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Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Teachers who began a strike on April 17 in the northern Mexican state of Chihuahua reacted with anger to their union's announcement that it had signed an agreement before it was shown to teachers. Many of them said that they would not comply with the union's order to end the strike.

The teachers had walked out to demand the payment of all salaries and benefits due to new and temporary teachers, many of whom have not been paid for over a year. On April 28, representatives of Section 42 of the National Education Workers' Syndicate (SNTE) announced in a press conference that they had reached an agreement in a meeting with Education Secretariat officials.

Although in some cities striking teachers began winding down and disassembling their encampments in front of government buildings, others refused to call off their strike, distrustful of SNTE, which has a long history of corruption and betrayal. In Parral, teachers had begun to take down their chairs, signs and tents, but when the union reps showed up and explained that the government had only agreed to hold more meetings to "analyze" the claims, they shouted denunciations and vowed to continue striking.

Heberto Caballero, secretary of Section 42, told *EL Sol de Parral* that what the teachers wanted—dialogue between SNTE and the government—had been achieved. He admitted that many teachers—due to what he called their "high expectations"—were not happy with the sellout, and added, "Although we have sufficient legal arguments to continue paying benefits, the State Government, although it recognizes them, requested a document that protects it before the law so that it is not committing any crime by paying them."

El Sol reported that Caballero "stressed that if the strike continues it would go from a protest in which their rights were protected, to an illegality in which the public force could even be used, since the State would take it as something out of agreement." He did point out that new and temporary teachers who had benefits pending would be paid all money owed them...up until May 31, 2015.

Panamanian professors protest to demand more funding for education

Professors at the University of Panama (UP) marched in Panama City April 27 to demand more funding for education. They were joined by administrators, students and supporters of higher education as they congregated at the Economics Ministry in the city's financial

district.

UP Chancellor Eduardo Flores told the crowd that the infrastructure of the university, the nation's largest and most prestigious, is "literally falling to pieces around us" as well as suffering from shortages of equipment and out of date laboratories in both the central and regional campuses.

University professors in Argentina hold 48-hour strike over pay raise demand

Professors in the National Confederation of University Professors (CONADU) in Argentina went on a two-day strike April 26 and 27 to press their demands. CONADU represents about 40 percent of professors, researchers and scientists in the university sector.

On the evening of the first day, public universities shut down as professors, members of student organizations and supporters of public universities gathered in front of the Education Ministry in Buenos Aires. CONADU secretary general Carlos De Feo denounced the policies of the Mauricio Macri government and the ministry's "disgraceful" raise offer of 15 percent—2 percent in April and June, 5 percent in August and 6 percent in December—which was already eaten up by inflation in the first three months of the year.

In addition to a 25 percent raise, CONADU is calling for a "trigger clause" pegged to inflation, regular ranking of salaries, and increased budgets for the university, science and technology. Another demand is the upgrading of contract and "ad honorem"—i.e. unpaid—work.

CONADU says that it will hold another 48-hour strike on May 10 and 11 if the ministry does not act on its demands.

Argentine steel workers to strike for wage increase

After failed wage negotiations with management representatives, directors of Argentina's 230,000-member Metallurgical Workers Union (UOM) voted April 26 to call a nationwide one-day strike for May 3. The employers' offer of a 12 percent hourly raise—typically spread out over three installments—would, according to the UOM, "be worth less than a kilo of bread."

The employers' raise offer would bring the minimum steel worker's monthly pay to 16,000 pesos (US\$780); the UOM is calling for 17,000 pesos (US\$829), which is equivalent to the "canasta básica" or basic food basket of essential needs.

The national strike will include a mobilization at the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires. However, another meeting between management and union reps is scheduled for May 2.

Strike at two Pennsylvania hospital strikes followed by lockouts

Nurses at two Community Health Systems (CHS) hospitals in Pennsylvania were locked out after carrying through a one-day strike on April 25 to protest a lack of safe staffing levels and wages. About 260 nurses at the Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton and another 120 nurses, mental health technicians and other staff at First Hospital in Kingston took part in the action after months of negotiations between Community Health and the Service Employees International Union failed to result in an agreement.

Nurses are also opposed to management's policy of floating nurses between units, made inevitable due to low staffing levels. Mental health technicians are striking to protest the company's unilateral implementation of its final contract offer. Moses Taylor Hospital nurses are especially aggrieved at the fact that they earn less than nurses at the Regional Hospital of Scranton, which is also owned by CHS.

CHS is a Fortune 500 company out of Tennessee. It is the largest provider of general hospital health care services in the United States in terms of number of acute care facilities. The company has been plagued with corruption charges and been forced to pay millions in fines. Its stock has lost over 76 percent of its value since the year 2000.

West Virginia machinists in third week of strike against layoffs

Members of the International Association of Machinists Local 88 are concluding their third week on strike at the TecnoCap manufacturing facility in Glen Dale, West Virginia over company demands to lay off one-third of the workforce. Union officials claim workers would be content to agree to a renewal of the old contract terms. The layoffs would affect 31 workers.

The IAM went out on strike on April 9, just three weeks after a separate union, the United Steelworkers, settled a week-long strike affecting 71 workers at the same facility. TecnoCap is an Italian-based company that also has another manufacturing plant in Ohio.

Ontario auto parts workers on strike

320 workers employed by Lear Corp. in Ajax, Ontario east of Toronto are on strike this week after delivering a near unanimous strike vote to their union Unifor last week.

The Unifor leadership had made clear their wish to avoid a strike, but negotiations broke down and the strike deadline passed without an agreement in place. According to the union a key issue in dispute is the disparity in wages between workers in seat manufacturing at the

Lear plant as compared to the rest of the auto industry. Lear Ajax is a principal parts supplier for Fiat Chrysler's nearby Brampton Assembly plant.

Ontario salt mine workers strike

Around 370 workers employed by US-based Compass Minerals at its salt mine in Goderich Ontario, north of Windsor, went on strike last Friday after months of negotiations failed to produce a new deal.

According to the union a central issue is job security with the company seeking to employ more contract employees after laying off 48 workers in February when negotiations began. In addition the company is demanding a range of concessions in overtime, long-term disability, retiree benefits and pensions. Workers affected by the strike include electricians, miners and production staff at what is the largest mine of its kind in the world. The company has stated publicly that it intends to maintain operations in spite of the strike while it goes through what it has been termed "long-term restructuring."

Workers strike Quebec seniors residence

Around 100 workers at the Manoir Sherbrooke seniors' residence south of Montreal went on strike last week after working without a contract for 2 ½ years.

The Estrie Private Housing Workers' Union (FSSS-CSN) has avoided strike action until now with a number of legal actions against the family-owned company, including attempts to have company property seized. The company has reportedly refused to pay its share of insurance premiums after an arbitration ruling that coverage was to include dental benefits.

While no details have been made public, union negotiators say they have put forward a final, final offer that they say is close what the employer demanded.



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