

# Argentine teachers, public workers unions call another limited strike

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Following last week's two-day nationwide teachers' strike, members of some teachers unions, as well as public workers, have voiced willingness to strike again, though their unions would once again limit these walkouts.

In the absence of an improved salary and benefits proposal from the government of Argentina's Neuquén province, teachers in the Neuquén Education Workers Association (ATEN) have voted to hold another strike. In a meeting in the province's eponymous capital, a majority of attendees voted to stop work for 72 hours. Meetings in other parts of the province will determine the final decision on when and how long the next strike will last.

In Santa Fé province, the third set of parity talks between the central administration and the UPCN public workers union, ATE state workers union and a number of teachers' unions concluded on March 9 with no resolution. The Labor and Social Security Ministry's offer of three installments totaling 16 percent—below a projected inflation rate of at least 19 percent—was called “insufficient” by the UPCN, which called for a 48-hour strike March 13 and 14.

### Haitian customs and postal workers strike over status, pay

Postal and customs employees in Haiti struck on March 5 to pressure the government to deliver on a promise to sign a law on their status agreed over a year ago. On January 21, 2017, the Minister of Economy and Finance, Jude Alix Patrick Salomon, had promised to publish the special status within 90 days. A year later, the Ministry asked for an extension until March 1, which came and went without customs and postal workers hearing any news, prompting the strike.

Included in the agreement was an 80 percent raise. Salomon claimed that the status change delay was due to the time it takes for the Office of Management and Human Resources to follow verification steps for each agent. He also claimed that 40 percent of the raise had already been delivered and that he would meet with agents' representatives.

### Trinidadian cement workers protest nonpayment of back wages

Workers for Trinidad Cement Limited (TCL) held a lively protest outside the company's headquarters in Claxton Bay March 8. The workers carried signs and chanted to demand back pay dating back years. The Oilfields Workers Trade Union (OWTU) is in negotiations with the firm for the 2012-2014 period.

OWTU branch president for TCL Ahmad Mohammed told reporters that TCL negotiators claim that the company would need 30 months to pay the overdue wages. He called the claim “unreasonable and frivolous,” and noted that workers' morale was at “an all-time low.”

One other reason workers' morale is low is that TCL's parent company, CEMEX, has implemented changes to management, which according to a *Guardian* report, “has so far brought plans of retrenchment and unilateral changes to workers' terms and conditions of employment.”

### Peruvian bus drivers strike over firings, wage demands

Dozens of bus drivers for two transport companies in Lima, Peru's Metropolitan system—Transvial Lima SAC and Perú Masivo—struck for 24 hours March 7. The drivers protested massive firings deriving from several demands they delivered to the two companies last year, including better pay, changes in the duration of breaks and the reinstatement of a performance bonus.

News sources quoted one worker who said, “On May 8 of 2017 we presented a petition of demands, we have gone through all the processes, there have been conversations, but so far there is no solution.” In the meantime, according to their union, over 100 drivers have received letters of termination.

The drivers union announced an indefinite strike beginning March 19 if no solution is found. The Municipality of Lima and the Labor Ministry have called the strike “inappropriate” and said that Transvial Lima SAC and Perú Masivo would have contingency plans in place.

### Panamanian trash collectors strike over pay, equipment issues

Workers for Environmental Community Solutions (Sacosa), which contracts trash collection services for the Panamanian city of Santiago de Veraguas, walked off the job March 5. The 45 workers took the action to demand overtime pay, changes in administrative management, and improvements in equipment.

The strike lasted for two days, by which time trash was beginning to pile up around the city. The workers agreed to return to work March 7 following an agreement signed with the company's director.

### Bolivian soccer team strikes for unpaid wages, bonuses

Players for the Bolivian soccer team Club San José began a strike March 8 to demand the overdue payment of salaries and bonuses for the last two months. The club's president, Wilson Martínez, had met with the team the week before and agreed to pay part of the salaries following a game in the South America Cup playoffs, a promise he did not keep.

Club San José players have been compelled to strike for overdue wages before; in 2014, 2016 and 2017.

With another playoff game scheduled for March 13, the players suspended practice. On the second day, team second captain Ignacio García told reporters that the players would be willing to return to practice in preparation for the match if they were paid "something of the total owed."

On the second day of the strike, Martínez offered to pay the debt by March 18, when the team will play The Strongest. The players agreed to return to play.

### **Idaho miners reject arbitration as strike reaches one-year mark**

The 250 miners at the Lucky Friday Mine in Mullan, Idaho voted overwhelmingly March 7 to reject a proposal to submit their year-long strike to an arbitration panel. Members of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 5114 voted by a 123 to 51 margin against binding arbitration.

The strike was triggered back on March 13, 2017, over a proposal by management to do away with a system whereby lead miners select their own crews for work in the silver, lead and zinc mine. Management claims the procedure is a "unique bidding system that no other mine in the United States works under."

The company wants full control in determining assignments in order to raise productivity. Miners on the other hand believe that the current system provides for greater safety and has also allowed them to break production records in the past. Workers also believe the company proposal will allow management to override seniority.

In April, management and union officials came to an agreement to submit the dispute to a three-member arbitration panel that would not seek a compromise but declare a winner-take-all decision. A USW official admitted, "There were concerns the arbitrators could impose a contract ... our members would find untenable." A company news release, upset over the result, pointed out that the "union had suggested arbitration."

Miners will be marking the one-year strike with a rally on March 17.

### **Hamden, Connecticut manufacturing workers strike**

Industrial workers at the Porcelen Specrail plant in Hamden, Connecticut have been striking since March 1 to raise the demand for better wages, affordable insurance and a retirement plan. The contract for the 60 members of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 11, expired back in January and was extended until March 1, but no agreement was forthcoming.

An average machinist wage at Specrail is \$14.30 an hour, considerably under the state's median machinist wage of \$23.68. But many of the workers make just over the minimum wage of \$10.40 an hour and have rejected the company's offer to raise that wage to \$11.30 as completely unacceptable.

The company is also proposing to hike health care premiums to about \$600 a month for workers with families. This would consume 33 percent of the lowest paid workers' monthly wages.

Porcelen Specrail is owned by Cleveland-based G&S Metal Products Company Inc., which operates facilities in both Connecticut and Ohio and is the largest producer of metal bake ware in the United States.

### **Machinists strike Philadelphia, Ohio firm**

A strike by machinists has shut down Gradall Industries in Philadelphia, Ohio, a manufacturer of heavy industrial equipment. The walkout involves 208 workers, members of the International Association of Machinists Local 1285. The previous contract expired in March 2017.

The main issue is a company demand that health care benefits fluctuate in coverage and cost annually. Management also wants to bar employee spouses from coverage if they have alternative health care insurance. The company rejected a proposal by the union aimed at cost savings.

Police blocked access to the plant entrance where pickets were stationed, citing the alleged possibility of violence. Police threatened a \$144 fine for vehicles that drove past the police road closure signs.

### **Carleton University workers on strike**

Eight hundred fifty administrators, technical staff and other support workers walked off the job March 4 at Carleton University in Ottawa, with the conflict growing increasingly bitter in recent days according to press reports.

Pensions are a central issue in the dispute, with the university demanding the elimination of contract language that the union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), says has protected defined pension benefits for over 40 years. Some classes have been cancelled because of the strike, and there have been significant traffic delays near campus resulting from city transit drivers refusing to cross picket lines.

Although no new negotiations are currently scheduled, union leaders have said that they had asked for dates to resume talks, but university negotiators have labeled those claims untrue.

### **Whitehorse city workers prepare job action**

Municipal workers in Whitehorse, Yukon are gearing up for possible job action up to and including a strike that could begin as next week after their union walked away from the bargaining table last week.

Organized in two locals of the Yukon Employees' Union (YEU), the workers are facing a range of concession demands from the city, including the elimination of severance pay for retiring workers as well as cuts to bonus pay. Union negotiators have played down the possibility of a strike and it is also possible that workers will be locked out after the deadline of March 17 if a deal isn't reached before then.



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