

Chilean teachers in two-day national strike; BC forestry workers set to walk out

Workers Struggles: The Americas

9 October 2018

Chilean teachers hold two-day strike and protest over pay and conditions

Tens of thousands of teachers struck and marched in cities throughout Chile on October 3 and 4. Organizers claimed more than 75 percent turnout for the walkout, though adherence varied by region. In the capital, Santiago, more than 30,000 teachers and their supporters marched down the La Alameda thoroughfare to voice their anger over the foot-dragging of the Education Ministry regarding their demands.

The issues include excessive workloads, violence against teachers, labor insecurity, discrepancies in pay and benefits, the evaluation system, and the scarcity of opportunities for teachers to participate in policy bodies. A long-festering issue is the payment of the Historical Debt, a promised pay adjustment dating back to 1981. The teachers' unions and the ministry have been holding talks since April, and their response, according to union officials, has been "null."

The teachers' unions have said that they may launch an indefinite strike if their demands go unheeded.

Tijuana doctors protest shortages of medicine, supplies, personnel

About 70 doctors walked out on the morning of October 3 to hold a protest at the entrance of the Tijuana General Hospital (HGT) against deficiencies of medicines, supplies and staff. The doctors called on the city's residents to join them and to demand that the Baja California state government resolve the situation.

Tijuana is the fastest-growing city in Mexico, and thousands of families now go to the HGT for health and medical services, including emergencies, pediatrics and gynecology.

However, provision of adequate medicines, supplies and personnel has not kept up with this growth. The doctors blame the recent patient deaths—one of them just the day before—on the lag.

Existing services were not interrupted during the protest. For the time being, the doctors have ruled out a strike but say that they will continue working under protest.

Mexican airline pilots' union calls off Aeroméxico strike, signs agreement

After delaying planned strike action last week, negotiators for the Airline Pilots Association (ASPAs) reached an agreement with Mexico's flagship airline Aeroméxico on October 2. Following an assembly dominated by the union bureaucracy, the strike was called off and the pilots were told to show up for work.

On September 13, the ASPA announced the strike for October 1 after the firm cut some travel benefits following a nonfatal takeoff crash in July.

The primary issue in the strike call was the discrepancy in pay between pilots who began working for Aeroméxico before and after 2010, known respectively as Contract A and Contract B pilots. At the time, the company pleaded difficulties due to the global financial crisis, and the ASPA agreed to 40 percent lower pay and benefits for the Contract B pilots, who constitute 48 percent of the company's 1,100 pilots.

In 2018, with the company's profits improving, and under pressure from the membership, the ASPA demanded parity between the two categories. The ASPA complied with a Labor Secretariat request to delay the walkout and keep bargaining until October 3. It emerged from the meeting agreeing to a 5.15 percent raise, unspecified improvements in safety and productivity rules and a promise from

Aeroméxico to review the Contract B issue...in 2020.

Panamanian electrical workers' protest planned closure of power plant

Workers at the Bahía Las Minas power plant in Cativa, Panama, protested on October 4 against the government's plan to close the facility in December. The protesting workers argue that the government, which has a 49 percent interest in the plant, is intent on privatizing energy production nationwide. An official of the SITIESPA electrical workers' union claimed that more than 500 workers would be affected by the shutdown.

The official, Ariel Muñoz, told EFE reporters, "The electrical system as such is already privatized, but the government continues to participate in many companies. There is a strategy of financially strangling these companies to be able to say that the government cannot manage them and that they must be closed."

SITIESPA called for pickets at the Ministry of Finance and Economy to demand that the government, which has not reached a decision on its contract with Colombia-based private firm Celsia, which owns 51 percent of the Bahía Las Minas, keep the plant in operation.

Ohio graphics workers strike over unfair labor practices

Some 33 workers at Cubbison Company's graphic print-making facility in Austintown, Ohio, are continuing a strike begun on September 17 over a number of unfair labor practices. The members of Teamsters District Council 3 have been without a contract since December 2017.

There exist five open cases before the National Labor Relations Board over bad-faith bargaining, coercive actions, threats and surveillance of employees. The strike follows a strike by members of the United Steelworkers in Masury, Ohio, against another graphic print-maker, at Roemer Industries.

New talks involving a federal mediator resumed two days after workers walked off the job.

BC Forestry workers set to strike

Around 2,000 forestry workers across northern British Columbia could be on strike this week after their union, the United Steelworkers (USW), issued a 72-hour strike notice on October 3 following mediated negotiations the previous week that failed to produce a new deal.

The workers are employed at operations under the Council on Northern Interior Forest Employment Relations (CONIFER) and have been without a contract since June of this year. Although more than 90 percent of the membership voted in favor of a strike in August, USW leaders say that they want the employer back at the bargaining table and it is not their intention to strike.

Union negotiators say they are trying to get a pattern agreement in place, but provisions in the latest offer are well below what was in the previous contract. CONIFER has not publicly commented on the impasse, but the union says it is demanding concessions on overtime, benefits, and paid holidays.

Strike at Saskatchewan Co-op

Some 130 workers employed at five locations of the Moose Jaw Co-op went on strike last week after voting overwhelmingly to strike against a new two-tiered contract that would disproportionately affect female employees.

According to negotiators for their union, the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), the contract rejected by the membership also included a 2 percent annual wage increase in a four-year contract deal. The proposed contract would mean that 23 workers who are mostly women would be relegated to a lower tier with lower pay and fewer benefits.

The Co-Op runs a number of outlets including grocery, gardening and gas centers in Moose Jaw. The union has appealed to the public to take their business elsewhere during the strike.



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