

Colombian public-school teachers strike, protest for two days

## Workers Struggles: The Americas

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

### Colombian public-school teachers strike, protest for two days

The Colombian Federation of Teachers (Fecode) called a 48-hour national strike for August 28 and 29. In Bogotá, teachers marched to the Education Ministry building, where they chanted and speakers demanded that the right-wing government of Iván Duque reverse its course of attacks on education and underfunding of schools and the teachers' health care system. In Pereira, Barranquilla, Medellín, Cali, Bucaramanga, Mocoa, Nariño, Montería, Cartagena, Manizales and other cities, Fecode reported a high participation rate.

Fecode's appeal to the Duque administration to engage in dialogue is an exercise in futility. In the manner of Macri in Argentina and Bolsonaro in Brazil, he is fully committed to privatizations, austerity and authoritarian rule. His National Development Plan is aimed at lowering wages and pensions and attacking working conditions. According to Fecode's website, 3,000 complaints are lodged per day over inadequate health care, lack of medicine, delays of up to five months in appointments and other issues.

In addition, violence against teachers, social activists and unionists in Colombia has continued apace under his administration. Fecode President Nelson Alarcón presented some harrowing statistics regarding violence against teachers at the Bogotá rally. This year alone, 10 teachers have been murdered by paramilitary death squads and 680 have been threatened.

### Argentine university health professionals hold one-day strike, march over working conditions, job security, other issues

Following an assembly vote of more than 90 percent in favor, members of the University Health Professionals Syndicate (SIPRUS) in Santa Fe, Santa Fe province, Argentina, struck on August 29. The list of demands that prompted the walkout include pay for overtime; reinstatement of the inflation-pegged "trigger

clause," which was recently eliminated; the regularization to permanent full-time status of all temporary, contract and "self-employed" workers; respect for workers' rights; adequate infrastructure; and sufficient supplies.

Emergency services and urgent care continued to function. The mobilization included a march to the provincial government center, where a rally was held.

### Argentina: Caretakers and disabled protest austerity policies

Disabled people, their families and caretakers, some carrying handmade signs, held a demonstration on August 27 in Buenos Aires. The protest, called by the Argentine Council for the Inclusion of Disabled People, or Caidis, protested the austerity policies of the Macri administration, with concomitant increases in inequality and cutbacks in services that have hit the working class as a whole, and fall especially heavily on disabled people and those who assist them.

As the Argentine economy nosedives—contracting more than 3 percent in the first five months of the year—and inflation continues to devastate workers' purchasing power, the International Monetary Fund demands that public services be slashed to meet payments on the loan that it arranged with the government. Delays in payments to social service agencies—up to five or six months—have increased as shortfalls of around 30 percent in the amount of the payments, according to a recent EFE report.

### Chilean Ministry of the Economy issues list of industries where strikes are prohibited

In the midst of an upsurge of class struggle in Latin America, Chile's Ministry of the Economy published in its Official Diary a list of 72 enterprises in which the right to strike has been illegalized. The list, announced August 29, cited article 362 of the Labor Code as well as the Chilean Constitution, which was formulated during the Pinochet dictatorship and approved in a controversial plebiscite in 1980.

Number 16 of Article 19 of the Constitution states that "workers

in corporations or enterprises, whatever their nature, purpose or function, that provide services of public utility or whose paralysis may cause grave harm to health, the nation's economy, supplies to the population or national security, mandated by law to establish the procedures to determine the corporations or enterprises whose workers will be submitted to said prohibition, will not be able to declare themselves on strike.”

The list includes electricity generation and distribution, water supply and distribution, petroleum distribution, medical services and the Central Bank, but the broad nature of its description could outlaw virtually any strike action as the economic crisis deepens.

### **Bolivian mineworkers continue strike over unpaid wages**

Mineworkers at the San Cristóbal mine in Bolivia's Potosí department began a strike August 19 to demand unpaid Sunday and overtime wages, in some cases going back to 2007. Faced with a lack of response by management to their demands, on August 28 a group of several dozen went to the capital, La Paz, where they camped out in front of the Labor Ministry, not far from the presidential palace.

Representatives of the mine, which is owned by the Japanese company Sumitomo and is the largest in Bolivia, failed to show up for a tripartite meeting on August 29. The union's secretary general has said that if the mineworkers fail to get a response, they and their families will go on a hunger strike.

### **Regal Beloit Manufacturing closes Indiana plant where workers had struck**

Management for Regal Beloit Manufacturing announced they would close its facility in Valparaiso, Indiana, as the strike by 110 members of Local 2018 of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) closed in on its second month. Another 60 non-union workers will be affected by the closure decision, and operations are to be moved to another plant in Monticello, Indiana.

The IAM international union, which had no strategy to win the strike, appealed to President Donald Trump to intervene to save workers' jobs. IAM international president Bob Martinez declared the closure “would ultimately threaten our national security” due to contracts where the Valparaiso facility provided bearings for military helicopters for Sikorsky Aircraft and Bell Helicopter.

Workers voted 99 to 5 to defeat a contract recommended by the union and launched their strike back on July 1. According to unofficial sources, Regal Beloit offered workers a mere 35-cents-per-hour raise and increased the cost of health care coverage. The union had been asking for a 75-cents-per-hour raise and a cap on out-of-pocket medical costs at \$15,000.

Regal Beloit acquired the Valparaiso plant in 2014, and in the previous contract negotiations workers had been compelled to

accept mandatory overtime on weekends and six- or seven-day workweeks at company whim. The company has operations in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe and Asia where it employs 23,000 workers. It is ranked 713th on the Fortune 1000 list and is the 17th largest corporation in Wisconsin.

### **Saskatchewan Crown corporation workers move toward strikes**

Voting gets under way on September 3 for strike mandates for 2,000 workers organized by Unifor at four Saskatchewan Crown corporations—SaskPower, SaskWater, the Water Security Agency and SaskEnergy. Results of the voting will be released on September 19 by the union.

In addition, 3,000 workers at the telecommunications company SaskTel have already voted for strike action should an agreement not be reached by September 20. SaskTel recorded a C\$127 million profit last year.

The current offers by the provincially owned public utilities are derisory. At SaskTel, the wage offer has been zero percent in the first two years and a 1 percent raise in the third year of the proposed contract. It is expected that any offers to workers at the other four companies will be just as miserable, but with the possibility of a fourth-year increase of 2 percent. Management is also seeking to increase contracting out at the various companies. Since 2007, executives at all the Crown corporations have received yearly salary increases at twice the rate of unionized workers at the five companies.

In Saskatchewan, an Essential Services Act brought in by the right-wing Saskatchewan Party requires that employers and unions in the public sector agree on the number of workers who would be deemed essential in the event of a strike and required to report for work. Should the parties not come to an agreement, then a labour tribunal is mandated with issuing a decision. During previous disputes, this additional layer of bureaucratic process has delayed strike activity. It is expected that the provincial government currently led by Premier Scott Moe's Saskatchewan Party will use its legislative powers to weaken any possible strikes.



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