

Workers Struggles: The Americas

29 September 2015

Strike by Mexican public services workers to demand payment of bonus

Members of the Suspeg state public workers union in the Mexican state of Guerrero walked off the job on September 21. They set up picket lines at state offices in 81 municipalities to press their demand for the payment of an overdue bonus, seniority incentives and more than 200 job positions.

In the capital, Chilpancingo, over 200 teachers from around the state joined with other state workers September 25 to march through the principal streets to demand the bonus of 5,000 pesos (US\$294) that the government and union had agreed to on January 15. About 15,000 workers throughout Guerrero would be affected by the bonus.

The governor, Rogelio Ortega, claimed that “there is no agreement, no written document that commits the government to pay that bonus; it is an illegal strike.”

Ortega claimed that the moneys were earmarked for maintenance and repairs. He also threatened to dock the pay of the striking workers.

The mobilization began the day after a protest commemorating the one-year anniversary of the disappearance of the 43 *normalistas* (student teachers) in Iguala, 102 km (63 mi.) from Chilpancingo.

Peruvian municipal sanitation workers lift strike

Municipal sanitation workers for the district of Jose Leonardo Ortiz in the province of Chiclayo suspended the strike they began earlier in the week to press various demands. The director of the workers’ union, Segundo Diaz Perez, told reporters that they were temporarily lifting the stoppage due to the enormous amount of trash that has piled up and to give the mayor a chance to respond to their demands.

Those demands include a raise of 100 soles (US\$31) in monthly pay for the 243 employees, refurbishment of seven trash trucks that are currently sitting unused in a warehouse, the purchase of uniforms, brooms and other tools. All of the demands had already been undersigned in a collective agreement last year.

Conflicts between the municipal government and workers in Jose Leonardo Ortiz have been a regular occurrence, with protests and strikes breaking out in October 2014 and in April, June and August this year.

Uruguayan teachers strike to denounce police violence

Teachers and education workers in Montevideo held a two-day strike action on September 24 and 25 to protest police violence against teachers and students on September 22.

On that day, police dislodged members of the ATES, ADES and Afutu (secondary school teachers, secondary education workers and Uruguayan University workers respectively) unions and student supporters, from the Central Council Directorate (Codicen) of the National Public Education Administration, which they had occupied the day before. The occupation was held to press demands for increased investment of the national budget in education, an improved system for supplying substitute teachers, municipal government reforms, and a universal system for scholarships.

The police moved in, arresting 11 men and one woman. Some of the arrested, as well as witnesses, accuse the police of attacking them violently and needlessly. The teachers were released, but were “under investigation.” The Interior Ministry justified the police action as appropriate.

A lawyer for the teachers told *La Republica*: “we have lodged a complaint... It refers to cruel and humiliating deeds that are the nucleus of the crime of torture. These citizens were attacked. They passed through forensics. They had proof of extremely important lesions and also were humiliated during their apprehension and the period of detention. The accusation is against police personnel.”

Strike by Argentine teachers passes 30-day mark

September 26 marked day number 32 for an indefinite strike by teachers in Argentina’s northwest Catamarca province. The teachers, members of the ADUCA and ATECA educators’ unions, mobilized to carry out blockades of streets.

The unions called on their members to strike for three more days this week. The unions are keeping “attendance lists” to mark any teachers who do not adhere to the action as “absent.”

A number of cities, including Tinogasta, Santa Maria, La Paz and Andalgalá, are on strike, though in the provincial capital, also called Catamarca, the walkout appears to be losing force.

At issue are unfulfilled contract provisions and government intransigence over negotiations. The unions accuse the government of trying to pit parents against the teachers, and at some schools striking teachers have complained of persecution by school

authorities. The government claims to be open to dialogue, but demands that the teachers return to their classrooms before talks can resume.

Philadelphia news crew goes on strike before papal visit

Cameramen, photographers and other technicians at NBC10 in Philadelphia went on strike September 24, two days before the papal visit. Members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) gathered in a parking lot the night before and voted unanimously to strike the Comcast subsidiary over work rules and the slashing of 12 jobs to be replaced by lower-paid workers.

In two separate incidents on the first and second day of the strike, two union pickets were hit by NBC vehicles. The IBEW plans to demand charges from both the United States and Pennsylvania attorney general's offices. Many veteran workers recall years ago when an IBEW member was run over and killed in the same area—Lower Merion.

According to the IBEW, the two sides were very close to an agreement when a new NBC management team was put in place and the company pulled its agreement from the table two days before the strike erupted.

Strike by Hawaii tile workers ends with tentative agreement

The strike by 1,000 tile workers in Hawaii ended September 24 after the union and the Tile Contractors Association reached a tentative agreement. Details were not made available, but workers had been demanding better pay and benefits and had lost patience after working since September of 2014 without a contract.

Workers saw the unresolved contract as a way for the contractors to cheat them out of raises and retroactive pay. Local 1 of the mason's union began the strike on September 21, shutting down a small number of sites with the threat of expansion of the strike to nearly two dozen major projects throughout Hawaii, including sites such as Symphony Honolulu and the Ritz Carlton.

Ontario casino workers locked out

Six hundred fifty workers employed by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLG) were locked out last week at its casino in Brantford, Ontario west of Hamilton, as well as at racetracks in Sudbury and at the Woodbine track north of Toronto.

The workers, who have been without a contract since May, are represented by Unifor. Union representatives say the main issue in dispute is pensions, with the provincial Liberal government

looking at privatizing its casino in the next couple of years.

Managers at the Brantford casino say that it will remain open in spite of the lockout, but with all gaming tables closed, only the slot machines will be operational.

English teachers in Quebec vote for strike action

Teachers in the two largest English school boards in the province of Quebec have voted for up to six days of strike action beginning after the federal election, which takes place on October 19.

The planned job actions are part of a coordinated, if modest, campaign by various smaller unions to oppose deep cuts by the provincial government to education funding. These latest strike votes will mobilize nearly 3,000 teachers who join French language teachers in the province currently engaged in a series of one-day strikes.

Limited job action hits Ontario elementary schools

Last week, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) announced it was beginning an escalating work-to-rule job action with the possibility of rotating one-day strikes to follow in the coming weeks.

Negotiators for ETFO say they have only taken this measure because the provincial government is insisting on imposing the same contract that secondary teachers recently accepted and have failed to return to bargaining to deal with their objections. They point to a significantly different funding formula for elementary schools that means larger class sizes and poorer working conditions.



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