

## Protests by Honduran education and medical workers

# Workers Struggles: The Americas

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The *World Socialist Web Site* invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature

### Latin America

#### Protests by Honduran education and medical workers continue

Teachers, students, doctors, health workers and others in Honduras held protests June 13 against attacks on the nation's education and health services and demanding improvements. In the capital Tegucigalpa, protesters blocked streets with rocks and burning tires, while in the northern municipality of Villa Nueva, police tear-gassed demonstrators. The mobilizations were called by the Health and Education Defense Platform (La Plataforma), the Honduran Federation of Organized Teachers and other organizations.

Strikes and protests began in May and have continued since then in spite of police repression and the call by President Juan Orlando Hernández for a “national dialogue” to supposedly “attend to the call of the Honduran people, those who have suffered most, but with results.”

Teachers and health workers have demonstrated they have no faith in Orlando Hernández and his professions of desire for “broad, transparent, inclusive and highly participatory” discussions.

In 2010, post-coup president Porfirio Lobo Sosa visited New Orleans—where 90 percent of schools were converted to charters after Hurricane Katrina—meeting with then mayor Mitch Landrieu and agreed to collaborate on school and health policies. Chief among the goals have been the privatization of these services, firings and the disempowerment of workers. Teachers and health workers claim that Orlando Hernández, whose election was rife with charges of fraud, has a similar privatization agenda.

Although four education sector organizations and one doctors' group have agreed to meet for Orlando Hernández's “Round Table,” Plataforma head Liga Ramos told reporters, “We already have nine points and if the government doesn't want to attend to them, we will continue in the streets, because we don't believe in this government.”

#### Mexican Congress workers' union ends strike, accepts reduced pay deal

Workers for the Congress of the Mexican state of Guerrero went on strike May 20 to press their demand for a 13 percent wage increase. The striking workers, members of Section 55 of the Public Servants Syndicate

of the State of Guerrero (SUSPEG), had set up an encampment at the entrance of the Congress building.

SUSPEG had gotten a 13 percent raise in 2015, and repeated the demand for this round, but following a meeting with the Secretary of Financial and Administrative Services, union bargainers accepted the state Congress's offer of just 8 percent. The union called off the strike and ordered the workers back to their posts.

#### Colombian university professors' strike for overdue pay enters fifth week

Professors at the Autonomous Foundations University of Colombia (FUAC) in Bogotá approached the end of the third week of their strike June 15. The professors, members of the Sintrafuac union, had voted 332 in favor and 140 against strike action with 4 blank or null ballots on May 7 and 8. The strike began on May 20 and teachers have set up encampments near FUAC.

According to Sintrafuac, the professors have not received their salaries since January. Health and retirement benefits dried up in November. However, FUAC's financial problems go back to at least 2017, when budgetary problems—which professors and students say stem from bad administration—brought on cuts to classes, equipment and staff, inability to pay into health insurance, as well as loss of accreditation for some classes. The situation has gotten progressively worse since then.

At least 25 professors have left FUAC in the last few months. FUAC administration has suggested one solution to the crisis: cutting pay in half, a move rejected by the professors. Sintrafuac has called on the Education Ministry to intervene.

#### Argentine mineworkers strike over security, pay parity

On June 13, about 40 mineworkers belonging to the Hierarchical Mining Syndicate (ASIJEMIN) at the Andacollo mine in Neuquén, Argentina began an indefinite strike. The action was taken after the management of Trident Southern Explorations, which runs the mine, failed to respond to a number of demands.

Chief among the demands is the provision of appropriate clothing, and for ambulance and medical personnel. In two recent cases, two workers injured in accidents had to be evacuated in pickup trucks. Another demand is pay parity between Argentine workers and workers from other countries, primarily Chile. Improper storage of explosives and chemicals, unstable shelves and risks of injuries from unsafe conditions also figured in the workers' complaints.

On June 15, it was reported that ASIJEMIN and management had reached an agreement and workers were going to return to work following the company's promise of an ambulance and thermal jackets, as well as a doctor within 10 days. Further talks at the subsecretariat of labor were scheduled for June 19, and ASIJEMIN secretary Mauricio Escobar told reporters, "This is an advance but there still remain topics to resolve."

However, news media reported on June 16 that the workers were still on strike, since the workers, not satisfied with promises, are determined not to return until the ambulance and clothing actually arrive.

### **Chilean mineworkers strike for health and retirement benefits**

Around 3,200 mineworkers out of a total workforce of 4,600 went on strike early in the morning June 14 at northern Chile's Chuquicamata mine. The striking workers, members of three different unions, walked out after negotiations with Codelco, the state-owned operator of Chuqui, as it is known by locals, passed their deadline without resolution.

Codelco bargainers had offered bonuses, but the main concerns of the miners have to do with other issues, particularly health and job security. Codelco is planning to convert the open-pit Chuqui complex to underground operations due to the steady fall of quality of the ore that it has been mining for years. The "transformation" will likely entail massive firings, and workers are concerned that they will be left in the cold in terms of their retirement and health benefits. They also fear that the company will bring in subcontract and temporary workers at lower pay.

### **Strike vote by food handlers at San Francisco International Airport**

Some 1,500 food and beverage workers that serve three major airlines at San Francisco International Airport voted overwhelmingly for strike authorization last week. The workers are employed by LSG Sky Chefs and Gate Gourmet and service United, Delta and American Airlines.

One worker told CBS that he had been working up to 14 hours a day six days a week, but still has to moonlight as an Uber driver to survive. Health care benefits are inadequate and only 10 percent of workers can afford to cover a family member under their plan. Average pay is reportedly \$18.66 an hour.

Management said that it has plans to continue operation in the event of a strike, i.e. by mobilizing strikebreakers. To be in a legal strike position workers must still be released by the National Mediation Board, which can be a drawn out process.

### **Workers strike Southeastern Michigan contractors over pensions and wages**

Some 200 mechanical insulators have been on strike since June 1 in Southeastern Michigan over pensions and wages. Local 25, which represents the strikers, has been bargaining with the employers' group, the Master Insulators Association of Southeastern Michigan.

The pension fund, according to the union, is only 71 percent funded, and the union is pressing for a plan to achieve 100 percent funding.

### **Workers strike to protest religious discrimination at Minnesota processing plant**

Muslim workers at the Jennie-O plant in Melrose, Minnesota went on strike June 10 over discrimination and changes in working conditions. The action involved some 35-40 workers.

The workers had previously been able to punch out to carry on prayers at their appropriate times during the workday, but the practice was abolished by management.

Workers were told they could only pray during designated breaks. During a meeting with management over the issue, a plant manager threatened to throw them out of the facility.

Other complaints include health and safety violations, staffing practices and racist behavior.

### **Tentative agreement after one-day strike for Michigan bricklayers**

Union and company negotiators came to an agreement June 10, twelve hours after bricklayers in Southeastern Michigan walked off the job against 15 contracting companies. Masonry and Allied Craftworkers Local 2 has not released details of the new agreement although sticking issues in the negotiations revolved around pensions, health benefits and wages.

The union, which represents bricklayers, masons, tile workers and others, has been negotiating with the employers' group Masonry Contractors Association of Southeast Michigan.

### **Sudbury city workers vote to strike**

Both outside and inside workers in the City of Sudbury, Ontario voted heavily in favor of strike action last week, with the leadership of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) calling it a normal part of the bargaining process.

Over 1,500 city workers including bus drivers, library workers and public works staff have been without a contract since April 1, but the union is not releasing details of negotiations which are ongoing.

### **Strike by Ontario plumber, pipefitters ends**

A strike by 12,000 steamfitters and plumbers across Ontario ended after just a week when the Ontario Pipes Trade Council (OPTC) accepted the deal offered by the Mechanical Contractors Association of Ontario (MCAO) on June 11.

Workers had voted overwhelmingly in favor of strike action at the end of May, but last week ratified a new deal that includes a wage increase of 6.7 percent over three years. A main stumbling block in negotiations was employer demands for an increase in work hours, but union negotiators report that flexibility for workers was maintained in the new deal. It is not clear, however, if other concessions are included in the settlement that concluded the first strike of its kind in over 30 years.



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