

Strikes in Chile, Costa Rica and Honduras

Teachers struggles erupt across Latin America

Andrea Lobo
8 June 2019

On Thursday, while teachers and doctors across Honduras were confronting death-squad activity as they continued their month-long strikes and demonstrations against the privatization of education and health care, 75,000 educators were taking to the streets in Santiago, Chile, and hundreds demonstrated in San José, Costa Rica.

Elsewhere in Latin America, tens of thousands of teachers joined a general strike on May 31 against the endless austerity and cuts to real wages by President Mauricio Macri's administration, and a million workers and students marched across Brazil on May 15 against cuts to public education. Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico have also seen major strikes by teachers earlier this year against attacks on funding and pay.

In every country, teachers face the same scourge—cuts to their real salaries, bonuses and pensions, along with the ruining of their workplaces and lack of didactic materials, privatization drives, the demonization by the corporate media and capitalist politicians, the growing poverty and lack of social services that their students and communities face along with growing repression and attacks against basic democratic rights.

The source of these social attacks is also the same. As the crisis of global capitalism deepens and warnings mount of another imminent crash triggered by the US economic war against China, the financial and corporate ruling elites are intensifying their financial parasitism, which increasingly relies on leeching money from existing social wealth like pensions and the resources assigned to public spending.

In Latin America, a short period of minor increases in social spending under the so-called “Pink Tide” governments—allowed by a surge in commodity prices in turn fueled by China's growth—has been followed since

2014 by an abrupt lurch back to economic stagnation, attacks against jobs and wages and social austerity.

Whether countries have been ruled by openly right-wing regimes, such as the governments of Macri in Argentina, Sebastián Piñera in Chile, Iván Duque in Colombia, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Juan Orlando Hernández in Honduras, or forces in some fashion associated with the “Pink Tide”, as in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Venezuela and Uruguay, the imposition of the weight of the economic downturn on the working class and public services it relies upon is universal.

At a time in which teachers need to be appealing with every ounce of energy and time to the rest of the working class in each country and to teachers internationally to take a united stand against endless austerity, the trade unions, including those seeing the need to call strikes in order to let off steam, as in Costa Rica, Honduras and Chile, are channeling each of these struggles behind futile negotiations with bourgeois governments that are proven enemies of public education and the working class as a whole.

The response by the ruling class to this resistance led by teachers has been the same everywhere: claims that there is “no money”, along with police state repression and reprisals. Above all, however, they have counted on the trade unions to isolate and betray the strikes. Not one of these struggles has met the demands of teachers and other workers.

In Honduras, education and medical staff in the public sector have carried out strikes, mass demonstrations and roadblocks since late April against two bills aimed at facilitating mass layoffs and the further privatization of these services demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The National Party regime, which was installed in a military coup backed by the Obama

administration in 2009, has deployed US-trained special forces accompanied by police and plainclothes agents to shoot live ammunition at demonstrators and kidnap them.

On Monday, the body of Yefrin Guillermo Arias García, a young doctor who was participating in the protests, was found in the western department of Copán. Several videos by bystanders surfaced online this week showing armed groups snatching demonstrators and taking them away in vehicles, recalling the activities of death squads during the US-instigated civil wars in the region during the 1980s and 1990s.

In Chile, for two Thursdays in a row, the infamous Carabineros special forces violently repressed marches in the cities of Santiago and Valparaíso with water cannon, tear gas, rubber bullets and stampedes.

Teachers are fed up with conditions in Chilean schools, citing rodent infestations, infrastructural damage, unsanitary bathrooms and a lack of textbooks more than two months after classes started. The ongoing indefinite strike, however, began soon after protests erupted over the elimination of history from the core curricula in high schools, which is widely perceived as a concerted step by the right wing to suppress the history of the murderous Pinochet dictatorship.

After teachers in Costa Rica led a 93-day public-sector strike betrayed by the trade unions last year—the longest strike in the country’s recorded history—the government has become emboldened and has targeted educators.

The partial and intermittent strikes this week called by one of the three main education unions, APSE, was triggered by the outrage among teachers caused by a bill banning strikes in the education sector and the recently approved “Law to Bring Legal Security over Strikes and its Procedures.” The latter bans all strikes against government policies as well as the setting up of picket lines and roadblocks, and establishes an expedited process for ruling the strikes illegal.

One only needs to look at the events in Honduras and Chile to know what the enforcement of such a measure looks like.

The turn to murderous repression and attacks against democratic rights to enforce the austerity dictates of the IMF and Wall Street has the complete backing of US imperialism.

On Wednesday evening, US Chargé d’Affaires Heide Fulton tweeted: “I expressed today my gratitude to the Honduran security forces protecting the US embassy in Honduras for your service,” while tagging the Honduran Police and Military pages.

On the other hand, despite efforts by the press to portray teachers as “selfish” and “lazy”, their leadership role in the fight against social austerity has elicited widespread support among broader layers of the working class.

Parents from La Esperanza, in the western Honduran department of Intibucá, have been occupying the María Teresa Castellanos Kindergarten since last month to protest the privatization bills. Claudia, a mother said to *Hoy Mismo*, “We will back teachers until the end.”

Similarly, last year’s strike in Costa Rica won the active participation in marches and roadblocks of hundreds of thousands in the first weeks.

The strikes in Latin America are unfolding in the context of a global wave of struggles by educators from the United States to New Zealand, to Poland, to India and North Africa.

The globalization of capitalist production has created similar attacks on educators and the working class as whole in every country, with the strikes of teachers and other workers in each country taking on the character of linked battles in one world struggle.

The decisive question facing teachers and the working class as a whole in Latin America and internationally is that of breaking the stranglehold of the trade unions and forming new fighting and democratic organizations, rank-and-file committees at each workplace and neighborhood to take the conduct of each struggle into the hands of the workers themselves, and uniting them across sectors and borders as part of an international and political movement for power and a socialist alternative to bankrupt capitalist system.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact