

Workers Struggles: The Americas

21 July 2015

Mass protests in Potosí and La Paz, Bolivia

Popular protests and barricades across the Department of Potosí in Southwest Bolivia have paralyzed the city of Potosí. Workers have also occupied mines and a general strike is taking place. Potosí is a silver and tin mining region, suffering from a drop in commodity prices.

The strike is being led by a coalition of community organizations, professionals and unions. At issue are 26 demands to the Evo Morales regime. These include the building of hospitals and the industrialization of the region to provide jobs. The struggle is on its third week.

Government officials have accused the protesters of attempting to sabotage Pope Francis's recent visit to Bolivia and of creating conditions for a coup.

Argentine teachers strike in Buenos Aires over controversial murder of five-year-old

On Wednesday teachers in Buenos Aires walked out in protest over the firing of kindergarten teacher Alejandra Bellini and school principal Elsa Vincova as a result of their failure to inform the "School Orientation Team" about five-year-old Agustín's circumstances to prevent the death of the child at the hands of his stepfather. The strike was capped by a massive rally of some 5,000 teachers.

The two were fired for supposedly "not following protocols to guarantee that the child, Agustín, not be beaten", according to Education Minister Esteban Bullrich. Agustín's death laid bare the lack of resources "of school orientation teams," which have only one school psychologist for every 3,000 students.

The teachers insist that the city government is using the teachers as scapegoats to cover up for its own negligence and point out that provincial schools lack the resources to deal with family violence. "In each district there are only two or three professionals assigned for every 20 schools," declared Bellini. A spokesperson for one of the teachers unions, UTE, pointed out that the education budget has undergone a decade of systematic budget cuts.

Mexican teachers protests continue

On July 15, thousands of Mexican teachers, belonging to the dissident CNTE trade union, marched in Mexico City demanding new negotiations with President Peña Nieto, toward negotiating changes in the newly enacted Education Act, including making teachers' evaluations "not punitive." Marches and rallies took place in 26 of the 31 Mexican states.

In the city of Tuxla, Guerrero state, members of the official SNTE union also marched, demanding that the government rescind the Education Act. At their rally, students and teachers lit a bonfire made of campaign material from all the political parties to signal their dissatisfaction with the political establishment.

In Mexico City the education workers rallied outside the residence of president Enrique Peña Nieto, demanding direct negotiations between the administration and the CNTE, with the aim of rescinding the legislation. The marchers were stopped by a cordon of police that kept them away from the government palace.

The teachers announced preparations for a new plan of action between now and August 23, when classes begin, to mobilize education workers across Mexico.

Labor board strikebreaking at Illinois dealership

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued a proposal that seeks to split striking workers and bring a yearlong labor struggle at an East Dundee, Illinois automobile dealership to a close. The NLRB document, dated July 10, recommends that Al Piemonte Chevrolet rehire five of the nine striking auto mechanics as a way to end a lockout. The dealership supports the proposal while the International Association of Machinists (IAM) believes that workers will reject the measure.

The IAM first called a strike back in July 9, 2014, shortly after nine mechanics voted to join the union. But management put up strong resistance to accepting the local's master agreement for the Chicago region. In complaints filed with the NLRB the union has charged management with harassing workers with threats of firings and in some cases offers of promotions.

The dealership has tried to limit picketing. In one of the most provocative assaults, the owner hired a bulldozer to remove a median located on the right-of-way in front of the dealership. The ground was bulldozed while workers stood on the median.

In January of this year, the IAM offered to return strikers to work. Piemonte Chevrolet responded by declaring striking workers had been replaced, at which point the struggle became a lockout.

future negotiations.

Electrical workers strike across Nunavut

Over 140 workers employed by Qulliq Energy Corporation across the Territory of Nunavut went on strike July 16 after working without a contract since the end of 2013.

The workers are represented by the Nunavut Employees Union, whose leaders say they are only fighting for wage increases to keep pace with the high cost of living in Canada's Arctic. Workers, who are fighting for annual wage increases of around 2 percent, are particularly determined in light of the 3 percent raise that Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) gave themselves last year.

The striking workers are responsible for mechanical, electrical and line maintenance for electrical facilities across Nunavut.



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City workers strike in British Columbia

Some 183 municipal workers in the city of Fort St. John, British Columbia are on strike this week after voting in favor of strike action, rejecting the latest contract offer brought to them by their union, the BC Government Employees' Union (BCGEU).

Union leaders said that there were no concessions contained in the offer, which included a 7 percent wage increase over three years. Firefighting, and numerous other services that are deemed essential will not be affected by the strike and garbage collection is contracted out.

Workers have been without a contract since the end of last year and a mediator has been put on standby for