

## Argentine teachers, transport workers in strike action

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Argentine teachers hold three-day strike to demand pay and infrastructure improvements

Members of the Suteba education workers union in Buenos Aires province, Argentina walked out for 72 hours beginning August 27. So far this year, teachers have struck 19 days over their demands. Adherence to the strike was reported as being between 90 and 95 percent, although the government claimed that it was around 50 by the second day.

The main demands are for a more substantial wage raise than the 20.7 percent offered by the provincial government of María Eugenia Vidal and improvements in infrastructure.

Inflation is running at over 30 percent, making Vidal's 20.7 percent offer a net salary cut. The salary raise demand includes a trigger clause for inflationary fluctuations. As for infrastructure, Suteba complains that neglect has made school buildings unsafe and has called for the declaration of a state of emergency in 17,000 education establishments throughout the province.

### Argentine bus drivers strike to protest firings, working conditions

Drivers for Line 60 of Buenos Aires' Micro Ómnibus Norte S.A. (MONSA) bus line, which transports some 250,000 passengers per day, went on strike August 27. The drivers walked out that afternoon to protest recent firings. They also demanded improvements in working conditions, including the state of the buses, and demanded higher wages.

The drivers' union issued a statement denouncing "arbitrary firings, noncompliance with the frequency established by the CNRT [National Transportation Regulation Commission], the poor state of the units and bad security and hygienic conditions." It also addressed itself to bus riders, criticizing those conditions.

On August 29, the striking drivers marched to the Labor Ministry, where one union delegate told reporters, "The enterprise did not agree to the meeting arranged by Labor that we went to; they want to generate a very great conflict."

That afternoon, the workers were called back to their buses and the Ministry of Labor reestablished service following the imposition of obligatory conciliation talks.

### Guatemalan court orders doctors cease strike plans

The Guatemalan Labor and Social Security Court of Appeals issued an order August 31 to doctors that they continue to provide services at the Roosevelt Hospital in Guatemala City. The order was in support of a request by Health Minister Carlos Soto to prevent doctors from carrying out their plan to cease external consultations and only provide emergency services.

The doctors are calling for a salary raise, and have held a number of protest actions since August 13. On August 30, a group of doctors tried to enter the Labor Ministry where Soto was making a speech, but were blocked.

Although meetings have been held between medical and government negotiators, the government has claimed that it is impossible to raise their pay. Instead, the ministry has offered 4,000 quetzales (US\$542) as an end-of-year bonus, a sum that the doctors consider insulting. In view of the standstill, the doctors appealed to President Jimmy Morales to intervene.

Thirteen other Guatemalan hospitals are in a state of "permanent assembly" over similar salary demands.

### Trinidad oil workers protest planned closure of refinery

Workers for Trinidad and Tobago's state-owned Petrotrin oil company gathered outside the gate of the firm's Pointe-a-Pierre refinery on the morning of August 28. The workers had received word that the firm was planning to close down the refinery stage of its operations and concentrate on exploration and production. Some of the workers had downed their tools to attend the gathering.

The previous Tuesday, August 21, Ancet Roget, head of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union (OWTU), met with Petrotrin's executive board and was informed of the decision. The board told Roget that refinery production had been steadily falling and that it had been importing oil to keep the refinery going, resulting in billions in Trinidad dollars (TT\$1.00 = US\$0.16) in indebtedness. The board informed Roget of the decision, which he kept under his hat, but it nevertheless leaked out.

According to the chairman of Petrotrin, 2,600 jobs will be affected; the number of permanently terminated refinery jobs is 1,700.

The Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM) announced on August 29 that it was calling for a "day of rest and reflection" on September 7. The JTUM represents workers in the banking, education, nursing, farming and communication sectors. Roget, meanwhile, has said that the union has its own proposal that would turn the company around and that it should be given a chance to be implemented.

## **Chilean copper mineworkers continue strike over wage offers**

The strike begun August 13 at the Andina Division of the National Copper Corporation of Chile, Codelco, continued as workers reaffirmed their rejection of the company's salary and bonus offers. Following a "final offer" by management, the 83 members of the Andean Division Plant Syndicate (Suplant) voted August 27 to remain on strike.

Codelco has continued with its contingency plan of spreading out its nonunion labor force, and has claimed that production has not been affected. However, one of the Andean Division's concentrator plant's production lines was shut down August 20, while another stopped operating August 27. Suplant sources say that the company is running out of room to store unprocessed ore and that operations will have to be shut down soon.

Sources close to the union have stated that the firm has five days to come up with a new offer, which would be voted upon in assembly.

## **Chilean tax department workers strike against pro-business tax "reform"**

Workers for Chile's Internal Taxation Service (SII) held a 24-hour nationwide strike August 29 to protest tax "reforms" proposed by the right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera. The measures, supposedly designed to modernize tax collection, "not only intends to dismantle the SII and its facilities, but also is infringing on the country's tax collection," claimed Internal Taxation Officials Association of Chile (Anfich) president Juan Apablaza.

Apablaza warned that the measures will benefit big business "to the detriment of the rest of Chile" and are aimed at weakening the SII's ability to inspect tax records of those large enterprises.

Anfich issued a communiqué warning clients beforehand about the stoppage. Though the government had a contingency plan in place, delays in service were reported across the country.

## **Pennsylvania credit union strike ends with sellout agreement**

More than 100 workers at People First Federal Credit Union, based in Allentown, Pennsylvania, voted to ratify a new five-year contract August 15 after a five-day strike over wages and healthcare benefits. A Teamsters Local 773 official said the contract passed by a "good majority", indicating a significant minority voted against the contract.

Originally strikers were opposed to any attempt by management to impose any part of the healthcare costs on workers. But the union and management agreed to a contract that would only delay the imposition of a \$15-a-month contribution until year four of the agreement.

The new agreement provides an initial 55-cent hourly pay increase followed by a maximum \$1.85 hourly pay increases. The starting wage for clerks, who occupy the lowest rung on the pay scale, will reach a meager \$12.50 an hour by January 2019. Local 773 President Dennis Hower, said of the wage settlement, "We needed to correct the wage scale, which I think we have done to a great extent."

## **New talks in month-old Montana lockout**

New talks are to begin September 11 in the month-old lockout of nearly 40 workers at the Imerys Talc plant in Three Forks, Montana. Management and the Boilermakers Local D-239 will resume negotiations under a mediator.

Workers had twice unanimously rejected proposed contracts and voted 27-7 against a last offer before the company moved to lock out workers on August 3. Imerys is determined to ram through a series of demands including an end to retiree health benefits, the freezing of pensions, and destruction of work rules that govern seniority, job classifications, overtime and layoff recall provisions.

Imerys has 16,000 employees and has operations that extract minerals in 50 different countries.

## **Striking health workers facing picket line violence**

Reports emerged last week of at least five striking workers at the Owen Sound Family Health Organization (OSFHO) being hit by cars while walking the picket line with at least one taken to hospital for their injuries.

The strike by workers at OSFHO began May 22, but reports show little progress in contract talks to date between the employer and negotiators for the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU). In recent days a number of incidents have been reported of workers being struck by drivers entering the parking area to the facility, but police have so far not laid any charges.

## **Unions again extends talks for Montreal broadcast workers**

Eight hundred thirty workers who are employed by TVA Montreal, the largest private French language television network in Canada, will not be on strike or locked out before September 22 after their bargaining committee agreed to extend contract conciliation by one more week.

The workers voted in May to give their union, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) a strong strike mandate, which was reaffirmed at a negotiation meeting held last weekend. Union leaders have blamed the parent company Quebecor for transferring work between affiliates, taking away jobs from workers at TVA.

Workers at TVA have been without a contract since the end of 2016 but the two sides remain at odds most particularly over the issue of contracting out of work.



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