

Workers Struggles: The Americas

5 July 2016

Mexican teachers strike against education “reform”

Thousands of teachers took to the streets of Monterrey, capital of the northeastern Mexican state of Nuevo León, on June 30, blocking traffic in defiance of the governor, Jaime Rodríguez, to protest right-wing education reforms launched by the administration of Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto.

The teachers gathered at the Esplanade of the Heroes, in the Macroplaza in front of the governor’s palace, and resolved to strike on July 1. About 200 Civil Force police were deployed, but confrontations were avoided.

The next day, the teachers arrived at the Esplanade with chairs, umbrellas and coolers and “decided to suspend classes, despite the warning of the state government that they would be docked for the days that they did not show up for classes,” reported excelsior.com.mx.

Teachers’ protests and barricades continue throughout Mexico, in spite of negotiations underway between the CNTE union, the government and Morena Party leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador, aimed at bringing the protests under control.

Mexican bus drivers strike for overdue pay, benefits

At least 30 drivers for the ViveBús transportation system in Chihuahua, Chihuahua, Mexico struck to demand payment of overdue biweekly wages, overtime pay and contributions to the IMSS social security and Infonavit housing funds. The drivers also struck to protest against changes unilaterally made by the Transport Director without their knowledge.

Some partial wage payments have been made, but the drivers say they will not return until all they are owed is brought up to date.

In an interview with diario.mx, one driver summed up the attitude of his coworkers: “We’re already fed up with nothing but promises, that a paper is signed, another, and that in such and such a time they pay, the next week, the next month, but now we’re going for everything because the government is going out the exit door and we don’t want the debt to stay.”

Colombian truckers’ strike enters fifth week

After 17 days of negotiations and 26 days on strike, truckers and Transport Ministry reps failed to reach an agreement July 1. The Colombian Truckers Association (ACC) launched a “Truckers Crusade” on June 6 over government failure to abide by an agreement signed 15 months earlier.

The strike was also used as a form of protest against the draft of a decree announced by the Transport Ministry that ended the process of scrapping older trucks, and that would establish a system of registration. ACC wants a credit system as well as discounts or subsidies to counteract the expenses the truckers confront: fuel, maintenance, repairs, tolls and others.

There is a glut of trucks in Colombia, which pushes cargo delivery rates down. Over 50,000 trucks do not have the documents required by the ministry’s decrees, resolutions and circulars. A group not affiliated with the ACC submitted a petition to the government to sanction and “immobilize” unregistered trucks and punish businesses that commit fraud through falsified and duplicated documents.

Some 2,000 National Police officers have been deployed to highways where truckers have blocked traffic and some arrests have been made. The truckers say they will not return to negotiations until the detained protesters are freed.

Protests against firings at Colombian telephone company

Recently fired employees of the Bogotá Telephone Enterprise (ETB) and their supporters protested in front of the firm June 30. The protest followed a June 28 vigil in support of the workers and against privatization plans.

The workers’ union, Sintrateléfonos, is calling in particular for the rehiring of three workers, Mery Soto, María del Pilar Miranda and Edwin Velasco, who had initiated a hunger strike against the board of directors’ plan to sell ETB. One of the hunger strikers also alleged sexual harassment.

On June 23, according to Sintrateléfonos, 25 workers were fired. So far in 2016, 70 people have been let go. ETB board members claim that it was necessary “to reduce the workforce in order to guarantee competitiveness.” Hunger striker María del Pilar Miranda told colombiainforma.info that the 25 firings represent minimal savings for the enterprise.

In addition to the firings at ETB, over 4,000 contracted municipal personnel from the previous administration will not have their contracts renewed. More than 300 of these temporary workers began a hunger strike on July 1.

issues.

72-hour strike to protest closure of Bolivian textile firm

La Paz, Potosí, Cochabamba and other cities in Bolivia were the scenes of a 72-hour strike and marches against the closure of the state-owned Enatex textile plant beginning June 29. The government shut down the plant in May, laying off about 1,000 workers. The Bolivian Workers Central (COB) called the action after 24-hour and 48-hour stoppages failed to reverse the decree that shuttered the plant.

In Cochabamba, at least nine people—five protesters and four police—were reported injured on the first day of the protest, while at least 29 were arrested. By the last day, COB officials claimed that over 150 demonstrators had been detained and that two had been shot by police and taken to the hospital for surgery.

Workers fear that the closure of a state entity could open the way for closures of private firms under the same decree. The COB called on the government of president Evo Morales to initiate a dialogue, but on June 30, Minister of the Presidency Juan Ramón conditioned any meeting on the cessation of all current and future protests. Morales minimized the mobilizations, claiming that they had little effect on business as usual, and that they were carried out “more per instruction than through conviction.”

The COB announced a general meeting for July 4 to “determine the next measures to take on Monday and after.”

Argentine state workers protest to demand reopening of parity talks

Members of the State Workers Association (ATE) in the City of Buenos Aires marched June 30 to the seat of government to demand the reopening of parity talks. They also demanded the establishment of means to recognize the dignity of the work they do for the city. Various unions and social organizations joined the march.

Parity talks ended in April with an increase of 14 percent in effect until November, when a noncumulative raise of 17 percent will kick in. However, ATE Capital, the Buenos Aires ATE branch, has called the raise agreement one of the worst in the nation compared with other sectors, due to Argentina’s notorious inflation rate.

ATE Capital secretary general Daniel Catalano declared at the protest, “Today, to be a worker is to be poor,” and accused the government of seeking “to generate an army of unemployed.” The city government is headed by Horacio Rodríguez Larreta, who took office following two terms by Mauricio Macri, who assumed the presidency in December 2015. Both are members of the right-wing PRO party.

On the same day, the ATE branch in Río Negro province announced a 24-hour strike to take place on July 7 over the same

Pennsylvania industrial workers strike over wages and health care

About 175 members of the United Auto Workers Local 1612 struck June 28 after contract talks with Bridon American at two work sites in Hanover Township and Pittston, Pennsylvania broke down. Neither side has divulged details in the current contract struggle except that management has announced the latest contract was a \$2.3 million package and the union claims that “health care and wage issues are not sufficient.”

The company says that it will proceed with “business as usual” and has “put plans in place to cover all obligations in the foreseeable future.” Meanwhile truck drivers are refusing to cross picket lines to deliver supplies to the company.

Bridon American supplies high quality steel wire and rope for cranes, oil fields and mining projects.

National postal strike or lockout postponed but pending

With the employer rejecting a last minute appeal from the union to extend last week’s deadline by two weeks, postal workers could be off the job this week either by going on strike or being locked out.

According to negotiators for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW), the union didn’t receive a real offer from the Crown Corporation until June 25 and that contained a raft of concession demands to working standards. They further point out that Canada Post showed a profit of nearly \$100 million in 2015, but are nevertheless bent on cutting workers’ pensions while refusing to bring wages of rural carriers in line with those in urban centers.

The mounting confrontation could affect a planned public postal review scheduled for this month, which will make an assessment of the entire mandate of the government-run service, under the threat of sweeping restructuring that could include outsourcing, privatizations and wholesale job losses.



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