

# Workers Struggles: the Americas

30 August 2016

## Mexican university workers strike for pay raise

The Academic and Administrative Personnel of the Polytechnic University of Zacatecas Sole Syndicate (SUPAAUPZ) have been on strike since August 10 to press for salary improvements and other demands. The union wants a 15 percent raise, while the rector, citing economic conditions, offered 3.7 percent, which SUPAAUPZ called “insufficient.” There has been no movement in negotiations since then.

The union had asked for a meeting with the rector, but due to her disinterest in negotiating, it called the walkout. The state secretary of education has denied that there are enough funds to grant the raise, and the union has taken the case to the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JLCA).

A SUPAAUPZ representative has expressed fears that the JLCA will not take the petition into account and that it runs the risk of having to end the strike without getting any benefit for members.

## Doctors in Dominican Republic hold 24-hour strike

The Dominican Medical College (CMD) struck in all the public hospitals of the Dominican Republic’s northern Cibao region August 24. The CMD claimed 100 percent adherence to the strike call, with only critical and emergency cases being attended to.

The doctors, who work in health centers run by the Dominican Social Security Institute (IDSS), had the support of radiologists, technicians and nurses. Their demands include improvements in the condition of IDSS health centers, adequate supplies, medicine and equipment, better salaries, more personnel, enhanced security, more beds and improvements in intensive care and emergency areas.

## Three protesting miners, government minister killed during Bolivian miners’ strike

Recent strikes and protests by mineworkers in Bolivia’s Panduro region resulted in the killings of three protesters and accusations against three mineworker officials over the beating and murder of a government negotiator.

The mineworkers, members of the National Federation of

Mining Cooperatives (FENCOMIN), have been hard hit by the nation’s economic downturn and have been trying to get changes in laws that they think will improve their situation. They are demanding permission to associate with private firms, subsidies and the relaxation of environmental and other laws, measures that they hope will stem the steady deterioration in their livelihoods.

The mineworkers began strikes two weeks ago and set up roadblocks along various highways. As of last week, three workers had been killed and dozens injured and arrested as police and protesters clashed at roadblocks. On August 25, the body of Deputy Interior Minister Rodolfo Illanes, who had gone to the area to have talks with FENCOMIN leaders, was found on the side of a road. He had been badly beaten and had died of blows to the head. Authorities claimed that he had been kidnapped by a “mob.”

The media and Morales were quick to blame the miners as a whole for the killing of Illanes. Morales had earlier claimed that the strikes were part of a right-wing conspiracy to destabilize his government, and police rounded up dozens of FENCOMIN members. FENCOMIN called off the roadblocks and agreed to begin negotiations of August 26.

On August 27, Bolivia’s attorney general accused FENCOMIN president Carlos Manami and two other officials with murder, aggravated robbery, possession of firearms, criminal organization and attacking state officials. According to a *Voice of America* report, “After the news of Illanes’ death, government officials ceased talks with miners and asked for the maximum 30-year sentence for those found guilty in the case.”

## Paraguayan doctors’ union issues two-day strike call

The head of Paraguay’s National Doctors Syndicate, Lilio Irala, announced a two-day general strike to be carried out September 1 and 2. The union has been unable to reach an agreement with the Treasury minister.

Irala told reporters, “We took our salary framework proposal to the minister, Santiago Peña. We didn’t see any opening or possibility of him studying our proposal but rather, the direct imposition of the only proposal, which is the one from the ministry, that we have been rejecting systematically for some time.”

Irala called the proposal “very limited,” since it would only benefit about 40 percent of Health Ministry workers. This would leave the rest totally unprotected, according to Irala. He concluded, “We demand that the salary framework eliminate what is referred

to as hourly workload inequity.”

### **Chilean hospital workers strike to demand “a commitment to health” from government**

Workers at the San Juan de Dios Hospital in Chile’s Aconcagua Valley stopped work on August 23 following the collapse of emergency services. In some cases, people waited for 10 hours in the hallways before being attended to.

The president of the National University Health Professionals Federation (Fenpruss), Rodrigo Gruebler, said, “We need a commitment to the health of the citizens and not erratic declarations on the part of the health minister. We invite the minister to see the statistics released by the Emergency Attention Data Base.”

On August 25, the strike was called off, after Fenpruss representatives left a meeting with the hospital board and health ministry officials. Gruebler told reporters, “A board composed of doctors, nurses, technicians, auxiliaries and directors of the health service” had been formed and that the demands were agreed to “practically completely.” He warned, however, that “there is a great distrust in the authorities, since “many things have been promised and they haven’t been carried out.”

### **One-day national strike by Argentine teachers for parity talks, salary demands**

Teachers from primary school to university level took part in a 24-hour strike across Argentina on August 24. The unions and federations that organized the stoppage, and the marches and other mobilizations that accompanied it, claimed an adherence rate of from 60 to over 90 percent.

Of particular significance was the participation of private school teachers, who have often eschewed public-sector mobilizations. Students, retirees and social organizations, as well as members of the ATE state workers’ federation and other unions, also showed up.

The educators are demanding the reopening of parity talks over salary adjustments in response to the nation’s inflation rate, which the CTERA education workers confederation says is between 44.6 and 46.0 percent. This has eaten into the raise agreed to with the government of Mauricio Macri last February, which set the basic monthly salary at 8,500 pesos (US\$556). Another demand is that pensions keep up with the rate of inflation.

The government has turned a deaf ear to the strikes and protests, with Education Minister Esteban Bullrich claiming a lower participation rate—“almost 50 percent”—denouncing the mobilization and reiterating that the government would under no circumstances reopen negotiations.

### **New York hospital threatens to lock out nurses in response to partial strike**

Management at the Nathan Littauer Hospital in Gloversville, New York, said it will follow up a projected two-day strike by nurses with a five-day lockout. About 100 members of the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) are set to walk off the job September 1 to pressure the hospital over the lack of safe staffing ratios.

The two sides have unsuccessfully negotiated for two years. Nurses first walked off the job in January for a single day. The hospital imposed a four-day lockout following that strike.

The conflict has also been dealing with benefits. The NYSNA filed an unfair labor practice charge over a threat by the hospital to retroactively impose health insurance copays.

Besides Gloversville nurses, the NYSNA has also issued notices of intent to strike at two other New York hospitals—Samaritan Medical Center in Watertown and St. Elizabeth Medical Center in Utica.

### **Postal union dodges strike action**

Despite having issued a last-minute 72-hour strike notice last week, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) will not call its 51,000 workers out, but will instead launch a series of relatively innocuous rotating overtime bans spread out across the country in the coming weeks.

The union had received a 60-day extension to a strike mandate that was set to expire this week, prompting the issuing of a strike notice. Assurances were made by the union, however, that no actual strike would be called. Contract negotiations between the two sides have reached an impasse over demands by Canada Post Corporation to change pension provisions for new-hires to a defined contribution from a defined benefit plan. In addition, the union is fighting for pay equity for female letter carriers, particularly in rural areas of the country.

Obtaining a new strike mandate could take the union weeks or months and since Canada Post has withdrawn a threat to lock workers out. Further job disruption seems to have been averted for the near term, at least.



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