

Teachers rebel in Argentina, Bolivia, Peru

Workers Struggles: The Americas

10 April 2018

Teachers in Argentina hold 24-hour strike again over raise demand

Buenos Aires province witnessed another short strike action by teachers unions April 5 following the sixth attempt by the provincial government to push through its 15 percent salary raise offer in three stages: 7 percent in January, 4 percent in May and 4 percent in September. Last year's inflation rate was 24.8 percent and this year it is projected to pass 20 percent.

The web site of SUTEBA, the union of public school teachers in Buenos Aires, listed some of the other complaints of educators: "lack of classrooms; schools in disrepair; cancellation of courses; miserable school lunchrooms; lack of positions ... arbitrary layoffs." This month marks the eleventh anniversary of the police murder of teacher Carlos Fuentealba at a protest demonstration. At a demonstration in La Plata, teachers carried picket signs with photos of Fuentealba and demands for justice.

Bolivian teachers strike over work hours, supplies

Teachers struck and marched along the main entrance to the southeastern Bolivian town of Pailón April 5 to press their demands for the equalization of salaries, more teaching materials, facilitation of the program for acquiring bachelor degrees and recognition of a primary school licensure program.

Strike by Peruvian educators to demand budget increase, salary hike

Teachers in the Peruvian Education Workers Union (SUTEP) held a 24-hour "preventive strike" on April 5 to demand a better budget for the education sector, a pay raise and compliance with the agreement signed by the government following last year's strike.

Even though the Education Ministry had declared the strike illegal, it went ahead nationwide. In some regions educational institutions did function normally. The strike, according to SUTEP, was the antecedent to a national strike whose date will be determined April 14.

Mexican college professors and researchers poised to strike over salaries

Some 120 professors and 50 researchers at the College of the Northern

Border (Colef) in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico are ready to walk off the job on April 13, according to the SIPColef union. This would be the first time there has been a strike at Colef, a prestigious Mexican institute, which specializes in teaching and research in the social sciences.

According to SIPColef spokesman Carlos Vladimir Ruelas, the professors and researchers want a 15 percent raise due to the rising cost of living. "In recent years the purchasing power of Colef personnel has been undermined; meanwhile the salary increases have been inferior to the national indicators of inflation, which on the northern border rises to 7 percent." The Colef administration has offered only 3.4 percent, which one Colef researcher called "a real joke."

Though researchers in Mexico earn a monthly salary that is above the median—between 10 and 12 thousand pesos (\$US547-656)—they lose one third of that to taxation. In France, researchers earn about 5,000 euros (\$US6,000)

Last week, over 400 researchers for the National Science and Technology Council protested in Mexico City over the same issue. Along with their colleagues in the Ensenada (Baja California) Center for Scientific Research and Higher Education and the National Institute of Astrophysics, Optics and Electronics in Puebla, they are prepared to join the Colef workers in strike action.

Venezuelan bus drivers strike over lack of supplies

Public transit drivers in Puerto La Cruz, a coastal city in Venezuela's Anzoátegui state, stopped activity on the morning of April 5 to protest the lack of supplies provided by the regional transport association. Traffic was slowed or stopped on some streets blocked by drivers' vehicles.

The drivers demanded the delivery of promised supplies like spare parts, tires, oil, batteries and lubricants as well as maintenance and security on the roads and the fulfillment of various benefits.

Panama: Construction workers union announces strike over pay and rent issues

Panama's Suntracs construction workers union announced April 7 that it will call a general strike to begin on April 18 over unresolved issues in contract negotiations with the Panamanian Chamber of Construction (CAPAC). The announcement was made as negotiations stalled over the last 14 of 155 clauses in a petition that Suntracs reps brought to the table.

The primary conflict is over a salary raise demand of 15 percent and the amount of income tax covered by firms. The union has five days to legalize the action with the Labor Ministry. Mediation meetings will take

place at the ministry until the strike goes into effect.

Bahamian nurses in dispute over shift system, union busting

On April 4, the Bahamas Nurses Union (BNU) held an emergency meeting to discuss the use of non-union contract nurses at Public Hospitals Authority (PHA) facilities. The BNU accused the PHA of using the non-union nurses to a shift system, which had been rejected by the union members.

Nurses went on strike in 2014 over the proposed 12-hour shift system, but also over wage issues, benefits, unfair treatment and unpaid wages by management. Currently union nurses work a four-days-on/four-days-off schedule. Management has since brought in the non-union contract nurses to work the 12-hour shifts at lower pay.

A meeting between the BNU and the Health Ministry brought no results. The Department of Labour called for a tripartite April 6 meeting with the PHA. The BNU is considering filing for a strike authorization vote.

Union blocks strike by University of Michigan lecturers

The University of Michigan Lecturers' Employee Organization (LEO) blocked a strike due to begin this week after weekend negotiations with university administration moved "in the right direction," the LEO announced Sunday. Nearly 1,700 non-tenured faculty at UM's three campuses are fighting poverty level wages, which start at \$28,300 on the Dearborn campus, \$27,300 at Flint and \$34,500 in Ann Arbor.

The University's offer of a minimum starting pay of around \$10,000 in Ann Arbor and close to \$10,000 on the Flint and Dearborn campuses, was hailed as "already the biggest salary gain ever, although still not nearly enough for a living wage," the LEO's web site said. The LEO is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, which has repeatedly betrayed teachers struggles, including most recently in West Virginia and Oklahoma.

Massachusetts nurses threaten to walk out

Nearly 200 nurses at the Baystate Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield, located in western Massachusetts, scheduled to start a one-day strike at 7 a.m. local time on Wednesday. The walkout would be the second during the year-and-a-half long labor negotiations with management over understaffing and extra workloads, which nurses say put patients at risk.

Having already taken the measure of the Massachusetts Nurses Association, management has preempted the strike by imposing a three-day lockout on nurses starting at 7 a.m. Tuesday. Management is bringing in temporary nurses to scab on the strike.

Windsor Casino strike

More than 2,300 workers walked off the job at Caesars Windsor last

Friday after nearly two-thirds voted against a three-year tentative agreement "strongly recommended" by the Unifor union. It is the first strike at the facility since a bitter 41-day walkout against concessions in 2004.

Most workers at Caesars currently earn \$17 per hour. Some skilled workers earn above \$20 per hour. Up to one-third of the staff work part-time hours. The minimum wage in Ontario stands at \$14 and is scheduled to increase to \$15 next January.

The tentative deal would provide a 75-cent per hour wage increase for 2018, 50 cents more the following year and another 50 cents in 2020. Average annual inflation in the province currently sits at 2.2 percent and is expected to rise further. A one percent additional contribution to the inferior defined-contributions pension scheme was also proposed. In the hopes of bribing the poorly paid workforce to ratify the deal, signing bonuses of \$1,150 for full-time workers, \$900 for part-timers and \$500 for casual employees were offered.

Canadian Pacific Railway faces crew walkout

More than 3,000 train engineers, conductors and yard workers have voted to strike Canadian Pacific Railway on April 21 as contract talks drag on. In a statement, the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference said 94 percent of members voted for strike action after train crews have been without a contract since the beginning of 2018. CP is demanding "cuts and concessions" despite posting rising profit, the union said.

Iron miners strike Labrador

More than 1,000 iron miners in Labrador City walked off their jobs at the Iron Ore Company of Canada (IOC) mine on March 27 after voting by 98 per cent for a strike against company demands for a multi-tier wage and benefit system and the expansion of a temporary workforce. Negotiations are set to resume with the United Steelworkers Union, which has a long history of agreeing to concession-laden contracts.

Terry Atkins, who normally operates a grader for the company, said the community has been showing support since they first walked off the job, honking as they drive by and bringing the strikers food and coffee. "Everybody in this town is affected," he told the *Aurora* newspaper. "This is our town, it's our iron ore, and what this company tried to do to us time and time again—it's not right."



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