

# Peruvian municipal workers strike in Lima's most affluent district

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29 August 2018

At midday on Wednesday, August 22, hundreds of municipal workers from Lima's affluent district of Miraflores demonstrated in front of the offices of Mayor Jorge Muñoz Wells. The protest was part of a 24-hour work stoppage by 350 workers demanding unpaid wages before the mayor ends his term at the beginning of October.

The strikers belong to the Union of Municipal Workers of Miraflores (SOMMI), which represents 480 workers. Union leader Anibal Diaz explained the urgency of the action to the WSW:

“Mayor Jorge Muñoz Wells is currently running for mayor of Lima, when here in the municipality of Miraflores he discriminates against municipal workers. He still has some payments pending for 2015, 2016 and 2017. He is a mayor unable to solve the problems of his workers and still thinks of running for mayor of the entire city.”

María Gonzales, the municipality's attorney, told *El Comercio* that the arbitration tribunal had established that [the wages owed] have to be paid by January 2019. She added, “We do not have a budget” to meet the workers' demands.

While the municipality claims there is no “budget” to pay its workers, there was plenty of municipal money to convert the Miraflores waterfront—the *Malecon*—into one of the most exclusive zones in Lima. A square meter of living space in the Malecon goes for between US\$3,000 and US\$4,000, the highest price in the city.

Twenty-five years ago there were spacious two-story houses and no more than five parks, some in terrible condition due to the lack of irrigation and the wall that protects passersby from falling over a cliff—a 40-meter vertical drop that ends at the seashore. Today several dozen 10- to 15-story luxury buildings enjoy the

spectacular sunset over the Pacific Ocean. In addition, the seaside parks have expanded to a dozen and are well cared for by municipal workers.

The transformation of the Miraflores Malecon into an exclusive zone is the product of the neoliberal economic policies initiated at the beginning of the 1990s by former president Alberto Fujimori (subsequently imprisoned for crimes against humanity). His regime fostered a massive growth of social inequality, with a rising well-off bourgeoisie and an upper middle class that services it at one pole, and millions of people who barely have enough to live from day to day at the other.

According to *Global Wealth 2017*, Peru has 7,249 families with a net worth of more than \$1 million, which constitute 0.023 percent of the national population. The six richest Peruvians—with more than a billion dollars each—listed in *Forbes* magazine have a collective wealth of US\$9.4 billion.

Many of the workers from the Municipality of Miraflores live in the working-class zone known as the Southern Cone of Lima, with a population of more than 1,350,000 inhabitants, and particularly in its poorest districts that include San Juan de Miraflores, Villa El Salvador and Villa María del Triunfo. The difference in income between the workers who maintain the modern buildings of the Malecon and those who inhabit them is staggering.

María, a worker from the Municipality of Miraflores, told the WSW: “I work in the administration of the municipality. I live in Villa El Salvador and it takes me more than an hour to get to work. Our salaries allow us to buy less each time, so we will end up dying of hunger.

“I could not live with what the municipality pays me. In my house we all work, my husband and also my

three children, to make a living. It's true, if all the workers of the world came together, things would be better for everyone. In the end, we are all workers. In Peru more protests should be held."

In areas like Villa María del Triunfo, where strikers live, conditions are a far cry from the pristine parks of Miraflores. In some areas, trash goes uncollected for 15 days or more because the municipality fails to pay a private company for garbage collection. Residents complain of the rotting smells and the rats that the garbage brings. In some areas they choose to burn it, creating smoke pollution that is also unbearable. These areas are plagued by poverty, overcrowding and drug trafficking.

Lima's municipal leaders are as corrupt as the high-ranking judicial, executive and legislative officials who have recently made front-page news in Peru after being recorded exchanging favors for bribes.

In 2017, *La República* reported that the mayor of Villa María del Triunfo, "Ángel Chilingano Villanueva, was arrested on charges of allegedly being part of the gang 'Los Topos de Lima Sur,' dedicated to extortion and the payment of quotas to businessmen, merchants and neighbors of that district."

According to the National Institute of Statistics and Information (INEI), as of 2013, 45,700 municipal employees worked in the province of Lima, the vast majority concentrated in the city of Lima. There are growing demands and anger among this layer as throughout the Peruvian working class.

In June of this year, teachers, who number more than 500,000, staged a short national strike that was suspended by their union, the SUTEP. Last year they went on strike from July 12 until September 2, holding many large marches and clashing violently with the police.

Also in June, Lima transport workers held a 24-hour stoppage.

On August 8, EsSalud workers—doctors, nurses and technicians—went on a supposedly indefinite national strike that was suspended the next day, when the union reached an agreement with the Ministry of Health (Minsa).

The unions stage these 24-hour actions to dissipate the militancy of the working class and in an attempt to channel their anger back under the wing of the bourgeois parties.

More than 50 percent of the national labor force have informal jobs, that is, they are not on a payroll and receive no benefits such as health insurance and vacations.

The small strike of 350 workers of the Municipality of Miraflores and the big mining strikes against the transnational billionaires have a common origin: Both are fighting against a capitalist system that promotes inequality and poverty.



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