

Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 April 2016

Short strikes by Argentine university teachers to demand parity talks

Members of two national university union federations in Argentina held limited strikes last week. The Federation of University Teachers (Conadu) struck on March 29 and the National Federation of Teachers, Researchers and Designers (also known as Historic Conadu or Conaduh) began a two-day stoppage beginning on the same day.

The primary demand of the two federations is the convening of parity talks, which usually begin in June. The talks would discuss a variety of demands, including a 45 percent “emergency raise” for all teachers and doubling the pay of teacher assistants. “In addition, the teachers demand the application of the Collective Labor Agreement, civic improvements, better labor conditions and the elimination of the profit tax [a levy on wages defined as higher than average], among other items,” reported *La Gaceta*. Total membership in the two unions is about 130,000, with union spokespeople claiming a 75 percent adherence rate to the mobilizations. Conadu set up a tent in front of the Education Ministry in Buenos Aires on March 30, and held a plenary session of secretaries general. Conadu called its own plenary session for March 4 at its headquarters in the capital.

The unions already called limited protests on March 16 and 17, which failed to bring a response. Conadu head Pedro Sanllorenti told reporters that if the authorities still refuse to agree to a meeting, “we’re going to deepen the measures of force within the first 15 days of April.”

Colombian bus drivers strike over pay, working conditions

Some 180 bus drivers for Git Masivo, one of four operators for the Colombian city of Cali’s MIO mass transit system, walked off the job at 3:00 a.m. on March 28. The drivers complained of strenuous workdays, truncated vacations, harassment and persecution of workers, and noncompliance with wage payments and the required process for firings.

Regarding the firings, a GIT Masivo spokesman claimed that “it is not certain that labor persecution exists” and that the firings were the result of “unjustified absenteeism.” A protesting worker told Caracol Radio, “We have never had any rapprochement with the operator’s representatives.”

By 4:00 p.m. the next day, the drivers’ union, Sintragitmasivo, called them back to work, saying that some issues had been resolved, and that others, like the firings, suspensions, shorted vacations and stressful workdays, “will be reviewed.”

Doctors in Dominican Republic strike, march over wage, budget demands

Doctors, nurses and other workers in the Dominican Republic’s public health system walked out, marched and protested on March 30. The protesters, members of the Dominican Medical College (CMD), gathered at a hospital in Santo Domingo and marched, chanting and carrying picket signs, toward the Public Health Ministry. Officers from the National Police and the Metropolitan Transport Authority kept watch on them as they marched.

As before, the walkout—the seventh by public health workers in 2016—was called to voice demands including a 60 percent raise of the minimum salary, improved working conditions, better pensions and the earmarking of 5 percent of the gross domestic product

for health. Previously, CMD president Waldo Ariel Suero announced a three-day strike for April 5-7.

Protesters formed human chains around the ministry building and public hospitals throughout the nation. When Public Health minister Altagracia Guzman Marcelino came out, they demanded that she meet with them in the building, chanting “Not in the street!” Guzman Marcelino asked them to send representatives to “dialogue” inside while the rest waited outside.

After meeting for two-and-a-half hours, Guzman Marcelino and Ariel Suero emerged, announcing that they would form a commission that “will participate in the search for a solution with the Minister of the Presidency Gustavo Montalvo,” reported *hoy.com.do*. Ariel Suero called off the three-day strike as well. As Guzman Marcelino walked among the protesters, according to the report, “While some embraced her, others pushed her away and shouted a slogan against her administration.”

Guyanese minibus drivers strike to remove their union chief

About 20 drivers of minibuses that transport students to and from the University of Guyana (UG) Turkeyen Campus struck to demand the removal of the chairman of their union. The drivers complain that Eon Andrews, president of the United Minibus Union, had taken action to remove stickers from three minibuses last month. Without the stickers, the drivers cannot operate on the UG campus.

The drivers also said that Andrews has been charging them 3,000 Guyanese dollars (GYD) or US\$14.48 per month to operate on the campus, when in fact the fee is GYD2,500, (US\$12.06).

According to *guyanesechronicle.com*, “Efforts to contact Andrews were futile, as his mobile number was turned off... The bus operators plan to continue their strike action if the situation is not resolved satisfactorily.”

New negotiations in month-long Iowa industrial

strike

The union representing 50 striking workers at the WestRock corrugated box manufacturer in Sioux City, Iowa resumed negotiations March 31 with management after a month on the picket line. Members of the International Association of Machinists Local 1426 rejected company demands for pension and health care concessions along with changes in language governing how wages and promotions are implemented.

WestRock workers originally walked out on strike on March 3. A second WestRock plant in Sioux City represented by another union and a separate contract continues to operate.

Crown Royal workers reject union brokered deal

Workers at distillery giant Diageo’s Crown Royal facility in Gimli, Manitoba who have been on strike since March 5, last week overwhelmingly rejected a new contract proposal presented to them.

Both the company and the union, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, (UFCW) expressed disappointment at the outcome of the vote of 82 percent in opposition to the new offer, which reportedly included some improvements over the one that sparked the strike by 53 workers. Union leaders nevertheless acknowledged that the latest offer did not address significant issues such as pensions, disability provisions and vacation pay that remain in dispute.

The company has offered assurances that it is “well positioned” to continue to fill consumer demand for its popular Canadian whiskey despite the strike, and the union has indicated that it may be forced to make application to the Manitoba Labour Board to impose a contract settlement as early as May.



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