, was burned in front of union headquarters. The labor ministry is demanding a public apology from SINTRAJAP before resuming negotiations.

The strike has been declared illegal, but protests have continued, with occasional clashes with police occurring. The union has appealed the ruling. SINTRAJAP and Broad Front Party lawmaker Gerardo Vargas, representing Limón, have called for an independent commission to review the concession.

One death, seven arrests from protests in Dominican Republic

Communities in the north and northeast of the Dominican Republic held protests on October 29 to demand social projects, infrastructure improvements and pay for teachers. The Broad Front for Popular Struggle, or Falpo, called a 24-hour strike in Valverde province, to demand more public works in the poverty-stricken area.

Among the protesters’ demands were the hiring of teachers for public schools, improvements in roads, public health and potable water, and a general increase in wages.

A 36-year-old man, Apolinar Díaz, was hit by a bullet and died. The head of the Northwestern Police Directorate, Col. Rene Mena Sanchez, accused the demonstrators of the shooting. Falpo condemned

the killing and denied that it had anything to do with it, saying, “our aim is not to attack citizens, but to demand that the needs of the communities be attended to.”

Seven protesters were arrested. Another Falpo-led group of protesters marched to the provincial government headquarters in the community of Licy Al Medio in northern Santiago province to voice similar demands. The protesters called on President Danilo Medina to intervene.

Barbados beverage workers walk out over restructuring

About 400 unionized workers at Barbados’s largest beverage manufacturer, Banks Holding Limited (BHL), walked off the job October 25. The Barbados Workers Union (BWU) said that the strike, involving about 80 percent of the workforce, was caused by a “number of grievances.”

BHL is currently in the midst of rebranding its distribution arm, B&B Distribution, a process that has involved “separation packages” for nine nonunion workers. “However,” according to Barbados Today, “three from the bargaining unit are also set to go on the breadline.”

BHL has been in contract negotiations with the BWU, and the parties disagree over wages for bargaining unit members. The company’s claims that it was taken completely by surprise by the strike was contradicted by BWU general secretary Toni Moore, who said, “As recently as Wednesday, the 22nd of October, we directed correspondence that spoke to [the issue of integration].”

The workers returned to work as negotiations restarted. BHL sent a letter to the workers informing them that they would not be paid for the day they struck. BHL has delayed the retrenchment of two of the unionized workers. On November 1, BHL CEO Richard Cozier told the press, “It looks to me that within another week or two, everything would be settled to everybody’s satisfaction and we would get back to smooth sailing.” Moore could not be reached for comment.

The United States

Oregon hospital strike ends without agreement

Hospital workers ended their three-day strike at the McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center in Springfield, Oregon, October 31 and returned to work. There was no indication from hospital management that they will resume talks and back off from their demands for unloading the increased cost of health care on the backs of the 340 members of Service Employees International Union Local 49.

The hospital is offering annual wage increases of 1.2 and 1.5 percent over two years. These increases will be overwhelmed by 4 to 9 percent increases in the cost of health care deductibles, co-pays and premiums.

The old agreement expired at the beginning of January of this year and contract talks had been ongoing until they broke off in October. After that, 96 percent of the bargaining unit voted to strike. McKenzie-Willamette is one of the most profitable in Oregon. In 2013, it earned \$16.8 million, up 31 percent from the previous year.

Kentucky Teamsters strike over illegal replacement at auto plant

Some 161 workers for Voith Industry Services are on strike at a Louisville, Kentucky, auto plant charging the company illegally replaced workers who drive the cars off the assembly line. According to Teamsters Local 89 president Fred Zuckerman, two legal judgments have been made against the company, but workers have not been rehired.

Back in December 2012, The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued a decision ordering Voith to rehire 85 workers. The displacements are alleged to have resulted from collusion between Ford Motor Company, Voith and the United Auto Workers. Under the Teamsters, Voith workers were paid \$20 an hour and received a union pension fund. But Voith signed a contract with the UAW that paid workers \$11 to \$14 an hour.

Canada

Strike to close St. Lawrence Seaway

More than 460 workers who operate the series of locks on the St. Lawrence Seaway from Lake Erie to Montreal are set to go on strike this week after working without a contract since March and giving their union a near-unanimous strike mandate.

The workers are in four locals of UNIFOR, which filed for conciliation in August after reaching an impasse over staffing levels. The St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation is planning to eliminate 67 jobs by introducing automated mooring procedures at 15 locks. Union leaders are asking that staffing levels be maintained in the interest of safety, a proposal that management rejected months ago when talks stalled.

When mediated talks resumed last week, the union presented its first strike notice, but then postponed the strike deadline to this week. If a strike does take place, it could close the Seaway, effectively halting shipping through the Great Lakes.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact