

Workers Struggles: The Americas

Mass demonstrations in defense of education in Brazil, Honduran educators and doctors strike

4 June 2019

Latin America

Mass demonstrations in defense of education in Brazil

Mass demonstrations took place on May 30 in many Brazilian cities in defense of education.

The marches, organized by the National Students Union (UNE), the National Postgraduate Organization (ANPG) and the Brazilian Union of Secondary School Students (UUF) are a continuation of protests on May 15, and included thousands of students, professors and teachers. Over a million marched throughout Brazil.

The demonstrations were held in opposition to budget cuts that the Bolsonaro administration plans to impose, and education policies aimed at censoring political views and slashing funding for public education and science. A general strike has been called for June 14.

Strike by Honduran doctors and teachers

Demonstrations took place outside the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa, Honduras on May 31 as part of protests by striking doctors and teachers against the privatization of education and medical care. The strike began on May 30. Most schools in Honduran capital have shut down, along with several hospitals.

In addition to the rally at the US embassy, scores of protesters marched and blocked streets in Tegucigalpa.

The strikers have vowed to continue their protest strikes until the government cancels its privatization proposals.

Chilean miners protest over back wages

On May 30 miners and their families occupied the Ñirehuao bridge in southern Chile over payment of back wages. The miners

at the El Toqui gold and zinc mine in the town of Villa Mañihuales have not been paid since the firm, Laguna Gold, ceased operations earlier this year. The miners are demanding a minimum of 50 percent of their back pay, the reopening of the mine and re-employment.

The miners have rejected a government offer of 25 percent until the mine reopens under new owners.

Chuquimata copper miners vote to strike

Three unions representing miners at Codelco's Chuquimata copper mine rejected the company's last offer. As the Chuquimata miners waved strike banners and loudly demanded a strike, 2,755 voted for the strike, 490 against.

The company has offered a 27-month contract that includes a 1.2 percent raise and a US\$14,000 bonus, without responding to workers' demands for improved medical and retirement benefits. Codelco plans to lay off 1,211 workers at Chuquimata, as production shifts underground and the company cuts costs.

World copper prices have been dropping as a result of the trade war between the US and China. Absent another offer from Codelco, what follows is a five-day cooling off period of mandatory arbitration.

Codelco is the world's largest copper producer and Chuquimata is one of Chile's most important copper mines.

Mexican VW workers walk out of Silao plants over profit-sharing checks

On May 29, workers at the morning and afternoon shifts at the VW engine plant in Silao, Guanajuato state, walked off the job over a profit-sharing payment of one month's pay. The company had promised to pay the amount 10 days earlier.

The strike was stopped by the corrupt, corporatist CTM autoworkers union, calling it a "crazy walkout" and claiming that only 200 had participated. Indicating that the promised bonuses

may not take place, CTM leaders defended the company, the world's largest auto firm. "They have told us that there will be no profit sharing checks this year; the company is not legally bound; its profits were not so good in 2018," declared a CTM spokesperson.

The strikers published news of the spontaneous walkout on Facebook, together with their demands and photos.

United States

Workers protest unpaid wages at Washington state dairy

Dairy workers held a protest in Yakima, Washington May 29 demanding compensation for years of unpaid wages amounting to an estimated \$1 million. About 40 workers at Mensonides Dairy charge they worked through unpaid breaks and mealtimes for years and now are seeking payment.

Back in June 2018, three workers filed a lawsuit. One week later Mensonides Dairy filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

One of the workers, Ana Cruz, told the *Yakima Herald-Republic* that she was forced to work through breaks and skipped meals and was ultimately fired for taking a sick day. "We want to be first in line to be paid. We want the money that they owe us. It's not money that's being given to us—it's our money."

But other entities will probably take precedent in the bankruptcy. The dairy owes Northwest Farm Credit Services some \$29 million and it is believed workers may not see any money for 15 years.

Warehouse workers hold one-day strike at Connecticut logistics firm

A small group of warehouse workers at the XPO Logistics facility in North Haven, Connecticut carried out a one-day strike May 30 over unfair labor practices by the global company. Some one-dozen workers, out of the warehouse's 185 employees, took part in the action, which stems from charges filed by Teamsters Local 443 that allege coercive actions and statements along with surveillance of employees.

The Teamsters won a representation election for the New Haven facility back in 2016. But in 2017 a majority of workers petitioned to decertify the Teamsters. The company claims that wages were then increased by 30 percent over the next two years.

The New Haven protest was joined by similar protests at XPO facilities in Florida, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Texas. The Teamsters represent about 400 workers at those facilities and are supposedly engaged in negotiations. But they represent a fraction of the 50,000 XPO workers across the United States. The company is the tenth largest transportation and logistics operator in the world, with facilities in 32 countries and 100,000 employees.

A scandal erupted at the company's Memphis, Tennessee warehouse last year over pregnancy discrimination and sexual

harassment that led to congressional investigations. This past February, XPO announced the warehouse would be shut down, a move the Teamsters said was in retaliation for workers stepping forward to expose the working conditions.

Locked-out Dow Chemical workers hold protest in Deer Park, Texas

Locked out steelworkers plan a June 4 protest outside the Dow Chemical plant in Deer Park, Texas. The 235 members of United Steelworkers 13-1 were locked out April 22 after two overwhelming contract rejection votes by workers. The USW had offered to continue working while negotiations continued.

The USW had kept workers on the job under 24-hour contract extension since the previous contract expired in mid-February. Dow has been involved in extensive global cost-cutting, driven by the profit demands of wealthy investors. It carried out a merger with Dupont in 2017, creating the world's largest chemical company in terms of revenue.

Canada

Winnipeg transit workers facing lockout or strike

Members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) in Winnipeg, Manitoba are in a legal strike position after voting in April nearly unanimously to go on strike and then voting last week 97 percent to reject the city's final offer for a four-year deal.

Although 1,400 drivers, mechanics and other transit workers have been without a contract since January, the union elected to only stage a fare strike last month and has continued to express a preference to continue bargaining rather than call a strike. The deal that was rejected by workers contained wage hikes of only 1.75 percent annually along with a number of other concession demands.

The city, which now has the option of locking workers out, has asked that the province appoint a conciliator to resolve the dispute.



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