

Protests against layoffs across Argentina, Quebec daycare workers strike

Workers Struggles: the Americas

12 June 2018

Day of protests in Argentina against sackings and assaults on wages

As Argentina continues to sink into economic turmoil, workers across the country launched a day of protest on June 7 against layoffs and attacks on wages. In San Martín, Mendoza cannery workers at the La Campagnola Company in the western province of Mendoza rallied at the plant's entrance and blocked access to defend their jobs. Twenty workers were sacked last month and 35 in April, as part of a campaign to drastically reduce the workforce, which has fallen to 120 from 350 a few months ago. The company also intends to slash the number of seasonal workers from 800 in years past to 180 now.

Union leader Antonio Moyano of the Food Industry Union of San Martín denounced the layoffs. "They told us not to worry", declared Moyano, "because the company is investing in new machinery." However, the union has allowed the sackings so far, avoided strike action and launched limited protests, such as the one last Thursday, while making impotent appeals to the labor ministry.

In Cordoba City, workers marched through the streets of this industrial city demanding an end to layoffs in the government press agency, Telam, as well as in newspapers, and radio stations. The marchers rallied in front of corporate press associations to protest continuing layoffs and closures.

Workers also rallied and protested at Cordoba City's Provincial Power Utility, EPEC, against sackings and to demand back wages. The rally launched a 48-hour strike against the utility. The strikers are also demanding the freeing of six workers, arrested for allegedly attacking company managers, and the restitution of their jobs.

Marches, rallies and protests also took place in opposition to the layoffs of road workers in Tucuman province, of teachers in Buenos Aires and other Argentine cities. Workers consider the wave of layoffs, imposition of early retirements and wage delays in the context of austerity

measures being demanded by the International Monetary Fund as part of its \$50 billion rescue loan.

University employees in Brazil begin nationwide strike

Professors and administrative officials at federal universities in twelve states in Brazil have begun a nationwide strike for more government investment in education, better working conditions and a 27 percent pay increase on October 29. The walkout is in response to government plans to slash spending, including in education.

Among the federal universities on strike are those in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Mato Grosso. On June 5, an assembly of University of São Paulo workers and students endorsed the strike and rejected a proposed wage increase for education workers of 1.5 percent. The workers, who have not had a raise since 2015, are demanding a 12.6 percent wage increase. The strike also centers on the defense of the University Hospital, which has been subjected to government austerity measures.

Chilean fishermen stage protest

On June 4, fishermen at the Chilean port of Concepción marched and set up barricades blocking access to cities surrounding the port, which is located on the south-central coast. At issue were new government regulations on fishing that restrict traditional fishing methods for coastal fish and mollusks.

Mexico City firefighters protest assassination of fellow worker

On June 9, firefighters in Mexico City rallied in front of Mexico City's municipal government house, protesting Friday's assassination of one of their comrades, second inspector Javier Salinas García. The protestors blame Ismael García, leader of the Firefighters Union and current PRD congressional candidate, for masterminding the assassination.

Salinas García was campaigning for a new labor organization and opposed Ismael García's candidacy. A spokesman for the new organization declared at the rally that the attacks on Salinas García and others began when the new organization registered with the government authorities. Following repeated threats, Salinas García left a recorded message holding Ismael García responsible for anything that happened to him or his family.

Those firefighters that support the alternate union have faced harassments and attacks, including sackings, not getting paid properly, being denied access to fire stations and receiving anonymous death threats.

Upstate New York health care workers end three-day strike without contract

Health care workers at the Jordan Health Center in Rochester, New York, ended their three-day strike June 8 and returned to work without a contract. The 65 members of Local 1199 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) are seeking wage and benefit improvements.

The SEIU unanimously endorsed a federal mediator's proposal that called for a wage freeze in 2018 and a 7 percent salary increase during 2019 to 2020. Management wants to limit the offer to 6 percent by 2020 with an additional 1 percent in 2021. The union ceded the wage freeze in return for an agreement by the company to continue funding health care benefits, although there are reports management was able to obtain substantial reductions in the cost of the plan itself. Workers are also agitated by Jordan Health CEO Janice Harbin's salary increase from \$148,000 in 2013 to \$251,000 in 2016.

Quebec daycare workers launch unlimited strike

Following months of limited job action, more than 1,300 workers in Montreal and nearby Laval are on strike at 57 publicly funded daycare centers. After a series of one-day walkouts, workers voted last month to give the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) a mandate for unlimited strike action. The main issues in dispute include work schedules, seniority and working conditions, with the employer demanding the right to send workers home on a day they are called in to work under some circumstances.

Daycare workers in the region have been without a contract since the spring of 2015, during which time funding from the provincial government has been cut drastically. Although talks are continuing, the union has said the strike will remain in effect until a deal is reached.

BC casino workers vote to strike

Workers at various facilities of Gateway Casino in lower British Columbia have voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action, with the vast majority of 675 local members of the BC Government Employees Union (BCGEU) turning out to cast ballots.

Negotiations between the two sides broke off in May over substantial differences over wages and benefits with the union stating that the latest company offer would not even exceed the planned raise in the provincial minimum wage. The last contract for workers at Gateway expired in September 2017 and BCGEU negotiators have pledged to do whatever it takes to get a fair contract.

On June 4, the two-month-long strike by 2,300 casino workers at Caesars Windsor ended after they ratified a deal pushed by the Unifor union. The workers had rejected similar union-backed deals on two previous occasions.



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