Argentine teachers and students occupy campus, Halifax Shipyard workers reject contract

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

Argentina: Teachers and students take over National University campuses

Last Friday, students and striking instructors occupied the Río Cuarto campus of the National University, in Córdoba province. At issue are government cutbacks to the universities (part of the national economic austerity measures), the payment of back wages, and the renegotiation of wages under conditions of increasing inflation. The instructors were on the third day of a strike over these same issues.

Assisting in the occupation were members of the staff and administration, and non-student youth.

The professors' association (AGD) issued a statement declaring, "We fight for a public education system that is free, of high quality, and inclusive." Many of the occupiers carried signs denouncing the administration of President Mauricio Macri and the International Monetary Fund.

Occupations also took place in other National University campuses, in San Luis, La Plata, Cuyo and Arturo Jauretche.

Friday's occupations coincide with the 100th anniversary of mass student rebellions that won autonomy from government interference for the public university system, and initiated a long struggle for free public university education.

Throughout the week, events have taken place in Argentina marking the student uprising, including a march of 10,000 students on June 11 in the city of Córdoba, the center of the 1918 rebellion.

Electricity workers protest Brazil privatization

On June 11, workers at the state-owned electricity company, Electrobrás, participated in a 72-hour protest strike against the sale of state-owned companies by the administration to transnational corporations. Striking Electrobrás workers were joined at a rally at corporate headquarters by employees from other Electrobrás divisions; Furnas, Electronuclear, and Cepel.

The three-day protest strike rejected the privatization measures being imposed by current Brazilian president Michel Temer and his administration. Electrobrás management insists that the electric utility is bankrupt and that the best solution is to place it in private hands.

The strikers also demand the signing of a new employment contract. Their current one ended in May. Management is demanding givebacks in health and other benefits.

In addition to Electrobrás, the government has sold offshore oil reserves to transnational oil companies at auction and plans to privatize Petrobrás, the national petroleum company. In May, the government raised fuel prices, a move that triggered an 11-day national truckers' strike that paralyzed the economy. Some suspect that the rise in fuel prices was meant to make Petrobrás more attractive to foreign investors.

Teachers march in Oaxaca, Mexico in remembrance of 2006 struggle

Several thousand teachers, members of the CNTE dissident union, marched last Thursday in remembrance of the struggle, known here as the Oaxaca Commune, against attacks by then-governor Ulises Ruiz to repress their protests. The teachers, who are in the third week of a strike, marked the 12th anniversary of the government's attempt to repress their rally. The teachers marched through downtown Oaxaca, capital of Oaxaca state, and rallied, picketed, and painted slogans on the wall of PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) headquarters.

In June 14, 2006, Oaxaca municipal police attempted to repress and disband an occupation by teachers of the city center. Despite the use of tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition, Oaxacan workers and youth rushed in defense of the teachers and repelled the police.

The demonstrators insisted, 12 year after the events, that Ulises Ruiz and Jorge Franco Vargas, at the time Ruiz's government secretary, be tried and punished.

In Mexico City, striking teachers from Oaxaca, Chiapas, Michoacán and Guerrero continued their week-long protests and occupations of the city center, demanding the rehiring of sacked teachers and an end to the government attacks on teachers and public education.

Indiana steelworkers strike for higher wages

More than 80 workers walked off the job at the Union Electric Steel plant in Valparaiso, Indiana June 11 demanding higher wages after rejecting a company proposal. Members of the Intentional Association of Machinists (IAM) Local 2018 voted down a company offer of a nine percent wage hike over a four-year contract.

Workers are striking for a wage increase of between 12 and16 percent, claiming the company offered nine percent three years ago when the industry was in a downturn. The company's profits are further fattened by having its tax rate cut from 35 percent to 21 percent.

Kyle Yarnell, an IAM member, told the *Northwest Indiana Times*, "It's a slap in the face. We've met every quota they've had. They have three times as many orders on the books. We've done everything they've asked, increasing productivity and production."

Union Electric Steel makes forged and cast rolls for steel mills and has a global production chain with 8 other plants outside the United States and an additional 3 facilities in Pennsylvania. According to the *Northwest Indiana Times*, the company "staggers the contract negotiations so they don't all take place at once," as a ploy to divide workers.

Halifax shipyard workers reject union sanctioned deal

In a strong rebuff to the union leadership, workers at Irving Shipyard in Halifax, Nova Scotia voted 75 percent to reject a tentative deal that their union Unifor had accepted last week, after which it lifted its threat to strike pending a new round of negotiations.

Over 800 workers at the shipyard, which has a multi-billion dollar contract building ships for the Royal Canadian Navy, have been fighting not only against company demands to roll back wages and job security but also against their own union, which has sought to blunt the growing determination of the membership. A central issue for workers is the contracting out of work, with up to 300 contract employees working at the shipyard at any given time. In addition, there is longstanding resentment over managers getting sick days while those who physically build the ships do not.

The union has refused to make comment on the rejection vote, but sought to position themselves at the head of any incipient rebellion to safely contain it within bargaining channels while positioning it as a warning to the employer. Negotiations are continuing under threat of a strike and/or lockout by the company.

Striking faculty at York University vote to return to work

Even as their union seeks to hold a new ballot, contract faculty at York University in Toronto who have been on strike since the beginning of March voted to return to work under threat of back-to-work legislation by the new provincial Tory government of Doug Ford.

If the 1,100 contract faculty affected by the vote do return to work, it would still leave over 2,000 teaching and graduate assistants out on strike because they are in two other different locals of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). A key issue in this contract is job security and the dispute over the number of tenured positions and funding available to teaching assistants.

The vote has been condemned by one faction of the union bargaining team, who have called for a revote to take place later this week, citing voting irregularities. It is not clear when classes would resume even if the vote is upheld, but the university is appealing to all bargaining units to accept the deal being offered.

Toronto bail workers face lockout

Workers at 10 offices of the Toronto Bail Program, which helps secure release for prison inmates, are facing a possible lockout as early as next week if negotiations scheduled for this week do not produce a new deal.

Members of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU), the workers are employed under the Ministry of the Attorney General helping offenders return to the community and getting access to healthcare and other supports. The union is asking for 2.1 percent annual pay increase in a three-year contract, while the employer has proposed 1.5 percent which would not keep pace with the rate of inflation. In addition, the employer is seeking concessions on a range of other issues covering workload, job security as well as health, safety and benefits.