

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Argentine newspaper and casino workers strike

23 April 2019

Latin America

Argentine casino workers strike for 48 hours over closures

Members of the National Association of Casino Employees and Management and Maintenance unions struck all Buenos Aires provincial casinos and held a protest April 18 and 19 in front of two that are planned for closure. A planned blockade of a major route to the Necochea and Mar de Ajó casinos was called off due to the Holy Week holiday weekend.

The Labor Ministry called the unions to a meeting on April 29.

On April 12, the Provincial Institute of Lottery and Casinos announced the imminent closure of the two casinos in Necochea and Mar de Ajó, coastal resort towns in Buenos Aires. About 100 workers will be affected by the closures, and residents fear that the local economy will be negatively impacted. Residents of other casino towns also fear that they may be next.

Provincial authorities have said that they would try to relocate the laid-off workers, but workers note that the closest casino is more than 100 kilometers away.

Argentine newspaper workers extend by a day a 24-hour strike over firings

Workers for the Argentine newspaper *Clarín* and sports daily *Olé* walked off the job at noon on April 17 over the firing of over 56 of their colleagues. Originally, the industrial action was to be for 24 hours, but in a massive assembly of press workers the next day, the attendees, members of the Buenos Aires Press Syndicate (Sipreba), voted to extend the strike another day. *Clarín* (“Bugle”), the nation’s largest newspaper, recently announced a “redesign” that it claimed would increase productivity without investing in new technologies. On the morning of the 17th, workers arrived at the editing and print facility to find themselves blocked from entry by security personnel.

Lawyers for Sipreba declared the firings invalid and accused the papers of not following proper procedures before firing the workers. Protests have continued in front of the facility.

Mexican mental health workers protest over delays in pay

Workers for the Jalisco Mental Health Institute (Salme) in Guadalajara held a protest in front of one of the institute’s installations on April 18. They had begun working under protest on April 16 due to delays in payment of their salaries for the last five bimonthly paydays, known as *quincenas*. The medical and administrative personnel had signed 10-month contracts under a Salme subprogram known as Popular Security, Annex IV. Originally, around 200 people had signed on to the program, but the majority left after not receiving their pay. Now only 60 remain at mental health facilities in different areas in the state.

The workers had met with the Salme director, who told them that they had not been paid because there was an “error in the system in loading the code,” and in March they were told by the Health Secretariat human resources chief that their pay would be deposited on April 15. When that date came, the deposit included only partial payments to doctors and psychologists, spurring the protest actions.

Bahamian water workers vote for strike over promotion policy, suspensions

The Bahamas Utilities Service and Allied Workers Union (BUSAWU) held a strike authorization vote for its members who are employed at the government-owned Water and Sewerage Corporation (WSC) on April 17, in which 203 of its 318 members participated. The result was 155 in favor, 48 opposed. At the same time, the Water and Sewerage Management Union (WSMU) held a strike vote, in which 21 voted for and 14 voted against. The WSMU has 62 members.

The two unions called the vote over some longstanding issues. One is the lack of a consistent policy for promotions. The BUSAWU is calling for the posting of a hierarchical chart, which would show positions and vacancies. The union claims that the WSC’s promotion procedure policy has been “unorthodox,” resulting in promotions for “friends, family and lovers,” in the words of BUSAWU President Dwayne Woods.

Another issue is union leave—i.e., the right of union officials to take leave from work while in their union position. The WSC is

“unilaterally varying the terms of the industrial agreement for the leave or attempting to” instead of through negotiation, according to Woods. Lastly, suspensions of two union members were “the straw that broke the camel’s back.”

Colombian unions and social groups call for national strike against violence, anti-worker policies

Social and peasant organizations and unions in Colombia have issued a call for a national strike April 25. One of their demands will be compliance by the government of President Iván Duque with the peace plan signed in 2016 with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People’s Army (FARC-EP). Since the signing, 114 FARC ex-combatants have been assassinated as well as nearly 500 social, indigenous and union activists. In the last two weeks, three indigenous rights leaders and the seven-month-old daughter of a former FARC member were murdered.

The strike will demand that Duque not change the Statutory Law of Special Jurisdiction for Peace—which would include a war crimes tribunal—at a time when US Ambassador Kevin Whitaker has threatened to cut US aid if the tribunal’s powers are not weakened.

Another important demand of the nationwide strike will be the alteration of Duque’s National Development Plan (PND), which contains “articles and dispositions that have been denounced for being contrary to the interest of the majority of the population,” as reported by telesurtv.net. Still another is the demand that Duque consult with indigenous inhabitants of areas that would be affected by PND projects.

United States

Nevada casino workers rally over stalled contract talks

Workers at the Circus Circus Reno casino held a rally April 18 to protest unproductive contract talks. The Culinary Union, which represents 260 workers at the casino, has been in contract talks for seven months, and the old agreement expired in November of last year.

Management has only offered a 1.75 percent wage increase, which the union rejected. Eldorado, which acquired the Circus Circus Reno in 2015, had a 9.8 percent increase in profits for 2018, and the CEO stands to make \$8.8 million during 2019.

Maine teachers rally for right to strike

Dozens of Maine teachers rallied outside the State House in Augusta April 17 to demand the right to strike. The rally, called by

the state AFL-CIO labor federation and the Maine Education Association, sought to channel growing anger of teachers behind a bill sponsored by Democratic Representative Mike Sylvester. The bill would extend the right to strike to public sector workers. *Maine Public Radio* quoted Heather Sinclair, a teacher at Wiscasset Middle School who also holds a seat on the local school board, who said she was worried about teachers who are growing restless over local negotiations and no doubt affected by the mass strikes of teachers across the country. “When we don’t have a voice in how that is done, and we don’t have a voice in the way that we are evaluated, that can start to be really disheartening, and I worry. I worry about declining teachers. I worry about teachers who leave the business in the first three-to-five years.”

Canada

Newfoundland city workers face strike or lockout

Municipal employees in the Town of Placentia, Newfoundland, are in a position to strike, but may be locked out after they unanimously rejected their employer’s latest offer.

City management and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) have been in negotiations for nearly four years due to what the union is calling unnecessary delays involving paid outside consultants. The 15 workers affected include clerical and maintenance staff. All but one were present for the vote last week.

Management says they are offering the same wage increase that the town council approved for itself, but talks broke off more than a month ago, prompting the union to hold the strike vote while asking that the conciliator’s report be filed with the provincial Liberal government.



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