

National strike in Argentina

Workers Struggles: The Americas

27 February 2018

National strike, protests in Argentina against government policies

A nationwide strike on February 21 was accompanied by a massive demonstration in Buenos Aires over the policies of the government of President Mauricio Macri. The protest was the culmination of a week of anti-austerity protest actions beginning February 15. Union members, retirees and social and human rights organizations joined the march through the city's downtown.

The Macri administration has promoted a series of measures designed to undermine working class living standards and resistance in order to make Argentina more "investor friendly." These include attacks on pensions, hikes in utility and transportation rates, gutting of subsidies, promotion of temporary work, layoffs of public sector workers, and caps on wage increases, in a nation where the inflation rate is the second highest in South America.

Police, many of whom are now equipped with Tasers, have been given greater powers to repress the working class. Some police were deployed on highways leading to Buenos Aires to stop and search vehicles carrying protesters.

A number of union confederations—the General Workers Confederation (CGT), Argentine Workers Central, the State Workers Association and others—called the protest actions, but not all unions supported them. The CGT in particular has a long history of class collaboration and originally attempted to cooperate with Macri, only taking up limited strikes and protests in the face of working class demands. They now find themselves on the receiving end of corruption investigations, with CGT head Hugo Moyano facing money-laundering charges.

Argentine teachers set to strike over wage demand

Teachers in Bariloche, in Argentina's Río Negro province, are set to strike on March 5 if the government does not raise its wage offer of 15 percent. The provincial education minister claims that the offer is firm and that the strike will not alter it. The provincial governor claims that anything above 15 percent would put the province in debt. The latest inflation estimate by the Central Bank was 19.4 percent. A meeting between ministry officials and representatives of the Education Workers Union of Río Negro is scheduled for February 27.

In Neuquén province, a plenary session of general secretaries of the Education Workers Association of Neuquén (ATEN) voted to strike for two days, March 5 and 6, to press their wage demand. ATEN called on the government to convene a new meeting "where it moves closer to a coherent salary proposal, added to the repair of the schools and the creation of positions. If that happens, the assemblies will meet with urgency to analyze the situation."

Representatives of some of the 22 sections had more militant demands that failed to obtain enough votes. Those from Zapala proposed a five-day walkout to press the demand that teachers' salaries be equal to the cost of living, and that no worker earn less than 18,000 pesos (US\$901) per month.

Colombian teachers hold 24-hour strike to demand unfulfilled contract provisions

Teachers across Colombia struck for one day on February 21 to protest the government's noncompliance with various provisions in a contract signed last June. The

strike, called by the Colombian Federation of Teachers, Fecode, lasted 37 days.

A Fecode communiqué declared, “The majority of the new contracts for medical-health care services for teachers went into effect November 23 last year, but to this date the provider entities are not completely complying with the all terms.” It also complained of problems from old as well as new contracts: “The affiliation of teachers and beneficiaries is made difficult, they are denying emergency attention, ontological patients denounce interruptions in their treatments and medicines are not being handed over, among other points.”

Education Minister Yaneth Giha denounced the strike as unjustified, and claimed that the provisions were being met, though only eight of 24 have been met so far, according to her. Fecode issued a statement claiming that “the government intends to do the same thing it did with Avianca and declare it illegal,” referring to an airline pilots’ strike that lasted 51 days last year, but was declared illegal, and ended in November with no issues being resolved.

Mexican university workers strike over staffing, use of resources, contracting

Members of the University of Oaxaca Academic Workers Syndicate (STAUO) began a strike February 22. The walkout began the morning after an assembly vote following the lack of response to union demands.

The three fundamental demands in the strike are: transparency in staffing decisions at the University; clarification on the use of resources; and the rescission of unjustified contracts. The last refers to allegations that some contracts have been given to people who are already retired, at a time when the administration claims that the university is going broke. STAUO alleges cronyism as a factor in the selection of these new contracts.

Mediated talks follow one-day strike by food distribution center workers in Maine

Mediated talks were to have begun February 26 between Hannaford Distribution Center and the union representing

250 workers who struck the food warehouse in South Portland, Maine last week. Members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1445 held a 24-hour strike February 21 to demand higher wages and reduced healthcare costs.

The company offered annual 50-cent wage increases in each year of a new three-year contract. But that did little to offset expectations by workers that in the wake of company profits and a tax break they should receive much more.

According to the union, however, the real trigger for a strike and the lopsided rejection of the contract came after the company proposed to lower the starting wage for new hires by \$4 an hour. “They felt it was horrible that they would do that and create a two-tier workforce,” said Tom Brown, a servicing director for the UFCW.

Windsor autoworkers vote to strike

Workers at four companies that supply auto parts to Fiat Chrysler’s Windsor Assembly Plant have voted nearly unanimously to go on strike if a deal cannot be reached this week.

The workers involved in the contract dispute are employed by HBPO Canada, Avencez Assembly, ZF Friedrichshafen and Dakkota Integrated Systems, producing parts for the Dodge Grand Caravan and the Chrysler Pacifica, FC’s flagship minivan. The main issues in dispute include pensions and benefits with union negotiators trying to dampen workers’ hopes for wage increases to reflect the recent provincial hike in the minimum wage.

Unifor local President James Stewart revealed the union’s attitude to the vote, saying, “It’s unrealistic for anyone to bargain that type of increase. But the expectations are up, so that would be our challenge.” The current contract expires March 4.



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