

Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 November 2016

Nationwide strikes and protests in Chile against privatized pension system

Tens of thousands of workers and retirees held protest actions throughout Chile on November 4 against the nation's privatized pension system. The mobilizations, which included strikes, barricades, demonstrations and "cacerolazos" (banging of pots and pans), were called by a coalition of unions and social organizations called "No+AFP" for "No More AFP," referring to the acronym for Administradoras de Fondos de Pensiones (Pension Fund Administrators), which manages US\$178 billion in "individual capitalization" assets.

The AFP was imposed on the Chilean working class in 1981 during the brutal military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Right-wing economists and politicians hailed it as a model of a market-based approach to retirement funding, claiming that it would cover 70 percent of workers' wages once they had left the workforce. Over three decades later, 90 percent of retirees receive less than 154,000 pesos (US\$233) monthly, less than half the minimum wage.

Chilean workers have protested numerous times against the AFP, and despite President Michelle Bachelet's professed commitment, following mass protests in August, to a "grand national agreement" to improve pensions, the promise has not been acted on.

According to the Interior Ministry, 10,000 protesters in the capital Santiago rallied at the Plaza de Armas and around 58,000 held protests in other cities. In Santiago, protesters barricaded streets, some burning tires, and a few hooded individuals set fire to buses. No+AFP disavowed the bus burnings and the media and government used them to characterize the protests as "violent." About 70 protesters were reported arrested nationwide.

Peruvian judicial workers strike for 48 hours over salary, budget demands

Employees in Peru's judicial sector struck nationwide November 3 and 4 to press their demands. The striking workers want a wage increase and the leveling of the pay of employees covered by the Administrative Services Contract, or CAS. The CAS is the result of a legislative decree governing benefits and

obligations of judicial sector workers.

In addition, the striking workers are demanding that the national government budget 3 billion soles (US\$888 million) for 2017. Congress cut back the judicial budget. Union head Marco Antonio Panduro Flores told reporters, "The strike is an agreement at the base; we need a large budget for judicial reform, also we demand the payment of our outstanding accruals and other benefits that we earned over many years, but the state keeps denying us."

The judicial workers resolved to hold another strike for 72 hours if they did not get an acceptable response to their demands.

Guatemalan cargo truckers end strike over restrictions on deliveries

Negotiators for Guatemala's Heavy Transport Union reached an agreement with the government November 4, ending a national strike begun October 27 against restrictions on heavy cargo truck movement in Guatemala City, the nation's capital and largest city. Over 21,000 heavy cargo truckers had participated in the job action, according to the union.

The municipal government had passed an ordinance expanding the times that truckers could not transport heavy cargo through the city in the morning and afternoon, as well as on Saturday. Demanding that the new measures be completely repealed, truckers periodically blocked traffic into and out of the city and halted or slowed movement at some customs houses and ports.

National Police units moved in to escort trucks carrying fuel into the city, and the Chamber of Agriculture issued a statement condemning violent acts that they claimed were committed by striking drivers. The statement concluded: "We denounce publicly and demand that the Public Ministry investigate the possible existence of criminal structures which may be operating in an organized manner behind the strikes at some ports and customs offices, threatening national security." President Jimmy Morales alleged that some people were taking advantage of the situation, alarming the citizenry, and that three persons had been arrested.

The union and the national and municipal governments held talks during the strike. The union dropped its original demand to completely repeal the ordinance, with union secretary general

Rony Mendoza announcing that the parties would sit at a “dialog table” to find alternatives to the restrictions, which were still slated to go into effect on November 7.

Trinidadian youth training workers protest working conditions

About 90 workers at the Youth Training & Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) in Chaguanas, Trinidad held a protest on November 3 in front of its head office. The workers complain that conditions at the YTEPP are unsafe and unsanitary.

The YTEPP is, according to its web site, “an intervention strategy aimed at addressing the issue of escalating unemployment, particularly among young persons between the ages of 15 and 35.” It recently moved to the Woodford Lodge in Chaguanas, Trinidad’s largest borough, although the conversion of the building had not been completed.

One worker told a Newsday reporter about a number of problems: “This building and the environment is unsafe. ... Raw sewage is running into the drains and offices and the strong stench is unbearable as employees are also getting sick. When staff are having their meals, there are rodents and roaches crawling around. In addition to that, when you are eating you get the smell from the sewer which is overpowering.” Another worker complained of having to “jump over drains to get to and from another department.” The workers have vowed to continue their protests until the conditions are rectified.

Ohio amusement park workers strike

Over 100 workers at the Cedar Point and Cedar Fair amusement parks in Sandusky, Ohio struck Friday after voting down a management offer. It was the second contract rejection vote by the workers, whose contract expired October 1.

The union at the park, Laborers Local 480, covers a number of different job classifications. Other divisions also involved in the walkout include carpenters, plumbers, electricians and painters.

The contract rejection centered on economic questions, including health care costs and pensions. Local officials pointed to booming profits for the amusement park and high levels of executive compensation as reasons for the multiple rejection votes.

Management said that it was making plans to continue operations during the strike. It has called the strike “unlawful” and plans to file a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board.

Professors strike at University of Manitoba

Twelve hundred faculty at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg went on strike last week after working without a contract since March of this year.

The University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA) is reportedly asking for a 6.9 percent increase in wages in the first year of a new contract and the university is offering a 7 percent increase over four years. In addition the two sides are far apart on job security for some instructors and on the issue of workload protection. UMFA has accused the provincial Conservative government of “illegitimate” interference in the bargaining process for asking that all contracts be extended for a year with no wage increase.

Conciliated talks began last week and school administrators have said that classes will continue throughout the strike and that the academic year will not be jeopardized.

B.C. bus drivers to strike

Bus drivers employed by First Canada in the Central Okanagan region of southern British Columbia could be on strike this week after issuing strike notice last week with negotiations taking place throughout last weekend.

The 217 drivers are represented by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). Union negotiators say the main issue in the dispute is a demand that drivers be paid the same as they are in other jurisdictions, regardless of the type or size of vehicle they drive. First Canada has so far refused to negotiate on the matter, saying that it would cost the company 1.4 percent to meet the union’s demand.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact