

Guerrero, Mexico educators protest; Argentine garment workers strike

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

14 March 2019

### Guerrero, Mexico educators protest

Teachers from the southern state of Guerrero, Mexico blocked the state legislature March 11. The education workers are demanding the cancellation of Mexico's Education "Reform" law and that 5,700 of their fellow teachers be included in the government incentives program, FONE. According to the Education Reform law, FONE supposedly "rewards" good teachers. The teachers are also demanding that any teacher fired due to a low performance evaluation be rehired.

Teachers from the communities of Costa Grande and Acapulco blocked the entrance to the legislature with buses.

A spokesperson for the teacher's union, the SNTE, declared that, while the union preferred "dialogue" with education authorities, it will mobilize the teachers to demand that teachers be paid what is owed to them.

### Argentine garment workers strike over wages and working conditions

Four hundred garment workers went on strike on March 12. Their demands include a bi monthly bonus of US\$96, not linked to production quotas, and an end to physically exhausting speed-ups at the Textilana Mauro Sergio plant in the city of Mar Del Plata, Buenos Aires province.

The primarily female workforce denounced the company's new production system that forces each worker to perform tasks formerly done by four workers, damaging their physical and mental health.

### Mexico City firemen stage protest

Scores of firemen blocked streets in downtown Mexico City on March 11 to demand the recognition of 330 workers and that their salary be paid up. The workers were hired last October, but have yet to be paid.

Mexico City fire authorities claim that contracts have not been drawn up for these workers and called on firefighters to join them at the negotiating table.

### Workers and students march on International Women's Day across Latin America

Workers and youth marched across Latin America for equal rights, equal pay, an end to part-time and casual labor, against violence and for the right to a safe and legal abortion. In the face of continent-wide restrictions of abortion rights, this was a common theme for all the marches.

Tens of thousands marched in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Mexico City, Lima, La Paz and other Latin American capitals.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, the theme of the march was "8 against the debt" denouncing the impact of the Island's austerity measures on workers' living standards and government attacks on teachers' pension rights, in the interest of Wall Street and other holders of Puerto Rican bonds. The march also commemorated 100 years since the birth of Independence fighter Lolita Lebrón.

### California county workers end two-day strike

More than 900 workers for San Mateo County returned to work March 7 after a two-day strike to protest a wide variety of issues including working conditions, retiree health care, understaffing, caseloads and job retention. The strike comprised mostly behavioral health and recovery service workers,

licensed therapists, and included administrative workers for the sheriff and District Attorney's office.

Concerning wages, county management proposed a 12 percent pay increase over the course of a three-year contract. The wage clause also includes specific raises based on longevity and positions that have proved difficult to fill.

The American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 829, which represented the striking workers, used a limited strike to let off steam while throttling the demands of county workers.

At the same time, AFSCME settled contracts for another 10 bargaining units. But those agreements failed to resolve sick leave and retiree health care, and the union agreed to labor-management committees in order to avoid strikes and leave the behavioral health workers to fight alone.

### **West Coast Maritime workers protest Alaskan governor's attempts to slash jobs**

Members and supporters of the Inland Boatmen's Union were slated to stage a rally in Bellingham, Washington on Friday March 8 to protest the attempts by Alaska Republican Governor Mike Dunleavy to impose \$100 million in cuts, which will slash 75 percent of the budget of the Alaska Marine Highway System. The draconian measures threaten the loss of the jobs of at least 250 AMHS workers organized in the Inland Boatmen's Union. Also to be impacted are at least 32 other jobs dependent on the AMHS in Whatcom County along with a loss of over \$4.2 million in economic activity.

Since 2013 the Republicans and Democrats have imposed \$29 million in cuts to the AMHS budget. The proposed cuts come on the heels of a decision to pare another \$27 million by forgoing the fitting of the ferries Tazlina and Hubbard with crew quarters, which AMHS workers have long desired and needed. The ferries Aurora and Fairweather are being retired to avoid \$11 million in overhaul and maintenance repairs.

Dunleavy is intent on privatizing AMHS and has already engaged at least one agency to consider options.

### **Minnesota Amazon workers protest working conditions**

Some 30 Amazon workers walked off the job for three hours March 8 to call attention to a number of grievances at the company's fulfillment center in Shakopee, Minnesota. In a Facebook post, the striking workers posed for a picture holding a sign, saying, "We are humans, not robots."

The workers posted a number of demands, including a safe

working environment, rational production quotas as opposed to "unfair rates that force errors and end careers," a halt to "unfair firings" and the setting up of a committee to give workers a voice.

Many of the workers are East Africans and Muslims. While they have the right to prayer breaks, they bridle when the company penalizes them by counting prayer breaks against their productivity rates.

### **Southern Ontario electrical workers on strike**

Part-time workers employed by the town of Lakeshore, east of Windsor, Ontario went on strike last week after negotiations between the town and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) union broke down.

The 21 workers affected are facility attendants who joined the IBEW over a year ago and have been fighting for a first contract ever since. Union negotiators say that the two sides remain far apart over a number of issues, including wages and scheduling. In particular, they cite demands by the town for "flexibility" to require workers to come in on weekends.

### **Ontario health workers strike**

Last week, over 85 nurse practitioners and other health workers in Windsor-Essex County in southern Ontario went on strike after rejecting the employer's final offer and mediation failed to produce a new agreement.

The workers, who are members of the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA), have been working without a contract since March of last year. Union leaders say they are fighting for wages in female-dominated jobs that are comparable with male-dominated professions such as police and firefighters.



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