

## General strike threatened in Bolivia

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

11 July 2017

### **Bolivian labor federation calls general strike, protests over electricity rate hike**

The Bolivian Workers Central (COB) issued a call last week for a 24-hour strike and protests July 12 against the increase in electricity rates recently announced by the Energy Ministry. The previous week, in Cochabamba, representatives of over 270 neighborhood organizations had already led marches against the increases in electricity rates and fares for urban mass transit.

Shortly after the COB announcement, the Bolivian Syndical Mineworkers Federation (Fstmb) and the Confederation of Renters and Retired People announced their solidarity with the action.

Minister of Energy Rafael Alarcon claimed that the increase was aimed at guaranteeing sustainability for the sector and denounced the position of the COB and others as “intransigent” and “political.”

### **Strikes in southern Mexico hospitals over nonpayment of wages**

Workers at the Oaxaca Children’s Hospital began a strike July 7 following an assembly vote. The workers, members of the National Health Secretariat Workers Syndicate Section 35, voted to walk off the job to bring attention to the lack of supplies, medicine, equipment, maintenance and staff, all of which, according to a report in *El Occidental*, has brought the hospital to “the brink of collapse.”

Workers complain that they are unable to attend to patients, including the suspension of surgeries, and that minors have had to be sent to other hospitals. The workers say that the situation is the worst in almost 20 years.

Meanwhile, workers for Integral Security, Cleaning and Maintenance Services (SEGLIM), which contracts with hospitals in Oaxaca, began a strike on July 6 to protest the lack of pay for the last fortnight and to demand a raise. Services at the city’s Civil Hospital and 30-bed Hospital de Putla were affected.

### **Mexican press workers end strike over pay, conditions**

Workers for the Mexican daily *La Jornada* were called back to work by their union, Sitrajor, on July 4, five days after they had walked off the job (<http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/07/04/wkrs-j04.html>) over management’s announcement that it was cutting benefits by up to 50 percent. The union had called the walkout a week after the Local Conciliation and Arbitration Board (JLCA) had endorsed the paper’s

claim that it could not afford to pay the benefits.

Demos, *La Jornada*’s parent company, filed a request that the JLCA declare the strike “nonexistent and illegal,” a request the board readily granted. Sitrajor called off the strike on July 5 and signed an agreement with the company to order the workers to unoccupy buildings, take down the red-and-black strike flags and go back to the job.

### **Three-day strike by Bolivian postal workers over nonpayment of wages**

Postal workers in Sucre, Bolivia, resolved to strike for three days beginning July 7 to demand the payment of overdue wages from their employer ECOBOL, the national postal system. The strike followed a 48-hour stoppage on July 4-5, to which there was no response by ECOBOL. The workers voted to take up the strike again, this time for 72 hours, with the possibility of converting it into an indefinite walkout if ECOBOL does not respond.

The 19 workers are owed three months’ pay in addition to 15 monthly meal allowances, about US\$58 each. ECOBOL, which has been roundly criticized by the workers and its union for poor administration, has failed to make contributions to the pension and health insurance funds. The news web site *correodelsur.com* reported, “Among the workers there are people who should retire, but because ECOBOL did not make the deposits they cannot get this benefit.”

### **Uruguayan meat workers strike in protest against layoffs**

Workers for the refrigerated meat business PUL de Melo, in the Uruguayan department of Cerro Largo, struck and gathered at the plant’s entrance July 4. The action was called by the Federation of Meat Industry Workers (Foica) as a response to PUL’s layoff of 140 workers. They were joined by hundreds of workers from other unions as well.

Foica claims that the layoffs—or sending of the workers to the *seguro de paro*, or unemployment office—was owing to a “syndical conflict.” According to a union official, an entire shift of workers in the boning department was sent to the unemployment office “because the enterprise does not accept the workers’ assemblies inside the plant.”

### **Argentine newspaper workers strike for unpaid bonus**

Workers for the Buenos Aires-based tabloid *Perfil* walked demand the payment of the second half of their end-of-year bonus, known as an *aguinaldo*. In an assembly convened by the Buenos Aires Press Syndicate (SIPreBA), they voted overwhelmingly against a management offer to pay the bonus in three installments.

A statement by SIPreBA demanded the payment “in the terms that the law establishes.”

### **City of Buenos Aires teachers announce strike against government salary offer**

Teachers for the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, announced July 6 that they would strike July 11 in rejection of the government’s offer of an 18 percent wage raise, which the Sedeba teachers union described as “paltry.” The raise is less than two-thirds the 27.4 percent obtained by teachers in Buenos Aires province July 4 after 17 days of strike action and five months of negotiations.

Sedeba officials criticized the city’s unilateral abandonment of salary negotiations and said that they want to return to the table to “reestablish dialogue.” At least seven unions expressed their intention to adhere to the walkout.

### **48-hour strike by Argentine judicial workers to demand parity talks**

Judicial workers for Buenos Aires province stopped work for two days to push their demand for restarting parity talks with the government of María Eugenia Vidal. The last parity talks took place June 13, when government reps offered a 20 percent hike in four payments. Buenos Aires Judicial Association (AJB) negotiators rejected the offer as less than the previous offer, and the parties have not met since.

AJB is demanding “an urgent convocation to parity talks,” which governor Vidal promised in 2015. “We want deal with the problems of provincial justice and its shameful functioning,” AJB head Agustin Garcia told reporters.

### **Chicago transit workers vote strike authorization**

In a preliminary ballot, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) train operators have voted overwhelmingly to strike. The workers have been on the job 18 months without a contract.

According to the union, the CTA’s last offer did not include pay raises and cut the number of vacation days. The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) reported that 98 percent of those voting voted for strike authorization, but the ATU has not set a strike date, citing a no-strike clause in the contract.

### **California cannery workers’ strike ends**

Cannery workers at San Benito Foods in Hollister, California, ended their strike July 1 after obtaining an immediate \$1-an-hour wage hike. The

100 full-time workers walked out June 23 against appeals by Teamsters Local 890 to await a final bargaining session. The agreement also includes an additional 2.25 percent wage increase in both 2018 and 2019.

The company tried to bring in replacement workers and issued threats against the strikers. Once canning season begins in mid-July, San Benito Foods brings on another 350 part-time seasonal workers to process produce.

### **Negotiations break down, threaten to re-ignite Alaska city workers’ strike**

City negotiators for Wrangell, Alaska, withdrew from contract talks July 5 and announced they would not consider a counter-proposal from the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers on behalf of 24 municipal workers. The rejection opens the possibility that city workers will resume strike action, which began on June 22.

The two sides originally conflicted over wages, with the union asking for a \$2.50-an-hour wage hike, while the city would only offer 75 cents. The city is also seeking to impose a greater burden of health care costs on workers.

### **Court defends firing of Minnesota fast-food workers protesting lack of paid sick days**

A federal appeals court ruled July 3 against six Jimmy John’s workers in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota, who were fired for protests against the lack of paid sick time off. The court declared workers are not protected by labor law when their actions assume a “sharp, public, disparaging attack upon the quality of the company’s product and its business policies. ... Allegations that a food industry employer is selling unhealthy food are likely to have a devastating impact on its business.”

In 2010, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) lost an election to represent Jimmy John’s workers by 87-85. A group of workers sought to continue the struggle by posting a picture of two sandwiches, one made by an allegedly sick employee. The caption read, “Can’t tell the difference? That’s too bad because Jimmy John’s workers don’t get paid sick days.”

### **Ontario mental health workers set to strike**

Eighty-six mental health workers employed by New Path Youth and Family Services in Simcoe County, north of Toronto, will be in a strike/lockout position on July 14 after conciliated talks failed to produce a new agreement.

New Path is a government-funded center that provides health services for children, youth and their family. Therapists, counsellors and youth workers there are represented by the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). Union negotiators say they are only looking for a modest wage increase, but the employer is offering C\$700 credit cards in lieu of a wage increase.



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