

Costa Rican public health workers strike against tax changes, privatization plans

Workers Struggles: The Americas

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Workers at public hospitals in Costa Rica walked off the job August 5 to protest a tax reform bill passed last year. Seventeen unions, grouped in the Syndical Front in Defense of the Costa Rican Social Security Fund (CCSS), embracing thousands of hospital and clinic workers, called for a 48-hour strike.

The tax reform policies have resulted in increased taxes for working people and reductions in annuities. According to the Front, they are designed to progressively underfund the CCSS, thus creating conditions for privatization. Other demands are that the nation's executive branch and CCSS authorities comply with agreements signed six months ago to guarantee labor rights, reject harmful fiscal policies and cease reductions in the health care budget.

With talks between CCSS and the Front stalled, and under pressure from the workers, the strike was extended until Friday, August 9. On August 8, thousands of health workers and supporters marched to the CCSS building in San José. Management and government officials predictably denounced the strike and protests while shedding crocodile tears for patients who missed appointments, though emergency services remained open.

Late in the afternoon on August 7, the National Association of Educators (ANDE) announced that it would join the health workers' strike, after the legislature approved a law for "Dual Education." According to the ANDE, the law, which purports to help students from 15 years and up to gain work experience, would actually open the way for their exploitation, low pay and weakening of labor rights, while diverting the young workers away from higher education. Teachers joined the August 8 march, and an assembly is planned to determine further actions.

Mexican state office workers strike for back pay

Workers at the state Integral Family Development (DIF) department in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico, stopped work on August 5 to protest the nonpayment the previous Friday, August 2, of overdue salaries. Between 400 and 500 employees were affected when they did not receive their biweekly pay, representing more than 7 million pesos (US\$360,342). Also unpaid was an efficiency bonus.

Management had asked the workers to return to work, but since, as their union head told *El Sol de Tijuana*, "If we don't [carry out] this action, we really don't know [when] they are going to pay us," adding, "Many of us live day to day, and this is definitely not correct."

The deposit of the monies took place later that day, and the DIF staff returned to their posts. However, the next day, five sectional secretaries met with DIF authorities to discuss the overdue payment of 50 percent of a retroactive raise dating back to January 1.

Municipal employees in Argentine province to strike for better pay and labor conditions

The Municipal Employees and Workers Syndicate (Seom) in Jujuy, the capital of the northwest Argentine province of the same name, has called for a strike on August 14. According to a Seom press release, the strike call is a response to a petition for "the immediate transfer to permanent status [of contract employees] of municipalities of the province and free parity talks without a ceiling." Other demands are "decent hygienic conditions and security" as well as an end to "labor and gender violence."

Striking workers and supporters will begin with an assembly at one of the capital's municipal buildings at 9:00 a.m., then march to Jujuy's central plaza across from the provincial government house. Delegations of Municipal Workers

Confederation bureaucrats will address the workers. At 5:30 that afternoon, delegates of Seom Jujuy and municipal youth will have a meeting.

Buenos Aires judicial sector workers strike over salaries, parity talks

Hundreds of members of the Buenos Aires Judicial Association (AJB) struck August 5 over longstanding grievances against the provincial governor's policies. An AJB statement said, "The government of María Eugenia Vidal unilaterally suspended parity meetings that were being carried out at the time and decreed in a unilateral form three increments of assets on account of a future accord."

The statement emphasized the urgency of resuming parity negotiations that "obey the necessity to reverse the deterioration of salaries that judicial workers are suffering" since Vidal, an ally of right-wing President Mauricio Macri, took power, and that "has deepened during the years 2018 and 2019."

In a conflict that has dragged on for months, the AJB has called a number of short protest strikes, not only over pay issues but also over budget cuts, attacks on labor rights and crumbling infrastructure, that have failed to make headway. The day after the latest strike, a meeting was held in which members voted to strike again August 8.

Argentine state workers strike to demand overdue payments

State workers in Argentina's southern Chubut province continued their strike to demand an end to "phased" payments of salaries and benefits, recently announced by the government of Mariano Arcioni. The Syndical Unity Board, which represents the state workers as part of the Argentine Workers Central (CTA), also called for a march to the Government House in the capital, Rawson.

Marchers gathered at the Economy Ministry and marched toward the Government House, but encountered a recently constructed fence guarded by contingents of police. Instead, they held a rally, in which the CTA Chubut secretary general criticized the phased payments and demanded parity talks. He threatened "progressive struggle" if the payments were not made and if the government, as it has threatened, docked pay for striking workers.

Union issues strike threat as Nevada teachers continue negotiations

The threat of a strike by some 15,000 teachers in the area surrounding Las Vegas continues as some 320,000 students, the fifth largest district in the United States, returned to school August 12. Despite a bill passed by the Nevada legislature to fund schools, the Clark County School district has balked on meeting teachers' demands due to a \$17 million budget shortfall.

Teachers voted to authorize strike action back in May unless the district came through with money to fund raises and health benefits. In addition, the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) charges class sizes are being seriously affected by the fact that the school year begins with 750 teacher vacancies unfilled.

John Vellardita, the executive director of CCEA, said there will be no strike in the first week of school, but the union has warned district officials that once the year's first paychecks are issued, it may not be able to hold back a strike. Both the union and school district are returning to the bargaining table this week.

Ontario school employees take strike vote

Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) bargaining on behalf of education aides, custodians, secretarial staff, IT workers, paraprofessionals and other support staff have voted to grant strike authorization. Some 55,000 workers employed by school boards across Ontario face a contract deadline later this month.

Management is demanding a raft of concessions including larger class sizes, cuts to some programs and mandatory online courses in high schools. For its part, the CUPE has not spelled out what action it might take if an agreement isn't reached, but indicated that it would likely call token protests rather than all-out strike action.

Votes are also scheduled to take place at individual CUPE locals, but these will not be completed until September 17. The next talks are set for August 14 and 15.



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