

Workers Struggles: The Americas

18 November 2014

Latin America

Buenos Aires teachers strike for 48 hours over salary demands

Teachers in the Buenos Aires Educators Union Front, which embraces public and private teachers' unions in the province, struck November 11 and 12 to demand salary adjustments to counteract the nation's rampaging inflation. The Buenos Aires Educators Federation (FEB) claimed an adherence rate of 97 percent on both days.

In addition to the revision of their salaries before the end of the year, the teachers are demanding the payment of an end-of-year bonus (aguinaldo), "to palliate the difficult situation in the sector," and the urgent convocation of parity talks.

FEB president Mirta Petrocini told reporters, "Here there are no hidden motives; it's enough to go to the supermarket to get a real notion of the deterioration of salaries. It's enough to walk around the schools to see the conditions under which the kids have to study." Petrocini denounced the provincial government's "evident attempts to delegitimize the struggle."

Petrocini added, "There is a plan of struggle voted on by the FEB Congress that will be put into motion if there are no concrete responses to our demands."

Argentine newspaper vendors' union suspends strike call under arbitration order

On November 13, in response to the announcement by the Buenos Aires News and Magazine Vendors Syndicate (Sivendia) of a two-day strike by newspaper kiosk operators, Argentina's Labor Ministry issued an arbitration (conciliación obligatoria or obligatory conciliation) decree. The union called off the action, set for November 15 and 16.

The strike was voted on at an "extraordinary assembly" the week before, to push the vendors' demand for recuperation of part of their wages "broken arbitrarily and unilaterally by the big editorial boards more than 14 years ago," the union announced on its web site. In addition to a 20 percent commission, the workers demand improved labor conditions.

"The time for dialogue has ended," union secretary general Omar Plaini was quoted.

Another official said, "we are confronted by a monopolistic concentration never before seen in our activity; [daily paper] *Clarín* is trying to end up with everything casualized more each day in our field."

The vendors had already held a two-day strike in September with no response by management. Upon hearing of the arbitration decree, Sivendia called off the planned strike. The union warned that if within "the [15-day] deadline for conciliation and negotiation the editorial boards do not offer answers to the demands, the plan of struggle will be taken up anew."

Chilean kindergarten workers strike for participation in educational reform

Teachers and other workers at kindergartens in Chile held a nationwide two-day "warning strike" to demand inclusion in educational reform talks. The workers are members of the National Association of Kindergarten Workers (AJUNJI).

The kindergarten workers are protesting their lack of participation in discussions following the legislation of a new Planning Law. AJUNJI is calling for a delay in the implementation of the law.

Critical issues include improvement of present infrastructure, the building of new sites, decreasing the number of children per room—and per worker—increased staffing levels and sufficient resources.

Strike by Peruvian miners over falling incomes

Workers at Peru's largest copper mine, Antamina, walked out on November 9 to demand a bonus to counteract the decline in their incomes due to shrinking returns from a profit-sharing agreement.

Company officials blame the worldwide fall in copper prices for the decline in profits.

About 1,630 out of a total 2,860 workers at the mine are represented by the SUTRACOMASA union, which has been holding meetings with Antamina management.

Unionized workers are concentrated in key areas, including extraction, transportation and shipping. This is the first time that workers have struck at Antamina. SUTRACOMASA called off a planned strike in 2009 when management made a last-minute offer of a one-time bonus.

The United States

Postal workers protest cuts

Postal workers across the United States participated in about 100 rallies on November 15 to protest planned cuts to the US postal system. The protests were held the same day as a meeting of the postal service's board of governors.

Postal workers are opposing plans for a massive consolidation by the US Postal Service. The post office is planning to shut as many as 82 mail distributing and processing plants across the country. It has already closed 141. The move will serve to extend the length of time that it takes to deliver first class mail. The closures are scheduled to begin in January and will be spread out across 2015.

Currently, it takes about one day to deliver first class mail when sent locally. After the cuts that standard will be increased to two days. Postal management claims that the reorganization will not lead to layoffs, with workers being transferred to other facilities.

The postal service estimates that the cuts will save some \$750 million annually. The four postal worker unions called the day of action.

Postal workers unions advanced no plan to mobilize their membership against the cuts. Instead they issued an appeal to incoming Postmaster General Megan Brennan to reverse the policies of her predecessor, Patrick Donahoe.

Canada

Quebec daycare workers resume job action

Last week over 13,000 daycare workers across the province of Quebec took part in the fourth one-day strike since July to protest stalled talks with the provincial Liberal government.

Daycare workers in Quebec, who are represented by the Centrale des syndicats du Quebec (CSQ), are fighting to be paid for the actual hours they work, which is close to 50 per week, as opposed to the 35 hours for which they are paid. They have been working without a contract for over a year.

The campaign of job actions by the CSQ is part of a broader struggle by workers in the province against proposed increases in daycare charges to parents and threats to cut or eliminate universally subsidized daycare in Quebec.

BC court workers stage strike

Native court workers at the Prince George courthouse in central British Columbia held a one-day strike last week in a fight for wage parity with those doing similar work within their union.

The workers involved, who help aboriginal clients navigate the legal system, are represented by the BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), and in September voted nearly unanimously in favor of strike action. The workers are employed by the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia, a non-profit organization that has seen its government funding slashed in recent years.

Native court workers have not had a wage increase in five years and the increases they have won over the last decade do not keep pace with the rate of inflation.



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