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Workers Struggles: the Americas

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Teachers nationally in Mexico, but especially in the states of Guerrero, Chiapas, Oaxaca and Michoacán, as well as the capital Mexico City, struck and held mobilizations from May 15, Mexico’s Teachers Day, to May 17. The strike call was made principally by the National Education Workers Coordinator (CNTE), which has a strong presence in the aforementioned southern states. Members of the National Education Workers Syndicate (SNTe) federation also took part.

The actions were called to pressure politicians to abrogate the pro-business legislative agenda usually referred to as “education reform” that was carried out under the previous administration of Enrique Peña Nieto. His successor Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) has committed to continue “education reform”, though with some minor modifications that teachers say amounts to just “putting on makeup.”

The mobilizations were also intended as a show of strength preceding a May 20 meeting with AMLO agreed to by CNTE.

Another demand by teachers is the payment of long overdue wages and benefits in some regions, access to health care and other services and the reinstatement of nearly 600 dismissed education workers.

In state capitals, teachers marched, set up encampments known as plantones and demonstrated in front of government buildings. On the last day, instead of marches, CNTE held public forums.

Chilean baggage handlers continue strike over pay, benefits

Baggage handlers at the Commodore Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport in Santiago, Chile began a strike May 9. The strikers are employees of Swissport, a Chinese-owned airport ground and cargo handling services company.

The workers walked out over pay demands that include a three percent raise plus value-added tax for a duration of three years and a margin of distance between the minimum wage and

their base salary of 60,000 pesos (US\$86). They also wanted paid vacations and holiday pay.

The negotiations had gone on for two months without an agreement. The company offer included a raise of “practically zero,” according to one negotiator. The Labor Ministry called a tripartite meeting for May 13, but after four fruitless hours, the meeting broke up and the strike continued.

The baggage handlers have held a number of demonstrations with banners and pickets at the Swissport entrance, at times blocking access. On May 13, a contingent of Carabineros, Chile’s national police, attacked pickets with a water cannon.

Disabled services workers, clients, supporters in Argentina protest cuts to funds, pensions

Thousands of disabled people and service providers were joined by supporters in a protest in front of the official residence of Argentine president, La Quinta de Olivos, located in a suburb of Buenos Aires, on May 16. In their march, protesters carried signs demanding no cuts to the 1,400 institutions that provide services to disabled people.

The coordinators of the march noted that if the cuts promoted by the provincial government headed by María Eugenia Vidal are not stopped, many institutions will not be able to pay workers who help the disabled. They also demanded an increase in noncontributive pensions, which have lagged far behind inflation.

The national and provincial governments deny that funds have been cut and claim that budgets for disabled services have been maintained and increased. However, the Permanent Forum for the Promotion and Defense of Rights stated, “the functionaries do not take the real costs into account, and the reigning inflation in our country, putting these institutions into a grave crisis.”

Brazilian airline workers strike over back pay, benefits and firings

Pilots, copilots and cabin crew members of Avianca Brasil, the nation's fourth-largest airline, began an indefinite strike May 17. The strikers are demanding negotiations with the company over delayed payments of salaries and benefits.

Avianca Brasil declared itself bankrupt in December, and has canceled flights, accumulated debts of over \$256 million and given back 18 airplanes that it could not pay for. The airline appealed to the Superior Labor Tribunal for a judgment that ordered workers at four major airports to maintain at least 60 percent of the crews.

On being informed of the planned strike on May 13, Avianca Brasil began a mass firing of over 900 pilots, copilots and auxiliary workers. The striking workers are calling for the reopening of negotiations.

Honduran health, education social service workers strike, protest privatization decrees

On May 13 and 14, doctors, teachers and others in Honduras struck and protested recent legislation that would privatize health and educational services. The first protest was held by workers for the National Institute of Vocational Training, who fear that they will be fired once the institute is privatized.

On the next day, in an action called by the Platform for the Defense of Health and Education, protesters gathered in Cuba Square in Tegucigalpa, the capital. The protest was supported nationwide by work stoppages and protests in schools and health and medical facilities.

Hondurans have held a number of protests against the US-backed government of President Juan Orlando Hernández—whose election many consider the result of fraud and violence—and his plans to privatize public sectors. The government's response has usually included repression.

On April 27, for example, a 10,000-strong protest against government privatization policies, corruption, human rights abuses, violence and repression was broken up by police who fired tear gas into the crowd. Political assassinations are not uncommon. Honduras is one of the most violent places in the world outside of war zones.

Teamsters strike warehouse facilities in Minneapolis-St. Paul

Some 80 Teamsters at seven Murphy Warehouse Company facilities in the Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota metro region went on strike May 15 over unfair labor practices and the tripling of health care costs. Teamsters Local 120, which

represents the striking workers, claims that the actual cost for the health care plan went down by more than four percent this year.

The health plan the company is pressing for is currently covers its non-union employees. Management has sought to peddle the idea that a \$1.50 wage increase and a \$1,000 signing bonus will cover the increased cost of the plan, but clearly workers are worried about future increases.

Previously, Teamster members did not pay premiums for health care coverage. The company's non-union plan currently requires premiums of \$15 for single individuals and \$45 for family. Murphy Warehouse Company is the only unionized third-party logistics company in the Twin Cities region.

Wood Buffalo Housing workers picket in Alberta

Locked out workers at Wood Buffalo Housing in Fort McMurray, Alberta are continuing picketing after management and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) failed to reach an agreement over layoffs.

Twenty-five groundskeepers, housekeepers and maintenance workers are threatened with layoff due to ongoing budgetary issues. The jobs would be taken over by an outside contractor. CUPE has offered "ideas" for cost savings as an alternative to the jobs cuts. CUPE has demanded that the city administration intervene to force Wood Buffalo Housing back into talks. Negotiations have been ongoing since October 2018.



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