

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

31 May 2016

## Strike by petroleum workers in southern Argentina against workforce cuts

Workers for the state petroleum firm YPF in Argentina's Chubut and Santa Cruz provinces struck at midnight May 28. The strike, called by two regional unions, has affected 40 percent of YPF's production. The unions had rejected a government dictate to participate in "obligatory conciliation," or arbitration.

The unions blamed YPF for "dropping teams and the reduction of activity," resulting in the loss of hundreds of jobs. They denounced the call for arbitration, which "doesn't do enough and is a permanent provocation." In Santa Cruz, YPF has plans to lay off 14 teams, which include seven workers from Chubut, according to the unions.

Jorge Ávila, secretary general of the Private Petroleum and Gas Syndicate of Chubut, spoke of "an erosion that they want to do, company by company, operator by operator." He added that, despite being called to dialogue by the national government, its intention "was always to reduce the number of workers in order to return to activity with more man hours."

However, Ávila said that union reps would return to salary talks with the CEOPE petroleum industry association on May 31 and continue negotiating, but "we aren't going to mix things."

## Argentine municipal workers strike over work clothes, categorization

Municipal employees in the town of Palma Sola in Argentina's northwestern Jujuy province remain on an indefinite strike they began May 16. The workers, members of the Municipal Employees and Workers Syndicate (SEOM), walked off the job after repeated attempts to get the authorities to provide them with appropriate clothing for their jobs and to regularize the categorization of workers.

SEOM delegate Odilón Mendoza told *El Tribuno* that he

had already delivered a note to the mayor, giving him a deadline to respond. The workers had held a strike and protest last November over the same issues to no avail. Mendoza said that the mayor has yet to talk to SEOM and "the employees adduce that it is a total lack of respect towards the workers."

## Honduran health workers call strike over salaries

On May 27, the Tegucigalpa affiliate of the Honduras Medical Syndicate (Sitramedhys) announced a strike for May 30 to protest the failure of the government to comply with a salary adjustment that it had previously promised. Sitramedhys local president Miguel Mejía told reporters that the union would hold "progressive assemblies" to inform its members about the response of the government to its demands.

Mejía denounced the present administration of president Juan Orlando Hernández, saying that he was not serious and had unilaterally broken off dialog with the health workers.

Since last June, Sitramedhys has been asking for a raise and "the current authorities committed themselves in an informal manner to give a raise of 200 lempiras [US\$8.87] for each worker, something that looks absurd to us," he said.

"Recently a study was produced for us and at the minimum they'd have to increase [salaries] by 5,000 lempiras [US\$221]; nonetheless we are soliciting an intermediate amount and it could be deferred."

## Mexican teachers protest firings of colleagues

Teachers in Zacatecas, the capital of the central Mexican state of the same name, occupied a number of tollbooths along major expressways on the morning of May 27. Later, the teachers marched to the Historic Center's Enrique Estrada Park.

The occupations and marches were organized by the Democratic Teachers Movement of Zacatecas (MDMZ) and were part of national protest actions against education reforms spearheaded by president Enrique Peña Nieto. The primary demand of the MDMZ mobilization was the rehiring of 26 teachers who had been dismissed from their jobs.

MDMZ Secretary General Víctor Hugo Montoya Gómez “explained that at the national level, the day has as its purpose the demand for a dialog with the authorities and the reinstatement of dismissed teachers at the national level,” reported ntrzacatecas.com.

Montoya Gómez told reporters that “in other states, the citizenry has been participating with the professors, carrying out mobilizations with more impact,” but admitted that participation by teachers in Zacatecas, “being honest, has been diminishing.”

### **Faculty in three-day strike at Washington state college**

Faculty at Green River College campuses in Auburn, Washington walked off the job May 23 on a three-day strike to protest the slashing of 11 programs and the job cuts that will accompany them. The administration says the new cuts will save \$1.2 million toward an operating budget deficit of \$4.5 million.

Members of United Faculty, angered by the decision that was conveyed to them in an email, voted unanimously for strike action three days earlier. Starting in 2013, the union has voted on three occasions for no confidence in the college’s president Eileen Ely and demanded her resignation. Students have solidarized with teachers through demonstrations and the packing of board meetings.

Green River College, like other community and technical schools, faces decreased funding which according to management could amount to \$1.5 million. The union claims that the latest round of cuts was a form of retaliation for the militant opposition by teachers. The union wants the school to use a portion of its reserve funding to maintain jobs and programs.

In addition, the union is offering to collaborate with the administration in coming up with cuts. “Whatever budget challenges this college faces they may be met together through authentic transparency and collaboration and without the permanent damage created by program cuts,” said union president Jaeney Hoene.

### **Construction workers strike over wages in Quad Cities**

Some 300 building construction laborers walked off the job in Quad Cities May 23 after talks between representatives of contractors and Laborers Local 309. Associated General Contractors, which represents some 70 companies in the Quad Cities of Davenport, Bettendorf, Rock Island and Moline, which border on the states of Illinois and Iowa, say the negotiations broke down over wages and has rejected the union’s call for a mediator.

Local 309 is requesting a 3.6 percent raise compared to contracts settled with carpenters, iron workers and brick layers that settled for less than 3 percent. The strike has affected some 40 projects including construction sites at John Deere Harvester in East Moline and the 3M plant in Cordova, Illinois.

### **Canadian postal workers facing job action**

Negotiations for 50,000 postal workers have reportedly reached an impasse as the deadline of July 2 approaches, at which time they could either go on strike or, more likely, be locked out by Canada Post.

The Crown corporation has notified a number of major customers of a possible work stoppage while the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), which represents mail carriers and other postal workers, is fighting a raft of concession demands by management attacking pensions, benefits and job security.

Union negotiators allege that Canada Post is seeking a confrontation to coincide with a federal task force that is assessing door-to-door delivery and the very future of the postal service throughout the month of July.



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